AFROCENTRICITY FOR ALL: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE SELF-HEALING POWER OF ALTERNATIVE CURRICULA AS A MEDIATING TOOL OF INCLUSION

by

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ABSTRACT

MARCIA J. WATSON. Afrocentricity for all: A case study examining the self-healing power of alternative curricula as a mediating tool of inclusion. (Under the direction of DR. GREG WIGGAN)

Student achievement and school reform are some of the most pervasive topics in public school discourse. However, the curriculum is one area that remains virtually unchanged across U.S. schools. The efflorescence of federal legislative policies, such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS), and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) have attempted to modify national assessment measures without preemptively seeking true curriculum or pedagogical reform. As a result, today's non-White students seldom have the opportunity to learn and identify with multicultural perspectives in history. One alternative approach is to expose students to an Afrocentric education (Allen, 2009, 2010; Dei, 1994, 1996; Hilliard, 1998; Hilliard & Amankwatia, 1998; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Murrell, 2002). Using a case study design, this work explores the perceptions and experiences of students and teachers at an Afrocentric school. The study examines the utility of Afrocentric schools as a curricular model of racial *inclusion*. The Afrocentric school this study investigates is high performing, and boasts 70% and 77% percent student mastery in mathematics and reading, respectively. The findings reveal that the students and teachers described their school as having: (a) a familial community, (b) small learning environment, (c) embedded Black history, (d) ancestral inspiration, (e) edification and positive imagery, and (f) an inclusive curricula that is welcoming of all students. The results of this study

are especially important when considering the lack of multiculturalism found in traditional public schools and the dismal state of U.S. student achievement.

Keywords: Afrocentricity, Afrocentric/African-centered education, case study, inclusion, Black education

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I dedicate this study to the various women, both living and transitioned, who have taught me the meaning of *courage*. Some of you I have never physically met; others I know dearly. But through each of your life's stories, I believe that I have grown to *know* you. Courage has been the single most important virtue needed to complete this study. And I appreciate each of you for going before me.

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Harriet Tubman
Janice Watson
Jessica Watson
Ida B. Wells

DEDICATION

It would be inappropriate if I did not *also* dedicate this dissertation to a course that changed my trajectory as a student, a scholar, and a person: *Education as Self-Healing Power.* I believe that education's transformative power should be shared and never kept secret. I hope through this dissertation, the course will eternally live on the human record.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Do not be proud and arrogant with your knowledge. (Ptahhotep, 2388 B.C.)

Excellence in education is much more than a matter of high test scores on standardized minimum or advanced competency examinations. We expect the schools to expand the scope of knowledge and develop the rational reflective and critical capacities of our children. We have every right to expect that, upon completion of public school work, our children will have the general skills to enter the world of work and to be fully functional members of the society. But more than this, we want the content of education to be true, appropriate, and relevant. We want the educational processes to be democratic and humane. We want the aim of education to be the complete development of the person, and not merely preparation for the available low-level jobs, or even for high-level jobs, that may serve no purpose beyond individual enhancement. Among other things, excellence in education must prepare a student for self-knowledge and to become a contributing problem-solving member of his or her own community and in the wider world as well. No child can be ignorant of or lack respect for his or her own unique cultural group and meet others in the world on an equal footing. We believe that this type of excellence in education is a right of the masses and is not merely for a small elite. (Hilliard, Sizemore, et al.,1984, p. 7)

African American student achievement has received substantial attention in academic research (Chenoweth, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Irvine, 1990; King, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that 18% of fourth grade and 14% of eighth grade Black students are at or above proficiency in mathematics (NCES, 2013a), while 17% of fourth grade and 16% of eighth grade Black students are at or above proficiency in reading (NCES, 2013b). The NCES (2013b) also reports that 54% of fourth grade and 45% of eighth grade White students are at or above proficiency in mathematics (NCES, 2013a), while 46% of fourth grade and 46% of eighth

grade White students are at or above proficiency in reading. These figures are undoubtedly disturbing across both racial groups. Clearly, both groups are underachieving. Recent reform initiatives like *Common Core* and *Race to the Top* have aimed to "fix" the problem of African American student underachievement, yet many of these efforts have focused on *treating* Black children without preemptively seeking to address the systematic root causes of today's educational problems, such as lack of teacher preparation and urban school inequality. These efforts are in vain, notwithstanding good intentions.

Today's African American students face educational disparities that are systemic, pervasive, and long lasting (Irvine, 1990; Kozol, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002; Mickelson, 2001). It is important to better understand these educational conditions in order to explain and address African American student achievement. For the purpose of this study, Black and African American are used interchangeably. One compounded problem that most public schools encounter is the lack of multiculturalism, diversity, and non-hegemonic perspectives in school curricula. Today's public school curriculum systemically perpetuates cultural hegemony and White, Eurocentric ethos (Delpit, 2006; King, 2005; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Sizemore, 1990). Curricular hegemony is not a new phenomenon, as described over eighty years ago in Carter G. Woodson's *Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), but its dangerous effects have intensified through current modes of instruction. Today's curriculum content has been simplified for the sake of state assessments, which has de-emphasized critical thinking. The lack of multiculturalism in the curriculum now teaches students cultural tidbits, menial knowledge without contextualization or inquiry, and purges out diverse perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1994;

Nieto, 1992). For students who are not of European descent, there is little room to probe or explore history that reflects their own cultural identity.

Traditional schools pejoratively ignore non-White cultures, and solely teach Eurocentric perspectives. Many traditional schools only expose students to multiculturalism via cultural history months or diversity events. As a response to both inadequate and failing public schools, the emergence of non-traditional school models has surfaced. One alternative approach to education is Afrocentric (also known as Africentric or African-centered) schooling. Afrocentric schools embed the tenets of Afrocentricity into the school culture, which is the theoretical framework that places African people at the *center* of analysis (Asante, 1991, 2003). According to Asante (1991), Dei (1996), and Dragnea and Erling (2008), Afrocentric education focuses on cultural, academic, and social goals. Within Afrocentric schools, "… teachers teach Black students about their culture, about life, and about their role in society and the world while maintaining high expectations and demanding excellence" (Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 3).

It is important to conceptualize the differences between Afrocentricity, which guides Afrocentric schools, versus the Eurocentric framework found in traditional education. Afrocentricity is defined as, "A mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interest, values and perspectives predominate" (Asante, 2003, p. 2). Asante (2003) continues:

> In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomena. In terms of

> action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus to be [Black] is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia and white racial domination. (2003, p. 2)

Afrocentricity, as described above, is the bedrock of Afrocentric education. A comparison of Eurocentric and Afrocentric education is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Contrasting values of teaching (Austin, 2006; Kenyatta, 1998)

Eurocentric Style of Teaching	**Afrocentric Style of Teaching**
Rules	Freedom
Standardization	Variation
Conformity	Creativity
Memory of Specific Facts	Memory of Essence
Regularity	Novelty
Rigid Order	Flexibility
Normality	Uniqueness
Differences Equal Defects	Sameness Equals Oppression
Precision	Approximate
Control	Experience
Mechanical	Humanistic
“Thing” Focused	“People” Focused
Constant	Evolving
Sign Oriented	Meaning Oriented
Duty	Loyalty

The uniqueness of Afrocentric education is found in the teaching style, curriculum, and learning environment for students. Table 1 demonstrates the distinctiveness of Afrocentric education. It is the Afrocentrists’ aim to cultivate the best qualities in each student. Competition, individualism, and materialism are not part of the traditional pre-colonial African ethos, nor is it used within the Afrocentric school model (Akbar, 1998;

Dei, 2012; Murrell, 2002; Obenga, 2004; Rodney, 2011). Having a learning environment which validates the importance of collective unity – as demonstrated in the African tradition – is an identifiable difference in Afrocentric education (Brown, 1996; Lee, 1992).

Figures 1 and 2 provide illustrations of Afrocentricity in comparison to Eurocentrism. Whereas Eurocentrism informs Africa using hegemony, Afrocentricity confronts hegemony through a search of truth. Figure 1 displays that hegemony is centralized within Eurocentrism and Africa is marginalized (see Figure 1). This is attributed to Eurocentrism's antithetical claims against African heritage. This proves true throughout history and is displayed today in the systematic removal of African contributions from the traditional curriculum. In Eurocentrism, which is used in traditional public schools, all non-European cultural contributions are marginalized. This promotes *hegemony,* meaning one monopolized perspective that dominates ideology (deCompte & LaMarris, 1999; Lemert, 2010). Within the Afrocentric framework (see Figure 2), the perniciousness of hegemony is addressed. It is important to note that within the Afrocentric framework, no culture is marginalized. This is because, by design, Afrocentricity acknowledges Africa as the origin of the human family tree rather than a race. Afrocentricity validates the contributions of all groups, which are viewed as part of the original African Diaspora. This includes all people and cultures (Akbar, 1998; Asante, 1991). Africa's connection to all cultural groups is represented using a circle, denoting the inclusiveness of varying perspectives (see Figure 2). This theoretical paradigm is beneficial for students in academic settings.

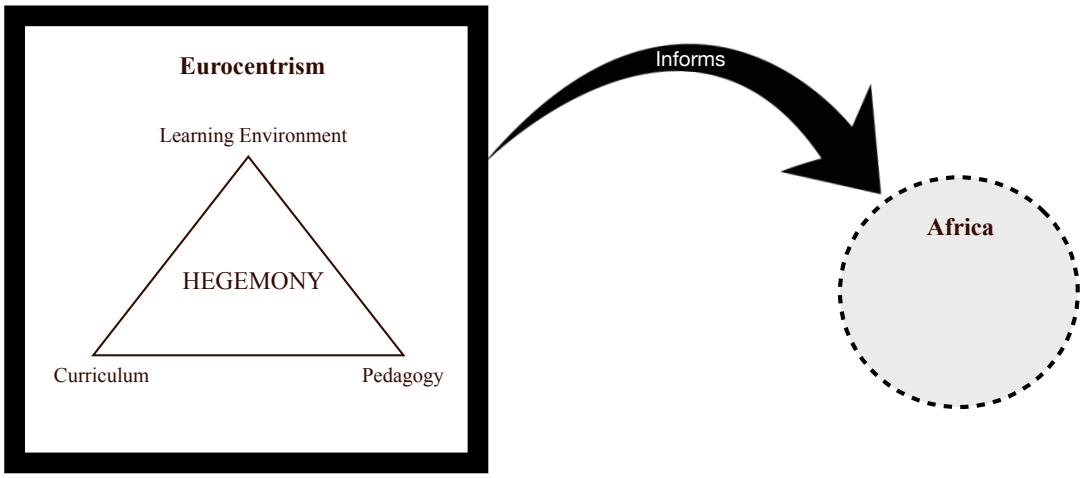

Figure 1: Eurocentrism illustrated

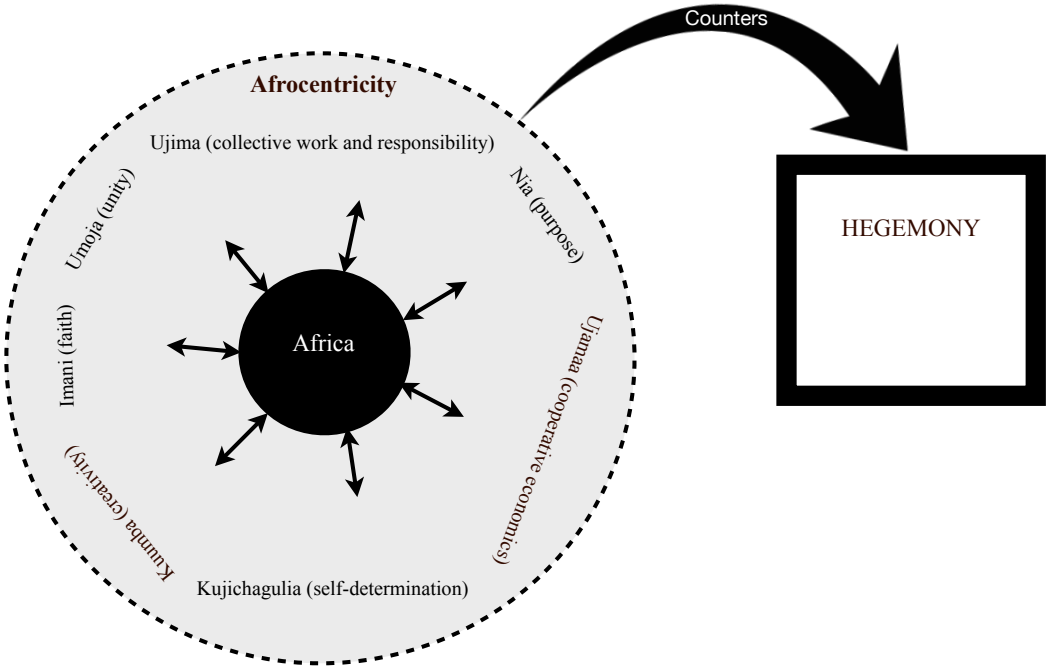

Figure 2: Afrocentric theory illustrated

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the tenets of Afrocentric education do not exclude or marginalize students based on race (Brown, 1996; Dei, 1994). Instead it responds to

hegemony (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014). This is why Afrocentric schools are considered *inclusive* of all racial groups, whereas traditional education is not. Today, Afrocentric education reinforces anti-racism education and discourse, and provides positive learning environments for students (Agyepong, 2010; Allen, 2009, 2010; Dei, 1994, 1996, 2003; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Murrell, 2002). These positive learning environments bring healing and historical realignment, which is known as "sankofa." The concept of sankofa is an Akan term, which literally means, "go back and fetch" (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014). Afrocentric education promotes positive self-concepts for students and retrieves "lost" historical knowledge. Thus, it must be acknowledged that Afrocentricity is a human approach to education, not a racial approach (see Figure 2). It is important to recognize its agency and utility across all cultural groups.

Afrocentricity's inclusion of all racial and cultural groups is a clear distinction from the Eurocentric framework found in traditional schools. Many traditional public schools attempt to implement menial multicultural education initiatives, yet fail to fundamentally address or change the curriculum. This leaves students of racial and ethnic minority groups *excluded* from the curriculum or on the margins as afterthoughts. As mentioned, students in traditional public schools are rarely taught African American history beyond slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Latino/Latina, Caribbean, Native American, and Asian history are often ignored as well. In traditional educational settings, students are taught the superiority of European contributions without an accurate assessment of the whole – or *inclusive* – picture. Afrocentric schools offer a more inclusive approach, because the curriculum starts at a different, more historically accurate

place of origin, that being Africa. This re-centered starting place involves the intersection of *all* students' racial heritage – Black, White, Latino/Latina, Asian, American Indian, etc. (due to topics like World history, globalization, modernization, international relations, current events, etc.). By restructuring the curriculum to include a more historically accurate starting place, Afrocentricity or Afrocentric schools are considered more racially *inclusive* than Eurocentric (traditional) schools.

Statement of Problem

African American students are overwhelmingly underserved in traditional public schools. The compounding factors of culturally irrelevant teaching, unqualified teachers, inequitable funding, and discipline disproportionality, negatively impact African American student achievement (Chenoweth, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Irvine, 1990; King, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Yet, little research has placed a concerted effort on exploring options that can reverse problems with student achievement. As noted, curriculum development is an area that remains wildly unchanged. Outside of stale state and federal assessment initiatives, there is little evidence of *true* curriculum reform. As a result, students are blatantly underserved in traditional schools. This is evidenced by the limited amount of multiculturalism found in school curricula.

Despite national curriculum reform initiatives, such *as No Child Left Behind* and *Common Core State Standards*, public school curricula overwhelmingly favor Eurocentric norms and ideas. Current school curriculum is lensed through Eurocentric hegemony, which elevates European ethos above all other cultures (Asante, 1988). This approach limits curricular relevancy for African American students (Dei, 1996; King,

Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Murrell, 2002). Without diversity in school curricula, African American students learn from a European perspective and nothing else (Dei, 1996; Jackson, 1994). Asante (2009b) and Dei (2012) assert that African American students generally learn about their history through the lenses of slavery and colonization. In this sense, there is no proper contextualization of cultural history that spans beyond slavery and the Civil Rights Movement (Loewen, 1995). There are important Black accomplishments that extend far beyond those oversimplified time periods, such as pre-colonial African history, the Harlem Renaissance, and Tulsa's Black Wall Street of the 1920s, etc. (Akbar, 1998; Diop, 1987; Karenga, 2002). It is important for all students, not just African Americans, to learn and understand the contributions of Africans across the Diaspora. Positive images in African American history should be accessible to all students in schools as well (Akbar, 1998; Loewen, 1995).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers at an Afrocentric school. Afrocentric schools utilize Afrocentricity as the guiding theory for instruction and curriculum design. Afrocentricity also realigns hegemonic propaganda with truth. For students, a realignment of right knowledge can correct misinformation and mis-education (Woodson, 1977). This study applies an Afrocentric theoretical framework in order to investigate Afrocentricity as a tool of inclusion for students. Typically, the word "inclusion" is used in special education contexts, to describe the merger of exceptional children into larger learning environments. For the sake of this study, however, inclusion means to be racially and

culturally inclusive in the curriculum. There is limited research that explores Afrocentric schools as models of inclusion, so this study aims to enhance the current understanding of Afrocentricity, specifically within 21st century contexts. The study examines teacher, administrator, and student experiences. While parents are also important in students' educational experiences, they are beyond the scope of this study. This study specifically examines experiences and perceptions of Afrocentric education, not necessarily family motives for student enrollment.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are: *What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school*? *And, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion?* The research process includes interviewing students, teachers, and the school's administrator at Sankofa Academy (the pseudonym for the school site), a high achieving Afrocentric school in the Southeast of the U.S. Next, as a means of understanding the school culture and climate, this study includes classroom observations to capture the enriched learning experiences of Afrocentric classrooms. Last, student participants provide written narratives describing their experiences at an Afrocentric school. The interviews, classroom observations, and student written responses were triangulated to ultimately connect Afrocentricity's theoretical teachings, which are inclusive, to a school model that adopts the same principles. Thus, the research questions focused on understanding Afrocentricity's role in student inclusion. The research questions and data collection methods capture the overall focus of this case study, which is to investigate the experiences of students attending a high achieving Afrocentric school.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are important to the study and have varying definitions in preexisting research. As a result, they each require a thorough understanding: African American, African-centered pedagogy, Afrocentric, Afrocentricity, diaspora, Eurocentric, hegemony, inclusion, MAAFA, MA'AT, Nguzo Saba, Pan-African, and Sankofa.

African American

The term African American refers to the Diasporic African. In terms of the study, as it pertains to African American education, Black and African American are used interchangeably in order to encompass those who are either Diasporic Africans or continental Africans. It is important to note that within an Afrocentric perspective, Diasporic Blacks are considered Africans.

African-centered pedagogy

Murrell (2002) defines African-centered (which is synonymously used with Afrocentric) pedagogy as education which:

> … brings to light those principles of good practice that already exist and links them to contemporary ideas and innovations that apply to effective practice in African American communities. The theory of teaching and learning is called 'African-centered pedagogy' and has been shaped by more than twenty-five years of teaching, community organizing, and research in and around urban schools and communities. (p. ix)

Afrocentric

As mentioned, the term Afrocentric literally means the centering of Africa, or the placing of Africa in the middle. It is a conceptual term that moves Africa away from the margins towards the center, and allows African perspectives to be representatives of *participants* rather than *objects* of interpretation (Asante, 2010). There are some contemporary nuances associated with the term "Afrocentric." In this study, Afrocentric is used synonymously to represent: Africentric, African-centered, Afrikan-centered, and Afrocentrism.

Afrocentricity

Asante (2003) defines Afrocentricity as:

> A mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interest, values and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomena. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus to be [Black] is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia and white racial domination. (p. 2)

Diaspora

The literal meaning of *diaspora* is to disperse throughout. In this context, Diaspora describes the historical moment where Africans were uprooted from the continent through the Transatlantic slave trade. There is a noted difference between the terms

Diaspora and international; the former is forced and the latter is by choice. Throughout this study the term Diaspora (or Diasporic) is used to describe the African American experience.

Eurocentric

Eurocentric is the narrowed perspective of assessing values, beliefs, history, and philosophy based on Western Europe (Kabon, 1998). This perspective ignores the historical contributions of Africans, and other racial groups, prior to the Greek and Roman invasions. Most traditional schools today operate under this paradigm. Afrocentric schools were formed in response to this ethnocentric perspective.

Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci coined the term hegemony to denote the propagation of one set of mainstream ideals that negate the complexities and experiences of others (deCompte & LaMarris, 1999; Lemert, 2010).

Inclusion

The term "inclusion" is utilized throughout the study to signify the including or encompassing of all social and ethnic groups. This term extends beyond race and includes socioeconomics, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. This word is central to the research and combats the notions that Afrocentric schools or Afrocentricity is separatist. Inclusion is a means to explore diversity and belonging.

MAAFA

The term MAAFA was coined by Dr. Marimba Ani to signify, "…the unique terror of African oppression" (Hilliard, 2002, p. 1). This word is Kiswahili and is used to explain the social and emotional turmoil that is experienced through the Black experience.

MA'AT

The MA'AT (or MAAT) is the personification of world order, which was established in pre-colonial Africa (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987). Today's Afrocentric schools are based on the principles of MA'AT, which are: truth, justice, harmony, balance, order, reciprocity, and propriety (Hilliard, 2002; Murrell, 2002). These principles were later contemporized into the Nguzo Saba.

Nguzo Saba

Maulana Karenga (1966) coined the seven principles of Nguzo Saba. They include umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith). Many Afrocentric schools embed these principles into the school culture.

Pan-African

Pan-African describes an historical and political movement that aimed to unite people across the African Diaspora toward cultural congruency and unity. Aside from being a term to describe a political movement, the term Pan-African can also describe a person who is interested in the unification of Africa across the Diaspora. Pan-Africanism is essential to this study because is served as a precursor to Afrocentricity in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Sankofa

The term sankofa is meant to promote the self-healing power of education. The concept of sankofa is an Akan proverb, which literally means, "go back and fetch" (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014). Afrocentric education requires students to

"go back" and revisit historical propaganda, and then realign falsehoods with truth. The self-healing concepts of education are beneficial for all students.

Significance of Study

Today's public education system leaves little room for curricular flexibility. Current school curriculum is streamlined, diluted, and culturally irrelevant for many students. This is due to the compounding effects of high-stakes testing policies and neoliberal economics, which have irreversibly changed the U.S. educational landscape (Anyon, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Spring, 2005; Stein, 2004). The implementation of rote-learning, drills, and memorization in order to prepare for looming state assessments, has supplanted educational rigor and critical thinking (Stein, 2004). This form of education is known as the "banking" model, in which the teacher authoritatively "deposits" information into students, without critical discussion and inquiry (Freire, 2000). The educational "banking" model is quite popular today, and overwhelmingly describes many public school settings. These pedagogical styles have diluted public education into factory-style models that produce laborers versus critical thinkers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Spring, 2005). Because of this, Darling-Hammond (2010) asserts that the public education system is leaving today's students virtually uncompetitive for the 21st century global job market.

Aside from being globally uncompetitive, there is a more pervasive and long lasting problem in the U.S. educational system that exists. To start, over 82% of the U.S. teaching workforce is White (NCES, 2013d). Racial grouping is not significant in determining teacher quality, but it is critical to understanding teacher perceptions of students (Jackson, 1994; Milner & Hoy, 2003). Classroom dissonance between students

and teachers often stems from cultural misunderstandings, stereotypes, intolerance, and ignorance (Delpit, 2006; Kunjufu 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner & Hoy, 2003). Since race has been found to be the primary identifying factor for stereotyping and creating assumptions (Ito & Urland, 2003; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Rattan & Ambady, 2013), it is safe to conclude that African American students are viewed collectively, and categorized as a cultural "group." These identifying factors are usually based on propagated media images (Milner & Hoy, 2003), rather than factual information indicative of student behavior and character. Under these assumptions, teachers expect students to conform to certain classroom behaviors that reflect their own personal cultural ethos (Delpit, 2006). This environment stirs indignation for both students and teachers. Chenoweth (2009) notes that many teachers possess, "…unapologetic racism coupled with the sense that it [is] inefficient to waste educational resources on anyone who didn't have the ability to benefit from them" (p. 15). For many teachers who have not been properly trained to educate African American or urban students, their attempts at instruction are counterintuitive.

In addition to academics, teacher perceptions also influence school discipline and discipline policies (Bireda, 2002). Over the past fifteen years, trend data shows that African American male students are three times as likely to receive a suspension or expulsion than their White counterparts (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Kunjufu, 20002; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2012; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Townsend, 2000). Even for the same discipline infractions, African American male students are more likely to receive harsher punishments than their White peers (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). These suspensions cause

students to miss critical instructional time, which is linked to course failure, dropping out, and even incarceration (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The disparity in African American student discipline is a well-researched topic, yet it still remains a widespread problem. This once again speaks to the disparity in the treatment of students, without addressing the systemic problem.

Teacher quality is another important factor for student success (Delpit, 2006; Milner & Hoy, 2003). Urban schools, many of which serve high populations of African American students, are most likely to have uncertified teachers with outdated and inadequate classroom resources (Kozol, 2005; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Many teachers in urban schools are also unqualified to teach the subjects they are assigned. This is especially dangerous for students. Once students reach high school, research has found that schools serving large numbers of African American students often fail to offer the necessary courses needed to graduate and matriculate into public college or universities (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Advanced mathematics and science courses are often unavailable in these schools (ibid.). Therefore, student success is more attributed to teacher's instructional effectiveness and school quality rather than lack of student intelligence. African American students, who are portrayed as "less intelligent" on state standardized assessments are actually "less served" instructionally. Yet, with all of the aforementioned issues negatively interfering with African American achievement, there is dangerous misinformation still circulating in research that suggests that these students are somehow "inferior," lazy, or incapable (Kunjufu, 2002; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). This research is popularly known as "the achievement gap."

African American school achievement has received substantial attention in academic research. As mentioned, most of the research focuses on the "achievement gap," which is more properly titled "opportunity" or "resource" gap. "Achievement gap" studies suggest there is a measurable difference between Black and White student intelligence. The history of these claims dates back to nineteenth century research propaganda that is submersed in racism (Gutherie, 1998; Wiggan, 2007). The results from these studies are irreversibly damaging and erroneous. There are undeniable structural differences in student treatment across schools. Yet, educational research still overwhelmingly embraces these notions and perpetuates falsified research (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

After over a century of racist research, it is more appropriate to advocate to close the *opportunity* or *resource* gaps, because there are observable practices that work to reverse Black student underachievement (Bloom & Owens, 2013; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009). This demonstrates that instructional methods, not race, determine a child's achievement outcomes. Some examples of effective African American student achievement are exemplified in "90/90/90" schools (Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012). This term represents schools with student populations of 90% or more racial minority, 90% or more free and/or reduced lunch, and 90% are at or above state mandated achievement levels. It is important to examine the effective educational practices found in 90/90/90 schools in order to more accurately address student achievement for the broader U.S. student population. Chenoweth (2007, 2009) and Bell (2001) examined how these high-performing urban schools across the U.S. differed from other schools. They found administrative commitment, teacher expectations, community

involvement, and adult/student mentoring are essential components in high performing urban schools (Bell, 2001; Bloom & Owens, 2013; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009). Sadly, 90/90/90 schools are anomalies. On a larger-scale, traditional public schools are failing African American students.

As mentioned, race-based research leads audiences to believe that there is something cognitively wrong or intellectually inadequate with African American students (Murrell, 2002; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Sizemore, 1990). This is a dangerous and deplorable claim. These claims disregard the fact that only 45% of White students in eighth grade are at or above proficiency in mathematics (NCES, 2013a), and only 44% of eighth grade White students are at or above proficiency in reading (NCES, 2013b). Research on "the achievement gap" ignores the institutional and environmental factors that undermine student achievement, such as learning conditions, teacher quality, and classroom resources, as mentioned earlier. Chenoweth (2009) explains, "[t]his is one of the great failings of most schools – that students who need the best teachers often get the weakest teachers," (p. 91). Thus, there exists an opportunity and resource gap, not a gap in student achievement, because national data indicates that both Black and White students are underachieving (King, 2005; Kunjufu, 2002; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). More importantly, traditional "achievement gap" research ignores the fact that "excellence" should be the primary aim for U.S. students (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003), and currently the U.S. is far from that goal (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Not only are there misconceptions regarding Black student achievement, the overall status of U.S. education – on a macro level – is also misunderstood. It is important to examine U.S. student achievement comparatively and internationally. The

2012 *Program for Student Assessment* (PISA) compares U.S. student achievement to other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations, and measures proficiency levels of 15-year old students. The 2012 PISA ranked U.S. students below the international average in critical subjects – such as mathematics and science. In mathematics, the 2012 OECD average was 494, while the U.S. scored 35th in educational districts with a score of 481. In science, the OECD average was 501, while the U.S. scored 28th in educational districts with a score of 497. Literacy was the only subject where U.S. students measured above the international average with a score of 498, while the OECD average was 496. Findings from this international assessment are helpful when putting U.S. student achievement, and excellence, into a global perspective.

On a national level, student achievement is still not much better. The NCES (2013b) presented fourth and eighth grade student achievement data, which measured the percent of students at or above proficiency. In reading, only 35% of fourth grade students and 36% of eighth grade students were at or above proficiency overall. In mathematics, only 42% of fourth graders and 35% of eighth graders were at or above proficiency overall (NCES, 2013a). These numbers reflect all racial and socioeconomic groups within U.S. public schools.

The differences in school geographic locale are also important when considering student achievement. The aforementioned 2013 NCES scores further disaggregate student achievement data based on school location, including: city, suburb, town, and rural. For eighth grade reading, 32% of city students, 41% of suburban students, 32% of town students, and 37% of rural students were at or above proficiency in 2013. For eighth grade mathematics, 31% of city students, 40% of suburban students, 32% of town

students, and 36% of rural students were at or above proficiency in 2013. It is important to note that all geographic locations, not just urban areas, are less than 50% proficient in both reading and mathematics (NCES, 2013c).

The 2013 NCES data also disaggregates student achievement based on racial group. For eighth grade reading, 44% of White, 16% of Black, 21% of Latino/Latina, 50% of Asian/Pacific Islander, 19% of American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 38% of multi-racial students were at or above proficiency in 2013 (NCES, 2013b). For eighth grade mathematics, 44% of White, 14% of Black, 21% of Latino/Latina, 59% of Asian/Pacific Islander, 21% of American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 37% of multi-racial students were at or above proficiency in mathematics (NCES, 2013a). There is a disparity among all racial groups towards the ultimate goal of 100% student proficiency. This demonstrates once again that excellence, not the metric of European student achievement, should be the primary measure of student success (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). A conceptual view of how students measure against educational "excellence" is displayed in Figure 3 below.

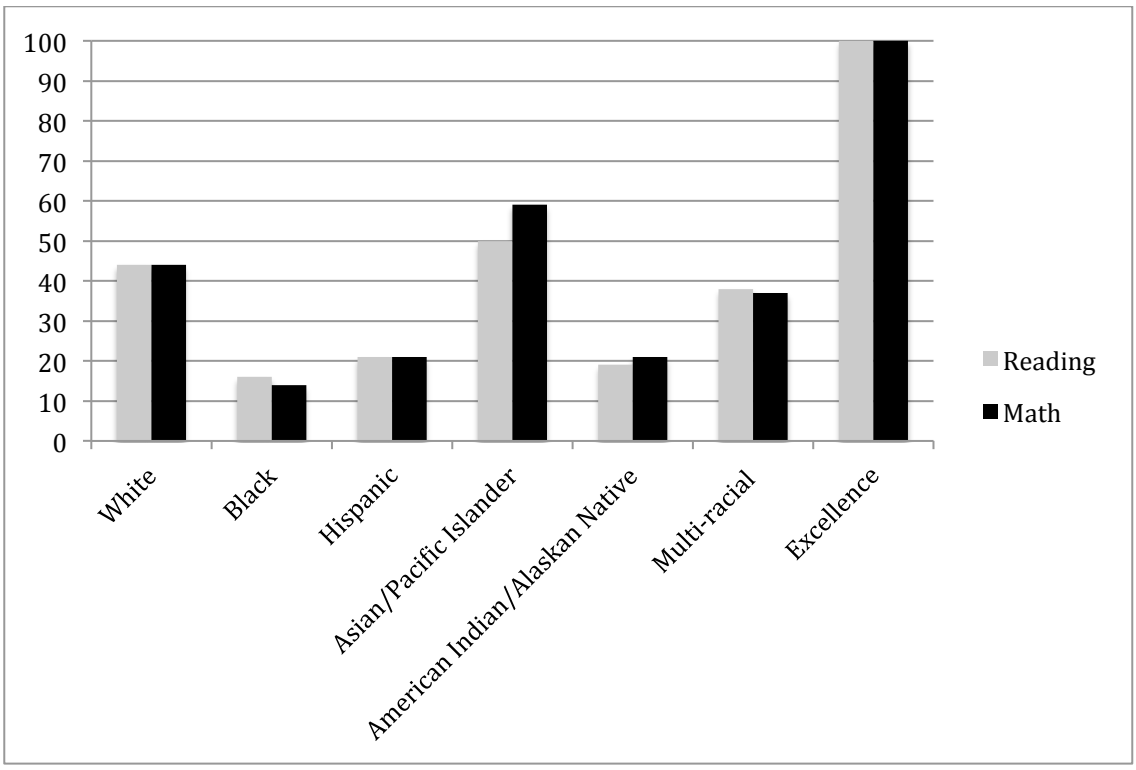

Figure 3: 2013 Eighth grade U.S. student achievement by racial group: A conceptualization of excellence

Figure 3 illustrates that disparities overwhelmingly exist between all U.S. students and excellence (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Based on the most recent data, the U.S. public school system is underserving the majority of its students. This is a crucial issue that must be addressed. Since it has been dispelled through research that African American students are less capable academically (Wilson, 1992), it is important to display successful school models that are setting "excellence," not racial group comparisons, as the standard-bearer for educational success. This study highlights one of these successful school models –Afrocentric schools – and expounds on the educational and social benefits for students.

Summary

Chapter one described the current educational conditions of African American students and connected the dangers of hegemony within school curricula. This discussion took into account recent educational reform initiatives that place increased emphasis on high-stakes standardized assessments and rote-memorization, which are dangerous for students. Additionally, this chapter stressed the importance of inclusion and alternative curricula for all students. One alternative form of schooling, as presented in chapter one, is Afrocentric education. The need for embedded cultural perspectives within a school design has led some educators to explore Afrocentric education as a viable alternative approach (Banks, 1998; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Murrell, 2002). These schools reposition Africa as a place of importance, and resist the objectification of Africa into the margins (Asante, 1998). This approach encourages critical counter-narratives that are often ignored in traditional schools (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014).

A qualitative single case study is the most effective way to study Afrocentric schools because of the lack of recent research in this area. While there is research that studies Afrocentric school designs, there is little consistency on the importance of alternative curricula for realigning right knowledge, and little to no research regarding Afrocentricity as a tool of inclusion. These research avenues are unique to this study. It is important to unite the critical needs of all students with a self-healing, alternative approach.

Objectives

This study examines Afrocentric schools, which are educational facilities that take an indefatigable stance against hegemonic curriculum practices. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers at a single Afrocentric school. The following objectives help guide the study's overall contributions. Specifically, this study:

- Extends the state of literature by qualitatively exploring the perceptions of students and teachers at Afrocentric schools
- Examines Afrocentric schooling experiences within 21st century contexts
- Introduces and enhances the current understanding of Afrocentric education as a model of *inclusion*

Organization of Dissertation Chapters

The remaining dissertation chapters outline the components of this research study. To start, chapter two is the literature review, which synthesizes previous research on Afrocentricity and Afrocentric schooling. The focus in chapter two is to explain the connection between Afrocentricity as a theory and concept, with Afrocentric schools. Additionally, chapter two reveals that more research must be conducted in order to examine Afrocentricity's role within the 21st century and its utility for all students. Especially when Afrocentricity is a loosely defined and propagated word, it remains unclear how to unify educational research surrounding Afrocentric schools, when there is still contested research surrounding its true definition.

Chapter three outlines the research method used in this particular research study. Since this research seeks to understand, in depth, the role of Afrocentricity as a tool of

inclusion, it is important to examine an Afrocentric school model in its entirety. Thus, a single case study is the best approach to investigate the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators attending an Afrocentric school in a large urban city. Within the case study setting, the researcher attempts to reveal how Afrocentricity can be used as an alternative curriculum model through classroom observation, interviews, and student discourse analysis.

Chapter four provides an exposition of the major findings, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the study. This study's qualitative research design necessitates the display of relevant quotes and field notes from the participants based on the themes that emerged from the study. Finally, chapter five presents a synthesized discussion on each theme as it relates to the research questions and theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of Afrocentricity guides the analysis for this chapter. Chapter five concludes with implications and recommendations for further research on Afrocentric schools, curriculum design, and inclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Whatever faults and failings other nations may have in their dealings with their own subjects or with other people, no other civilized nation stands condemned before the world with a series of crimes so peculiarly national. It becomes a painful duty of the Negro to reproduce a record which shows that a large portion of the American people avow anarchy, condone murder and defy the contempt of civilization. (Ida B. Wells, 1892)

But can you expect teachers to revolutionize the social order for the good of the community? Indeed we must expect this very thing. The educational system of a country is worthless unless it accomplishes this task. (Carter G. Woodson, 1933)

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers at an Afrocentric school. More specifically, this study aims to answer the following key research questions: One, what are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? And two, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion? There is limited research exploring Afrocentric schools as models of inclusion, so this study aims to enhance the current understanding of Afrocentricity, specifically within 21st century contexts. Afrocentric schools have emerged in response to inadequate learning environments and/or curricula for students. Today's 21st century public schools are guided primarily by standardized assessments and statewide curricula, which marginalize African American history into small, menial contributions (Dei, 1996; King, 2005). Many parents and educators have sought alternative learning environments, like Afrocentric schools, for a more inclusive school culture. In order to understand how these contemporary Afrocentric schools

emerged, it is important to illustrate the historical trends of Pan-Africanism, Afrocentricity, and the long-term influence that Africa has had on humanity. It is important to note that before the term Afrocentricity emerged, there was Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). These historical trends are important in connecting Afrocentricity as a social theory, as well as its emergence as a school model.

This chapter provides pre-colonial history and reviews the literature on Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentric education. In doing so, the chapter explores Afrocentricity's utility as an inclusive framework and the self-healing power of alternative curricula, as found in Afrocentric schools. Additionally, this review situates Afrocentricity in the broader educational context and discusses plausible options for today's hegemonic educational system. It surveys case studies of Afrocentric schools and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of these alternative-learning environments for students. Even with current research on Afrocentric schooling, it still remains unclear how Afrocentricity can be used as a tool of inclusion for all students. Thus, this review provides a comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of Afrocentricity and its utility within 21st century schooling.

Pre-colonial History

The topic of Afrocentricity must first start with a pre-colonial discussion of Africa and the origins of humanity. To begin, the conversation about humanity must first start in the modern-day Ethiopian region (Hilliard, 1998; Jackson, 1970; Williams, 1987). Egypt (originally known as Kemet) was first located in the northeastern region of ancient Ethiopia (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1990; Clarke, 1993; Jackson, 1970; Karenga, 2002;

Williams, 1987). In this study, Egypt and Kemet are used simultaneously. The first known inhabitants of Kemet dated to 10,000 B.C. (Clarke, 1993; Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987). Kemet's inhabitants were Black Africans:

> That means that it was a black or Africoid civilization. If one places the evidence from skeletal remains, mummified remains, carvings, paintings and ancient historical accounts into chronological order, the blackness of ancient Kmt, ancient Ta-Seti and even more ancient Hapi (Nile) Valey cultures will be obvious to any observer. (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 9)

This can also be confirmed trough primary interaction with the Greeks, as indicated in Aristotle's *Physiognomonica* and Herodotus' *Histories.* Both of their accounts describe the Egyptians with black skin and wooly hair. Herodotus describes:

> For the people of Colchis are evidently Egyptian, and this I perceived for myself before I heard it from others. So when I had come to consider the matter I asked them both; and the Colchians had remembrance of the Egyptians more than the Egyptians of the Colchians; but the Egyptians said they believed that the Colchians were a portion of the army of Sesostris. That this was so I conjectured myself not only because they are dark-skinned and have curly hair (this of itself amounts to nothing, for there are other races which are so), but also still more because the Colchians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians alone of all the races of men have [practiced] circumcision from the first. The Phenicians and the Syrians who dwell in Palestine confess themselves that they have learnt it from the Egyptians, and the Syrians about the river Thermodon and the river Parthenios, and the Macronians, who are their [neighbors], say that they have learnt it lately from the

> Colchians. These are the only races of men who [practice] circumcision, and these evidently [practice] it in the same manner as the Egyptians. (Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014, p. 104)

Their physical descriptions are important when distinguishing their undeniable African features. The Greek's involvement in Kemet highlights another misconceived idea about ancient African history. The pre-colonial Africans were documented teachers of the Greeks (James, 2010; Williams, 1987). James (2010) asserts, "the Egyptians taught Pythagoras and the Greeks, what mathematics they knew" (p. 8). When considering how Afrocentricity can realign right knowledge, it is important to note these particular historical events. Primary European sources also confirm the Greek's presence in Egypt in the form of apprentices or students. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* mentions:

> By way of completing of his education [Plutarch] proceeded to visit Egypt. The 'wisdom of the Egyptians' always seems to have a fascination for the Greeks, and at this period Alexandria, with its famous library and its memories of the Ptolemies, of Kallimachus and of Theokritus, was an important [center] of Greek intellectual activity. Plutarch's treatise on Isis and Osiris is generally supposed to be juvenile work suggested by his Egyptian travels. (Plutarch, 75 C.E./2012, p. 17)

Herodotus adds that in addition to being preeminent writers and scholars, the ancient Egyptians were also mathematicians and astronomers. He notes in his primary documents in 440 B.C.E.:

> But as to those matters which concern men, the priests agreed with one another in saying that the Egyptians were the first of all men on earth to find out the course

> of the year, having divided the seasons into twelve parts to make up the hole; and this they said they found out from the stars: and they reckon to this extent more wisely than the Hellenes… whereas the Egyptians, reckoning the twelve months at thirty days each, bring in also every year five days beyond the number, and thus circle of their seasons is completed and comes round to the same point whence it was set out. (Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014, p. 4)

Aristotle also mentions the Greeks' involvement in Egypt. He notes in *Metaphysics Volume 1*:

> Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure. (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1966, p. 3)

Aristotle confirms that mathematics was founded in Egypt. Furthermore he notes that the Greeks "discovered" the importance of science and mathematics after the Egyptians.

In order to teach the Greeks, the ancient Kemetians had to possess knowledge of the world order and the cosmos. Africans were producers of science, mathematics, philosophy, religion, and literature long before the Western world came in contact with the region (Asante, 1990; Clarke, 2007; Diop, 1974,1981, 1987; Kunjufu, 2002; Obenga, 2004). These Kemetians showed evidences of:

> The burial of the dead, the existence of a highly developed monotheistic religious system, the existence of a pharoanic led political system, the existence of a highly developed science of astronomy and many other things associated with

> cooperative and intelligent human society proved the existence of early civilization in the Hapi Valley, more developed than anywhere else in the world at that time. (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 9)

Herodotus also acknowledges the ancient Egyptian's spirituality. He notes in his primary work *Histories*:

> Moreover, it is true also that the Egyptians were the first of men who made solemn assemblies and processions and approaches to the temples, and from them the Hellenes have learnt them, and my evidence for this that the Egyptian celebrations of these have been held from a very ancient time, whereas the Hellenic were introduced but lately. (Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014, p. 58)

The high-level of organization within this ancient culture has dumfounded scholars for centuries and still remains a model for replication today:

> Ancient Egypt's Middle Kingdom must be regarded as one of the most remarkable epochs in the long history of African people. From 2050-1786 B.C., the Middle Kingdom contributed some of Africa's most significant literary and religious innovations. Its literature set the standard of future generations. Its art was held in such esteem that tit was used as a model in the Egyptian renaissance of the last native dynasties. In the fields of scientific and technical proficiency, the Blacks took giant steps and left a record of genius that continues to amaze modern scholars. Its colossal, yet precise, construction projects have few parallels, past or present. (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 49)

This positions the land of Kemet (known today as Egypt) as the center of world formation, world thought, and a universal contextualization for all people.

Kemetians created the establishment of this high society before invaders arrived (Williams, 1987). The most influential scholar during the Kemetic period was Imhotep, who was, "[the] builder of the first pyramid, architect, prime minister, philosopher-teacher, [and] father of medicine" (Karenga, 2002, p. 96). Today, Imhotep is an ancestor of distinction. He resides on the human record as the world's first multi-genius:

> [Imhotep] is the earliest personality recorded in history who dealt with questions of space, time, volume, the nature of illness, physical and mental disease, and immortality. There was no situation during his lifetime that did not cause Imhotep to reflect on the meaning and significance of its origin, development, and conclusion. He was the first philosopher in human history. In this sense, he is the true father of medicine, architecture, politics, and philosophy. (Asante, 2000, p. xiii)

Imhotep's knowledge of astronomy, architecture, and physics are manifested today through the great pyramids. Imhotep's influence on Kemetian royalty was so great, that he became one of the few citizens outside of the royal lineage who was promoted to the status of a God. His existence is imperative in recasting African American historical discourse. His legacy debunks Western myths suggesting Hippocrates was the father of medicine and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were the originators of ancient philosophy (Asante, 2000). His legacy also recasts the significance of pre-colonial African intellect.

Mathematics, as previously stated, was created by Africans and later taught to the Greeks. One well-known student who attended the ancient University of WaSet was Pythagoras. He learned teachings from, "… [the] *Rhind Papyrus* and the *Moscow Papyrus*… [which] predate anything else in the word in mathematics" (Asante, 2003, p.

223). In addition to being the first preexisting civilization with an incomparable command of mathematics, ancient Kemetians had the oldest writing system and language. Mdw Ntr or Mdw Netcher was the name of their sacred writing system. The Greeks later called this *hieroglyphics*. "The existence of this writing alone is testimonial to the development of early civilization in the ancient [Nile Valley]" (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 8). The evidence of this writing system along with archeological artifacts has solidified the importance of Kemetians throughout world history (Diop, 1981).

Mdw Netcher's significance is important for the realignment of historical timelines. It is perhaps most important for the signifying the ancient Kemetian's acknowledgement of God:

> The earliest Mdw Netcher writings described Offering lists to the deity or to its manifestations and powers. Later prayers of offerings were substituted for the Offering list. These writings as with almost all writings in ancient Kmt emerged out of a profound religious orientation toward the world. This religious orientation found its expression in preparations for life after death or for the resurrection. However, lost to many analysts is the fact that in the preparation for life after death or for the resurrection, the supplicant was actually articulating a set of values and a code of behaviors by which to live one's life in the world before death. No higher human behavioral code has been found anywhere in human history than the earliest code of the ancient Kamites. (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 11)

The evidence of Mdw Ntr is found in *The Teachings of Ptahhotep*, which is the oldest book in the world dating to 2,500 B.C. This book, along with *The Book of the Coming Forth* – which is the oldest religious book in the world, redefines misconceptions regarding African origin and intellect. Most importantly, it redefines thoughts concerning African spirituality (Karenga, 1984). Africans were the first known people to acknowledge a higher power and a monotheistic God. Within the Kemetian culture, spirituality is embedded and evidenced in *The Teachings of Ptahhotep*, which was written during the 5th dynasty, long before any invaders or cultural influencers came to the region (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987; Karenga, 1984).

The University – or schooling – system was also well established in the Kemetian region. "[In] the peak of Kemetic civilization there were actually more than 80,000 students…studying" (Akbar, 1998, p. vi). Universities such as the Grand Lodge of Luxor, the University of Sankore, Al-Azhar University, and the University of Fez were home to geniuses who have permanently shaped world history (Rodney, 2011). "Students from all over the Moslem world came to [Timbuktu] to study grammar, law and surgery at the University of Sankore; scholars came from North Africa and Europe to confer with learned historians and writers of this Black empire" (Clarke, 1993, p. 42). Their existence is incontestable. The ruins of the University of Sankore, for example, still can be seen today (Clarke, 2007). Thus, it must be acknowledged, "[the] colonizers did not introduce education into Africa: they introduced a new set of formal educational institutions which partly supplemented and partly replaced those which were before" (Rodney, 2011, p. 240). When situating this conversation within 21st century contexts, this is an important fact to note.

After the conquest of Egypt by "Alexander the Great" in 332 B.C.E., the Greeks looted and burned the Royal Library at Alexandria, which was home to many of the well-known scholars of Grecian history (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987; James, 2010; Williams, 1987). More importantly, this library housed the teachings of African professors and teachers who instructed the Greek philosophers on mathematics and theory. The subsequent colonization and enslavement of Africans across the Diaspora, "…was accompanied by a wholesale, systematic falsification of the human record. It left the descendants of Africans and others throughout the world in almost total darkness, regarding the contributions of African people to the population of the world and to world civilization" (Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987, p. 9). These events are critically important for understanding later concepts of Afrocentricity. It is important to realign Africa's history with these aforementioned historical facts, not just the nightmares of slavery and colonialism.

Precursors to Pan-Africanism

The damages from the African Diaspora, known as the MAAFA, dislocated African Americans from Africa. In the mid nineteenth century, the surfacing of Northern Black abolitionists – such as Bishop Richard Allen – congregated and formed the *National Convention Movement* in 1817 (Karenga, 2002). Almost a century before formal Pan-Africanism, and at the height of American slavery, Black activists in the North expressed a concerted effort in the unification of Blacks. The Convention's aim was to unify people Blacks to migrate to Canada (ibid.). The *National Convention Movement* expanded beyond just the northern United States; it also expanded into the Midwest. The looming Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 crystalized the group's efforts to unify Blacks in the

North and the South. This represents an inseparable connection to the eventual Pan-African movement.

Later, clergymen like Alexander Crummell, Martin Delany, and Robert Campbell also recognized this dislocation nearly fifty years before there was organized Pan-African unity (Okafor, 1998). Afrocentricity today rests on the intellectual heritage of these three thinkers. In 1831, Martin Robinson Delany wrote about the need to establish a sense of community within the African American experience. These efforts advocated for solidarity among African Americans, even before Emancipation (Adeleke, 1994; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ratteray, 1994). Delany was an abolitionist who lived between 1812 and 1855. He argued:

> … education should both liberate the mind and teach people the skills needed for economic survival. He also postulated that education could be used as a means of 'moral suasion' to change the attitudes whites held toward African Americans… He began to argue that Blacks needed to control their children's education and that race and ethnicity should be the central constructs for the study of the African American experience in the United States. (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000, p. 17)

Similar to Afrocentric theories of today, Delany was a free man born in West Virginia who refused racism and colonialism (Adeleke, 1994; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). After visiting Sierra Leone and Liberia, Martin Delaney's views became grounded in African unity. In fact, he was associated with the African Settlement Movement in Liberia, which predates Marcus Garvey's "back to Africa" movement. The African Settlement Movement aimed to facilitate a migration back to Africa post-emancipation in the nineteenth century. Garvey's movement is usually associated with Black Nationalism of

the 20th century. Delany's beliefs surrounding the need for self-sufficiency and Black unity within the community heralded subsequent theories like Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism.

Alexander Crummell was another historical Pan-African pioneer. Like Delany, Alexander Crummell was also a clergyman who spent time in Africa during the 19th century. He received his formal training in the Evangelical church, but spent time in Liberia from 1853 to 1873 (Crawford, 2003). While his original intent was to convert African people to Christianity (Appiah, 1990), Crummell pushed for political independence and liberation. At the core of Alexander Crummell's concern was the topic of race (Appiah, 1990). He saw himself as a "Negro" and understood the connection between his heritage and Africa. More importantly, he identified with the plight of Black people. His writings "effectively inaugurated the discourse of Pan-Africanism" (Appiah, 1990, p. 388). Both Delany and Crummell were religious leaders by trade, but used their occupations as a vehicle to disseminate information (Crawford, 2003).

Robert Campbell should also be included in the precursory Pan-African conversation. Campbell was a Jamaican man who helped to form the Niger Valley Exploring Party along with Delany (Blackett, 1977). He visited Africa in 1859 and argued for the creation of an independent Black settlement in Liberia. Campbell distinctively opposed accepting support from White philanthropists, who were against Delany's wishes (ibid.). In spite of their petty differences, the two men worked together to establish a treaty with the Alake and Abeokuta tribes, in hopes to establish an independent Black nation in Africa. The treaty was ratified on December 28, 1859. In 1860, Campbell and Delany recruited other abolitionists in England and formed the

African Aid Society to support the efforts of immigration to Nigeria (ibid.). They heralded support from both White and Black businessmen to fund an independent Black settlement in Africa. Lancashire and Scottish cotton manufactures supported their efforts, in hopes to build a slavery-free cotton plant in Africa, versus supporting the South's plantation economy (ibid.). Campbell and Delany went on advocacy tours in Europe, Canada, and the Caribbean in order to galvanize additional support from the Black community. They received little support, because many Blacks in the U.S. were preoccupied with the Civil War. While away from Africa on tour, the previously signed 1859 treaty became ensnarled with various political particularities. Their efforts to establish an African nationality, "…fell prey to the opposition of English missionaries in Abeokuta, English imperialist expansion and the outbreak of the Civil War in America" (Blacekтt, 1977, p. 24). As a result, their plans for an independent African nation were delayed, but their efforts were not in vain. These initial ideological stirrings united Africans and African Americans over forty years before the Pan-African movement officially started. It must be acknowledged that their accomplishments are what Pan-Africanism and Afrocentricity of later years eventually achieved.

Delany, Crummell, and Campbell have secured their place in the intellectual genealogy of Pan-Africanism, which later led to Afrocentricity. It is important to acknowledge their transition as European-trained clergymen to Pan-African activists. Their contributions serve as an appropriate foundation for this study. Arguably, Afrocentric schools have a direct connection to these three revolutionaries.

The Formation of Pan-Africanism

The official formations of Pan-Africanism came two years after Alexander Crummell's passing. The term Pan-Africanism was eventually created by three Trinidadians: H. Sylvester Williams, C.L.R. James, and George Padmore (Clarke, 1993). Pan-Africanism can be defined as an attempt to establish, "… a common cultural and political community by virtue of [origin] in Africa and common racial, social and economic oppression" (Adogambe, 2008, p. 7). As early as 1900, Henry Sylvester-Williams organized a group in hopes of unity within the confines of "Pan-Africanism," known as the *Pan-African Congress* (Agogambe, 2008). Six distinct meetings – in 1900, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927 and 1945 – solidified Pan-African's place in world history.

There were two initial goals of the *Pan-African Congress*. The first goal was the unification of Africa towards a central government (Agogambe, 2008). This revolutionary idea would essentially change the structures of world government and economics, all while promoting African unity and economic stability. A second goal of Pan-Africanism was self-reliance and independence. Many African countries during the formation of the Pan-Africanist movement were colonized, doubly Caribbean and continental Africa nations as dictated from the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Decolonization was an essential aim of Pan-Africanism, through the methods of African unity and empowerment.

It is important to note that Pan-African ideas were disbursed through varying political organizations, like the *United "Negro" Movement*, *International African Services Bureau*, and the *Pan-African Federation*. In 1936, George Padmore and C.L.R. James organized the *International African Services Bureau* and the *Pan-African*

Federation to secure civil rights for African people (Okafor, 1998). Padmore had a political stage "wide opened" from precursor Pan-Africanists (Lemert, 2010). From here, Padmore united with Kwame Nkrumah to organize the Fifth Pan-African Conference.

The fifth *Pan-African Congress* of 1945, hosted leaders such as W.E.B. Dubois, George Padmore, and Kwame Nkrumah, who began to shift focus specifically to continental Africa and the decolonization process. The liberation of African nations was a result of this Pan-African Congress. During the height of African decolonization, Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia founded the *Organization of African Unity* (OAU) in 1963. Selassie's aim was to unify individual nation states across Africa. Fifty-three (53) out of the fifty-four (54) countries – with the exception of Morocco – joined the organization. This was a substantial accomplishment; especially considering the last African nation to receive its independence was not until 1993 (Adogambe, 2008). Selassie's organization was eventually transformed into the African Union in 2002.

Black Nationalism

The key distinction between Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism is their respective origins. Pan-Africanism emphasized the unity of all Africans, continental and Diasporic, for the advancement of Africa as its central theme, while Black Nationalism focused on the fight for self-governance and ending discrimination, and later, connected to the struggle for the 'upliftment' of Africa. Whereas Pan-Africanism aimed to unite African countries with a concerted effort on continental Africa, Black Nationalism was initially more so concerned with the Black experience and day-to-day experiences of Black people in the Diaspora. Black Nationalism is defined as, "a thrust to build alternative structures, which … advance Black aspirations and interest" (Karenga, 2002,

p. 383). Some well-known Black Nationalists include: Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Maulana Karenga, and Marcus Garvey, among others. Each of them placed a concerted effort in uplifting Blacks from their current social conditions.

Marcus Garvey's *Universal "Negro" Improvement Association (UNIA)* called for the advancement and unification of Africans across the Diaspora. Garvey is known as both a Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist because of his efforts to unite all Africans, both Diasporic and continental Africans. As noted earlier, this was not entirely a new concept due to the efforts of Delany, Crummell, and Campbell. Garvey was concerned with the unification of Africa in plans to voyage towards relocating in Africa (Agogambe, 2008). Garvey's program had a concerted interest in character building and education. This was rooted in the belief that African culture and heritage were "necessary for true liberation of Diaspora Africans" (Asante, 2003, p. 17).

As noted, there are noticeable overlaps between Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Although continental origin is a key difference, both Black Nationalist and Pan-African movements worked towards unity in Africa. Black Nationalism aimed for Blacks to, "…see themselves as connected by their common position in America relative to Whites" (Tauheed, 2008, p. 699). Black Nationalism is similar to Pan-Africanism in regards to its critiques of racism. Black Nationalism also urges for complete economic independence and self-separation (Karenga, 2002). Although many viewed the Black Nationalism model as flawed and dangerous, there were commendable efforts that spawned from its conception. For example, the idea of *cooperative commonwealth* during the political periods of segregation and inequality, included "… efforts in education through school and church, and economic cooperation in the arts, health care, trade

unionism, banking, law, and insurance, among other aspects of economic and social life" (Tauheed, 2008, p. 699). The separation of Blacks from Whites was seen as a viable option for the economic and social independence of Blacks.

Pan-Africanism and Education

DuBois' early career advocated for integration and equality, in which he considered Garvey's views as counterproductive (Asante, 2003; Wiggan, 2010). Though his intermixing with the communist Party and *Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Wiggan, 2010), DuBois was outcast from the same America he once advocated for. Later in DuBois' life, he resided in Ghana and adopted an Africanist outlook. This is where DuBois began writing the *Encyclopedia Africana*, which is undoubtedly Pan-African. Although Garvey is usually heralded under the category "Black Nationalist," he is arguably the greatest Pan-Africanist in history (Asante, 2003). "[Garvey] saw clearly the relationship of Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora as variations of one people, one giant cultural project… [Even] the name of his organization emphasized his Pan-African commitment, the *Universal "Negro" Improvement Association* and *African Communities League*" (Asante, 2003, p. 18).

Aside from political efforts, Pan-Africanism also placed a concerted effort on education. The need for alternative schooling for African Americans was central to the argument of early and formative Pan-African movements. Early scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, Edward Wilmont Blyden, and Carter G. Woodson recognized that education was the impetus for freedom. This is important to acknowledge when later contemporizing the need for Afrocentric schools. Blyden – like Delany, Crummell, and Campbell – was also a clergyman who eventually helped to unify Africans and African Americans across the

Diaspora. Blyden worked alongside Crummell to begin Liberia's modern system of education (Appiah, 1990). Blyden and Crummell believed the proper home for African Americans was in Africa. In another sense, Carter G. Woodson also believed education was critically important for the plight of African Americans. Woodson's (1933) iconic *Mis-Education of the Negro* recognized that education was essential for African American uplift and social mobility. Joyce (2005) asserts:

> [Carter G. Woodson] made the connection between laws that forbade the teaching of reading and writing to slaves and the deliberate sparsity of information on Black history and the contribution of Blacks to world society. He was also clear on how this lack of information affected Black consciousness and impeded Black determination for independent educational, social, economic, and political progress. (p. 111)

As Joyce (2005) notes, Carter G. Woodson made a connection between the deliberate subjugation of Blacks and the scarcity of African American history in schools. Woodson is not usually associated with Black National politics, but his views as articulated in the *Mis-Education of the Negro* and *The African Background Outlined or Handbook for the Study of the "Negro"* are undoubtedly centered on African unity (Wiggan, 2010). These moments in history are important when identifying the chronological steps towards developing Afrocentricity and later, Afrocentric schooling.

The Impact of Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism

Education is just one focus that both Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism share. There is substantial overlap in both social movements, because of their overall concern with Africa and the African Diaspora. Although Black Nationalism and Pan-

Africanism originated in different places, their end focus was the same. The ideological and socio-political forces of Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism have essentially changed the world. For example, many attribute Kwame Nkrumah for helping Ghana reach its independence in 1947 (Drake, 1959). However, decolonization was not without consequence. When African nations reached independence, they experienced financial turmoil and debt from years of being under colonial rule (Sitglitz, 2002). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank granted loans to these newly independent African nations in order to "stabilize" their economies. Today, "… the high aspirations following colonial independence have been largely unfulfilled. Instead, the continent plunges deeper into misery, as incomes fall and standards of living decline" (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 5). These attempts at stabilization were erroneous and actually contributed to the destabilization of Africa's economy. Thus, the installment of the African Economic Community Treaty in 1991 (and later the Constitutive Act) aimed to save thousands of refugees who are displaced from religious and political wars within Africa. Along the same lines, one could argue that achieving collective empowerment among African people across the Diaspora, through Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism, has been a positive response to the negative effects of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism. Despite millions of Africans being displaced, Pan-Africanism teaches the consciousness of still "belonging" to Africa (Adogambe, 2008, p. 10). This reinforced the connection between global and continental Africanisms.

One could argue that the proliferation of Black scholars and world leaders, such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and H. Sylvester Williams were evidence of Pan-Africanisms success within itself. Each of the

aforementioned scholars and world leaders were influential during a tumultuous time in academic world history. These scholars described the importance of Black identity, equality, and unification – which are each tenets of Pan-Africanism (Clarke, 2007; Lemert, 2010). C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and H. Sylvester Williams' emergence as scholars interested in Black collectivity was in itself a long-lasting evidence of Pan-Africanism. The political and educational courage it took to demand change for the social plight of African people across the Diaspora was especially noble, considering the segregation era in which Pan-Africanism developed.

The scholarship resulting from the Pan-African movement helped foster the initial formations of Africana, Pan-African, Africology, and Diaspora Studies departments in postsecondary universities worldwide. The first evidence of Pan-African curriculum was written by William Leo Hansberry, who taught the first African studies course at Howard University in 1922. Hansberry eventually continued to start the first Black Studies department at Howard University (Alford, 2000). This inaugural step towards African unification, which was made in the 18th and 19th centuries, is evidenced today through this study.

Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism Today

Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism are frameworks with varying degrees of similarity and differences. Some debate the currency of these frameworks in what is considered a post-racial, 21st century society (Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1998). Although notions of post-racialism or colorblindness are quickly debunked (Ito & Urland, 2003; Rattan & Ambady, 2013), the argument still stands on whether Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism are effective frameworks for future development plans in the Africana

world. As noted, Pan-Africanism was developed as a response to White supremacy across the Diaspora and throughout the de-colonization movement in Africa (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2002). Many early Pan-Africanists believed that the Diaspora created racial conditions that were damaging to African descendants, so they sought to unify.

According to early Pan-Africanists like Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah, one of the key problems within the Diaspora is the condition of the disconnectedness and rootedness to Africa. Pan-Africanism frames a central "homeland" within a conceptual place or continent, versus a nation-state or specific country. According to Asante (1990), "this 'place' perspective [is] a fundamental rule of intellectual inquiry because its content is a enthronement of an African wholism… 'place' remains a rightly shaped perspective that allows the Afrocentrist to put African ideals and values at the center of inquiry" (Asante, 1990, p. 5). The same is true for the physical locale of Africa and concepts of "home." Many critics discredit the existence of a common "homeland" because of the lack of cultural congruency across continental Africa (Adeleke, 2009); yet Pan-Africanist researchers assert that African retentions across the Diaspora are incontestable (Akbar, 1998; Asante, 1998; Asante & Karenga, 2006; Clarke, 1993; Karenga, 2002; Murrell, 2002).

Afrocentricity in the 21st Century

Afrocentricity stands on the shoulders of Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism (Shockley & Frederick, 2010). In fact, it should be noted that Kwame Nkrumah – organizer of the *Fifth Pan-African Congress* and former president of Ghana – first used the word "Afrocentricity" in the 1960s, before the term was popularized in the 1980s by Molefi Kete Asante (Asante, 2009b; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). Today, Molefi K.

Asante is known for developing Afrocentricity into a social and theoretical framework. Asante (2010) contends:

> Afrocentricity finds its grounding in the intellectual and activist precursors who first suggested culture as a critical corrective to the displaced agency among Africans. Recognizing that Africans in the Diaspora had been deliberately de-cultured and made to accept the conqueror's codes of conduct and modes of behavior, the Afrocentrist discovered that the interpretive and theoretical grounds had also been moved. (2010, p. 37)

As a framework, Afrocentricity can be defined as the re-centering African agency from *objects* to *participants* in history (Asante, 1993). Today, Afrocentricity is a framework that confronts hegemony (ibid.). Asante (1998) argues, "Many today find it difficult to stop view European/American culture as the center of the social universe" (p. 4). Afrocentricity's role is to disrupt the hegemonic centrality of Europe into a more diversified outlook. Because Eurocentric ethos has been widely accepted for so long, "[people] often assumed that their 'objectivity,' a kind of collective subjectivity of European culture, should be the measure by which the world marches" (p. 1). Recognizing and becoming familiar with historical truths are the premise of Afrocentric views. Asante and Karenga (2006) postulate that these forms of oppression have been falsely indoctrinated through history. Ignoring historical truths that center Africa as the starting place of humanity undermines society's view of Black people and Black culture. As a result, African Americans and other oppressed groups now view their own culture through measures of Eurocentric lenses.

Afrocentricity, although heavily grounded in research, is not without strong contention. Ravitch (1990), Schlesinger (1998), and Lefkowitz (1997) each have castigated the claims of Afrocentricity and disagreed with Pan-Africanists– such as Molefi Asante, John Henrik Clarke, and Théophile Obenga (Asante, 1993). Even some African American researchers, like Henry Louis Gates (1991) and Tunde Adeleke (2009) take issue with Afrocentric theory. Gates (1991) skeptically dismisses Afrocentricity's utility in general and asserts in a widely published *Newsweek* article entitled "Beware of the New Pharaohs." Gates (1991) claims, "… too many people still regard African-American studies primarily as a way to rediscover a lost cultural identity – or invent one that never quite existed" (p. 47). Adeleke (2009) asserts that Afrocentricity is essentialist and monolithic. However, the very basis of Afrocentricity dispels theories that perpetuate essentialist and monolithic views of history. Asante (2003) argues that "Afrocentrists have never opposed any racial group or supported any type of discrimination… true Afrocentrist[s] cannot support any racist doctrine but must insist on diversity of cultural positions and experiences without hierarchy – that is, without saying one is better than another or more advanced than the other" (p. 268). In response to its opposition, it is important to note that European hegemony – not any specific persons or racial group – are the premise of Afrocentricity. These critiques help shape the political misconceptions that are evident even in today's conversations surrounding Afrocentricity and Afrocentric education.

Afrocentric Education

As mentioned, Afrocentricity is defined as the re-centering of African perspectives toward the center of analysis (Asante, 1991). Additionally, Afrocentric

education centers the African perspective to inform students. Afrocentric education generally encourages the following objectives for students, teachers, and school structures (Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990):

1. legitimizes African stores of knowledge;
2. positively exploits and scaffolds productive community and cultural practices;
3. extends and builds on the indigenous language;
4. reinforces community ties and idealizes service to one's family, community, nation, race, and world;
5. promotes positive social relationships;
6. imparts a worldview that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others
7. supports cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness (p. 50).

Lee, Lomotey, and Shujaa (1990), along with Dei (1994), Asante (2009a), and Karenga (1966) propose that Afrocentricity is a unified educational effort that encompasses much more than simply learning about Africa. Afrocentric school curriculum focuses on heritage, community, and African-centered pedagogy.

Today, the idea of Afrocentric schooling is often misunderstood to simply involve adding African facts and history into the curriculum (Dei, 2012; Joyce, 2005; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith & López, 2014; Murrell, 2002). Some key preliminary Afrocentric curriculum planners include John Henrik Clarke, Asa Hilliard, Molefi Asante, Wade Nobles, and Leonard Jeffries, among others, who have each left an undying legacy through their contributions to the pedagogical conversation (Asante, 1998). Although they each are noted for separate contributions in Afrocentric curriculum

development, their undeniable purpose was to unveil accurate historical information (Asante, 1998).

Dei (1996) found that Afrocentricity is an effective way of implementing an anti-racist curriculum. Dei (1996) pioneered bridging anti-racist curriculum and Afrocentricity. More specifically, he examined the intersectionality of Afrocentricity and anti-racism for students:

> Although Afrocentricity is a world-view embraced in opposition to the subjugation of non-White peoples by Eurocentrism, it is not an attempt to replace one form of hegemony with another. Knowledge of indigenous African cultural values is important for the personal development and schooling of all students. A critical reading of the history of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa, and an acknowledgement of the achievements of peoples of African descent, both in their own right and in broader human development, will be helpful to the progressive politics of educational and social change. (Dei, 1996, p. 181)

Dei (1996) and Joyce (2005) further assert that a focus on Afrocentricity is not oppositional to other forms of knowledge. In fact, it welcomes a plurality of varying perspectives and cultural experiences. A demonstration of Afrocentricity's utility is found in an example Afrocentric biology curriculum below (see Table 2).

Table 2: McClymonds Afrocentric biology curriculum (Ginwright, 2004, p. 92)

MA'AT Principles	Example Biological Concepts
Truth	Learning about truth through scientific evidence and reason.
Justice	Understanding cell equilibrium and functions.
Harmony	Understanding transportation through cell wall and surrounding environment of the cell.
Balance	Understanding basic cell structure.
Order	Understanding the proper function of a healthy cell (discuss viruses, cancer, steroids)
Reciprocity	Understanding the proper environment for the cells to grow.
Propriety	Understanding how cells try to self-correct from an imbalance or outside influence.

As displayed in Table 2, in an Afrocentric curriculum, concepts such as the MA'AT are centered in the curriculum. Race is not necessarily the center of discussion. Even in a laboratory science like biology, the alignment of curriculum with an Afrocentric perspective is plausible and implementable.

Dei (1994) asserts through anti-racist research, that Afrocentricity also requires reciprocal respect among students and teachers. "This proceeds from an understanding that each individual stakeholder has something to offer and that diverse viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives strengthen the collective bonds of the school" (Dei, 1996, p. 181). Instead of traditional methods of education where the teacher is the sole expert (Freire, 2000), students also bring to the classroom a useful skillset of their ethnicity, heritage, and culture (Jackson, 1994). This broadens the utility of Afrocentricity to all students.

Within schools, Afrocentricity critiques European hegemony and the adaptation of one grand narrative for the application of all students. The world's history and cultural diversity yields opportunity for critical cultural conversations, not common in traditional

school environments. Dei (1996) research substantiated the need for critical perspectives in education, in the form of Afrocentricity, to respond to the lack of Black and African perspectives in the curriculum. Dei (1996), found the "… perspectives, histories, and experiences; the absence of Black teachers; and the dominance of White, Eurocentric culture in the mainstream school system are shared by all Black youth" (p. 178). As noted in the previous chapter, student achievement, both nationally and internationally, demonstrate widespread student indignation and dissatisfaction with the current curriculum.

One model of inclusive cultural frameworks was known as the *Portland Baseline Essays*, published in 1987. This geocultural curriculum project was led by Dr. Asa Hilliard III, who took the historical contributions of four cultures, to promote the utility of multiculturalism in mainstream curricula ("Portland Baseline Essays," 1987). The cultures explored in the study include African American, American Indian, Asian American, and "Latino/Latina" American. This multiethnic/multicultural project was the first of its kind, servicing a large public school district –Portland Public Schools. The purpose of this project was to demonstrate the cohesive nature of multiculturalism and show the interdependence of all cultures on one another ("Portland Baseline Essays," 1987). The Portland Essays eventually were adapted by other school districts in Atlanta, Milwaukee, and New York (Binder, 2000; Leake & Leake, 1992b). Like Afrocentric schools today, the essays covered all subjects, not just African American history. For each academic subject, including art, language arts, music, social science, physical education and health, mathematics, and science and technology, scholars contributed extensive ethnic and cultural research. The basis of this project advocated for cultural

inclusion within the curriculum. Although the essays were written nearly thirty years ago, there is still relevancy in 21st century contexts (Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 1992).

Engaging pedagogical approaches are critically important, arguably, now more than ever (Asante, 1998; Delpit, 2006; Freire, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Afrocentric curriculum is encouraged for implementation, in order to counter systemic methods of curricular hegemony. Current models of education specifically focus on White, middle-class ethos (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2011; Kunjufu, 2002). In fact, many Black students experience moments of dissonance and marginality in educational settings (Dei, 1993; Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000; Dei, Mazzucca, McIssac, & Zine, 1997; Levin, 1992). Their experiences are typically directly related to cultural exclusion, racism, or prejudice. Afrocentricity, however, places importance on Black cultural contributions within the school curriculum (Asante, 2009b; Asante, 1998) (see Figure 1 and 2).

Early Afrocentric School Models

One of the earliest evidences of an U.S. Afrocentric school was the Nairobi Day School in East Palto Alto, California (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). The Nairobi Day School operated between 1966 and 1984, and proclaimed to teach, "…African and African American history, culture, and language as the basis of its curriculum and made use of pedagogical techniques that responded to African American children's learning styles" (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000, p. 17). The formation of Nairobi stemmed from community efforts to control and govern the neighborhood's education in East Palto Alto. When the school opened in 1966, it operated primarily as a supplementary program on

Saturdays. Four years into existence, Nairobi expanded to a full-time school for students (Hoover, 1992). Nairobi's pedagogical approach required teachers to hold high expectations for students. Teachers were also required to modify their lesson plans to incorporate an African perspective. Nairobi outperformed neighboring schools in literacy. In fact, Nairobi's administration guaranteed that each student would read on grade level after one year of attendance at Nairobi (Hoover, 1992). Nairobi was so successful that the *Institute for Black Child Development* described Nairobi as, "… one of the best educational programs for Black children in the country" (Blakeslee, 1975, p. 30). The school eventually closed in 1984 because of financial challenges, but findings from Nairobi demonstrate that high student achievement is possible when implementing corrective Black history and positive self-concepts (Hoover, 1992).

It should be noted that there were evidences of other Afrocentric schools documented during the late 1960s and 1970s as well, such as, "the Afro-American School of Culture, founded in Los Angeles in 1967; Omowale Ujamaa of Pasadena, founded in 1973; the Winnie Mandela Children's Learning Village, established in Compton in 1973; the Marcus Garvey School of Los Angeles, founded in 1975; and Uhuru Shule, founded in Los Angeles in 1978" (Kifano, 1996, p. 210). The aforementioned schools, similar to Nairobi, were community led initiatives aimed to more appropriately educate African American students. Many of these schools were destabilized through shifts in administration and leadership, and subsequently many of them closed. As a result, there is limited research on these schools. Nairobi, however, provides a general depiction of the early formations of Afrocentric schooling (Hoover, 1992).

Afrocentric Schools in the 1990s

Molefi Kete Asante began the initial formations of "Afrocentric" research (under that name) in the 1970s (Asante, 2009c). He eventually published *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* in 1980, which iconized Afrocentricity into a social theory. In 1991, Asante merged the Afrocentric theoretical framework with education, and explored the utility of Afrocentricity within schooling. Asante's (1991) main assertion distinguished the difference between Afrocentricity and multiculturalism. He contended that when multicultural education is implemented incorrectly, it could easily propagate racist Eurocentric research. Multiculturalism too, required proper realignment with right knowledge and historical fact (Asante, 1991). According to Asante, multiculturalism must stem from Afrocentricity, not the other way around (ibid). The aforementioned *Portland Baseline Essays* provide an Afrocentric lens of multiculturalism, as Asante advocates. The Portland Baseline Essays include the contributions of all racial groups, but acknowledge Africa as the starting place of humanity.

Many early formations of public Afrocentric schools came in the form of African American "immersion programs" (Gill, 1991). Milwaukee was a pilot city for immersion programs in public schools (Leake & Leake, 1992a). The district's progressive response to African American student underachievement, in the proposition of immersion programs, coalesced the support of community advocates desperate for school turnaround. The initial tenets of the immersion programs included:

> a) substantial reform of curricular content and instructional strategies… b) involvement of the entire faculty in an a 15-credit program of coursework related to African and African American life experiences… c) transformation

> of the school's physical environment through pervasive displays of textile prints, sculptures, banners, proverbs, quotations, and student work reflective of African and African American heritages… d) commitments from each immersion school teacher to make a minimum of 18 home visits per semester… e) establishment of an intermediate grades mentoring program which provides immersion school fifth grader with an adult from the local community who will serve as his or her mentor throughout the school experience. (Leake & Leake, 1992a, p. 29)

Two of the first schools, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School and Fulton Middle School, galvanized support from African American administrators and parents who resisted the historical distortions found in school curricula (Holt, 1991). Teachers were encouraged to utilize the *Portland Baseline Essays* in order to diversify their lesson planning and curriculum design (Leake & Leake, 1992b). These schools formed in direct opposition to racist research, like *The Bell Curve* and Intelligence (IQ) Testing, which suggested that African American students somehow best performed alongside White students (Leake & Leake, 1992a). The results from initial immersion schools displayed the exact opposite. Murrell (1993) case studied Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School, which was one of the inaugural immersion sites, and found students attending immersion schools were more developed and fared better cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Sanders and Reed (1995) also comparatively examined Milwaukee African American student performance at immersion and traditional schools. In their study, fifth grade students attending immersion schools demonstrated a higher level of intellectual

achievement in comparison to students attending traditional public schools (Sanders and Reed, 1995).

Since Sanders and Reed's (1995) research was only conclusive for fifth grade students, it is important to explore studies with more comprehensive research across grade levels. It is imperative to also present research conducted in other cities, besides Milwaukee, in order to assess Afrocentric educational experience more holistically. Alongside Milwaukee's initial formulation of immersion schools, in the 1990s other public school districts like Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Atlanta, and Washington D.C. concurrently introduced forms of Afrocentric schooling (Kifano, 1996; Murrell, 1993; Span, 2002). By the late 1990s, the term "Afrocentric" was more widely used in place of immersion. These school models spread beyond the Midwest towards the coasts and even abroad (Dei, 1994; Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turrene, 2010). Afrocentric schools were often established in large urban cities since they typically housed higher numbers of African American students. As these new schools spread, so did surrounding research. Studies in the late 1990s and early 21st century placed a concerted effort on better understanding Afrocentric schools.

Anselmi and Peters (1995) conducted a comparative study of two private middle schools in California. Their study examined African American middle school students attending Afrocentric and traditional schools. Anselmi and Peters (1995) performed character assessments on participating students and found there were noticeable differences between Afrocentric and traditional schooling, specifically in regards to positive self-outlook. Initial findings reveal, "… [when] expectations are institutionalized (as in the Afrocentric school), students internalize a positive valuation of self and thus

anticipate more events in the life course, more career-related achievement, and are more optimistic about the likelihood of achieving their goals" (Anselmi & Peters, 1995, p. 7). The results from this study further revealed students attending the Afrocentric school demonstrated increased expressiveness, instrumentality, affirmation and belonging, narrative density, future optimism, and career density (Anselmi & Peters, 1995). Of all the results, the measureable gains were found in students' increased optimism regarding their future career goals. This means students attending Afrocentric schools had a more optimistic outlook on their futures and possessed internal confidence to succeed.

Hopkins (1997) also examined the impact of Afrocentric schooling on students' character development. Hopkins (1997) conducted multiple several case studies to examine Afrocentric school designs in Detroit, Baltimore, New York, and Milwaukee. During the formative years of African American immersion schools, Hopkins (1997) researched male academies specifically. He conducted case studies at Malcolm X African Centered Academy, Paul Robeson African Centered Academy, The Center for Educating African American Males, Malcolm X African American Immersion School, and Martin Luther King Jr. Immersion School. Hopkins's (1997) research specifically explored in-school and afterschool Afrocentric programs. He concluded that the best strategies for African American males were early intervention, single-sex classrooms, and the infusion of African and African American history in the curriculum (Hopkins, 1997). Students in Hopkins' study experienced increased self-esteem and improved achievement (Hopkins, 1997). Hopkins' research is compelling, yet it is limited in that it only applies to African American males.

Similar to Hopkins, Webb (1996) also researched students at Afrocentric schools in the Midwest. Webb's research examined the experiences of both male and female students. Webb (1996) studied sixth, seventh, and eighth grade student achievement at an Afrocentric academy located in Minneapolis. Students in this school spent half of the academic school day at their traditional public school, and the latter half in an Afrocentric academy. The philosophy of the Afrocentric academy was to emphasize collectivity and community, over individualism. Webb's study investigated the impact of the half-day Afrocentric educational experiences on the students' achievement, self-concept, and behaviors. The study examined both White and Black students in the program, and had a control and experimental group. The students in the control group stayed at the traditional school for the longevity of the school day, while the experimental group spent half of their day at the Afrocentric academy. The pre and post-test results demonstrated the experimental group (the group that spent half of the day at the Afrocentric academy) experienced gains in mathematics. The initial results from Hopkins (1997), Saunders and Reed (1995), and Webb (1996), confirmed the benefits of Afrocentric schools for African American students. However, the aforementioned studies focused on the benefits of Afrocentric schools in comparison to traditional public schooling. Research, up until this point, failed to explore student and teacher experiences in-depth at Afrocentric schools. As the 1990s experienced a resurgence of Afrocentric education (Dragnea & Erling, 2008; Hopkins, 1997), research began to more deeply explore student, teacher, and parent experiences at these schools.

Kifano (1996) researched parent satisfaction at Mary McLeod Bethune Institute (MMBI), an Afrocentric supplementary Saturday school in the Crenshaw neighborhood

in Los Angeles. The study revealed that both students and parents benefited from Afrocentric schooling. Parents at MMBI were important to the learning process within the school community (Kifano, 1996). Parents in the study exhibited satisfaction in the school's enrichment practices and family engagement opportunities. They reported appreciation for the school's role in instilling a renewed interest and enthusiasm in students. Kifano's study also found that students benefited from Afrocentric schooling. MMBI's instructional practices contributed to students' political, moral, and cultural development (Kifano, 1996).

Whereas Kifano's (1996) study mainly focused on parent satisfaction, Manley (1997) researched teacher satisfaction and teacher training. Manley (1997) examined teacher feedback on the *Portland Baseline Essays* from Atlanta Public School educators. As mentioned, the *Baseline Essays* were the first comprehensive attempt at formulating an implementable Afrocentric curriculum. These essays were utilized in several urban districts in the 1990s, such as Portland, Milwaukee, New York, and Atlanta. Teachers in Manley's (1997) study were asked to rate how effective the essays were as a basis for curriculum development, lessoning planning, and classroom instruction. Manley surveyed Atlanta teachers ranging from one to forty-five years of experience. The study revealed no relationship between teachers' preparation and their perspectives on the essays; however, teachers noticed behavioral changes in students after implementing the *Portland Baseline Essays*. Teachers explained that students were more excited and involved in the Afrocentric lessons. Teachers also explained the most noticeable difference in student behavior came from low-performing students, who exhibited a newfound interest in curriculum.

As demonstrated in Manley's (1997) study, curriculum design and pedagogy are important in Afrocentric schools. Archie (1997) specifically examined social studies curriculum methods at three Afrocentric schools across Philadelphia, Detroit, and New Jersey. The purpose of Archie's study was to determine the level of uniformity within Afrocentric curricula. The results of Archie's study demonstrated the importance of teacher knowledge about African history. Archie concluded that Afrocentric education must consistently re-center Africa as the starting point of history (Archie, 1997; Asante, 1980, 2009a). Archie (1997) found the greatest determent to Afrocentric curriculum implementation were teachers who approached Afrocentricity as an additive means to incorporate student culture. Across the three Afrocentric schools in Archie's (1997) study, there was philosophical disharmony on whether all teachers could adapt to the Afrocentric pedagogical model. Archie noted that teachers disagreed on whether all teachers could learn and apply Afrocentric pedagogy in their classrooms. Meanwhile, the students in Archie's (1997) study had a much more agreeable perspectives of Afrocentricity. Students considered the Afrocentric curricula as valuable for "career and academic opportunities" (Archie, 1997, p. 139). The overall findings from Archie's study suggested that Afrocentricity must be embedded, not simply added, to school culture (1997). The rejection of additive history is what Asante (1991) formerly found as a distinguishing factor between Afrocentricity and multiculturalism. As Afrocentric education continued to flourish in the 1990s, so did academic research surrounding the differences between Afrocentricity, mainstream, or even multicultural learning environments.

The 1990s saw a proliferation of newly emerging Afrocentric schools (Kifano, 1996; Murrell, 1993; Span, 2002). As a result, research studies overwhelmingly aimed to assess the effectiveness of Afrocentricity for students. Murrell (1993), Sanders and Reed (1995), Hopkins (1997), Webb (1996), Kifano (1996), and Manley (1997) found added benefits of Afrocentric education for students and families. While their research approaches were different, they each provided insight into exploring alternative forms of schooling. These initial studies on Afrocentric education opened new epistemological avenues in academic research.

21st Century Afrocentric Schools

The turn of the 21st century offers a newly evolved milieu for Afrocentric schooling. As the educational climate changes, so do schools. The introduction of high-stakes assessments like *No Child Left Behind*, along with the reappearance of private and charter vouchers, impact current Afrocentric schools (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turrene, 2010). Charter schools, which are independently governed public schools, typically allow for additional curricular flexibility. This is often advantageous for emerging Afrocentric schools (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turrene, 2010; Murrell, 1999; Piert, 2006; Townsend, 2005). However, charter schools also usually require less district accountability (Piert, 2006). This change in landscape brings to question the effectiveness of Afrocentric school designs today. Today, there are less than one hundred Afrocentric schools across the United States that are open and in operation. These schools include public, charter, private, and independent schools. It is important to note that many of these schools have recently closed due to changes in district guidelines and revoking of school charters. Even still, the existence of these present-day Afrocentric schools is

testament to the demand for alternative forms of schooling for students. Reese‘s (2001) study examines the charter school issue.

Reese (2001) investigated student, teacher, administrator, and parent perspectives on Afrocentric schooling at Benjamin Banneker Charter School (BBCS) in Massachusetts. Participants were asked to discuss the advantages – or disadvantages – of Afrocentric education for teaching underserved Black students in impoverished urban communities. The case study at BBCS revealed that the Afrocentric program, in 2001, was under much scrutiny from local residents who were fearful of having an Afrocentric program nearby. Contrary to studies in the 1990s, Reese's (2001) study displayed community apprehension of Afrocentric programs. Nevertheless the BBCS staff and parents advocated for Afrocentric education. In Reese's (2001) study, teachers and parents considered Afrocentric education as an important curricular approach, for both Black and White students in the 21st century. "[Teachers] asserted that it was good for [Black students] to see themselves as major contributors in a historical context and it was good for [Whites] to see that [Blacks] had played a major role in the building of America and major civilizations in general" (Reese, 2001, p. 286). Parents also considered it important for their children to see positive Black role models and leaders within their curriculum and at their school (Reese, 2001).

Similar to Reese (2001), Mitchell (2003) also researched parent and teacher experiences at an Afrocentric school in Southern California. MAAT Academy, which was an Afrocentric afterschool program designed for African American students, aimed to help struggling students. Many students at MAAT were "at risk" of academic failure and needed additional instructional support. Mitchell (2003) conducted an ethnographic

case study that examined the parent and teacher perceptions of students attending Afrocentric schools. Teachers in the study felt an internal connection to MAAT and chose to work in an Afrocentric environment as a means to "give back" to the community. Teachers felt the education at MAAT was more holistic than traditional public schools. As a result, teacher experienced more job satisfaction. Parents in the study noticed observable changes in their students. Some of these student changes include improved self-esteem, more self-respect, and heightened academic focus (Mitchell, 2003).

Similarly, Rayford (2012) examined student, teacher, and parent experiences at an Afrocentric charter school. Rayford's study was conducted at Columbus Africentric Early College in Columbus, Ohio. The study explored seventh grade male students' self-concept, self-esteem, and racial identity. Rayford (2012) aimed to describe students' perceptions of Afrocentric education. Rayford interviewed two principals, eight teachers, nine students, and three parents and found that each stakeholder was influential in the educational outcomes of students. Data findings revealed that students at Columbus Africentric Early College demonstrated increased awareness of positive self-history through manifestations of Nguzo Saba. Students did not view their "Blackness" negatively (Rayford, 2012). This helped to foster nurturing learning environments for students. Teachers and principals were viewed as vital to the Afrocentric learning process. Rayford also found it was imperative for teachers to support Afrocentric education in their pedagogical styles in order educate students holistically. Shockley (2003, 2011) similarly found that Afrocentric teachers were important in the development of African American students. Shockley's (2011) single case study observed an

Afrocentric teacher for three years. In this study, Shockley observed a teacher's dedication to Afrocentricity both inside and outside of the classroom (p. 1031). Shockley (2011) noted:

> Afrocentric teachers are impassioned and desperate, and they mix those emotions together with their deep passion for African history and their knowledge of the reality of the global situation in which Africans now find themselves. What results from emotions and knowledge is an investment in the well-being and development of students, which in turn attracts the students to these teachers and creates a family atmosphere within schools wherein personal relationships are formed. Afrocentric teachers find creative ways to learn things about students' families so they can tether those things in when they need to remind a student of the school-home connection. (Shockley, 2011, p. 1031)

Shockley (2011) finds that Afrocentric teachers engaged students both in pedagogical style and curriculum development, and constantly re-centered all knowledge back to the ancestors. Teachers and parents in Shockley's (2011) study confirmed that the re-centering of ancestral knowledge was important for students' educational success.

When determining Afrocentric schools' effectiveness, is important to examine longitudinal data. Piert (2006) examined the long-term impact of Afrocentric education. This study examined how Afrocentric education influenced students' lives retrospectively. Piert (2006) case studied seven adult participants who were graduates of the same Afrocentric charter school. Participants reflected on their experiences in Afrocentric schooling, and described a sense of family and community that extended past graduation. Participants also described a greater self-concept from the nurturing, loving,

and energetic learning environment. Teachers expected "greatness from them" and high expectations were some of the most formative memories in Afrocentric schooling (p. 169). The participants also described how the principles of Kemet, as taught in Afrocentric schools, helped them in adulthood. Participants admitted they, "…relied on [Kemetic] values as they interacted with their fellow peers while away in the pursuit of higher education; also that they passed these values on to their children and utilized these values and principles in contemplating decisions of daily living" (p. 170). The only points of regret from the participants came from feeling "different" than their peers attending traditional public schools (p. 160). Piert's (2006) longitudinal study provides a unique perspective of Afrocentric education that often remains untold in research.

Afrocentric Curriculum in the 21st Century

In 2002, Murrell's *African-centered Pedagogy* presented a comprehensive epistemological overview of Afrocentric pedagogical techniques. Murrell's research also thoroughly formulated Afrocentric curriculum design theories. Murrell (2002) asserted Afrocentric pedagogy was much more than lesson planning; rather, it was an embedded philosophy that guided behavior. In addition, Murrell concluded that when Afrocentric pedagogy was implemented correctly, students were equipped to become "cultural learners" who were able to critically examine and confront hegemony (p. 169). Murrell (2002) asserted Afrocentric pedagogy was important for all learners, because it created a community of care and respect. Although Murrell's (2002) research provided theoretical overviews of Afrocentric pedagogy, it is important to these theories put into practice.

Gbaba (2009) studied Afrocentric curricula, specifically for language arts and literacy. Gbaba researched the Chiandeh project, which "center[ed] African American

children in their own ancestry to enhance their cultural esteem and learning, and specifically highlight[ed] the term cultural esteem and the lack thereof by many Blacks as an important issue affecting Black children's learning… due to monolithic Euro-centered curriculum… [and] instruction" (iii). Gbaba's (2009) study interviewed students, conducted classroom observations, and used discourse analysis for student written reflections through a K-12 school and afterschool program in Pennsylvania. The researcher used five literary theories to examine the intersections of multiculturalism, interpretivism, and Afrocentric theories in literacy. The study revealed that when African American children were centered as *contributors* in their own history and culture, students demonstrated more interested in literacy, displayed awareness for Afrocentric values, and demonstrated increased respect for their ancestry. The study also found that culturally relevant instructional materials enhanced learning outcomes for students of color and increased student self-awareness.

Shockley and Frederick (2011) also confirmed the importance of cultural relevancy within Afrocentric curricula. Shockley and Frederick's (2011) study disaggregated Afrocentric educational research based on five distinct categories. These categories included identity and Pan-Africanism, African culture and values, reattachment, Black Nationalism, community control and institution building, and education (Shockley & Frederick, 2011). Shockley and Frederick found that within Afrocentric education, one of the most important aspects was the incorporation of Black cultural practices. This stems from the belief that Eurocentric education inadequately services Black students. Shockley and Frederick (2011) found that establishing Afrocentricity within schools requires "re-Africanization," "redefinition," and

"rediscovery" of lost historical knowledge (p. 1224). This process of regaining cultural centeredness is imperative for Afrocentric educators. They found that Afrocentric education must serve as counter-hegemony, and it should also present information in a way that is relevant to 21st century learners. Shockley and Frederick (2011) state:

> Afrocentric educationists advance our understanding of culture and how it works by presenting the notion of culture as steadfast and traditional yet able to protect African people from European, American, or any other universalism, supremacism, and hegemony. These cultural assertions undergird what Afrocentric educationists wish to transmit to students in Afrocentric schools. (p. 1225)

Shockley and Frederick (2011) found that multiculturalism does not adequately address African American students' needs. Most diversity and multicultural initiatives superficially include modest additions to the curriculum, without properly re-aligning history (Shockley & Frederick, 2011). As a result, Shockley and Frederick (2011) suggest the benefits of Afrocentricity extend to all racial groups, not just African Americans.

Cultural relevance, as mentioned in Gbaba's (2009) and Shockley and Frederick's (2011) studies, is important for all curriculum types (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Even the most earnest attempts of Afrocentricity are not always received well among students. Traoré (2002, 2007) and Ginwright (2004) found that many Afrocentric curricula, although meaningful and important, are irrelevant to today's students. This is due to the students' need for more contemporary instructional styles. Ginwright (2004) asserts, "many Afrocentric reform efforts, particularly for middle and high school students, are simply out of touch with urban black youth culture and, as a result, experience limited

success" (p. 132). Traoré's (2007) study came to the same conclusions. Traoré (2007) examined the misconceptions of Africa among high school students and revealed that African history was propagated and distorted. As a result, students in the study were initially uninterested. After the researcher engaged the participants in critical discussions to correct falsified African history, students addressed key issues that were relevant to them including film, Africans in America, stereotypes, and personal values. Traoré (2007) found:

> In just five activities, the African American students changed their interest level in Africa from disinterest to very interested, from ignoring Africa to wanting to know more, from stereotypes of all things African to an awareness of the ways in which school, home, and the media have not contributed to their knowing their history and culture as people of African descent. (p. 673)

Just as Ladson-Billings (1994) urged for the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in public schools, Afrocentric schools must also reflect this contemporary relevancy for students (Murrell, 2002; Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). This suggests contemporizing instructional activities that engage students.

One form of student engagement is the utilization of hip-hop. Ginwright (2004) found the utilization of hip-hop in Afrocentric schools connected African American history with newfound agency. "Expanding and strengthening Afrocentric reform through hip-hop culture… requires a bold and courageous paradigm shift on the part of educators and reformers to conceptualize [Black] youth culture as an asset rather than a liability in educational change efforts" (Ginwright, 2004, p. 135). Afrocentric schools must find contemporary strategies, as suggested by Ginwright (2004), to provide engaging

instructional activities for students. Hip-hop is one pedagogical avenue; yet, there is room in academic research for other strategies.

Giddings' (2001) study found that effective Afrocentric schools must encompass the entire 12-year educational tenure for students. Yet, one challenge many Afrocentric teachers face is the absence of a comprehensive kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum framework (Durden, 2007; Giddings, 2001). Aside from the aforementioned *Portland Baseline Essays* (1987), Asante's *African American History* textbook (1994) and Karenga's *Introduction to Black Studies* (2002), there lacks a concise attempt to streamline Afrocentric curricula. To date, there is a myriad of knowledge accessible for teachers and educators at Afrocentric academies, but no 21st century instructional model (Giddings, 2001). This leaves curricula amorphous and inconsistent across Afrocentric schools.

Squire's (2012) case study examined the journey of an Afrocentric school in the initial stages of development. Findings indicated that Afrocentric schools offer spaces for nationalism and communalism, which "affirms the African spirit and identity" (Squire, 2012, p. 18). This is beneficial for both students and teachers. In addition, Squire's study found that Afrocentric education consider multiple perspectives, in comparison to more traditional school settings. Findings also indicated that teacher recruitment is a strenuous task in Afrocentric schools, because deciphering teaching philosophies and commitment is difficult. Similar to Giddings' (2001) study, resources and materials is another difficulty among Afrocentric schools in Squire's study. Ginwright (2004) presents a compelling case regarding curriculum's role in students' educational experiences. Additional curriculum development is critically important for the sustainability of

Afrocentric schools in the 21st century. In addition, more research that explores student perceptions, daily schooling experiences, and *inclusion* are important for better understanding Afrocentric schooling in the 21st century.

Afrocentric Schools: Where Are We Now?

It is important to grasp how Afrocentric schools are performing in the 21st century. Whereas research overwhelmingly supports that student cultural identity is stronger at Afrocentric schools (Gbaba, 2009; Hopkins, 1997; Mitchell, 2003), there is little information on current student achievement. Students at Afrocentric schools take classes across subject disciplines, and subsequently complete corresponding summative assessments to display mastery. A meta-analysis of 2014 Afrocentric school data suggests 41% of students are at or above proficiency in reading and 25% are at or above proficiency in mathematics (Detroit Public Schools, 2014; Missouri Department of Education, 2014a; Missouri Department of Education, 2014b; Ohio School Report Cards, 2014a; Ohio School Report Cards, 2014b). The national average for African American eighth grade student achievement is 16% proficiency in reading and 14% in mathematics (NCES, 2013a; NCES, 2013b). And at Sankofa Academy, the site of this study, the student achievement is among the top performers in the nation, with 77% proficiency in reading and 70% in mathematics. Although student achievement at Afrocentric schools is higher than the national average, it is important to note that many Afrocentric schools have low standardized test scores. As noted, each Afrocentric school varies based on leadership, teacher quality, and instructional effectiveness (Piert, 2013).

There are some exemplary Afrocentric schools such as the Columbus Africentric Early College in Ohio (Rayford, 2012). At Columbus Early College, 65% of students are

at or above proficiency in mathematics and 77% are at or above proficiency in reading, both of which are above the state average. Rayford (2012) reveals in 2011, Columbus Africentric Early College:

> … had a graduation rate that was higher than their school district and the State of Ohio. The teaching philosophies of teachers, although varied in ideologies, were similar with a committed to assist students in excelling academically. This commitment was complimentary with the mission statement of developing well-rounded students.
>
> (p. 376)

Columbus Africentric Early College in Columbus, Ohio also received national attention for its outstanding academic achievement (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). Similarly, Sankofa Academy performs above state achievement levels (see Figures 4-7). Thus, it was selected as the site for this study. As this literature review suggests, the effectiveness of Afrocentric schools largely depends on several key factors including leadership, community support, and teacher commitment to Afrocentric pedagogy. As displayed in the data above, student achievement varies depending on school site.

Today, dozens of Afrocentric schools exist across the country, with a concentration in Northern urban cities like Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and areas where there are organized educated Black communities. Until this point, research has covered nearly every area of Afrocentric education. These research areas include: pedagogy (Ginwright, 2004; Murrell, 2002), curriculum design (Gbaba, 2009; Ginwright, 2004; Traoré 2002), teacher effectiveness (Shockley, 2003, 2011), parent satisfaction (Kifano, 1996; Mitchell, 2003), student performance (Sanders and Reed, 2005), and even

student experiences (Rayford, 2012; Piert, 2006). Each of these studies help to formulate this current study's design. However, the topic of *inclusion* still is missing from research.

The dissertation most similar to this proposed study was conducted by Sharma (2010) in Toronto. Sharma's (2010) study examined the following research questions: *1. What are youth perspective of Africentric schooling? 2. Would students voluntarily attend an Africentric school?* Sharma interviewed ten high school students regarding their perspectives on Afrocentric education and reported the findings using grounded theory. Until Sharma's study, existing research lacked student voices regarding Afrocentric schooling. Sharma's (2010) study focused on these lost voices and presents a compelling case for inclusion within Afrocentric education. Sharma's findings reveal that youth desired inclusive schooling, but generally had mixed feelings about Afrocentric curricula due to stereotypes and racial stigmas. Students in the study who were apprehensive revealed that Afrocentric curriculum would be more desirable if it represented *multiple* cultures. It is important to note that Sharma's (2010) participants were high school students who did not attend Afrocentric schools. Instead, the participants provided their *perceptions* of Afrocentric schooling.

The overall scope of Sharma's research is most similar to this study because of its focus on *inclusion* within the Afrocentric framework. Sharma's (2010) study focused on understanding reasons why high school students would attend Afrocentric schooling and asked participants to identify curricula foci that were appealing. This study seeks to build on Sharma's (2010) study by providing multiple perspectives – including teachers, students, and administration. In addition, the data collection procedures proposed in my study examines more than just student interviews. The current study gathers three forms

of data, including interviews, classroom observations, and student essays. All of the data procedures center on the same topic of *inclusion*. This focus is largely missing from current research.

State of the Literature

The current state of the literature reflects two major waves in empirical Afrocentric educational research. The first wave encompasses the initial studies of the 1980s and 90s. To start, the *Portland Baseline Essays* of 1987 provided tangible examples of non-hegemonic curricula across. These *Baseline Essays* were implemented into many Afrocentric schools in the 1990s (Binder, 2000; Leake & Leake, 1992b). As Afrocentric schools saw an emergence in the 1990s, often through immersion programs, many empirical studies aimed to quantitatively compare Afrocentric and traditional schools' student achievement data (Kifano, 1996; Manley, 1997; Murrell, 1993; Webb, 1996). Other studies conducted in the 1990s, including Archie (1997), Hopkins (1997), and Webb (1996), qualitatively explored the benefits of Afrocentric schools for Black students.

Meanwhile, the second wave of Afrocentric educational research is found in 21st century studies. These 21st century studies reflect contemporary issues, including charter school designs, curriculum relevancy, parent satisfaction, and hip-hop (Gbaba, 2009; Ginwright, 2004; Mitchell, 2003; Murrell, 2002; Piert, 2006; Rayford, 2012; Sanders & Reed, 2005; Shockley, 2003, 2011; Traoré, 2002). The above studies provide a comprehensive overview of Afrocentric schools, specifically within qualitative research methods. Yet, since this research is positioned fifteen years into the 21st century, there are additional educational issues that many students face today – such as high stakes

assessments and zero tolerance discipline policies. Missing within educational research are varying perceptions of Afrocentric education, specifically among students and teachers embedded within this schooling environment (Sharma, 2010). There is also a void in current research regarding Afrocentricity's role within educational inclusion. Since traditional public schools racially *exclude* non-White students, it is important to actively seek educational models that are more *inclusive*.

Summary

Chapter two discusses the connection between pre-colonial history, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentricity. Each of these developments is influential towards the development of Afrocentric schools today. Pre-colonial research on ancient Egypt demonstrates that its inhabitants were undoubtedly Black and possessed a highly functioning society long before invaders arrived (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1990; Clarke, 1993; Jackson, 1970; James, 2010; Karenga, 2002; Williams, 1987). These societies consisted of mathematicians, philosophers, and religious leaders, all of which debunk the myths of African origins being primitive or beastly (James, 2010). Awareness of this knowledge is the precondition for Afrocentric philosophy and subsequent Afrocentric school models. Contemporary examples of Afrocentric schooling is made possible, not only from ancient Kemetian influences, but also from the Pan-African and Black Nationalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Pan-African and Black National scholars like Martin Delaney, Alexander Crummell, Robert Campbell, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and H. Sylvester Williams bravely influenced the political and social connection between Africa and African Americans,

which was severely damaged during colonialism and slavery. It is because of their efforts that contemporary Afrocentric studies, such as this one, are possible.

Overall, the literature conveys that Afrocentric schools are created in direct response to the ineffectiveness of traditional school models in serving African American students. These schools are not limited solely for African American students. Afrocentricity, both in theory and in school design, is the preeminent form of humanistic inclusion. Yet, there is little research that has shown how these schools can benefit diverse student populations. Therefore, more research must be conducted in this area in order to better understand Afrocentricity's role in *inclusion*. Chapter three explains the process of creating a qualitative research design and discusses sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures in order to understand how an Afrocentric schools can be used a tool of inclusion.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. This means that we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term radical in its original meaning--getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system. (Ella Baker, 1969)

My mother said I must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and more intelligent than college professors. (Maya Angelou, 1969)

Chapter two provided an overview of Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, along with historical and contemporary studies conducted on African-centered and Afrocentric schools. Chapter three outlines the research method used for this dissertation, including the research outline, sample selection, data gathering process, treatment of the data, limitations of the research method, and basic assumptions. This chapter provides a discussion on the research method and responds to two critical questions of the study. One, what are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? And two, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion? For this study, Afrocentric and African-centered are used synonymously, which has already been established in previous chapters. Overall, the single case study research method used allowed for an in-depth examination of a specific school site (Creswell, 2013; Glense, 2011).

Role of the Researcher

It is important to clarify the researcher's role and position within this research study. The researcher is a graduate student and a former public school educator. As a practitioner, the researcher worked at the middle school level in a large metropolitan public school system in Georgia. During this time, the researcher taught language arts in a public alternative school for two years. Many of the students at this school were removed from traditional classroom settings for behavioral or truancy reasons. While teaching language arts, the researcher noticed a keen interest in African American history – specifically during the school's designated Black History Month – among students. The principal of the school, during this time, allowed for more curriculum flexibility during the month of February (Black History Month), and the researcher used this added freedom for historical examinations of African American history, as well as current events that impacted urban African American students. This point demonstrates a teaching and curriculum development background for middle school students. Through this experience, the researcher frequently questioned the effectiveness of standardized curricula that were not engaging for students. The indignation from this questioning helped shape the researcher's quest to better understand alternative forms of curriculum.

Through the aforementioned experiences as an educator, the researcher cannot deny the influence of these moments on this study. The researcher advocates for alternative and inclusive forms of curriculum, based on seeing the effectiveness of such models in past experience. Before graduate school, the researcher found the term "Afrocentricity" to be negatively propagated and feared. Through a specific doctoral class, *Education as Self-Healing Power*, the researcher instead found utility in

Afrocentricity as a tool of mediation, healing, and inclusion. As the researcher began to realign the true meaning of Afrocentric theory, former experiences as a public school educator were inseparable from the unseen possibilities of Afrocentricity, especially for 21st century students. These experiences are important to note when examining the study's bias. The researcher aimed to neutralize the bias from past practitioner and researcher experiences in order to present the findings objectively.

As a former middle school educator and current doctoral student, the researcher has an increased interest in effective curriculum designs for students. Since the researcher is familiar with middle school curricula, state standards, and curriculum development, the researcher has a keen interest in developing more engaging curriculum models for students. The researcher volunteered at this study's school site periodically throughout the 2013-2014 school year in order to observe a tangible example of Afrocentric practices in education. The researcher is familiar with some staff at the school, but unfamiliar with the middle school student population. The researcher carefully bracketed the data collected at the site in order to account for any biases that might occur from formerly knowing some of the staff and teachers. All data from the site location was analyzed with particular attention paid to any indication of former knowledge of participants.

Afrocentricity, as mentioned, is a continuous, reflexive, and introspective journey towards truth and understanding. Thus, this study was not aimed to critique and assess the effectiveness of Afrocentricity being used at the participating school site; rather, the researcher aimed to identify ways in which the school served as a mediating tool of inclusion. The continuum and never-ending process involved with Afrocentricity is

important to identify throughout the study. Appendix F provides a flow chart that outlines the thought processes for conceptualizing this study.

Theoretical Framework

Afrocentric theory is a theoretical framework that focuses keenly on African-centeredness. It is also a theory that undergirds various school designs, such as the one in this study. In short, Afrocentricity positions the African Diaspora and continental Africa at the center of discussion. It also reestablishes African people as *participants* versus *objects* (Asante, 1998). Out of respect for the nature of this work, Afrocentricity was the most ideal theory that aligned with exploring the importance of African-centered school designs. In essence, it includes both the *theoretical* and *educational* perspectives being studied.

Researcher and theorist, Molefi Asante, describes Afrocentricity's distinctive paradigm differences:

> Afrocentricity is essentially the idea that African persons are the subjects, that is, human agents, working out our own destinies within the context of our historical experiences as opposed to being objects in the margins of European experiences. It is a way of viewing reality that places us in the center of our culture and social environment. When a person believes that the society is only to be used, that people are only to be victimized, that neighborhoods are alien, he or she is capable of the worst kinds of actions. Afrocentricity creates a framework for dealing with this type of dislocation. (Asante, 1993, p. 124)

To understand the tenets of this theory, it is important to understand how Afrocentricity can be both a study's topic (i.e.: Afrocentric school model) and also a theoretical framework that guides the study.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity places Africa at the center (Asante, 1993, 1998; Lemert, 2010; Murrell, 2011). This theoretical framework essentially removes Africa from the margins of Eurocentric analysis and posits that people of African descent are valuable contributors of their own history (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1998). Asante asserts that Africa should be at the center of historical and societal analysis, and for factual reasons. Wiggan (2010) describes Afrocentricity as "the indispensable perspective on the centrality of Africa and black studies" (p. 131). The critical need for Africa's "indispensable" perspective is relevant, not only regarding pre-colonial history, but also in contemporary discussions as well. Asante (1998) argues, "African Americans are a preeminently cultured people within American society, and our contributions to what is called 'popular American culture' are immense" (p. 9). Accepting Afrocentricity requires the dismissal of exclusive Eurocentric thought and the welcoming of other cultural perspectives (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1993, 1998).

Another aspect of Afrocentricity is the rejection of Eurocentric paradigms as the definitive measure of the Black experience. This is also important when selecting theoretical frameworks. Afrocentricity postulates its preeminent role in describing the African experience, and posits that it should be used without the validation or substantiation of other theories. Asante (1998) further questions, "How can the oppressed use the same theories as the oppressors? Is it possible that established European theory

regards its view is the best way to understand" (p. 181). Establishing separate paradigm for "Africa" is the only theoretical framework that could accurately depict African perspectives alongside other multicultural, critical, and conflict frameworks.

Afrocentricity is also a theoretical framework that guides education. Traoré (2007) suggests that educators teach history, for example, based on "…compiled [stories] of Africa told from their own perspective, filtered through the lens of long-standing colonial domination of the African nations" (p. 62). Thus, many African American students have little interest in a curriculum that is obviously non-reflective of their people. History and literature are often dedicated to Western ideals, and ignore the multiculturalism that is often represented in American classrooms (Karenga, 1995). Traoré (2007) further argues that telling a more Afrocentric story, "… [involves] making available the accomplishments of people of African descent, and learning more themselves about the continent and its people, not just its land masses and natural resources, but its human resources" (p. 70). In spite of its critics, the utility of the Afrocentric perspective is evident. Asante (1998) argues, "without the Afrocentric perspective, the imposition of the European line as universal hinders cultural understanding and demeans humanity" (p. 11). The Afrocentric analysis of the world deconstructs the pervasive and hegemonic way Eurocentric education diminishes other cultures (Karenga, 2002; Murrell, 2011). For this current study, it is central that an Afrocentric perspective is used to frame a study on an African-centered school (Pellerin, 2012). Any other theory would not adequately capture the primary goals of this study.

Case Study Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers at an Afrocentric school. In addition, this study aimed to determine Afrocentricity's utility for educational inclusion. To achieve this goal, it was important to capture the teacher, student, and administrator's perspective. All of the stakeholders' perspectives were important to this study's design. This study was intended to capture the experiences at one specific school, thus a single case study method was the best qualitative method. In this study, the single school site – Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) – was the case. Since the research aimed to explore, "[an] unusual interest in and of itself," the case study intent was *intrinsic* in nature (Creswell, 2013, p. 98).

According to Yin (2003), "a case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). The real-life context for this study was the school environment at Sankofa Academy. The researcher observed classrooms to document instructional and curriculum practices that differentiated from the mainstream, hegemonic pedagogy. Afrocentric classroom strategies include, but are not limited to: student-centered learning, positive affirmation, familial classroom environment, respect for community, higher-order thinking, and group activities (Dei, 2012; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Murrell, 2002). In addition to classroom observations, the researcher conducted interviews with teachers, students, and the school's primary administrator regarding their thoughts and perceptions of Sankofa Academy. Last, the researcher also collected student essay responses to an open-ended prompt regarding the student's experiences at Sankofa

Academy. This data helped the researcher assess student perceptions of their Afrocentric schooling experience.

Using a single case study was most beneficial for this study because of the singular school site. The researcher collected data from three primary data sources, in hopes to gather rich data that gleaned into the unique learning experiences at Sankofa Academy. These data sources included: interview transcripts, classroom observation notes, and student essay responses. For a single case study, it was imperative that the modes of data collection were in-depth and consisted of, "… many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audiovisual materials" (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). Creswell (2013) suggests that relying on one form of data for single case studies is usually an ineffective way of capturing the entire case.

Instrumentation

This study aimed to understand the nature of an Afrocentric/African-centered school, specifically at one site. For this reason, a single case study method was the best approach. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, Afrocentricity is an interpretive concept that falls on a continuum of truth and understanding. Thus, it was important to understand how this study's particular school defined the term "Afrocentricity" or "African-centeredness." The school's mission statement identified Afrocentricity's role in the Sankofa Academy learning environment:

> [Sankofa] has built its program around the concept, currently known as "African-Centered" education. [Sankofa's] holistic approach is based upon the premise that children will only excel academically and intellectually when the curriculum, teaching methodology, and environment reflect the builders of yesterday and the

> ideas of the future. [Sankofa's] belief in universal knowledge provides each student with the skills to meet the challenges of tomorrow. [Sankofa] use African Principles to teach and cultivate character and creativity with each student. ("What We Do," 2013, para. 1)

The school site (Sankofa) uses the seven principles of Nguzo Saba (see Table 3). As displayed in the table below, these seven principles are: umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith).

Table 3: Nguzo Saba: The seven principles (Karenga, 1965)

Name	Definition
Umoja (Unity)	To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.
Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)	To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.
Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)	To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.
Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)	To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.
Nia (Purpose)	To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
Kuumba (Creativity)	To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
Imani (Faith)	To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Nguzo Saba's seven principles most famously align with the holiday "Kwanzaa." The school had no former affiliation with Maulana Karenga or the Kwanzaa holiday specifically; instead, the school used the aforementioned principles as an applicable school mission statement and creed. Appendix E demonstrates how these seven principles were used as a metric for observation. Nguzo Saba was not a formal assessment; rather, this study used the seven principles as a guide when assessing Afrocentricity throughout the school and in the classroom. Instructors and school personnel were not bound to the metrics used in the observation rubric; the researcher instead aimed to observe how Sankofa Academy differentiated its instructional style from mainstream learning environments.

Research Setting

The research setting for this single case study was a private school in a metropolitan, urban city in Georgia. Sankofa Academy – or Sankofa – (pseudonym) is self-described as an African-centered school. As established earlier, African-centered is synonymous with Afrocentric in this study. At this site, Afrocentricity's role as a tool of inclusion was examined by interviewing fifteen 5^{th}-8^{th} grade students, four teachers, and one administrator. The research setting for this study was critical to the case study design. This allowed the researcher to observe participants in their natural activities that did not disrupt their day-to-day routines (Creswell, 2013; Glense, 2011). For case studies, specifically, physical boundaries – as exemplified in the research setting – are critical for maintaining the "case" (Yin, 2003). Sankofa Academy served as the study's case. Some preliminary demographics of the school site are found below:

Table 4: Sankofa Academy snapshot

Years in Existence	20+	
Grades Offered	Pre-K through 8th	
Number of Students	100	
Number of Teachers	12	
Number of Administrators	1	
Racial Demographic (students and teacher)	100% African American	
Student Tuition (per year)	Pre-K	$7140
	K – 3rd	$8000
	4th – 6th	$8100
	7th – 8th	$8200

As noted in Table 4, the average tuition is $7,860 per year for each student. This suggests that the student population assumingly came from middle to upper-middle class families. The above data was obtained from the school's administrator and school website.

Teachers were observed in their classrooms as a part of the case study. Interviews and student essays were conducted in a separate space available within the focal school (Sankofa Academy), for example: an administrative office or counselor's room. In order to maintain confidentiality within the school locale, the researcher chose non-invasive times to conduct interviews. For example, teachers were interviewed during their individual planning periods or individually afterschool. Students were interviewed individually afterschool or during the lunch hour. Each interview was conducted individually with the researcher on different days or times to ensure participants maintain privacy.

Sampling

This study focused on one specific school site, Sankofa Academy. Because the site is small, including approximately 100 students and 12 teachers, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling was important to ensure the study would not disrupt

participant confidentiality. There were twenty (20) participants total, including four (4) teachers, one (1) administrator, and fifteen (15) 5th – 8th grade students. Sankofa Academyhad approximately 15-20 enrolled 5th – 8th school students at the time of data collection, and it was important to capture as many participant experiences as possible for the case study. Twenty (20) total participants provided insights on Afrocentric schooling, from varying perspectives. It is important to note, that while interviewing parents would have been helpful, it was beyond the scope of the study. Since Sankofa is a private school and parents are required to pay tuition, it was assumed that families were educated and/or had a sort of "cultural awareness."

The researcher used purposive sampling for the student and teacher participants. An explanation of the specific sampling procedures is provided in detail in the sections below. Purposive sampling was especially important in this case study in order to offer diversity and variety in the sample (Creswell, 2013). In this study, purposive sampling was important in selecting participants. Purposive sampling also allowed the researcher to ensure different demographics (male and female) were represented (Creswell, 2013; Glense, 2011). The following sections outline the different purposive sampling selection criteria used for both students and teachers.

Student Selection

The student sample size contained fifteen (15) students ranging from 5th – 8th grade. This number was derived from the school's available middle school population (which ranges from 15-20 students). In order to obtain student consent, the researcher attended the school's monthly middle school parent meetings prior to the commencement of the study. This meeting was prearranged with the administrator and conducted at the

school site. This meeting was held to present the study's objectives to parents and students in order to recruit participants. Students were asked to complete one individual 30-minute interview with the researcher, along with one written 30-minute essay. Each student's involvement in the study totaled to one hour. Because the students involved in the study were minors, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) required parental consent of the study in addition to student agreement. The researcher explained the study's objectives at the parent meeting and answered the parent's questions and concerns. In addition, for those students unable to attend the parent meeting, forms were also sent home with students to be signed. Preference was given to those students who have attended the school (Sankofa Academy) the longest (as indicated by their age and tenure at the school). The researcher employed purposive sampling to include the oldest students for the study – especially those in seventh and eighth grades. Purposive sampling also ensured that an even number of male and female participants was represented. Total, this study contained eight (8) male participants and seven (7) female participants.

Teacher and Administrator Selection

The teacher sample size included four (4) participants. This number derived from the available teachers at the school site. The researcher attended teacher/staff meetings, which was prearranged by the school administrator, and presented the objectives of the study. The researcher explained the study's objectives to the teachers and reiterated the voluntary nature of participation. Teachers and the administrators were asked to complete two 45-minute interviews with the researcher, totaling to 1.5 hours. The researcher openly answered questions and addressed concerns from the teachers regarding the study. The researcher provided consent forms for teachers to complete at the staff meetings.

From the returned consent forms, the researcher selected those participants who volunteered for the study.

There was only one administrator at the school site. The researcher asked the administrator to participate in the study. The researcher reminded the administrator that participation in the study was completely voluntary. The researcher met with the administrator to explain the objectives of the study and openly answer questions. The researcher also reminded the administrator that participation in the study was completely optional.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) mentions that collecting various forms of data are imperative for effective case studies. For single case studies, in particular, diverse groups of data are essential (Creswell, 2013; Glense, 2011). In this study, teachers, students, and the administrator were each vital aspects of the study, and contributed useful perspectives in *intrinsically* understanding the experience at Sankofa Academy (Creswell, 2013). For this study, various data sources were gathered, including: classroom observations, interviews, and student written essays. The researcher's observations totaled to 20+ hours per month, and spanned across each of the participants' classrooms.

Additionally, the four teacher participants, along with the one administrator participant, individually engaged in two audiotaped interviews with the researcher. These interviews lasted 45 minutes each, which totaled to 1.5 hours per teacher participant. The fifteen student participants engaged in one 30 minute audiotaped interview with the researcher, along with one written reflection essay lasting an additional 30 minutes, totaling to 1 hour. Teacher and administrator interviews were arranged to accommodate

their individual planning and work schedules (either during planning periods or before/after school). Student interviews and written essays were also arranged during non-academic times (either lunch, extracurricular activity, or afterschool). The open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the approved interview protocol questions, as designated in the IRB protocol (see Appendix A-C). As indicated, students were asked different interview questions than the teachers and administrators. Interviews and field notes occurred congruently throughout the study, as designated later in phase II of the data collection timeline.

Data Analysis and Coding

As discussed, the data sources for this research study consisted of interviews, classroom observations, and discourse analysis of student written essays. The researcher utilized a *holistic* analysis of Sankofa Academy, and specifically highlighted various themes of inclusion within participant experiences (Creswell, 2013). The holistic analysis simply means that the researcher analyzed the *entire* case in order to more accurately understand the case as a whole (ibid.). While it is clear that verbal interviews required coding and analysis, it is important to understand the other analysis processes for classroom observations and student essays. Field notes were collected during classroom observations. The researcher took open-ended notes and documented the Afrocentric evidences in the instructional style and curricular activities observed throughout the school (see Appendix E). Student essays were written and completed individually by the students (see Appendix D). Audio-recordings were used for interviews (see Appendix A-C), and then transcribed.

Field notes and interview transcriptions were closely analyzed and coded (using open and axial coding) – looking for themes, patterns, and variations within the written responses (Creswell, 2013). As mentioned, the researcher used a holistic method of analysis (ibid.). The researcher started with open coding to identify common themes. Next, the researcher used axial coding to categorize small segments of the field notes and interview transcripts according to identified words or phrases. During this phase, data was organized based on the two research questions and categorized into major themes. The themes represented reflect the lived experiences of teachers, students, and administrator attending an urban private Afrocentric school. Participants' data was analyzed using the same collective themes, each with their varying perspectives and experiences. The researcher then selected themes that emerged from the open coding process and identified other themes and subthemes. For student essays, common themes were categorized and sorted according to student written responses. Focused coding and line-by-line analysis was performed, which allowed the researcher to make topical connections in the student's written reflection responses.

All of the data was collected and stored on a secure, password protected laptop and stored in a locked cabinet at times when not in use. All participants' names were removed from the study's findings and pseudonyms were used. Last, all participants were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions gathered throughout the research process.

Phase I: Planning

The first phase of research planning occurred during the months of April 2014 through September 2014. During this phase, the researcher received conformation from

the Sankofa Academy principal for site selection agreement. Next, the researcher collaborated with the principal to arrange key meeting dates for the participants, including the staff meeting (for teachers) and parent meeting (for students) for the 2014-2015 school year. Additionally, in phase I, the researcher completed and submitted the IRB to the university for compliance on a human-subject study. During this phase, the researcher obtained all of the necessary informed consent from parents, teachers, and administrators.

Phase II: Data Collection

Phase two of the study involved data collection. This phase was conducted from September 2014 through December 2014. There were two distinct steps in this phase. First, the researcher interviewed the participants, conducted field notes, and collected student written data. None of these data gathering processes were conducted in a particular order. Because this is a single case study, the researcher instead respected the participant's schedules and collected data based on their availability. Ultimately, it was the researcher's goal to capture the essence of the school culture without disrupting day-to-day activities. Second, the researcher allowed participants to review their interview transcripts, to ensure member checking and to reinforce validity. Once finalized, the researcher analyzed and coded the data for relevant themes.

Phase III: Follow-up

Phase three occurred during December 2014 through February 2015. This phase consisted of analyzing the data using open and axial coding. The researcher used NVivo qualitative software to complete the coding and triangulation of data. During this phase, the researcher found relevant themes that connected to the study. The researcher also

found connections to the study's research questions. This information became imperatively important when determining the utility of Afrocentricity and school inclusion.

Basic Assumptions

There are several assumptions associated with this study. First, traditional public school curricula are hegemonized and mainstream, and overwhelmingly teach European and middle-class ethos (Delpit, 2006; King, 2005; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Many parents find traditional schools lacking in multiculturalism and inclusion, which substantiates the importance of Afrocentric and African-centered schools as plausible school models.

Next, the theoretical framework that shaped this study is an interpretive word with many meanings. "Afrocentricity" is not only the guiding theory for the study, but it is also a type of school model that many districts have utilized and adopted. It is assumed that the guiding theory and school model are connected, and that the theory informs the school design. The literature review presented in chapter two demonstrates that many schools like Sankofa Academy exist across the United States, Canada, and throughout the world. It is an assumption that Afrocentric academies are similar in design, and have a distinction from traditional school designs. It is also an assumption that Afrocentric schools have additional curricular and pedagogical flexibility, in comparison to traditional school models.

Summary

Using a single case study method, which is a qualitative research technique, the researcher was able to investigate the utility of Afrocentricity as an educational tool of

inclusion. The researcher conducted and collected classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and student essay responses. Gathering data from multiple sources enabled the researcher to more accurately capture the school environment of Sankofa Academy. Teachers were recruited during staff meetings and voluntarily signed-up to participate in the study. Students were recruited at the school's parent meeting. Because the student participants are minors (under 18), parent consent was obtained for participants. Middle school student participants (in 5^{th}-8^{th} grade) were recruited for the study. The researcher purposively selected seventh and eighth grade students, due to their age and assumed tenure at Sankofa Academy.

The data analysis process for the interviews involved open and axial coding. First, the researcher used open coding to let the participant responses guide the data. Next, the researcher formed new codes (and sub-codes) from the open codes. For classroom observations, teachers were observed through the lens of Nguzo Saba, which are seven principles of Afrocentric education (see Appendix E). Last, discourse analysis was used for the student written narratives, using open and axial coding. Findings were analyzed in relation to the participants at Sankofa and are discussed in upcoming chapters.

The findings from this study are beneficial for educators, researchers, and curriculum developers because it connects Afrocentric education with inclusion. In addition, the study recasts African-centered/Afrocentric education as a tool of inclusion, healing, and mediation. The findings found in chapter four answer key questions regarding the utility of Afrocentric school models for all students. These questions include: One, what are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? And two, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool

of inclusion? Chapter four presents the findings of the study, and later chapter five provides the discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program, which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. (Paulo Freire, 1970)

Because you can't hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree. You can't hate Africa and not hate yourself… You can't have a positive attitude toward yourself and a negative attitude toward Africa at the same time. To the same degree your understanding of and your attitude toward Africa becomes positive, you'll find that your understanding of and your attitude toward yourself will also become positive. (Malcolm X, 1959)

Chapter three used a single case study approach to address the two components of this study: an analysis of teacher and student experiences and their perceptions of Afrocentricity's inclusiveness. This chapter presents the major findings of the study. The findings are categorized based on the focus of the research questions: *What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? And, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion?* Themes emerged based on interview data, student essays, and field notes. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three parts. Part I provides narrative information about the study's case: Sankofa Academy (pseudonym), because the nature of this research study requires a thorough description of Afrocentric learning environments. Thus, this section relies on the researchers' field notes and observations to descriptively depict the atmosphere of Sankofa Academy. Part II provides the demographic and background information on the twenty (20) participants. As mentioned, four teachers, one administrator, and fifteen

middle school students were involved in this study. It is important to accurately present descriptions of the research participants, specifically their schooling experiences and tenure at Sankofa Academy, in order to properly frame their responses.

Part III of the chapter presents the six major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Afrocentricity is the theoretical framework that was used to guide data analysis. This perspective allowed for more in-depth understanding of nontraditional educational paradigms and frameworks. An Afrocentric theoretical framework also allowed *cultural identity* and *race* to be at the forefront of discussion. These student and teacher interviews demonstrate the distinctive differences that Sankofa Academy exhibits at the pedagogical level, in comparison to other school models. Data was organized based on the two research questions and categorized into major themes. The themes represented reflect the lived experiences of teachers, students, and administrator attending an urban private Afrocentric school. The six themes that emerged were:

1. Familial Learning Community: "It's a Family Here"
2. The Pros and Cons: Small School Environment
3. Beyond February: "We Celebrate Black History Everyday"
4. Historical Realignment: The Power of the Ancestors
5. Edification and Positive Imagery: Know Yourself and Know your Worth
6. Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: Africa is the Motherland

Part I: Sankofa Academy

Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) – or Sankofa – is a self-described Pre-K through 8th grade Afrocentric private school located in a large metropolitan city in Georgia. The 2014 student achievement scores reflect the most recent school data. Below are the

results from the *Stanford Achievement Test* and the *Otis-Lennon School Ability Tests*. Students' scores were compiled by grade and averaged (see Figure 4).

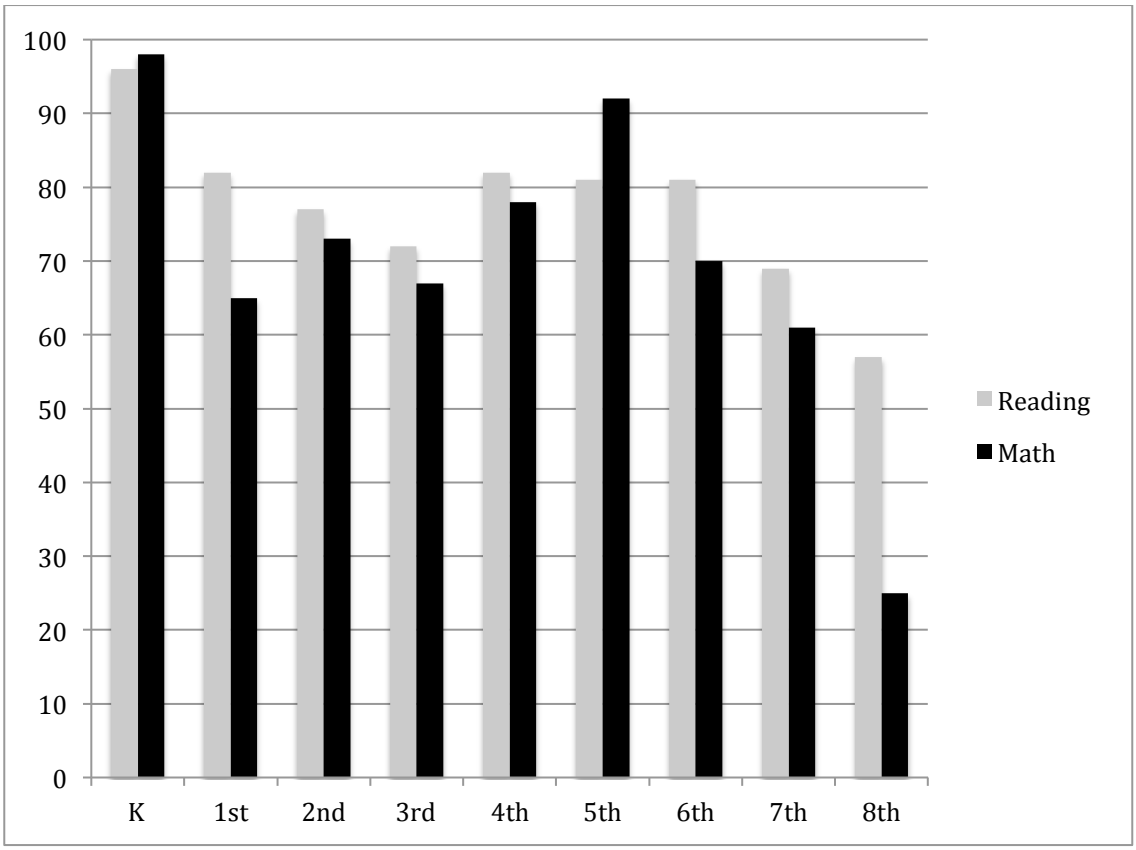

Figure 4: 2014 Sankofa Academy student achievement scores (K-8th grade)

Overall, the average achievement percentages for Sankofa Academy were 77% in reading and 70% in mathematics in 2014. The noticeable decline in the eighth grade mathematics score was reportedly due to high turnover ratings for advanced-level mathematics teachers for older grades.

To provide additional contextual information, Figures 5 and 6 provide past achievement data from Sankofa Academy in 2007 and 2012, respectively.

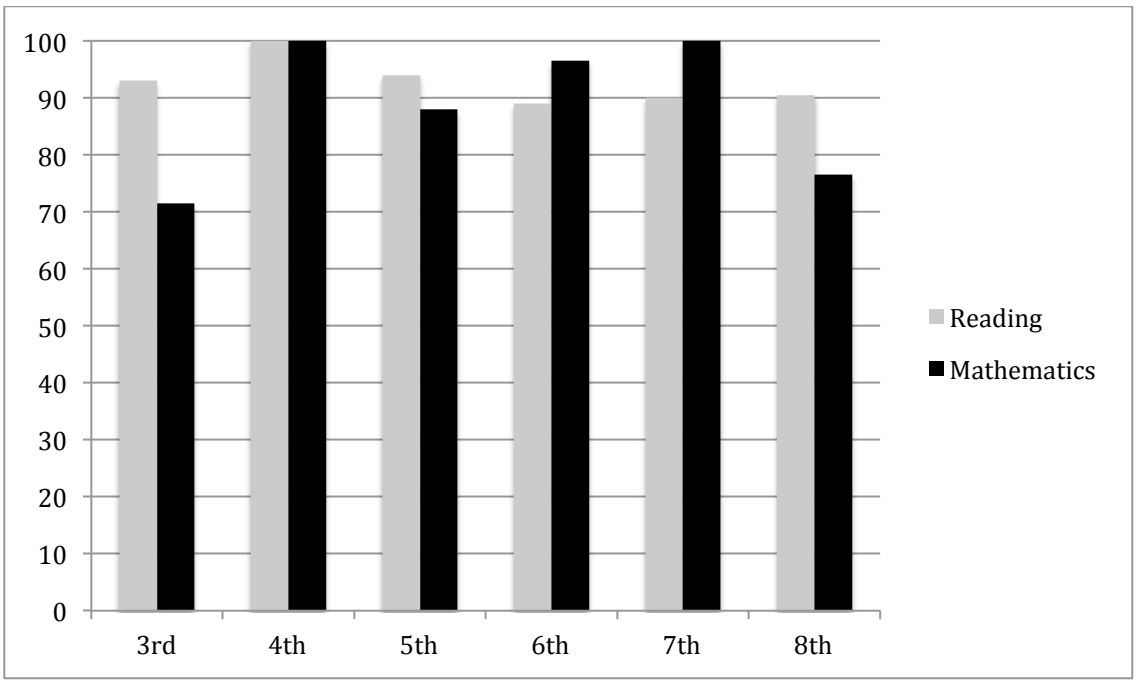

Figure 5: 2007 Sankofa Academy student achievement scores (3rd-8th grade)

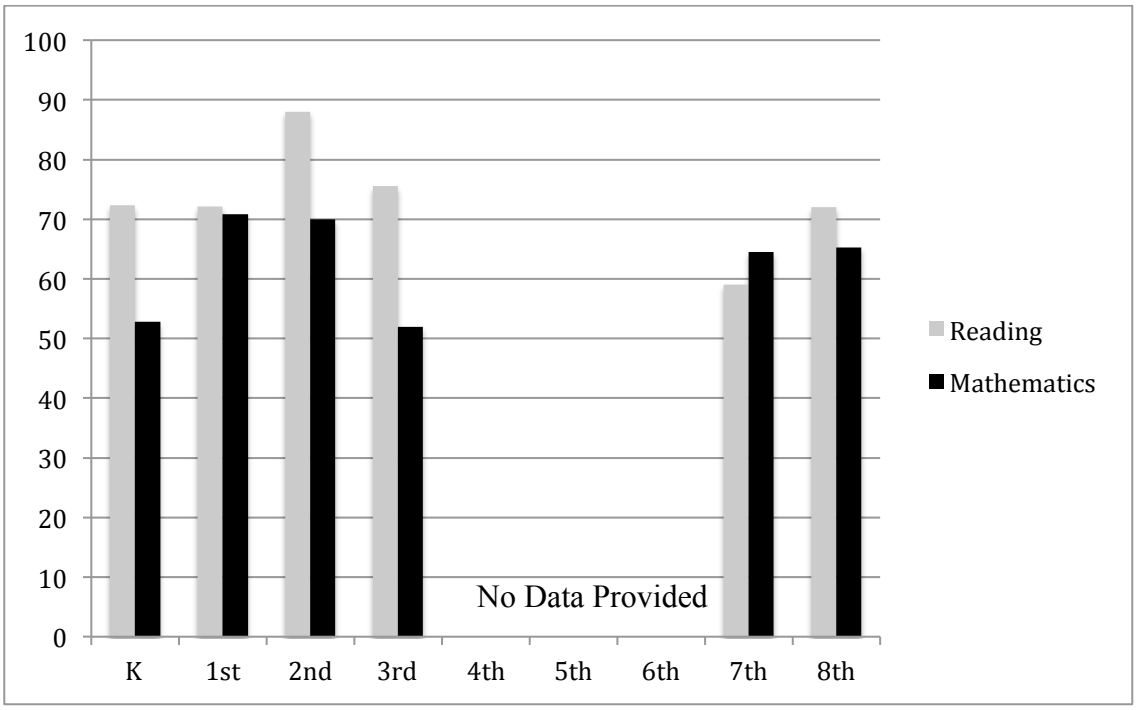

Figure 6: 2012 Sankofa Academy student achievement scores (K-8th grade)

These graphs help to illustrate student achievement at Sankofa, which is the primary focus for this study's research. In 2007, student achievement was 93% in reading and 89% in mathematics. In 2012, student achievement was 73% in reading and 63% in mathematics. Sankofa experienced an observable decline in the 2012, most notably due to changes in school leadership and administration. In 2014, the increase in student scores can be explained by improvements in the retention of teachers and the administrator. Although Sankofa's scores have fluctuated from 2007 to 2014, due to teacher and administrator transience related to salary, these numbers still tremendously outperform the surrounding school district. Figure 7 demonstrates achievement trends of the surrounding school district, Atlanta Public Schools. Over six years, the Atlanta Public Schools' mathematics and readings scores consistently averaged in the 50 and 60 percent range, respectively (NCES, 2013e; NCES, 2013f). In both academic subjects, Sankofa Academy scored at least fifteen percentage points above the local public school district.

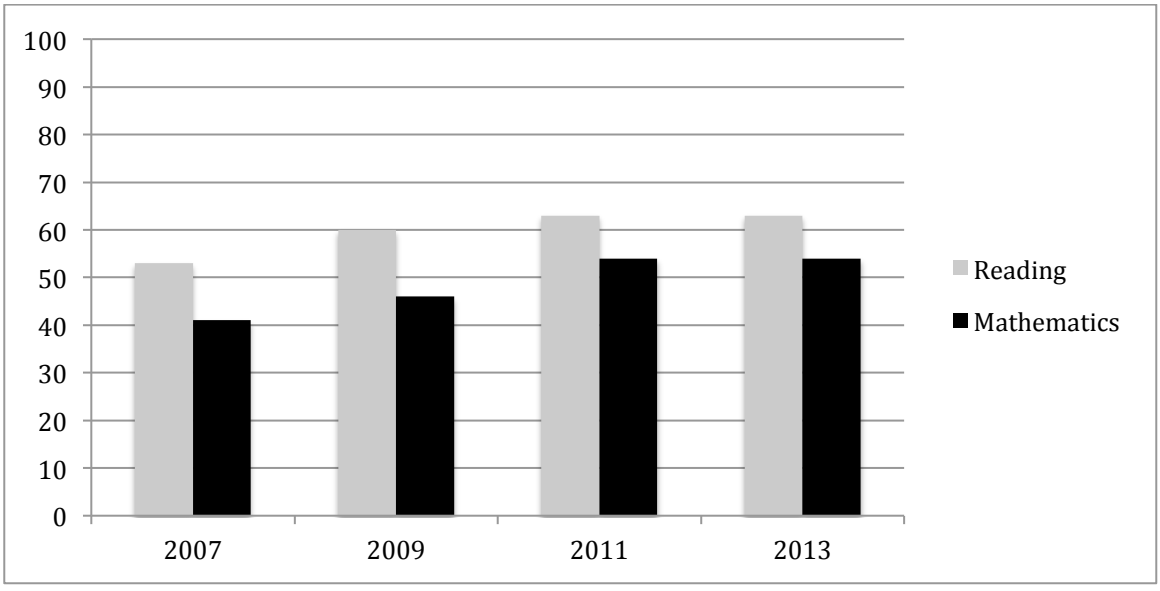

FIGURE 7: 2007-2013 Atlanta Public Schools grade 8 student achievement trends (% at or above basic proficiency)

The above figures demonstrate Sankofa's achievement ratings and academic caliber. It is important to also capture the uniqueness of Sankofa Academy's learning environment in order to better understand Afrocentric education. The distinction of Afrocentric schools is evident in the learning environment. Although the exterior of Sankofa looks like a traditional school, its interior and décor illustrates the uniqueness of Afrocentric schools.

Upon first glance, Sankofa would appear like a traditional school. Students wear navy and white uniforms, teachers are dressed in "regular" business casual clothes, and yellow school bus is parked out front for student pick-up and drop-off. Students are clustered into grade groupings, like K-1st, 2nd-3rd, etc., and every Monday the school meets in the cafeteria for an assembly with the principal. Middle school students go to homeroom in the mornings and rotate classes for the rest of the day. Students have daily homework. And, every Friday the students get a "dress down" day – where they are not obligated to where their school uniforms. Like traditional schools, the Student Government Association (SGA) hosts "Spirit Weeks," where students participate in Hat Day, Pajama Day, Wacky Tacky Day, etc., and classes go on local fieldtrips if time and scheduling permits. Yet with all the normalcies that mirror traditional schools, it has various "distinctions" that make it a unique learning environment for students and teachers.

When a person walks in the front doors of Sankofa, a Pan-African flag and pictures of prominent Black role models are displayed in front. Pictures of Maulana Karenga, Carter G. Woodson, Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, George Washington Carver, and Harriet Tubman are framed and displayed in a lighted showcase

accompanied by student work and projects on display for visitors to see. Immediately adjacent is front office and receptionist desk, where various parent sign-ups, PTA notices, and field trip announcements are posted. Down the hallway a bit further, an Nguzo Saba poster (Appendix G) and other positive affirmation posters (Appendix H-K) hang side-by-side under a banner that reads "Student Expectations." The rooms on the main floor include Pre-K3 and Pre-K4, health, literature, and grammar classrooms, as well as a cafeteria. Down the hallway, a large multicultural "Freedom Quilt" hangs above the office, signifying the unity of all people including African descent people. Before entering the stairwell downstairs, a large display entitled "They Came Before Columbus," highlights Native American history and provides information on various Indigenous American tribes. The majority of the classrooms are housed downstairs, including: K-1st, 2nd-3rd, science, mathematics, and a computer lab. Lockers line the downstairs hallway and more artwork, such as a "Women in History" poster, lines the hallway. In an adjacent building, a large gymnasium, history classroom, counselor's office, and band room are held for 4th-8th grade students. Overall Sankofa Academy's campus is relatively small, serving approximately 100 students. Yet, it is evident that the "culture" of the school and its learning environment, is different than the traditional setting.

Part II: Participants

Table 5: Teacher/administrator participant snapshot

Pseudonym	Role	Gender	Age Range	Grade(s)/ subject(s) taught	Years at Sankofa	Taught in public schools ?
Ms. Henderson	Teacher	Female	50s	K – 1st	20	Yes
Ms. Simpson	Teacher	Female	40s	2nd – 3rd	6	Yes
Mr. Gregory	Teacher	Male	30s	4th – 8th history	5	Yes
Mr. Lance	Teacher	Male	30s	2nd – 8th technology and drama	7	No
Ms. Jones	Administrator	Female	30s	N/A	2	Yes

Ms. Henderson

Ms. Henderson is a veteran teacher who has worked at Sankofa for over twenty years, seven of which she has been a lead classroom teacher. Before teaching at Sankofa, she taught in the public school system. She currently teaches K-1st students. When asked about her typical day, she explains the multitude of activities and lessons she prepares for her students each day:

> My typical day consists of going over calendar skills with the children, discussing current events, the weather. Um, we're working on our language skills, which consist of phonics, writing, dictation, reading, math, science and social studies. We have lots of hands-on activities as well as written seatwork and then they have an opportunity to go to different centers, and have activities as well.

Ms. Henderson is well-known around the school, and is somewhat of a "legend" within the Sankofa family. She was one of the first teachers hired, and began teaching during the school's second year of operation.

Ms. Simpson

Ms. Simpson has been teaching at Sankofa for six years. In fact, she is also a parent whose child attends Sankofa. She teaches 2nd and 3rd grade for across all subjects, and also serves as the French teacher for interested middle school students. When asked about her typical day, she provides a detailed overview of her daily and weekly schedule:

> Ok, I arrive by eight o'clock for most days. I come down to my classroom and prepare for today's lessons. I put work on the board, work in the centers, make sure that the area is clean and ready for the children. I pick my student's up at 8:15 in the morning. We do devotion; which is wonderful… I pick the students up at 8:15; we come downstairs and start devotion, which is student-lead. I have a leader, a reader and a motivator. And, um, we do Black history, which is very integral to our day… Then after Black history, we have our bathroom breaks and come back into the classroom and we start with language arts on a typical day. We have reading language arts then we move into social studies, math and science. Um, I usually have my students all day… except on Tuesdays. I do have a one-hour break where they go and sing in chorus. We have lunch at 11:30 and I sit in lunch with the students. And um, after lunch we come back down for a little more language arts and or social studies and I usually give them thirty minutes outside every day because this age group really needs to go outside. And we go outside for thirty minutes, come back in and then go back into our studies. And we work well until about 2:30 and then we get ready for our dismissal at 2:30, get their homework down, get their book bags, and then finally we dismiss.

Ms. Simpson reflects on how teaching compares to other teaching positions she's had. Before teaching at Sankofa, she worked for the local public school district. She shares that the school's curriculum flexibility allows for innovative lessons, meaningful learning, and non-traditional pedagogical methods:

> What I love about this school is I can be an "out the box" thinker. That's what actually took me out of public schools… The thing that's good about working here is that you can teach their core skills in many different ways, you can be out the box. You know, we did ordinal numbers the other day so I bought a scale and then we weighed all the children and then we put then in order by their weight. It was just out the box thinking where instead of just some random numbers, we used numbers that really meant something to them. That's what I like about [Sankofa].

Mr. Gregory

Mr. Gregory is a 4th-8th grade history teacher, who has been at Sankofa for five years. He is one of the younger male teachers, so many of the middle school male students look up to him in a very evident way. Aside from teaching, he also is the school's assistant basketball coach. When asked to describe his typical day, he shares about academics and extracurricular activities:

> Hmm, typical day. This year I just teach social studies but I've taught social studies and I've taught math. I'm usually on cafeteria duty and I watch the kids in the mornings, greet them when they come in, and watch them until their teachers come and get them, which is usually between 8:15 and 8:30. Then at 8:30, I get my first class, which is usually one of the seventh or eighth grade classes. They're

> split up into two groups. So I usually get the seventh and eighth grade class. Afterschool on Wednesdays, sometimes the kids have basketball practice. I'm also an assistant coach for the basketball team.

In comparison to his teaching positions at other schools, Mr. Gregory likes the added autonomy he has in his classes. Like Ms. Simpson, he also likes the flexibility and independence gained from a private atmosphere:

> I like the autonomy that I have. When I first got here, um, it was my first full time teaching position and I didn't expect for my principal to have so much faith in what I was doing… I had worked in other schools and other programs where um, the administration would want to know exactly what you're going to say… I like the fact that they trust me to teach the way that I want to teach. And teach in a way that feels comfortable for me… And it's been like that ever since I've been here and I haven't had any problems in that way, so I like that.

Mr. Lance

> Mr. Lance is a "jack of all trades" teacher that is integral to the learning environment at

Sankofa. Outside of work, Mr. Lance is a devout community performer and storyteller, which is evident in his teaching style and extraverted methods. He has been teaching at Sankofa for seven years, and has only taught in Afrocentric school settings. When asked about his typical day, he shares:

> [Laughter] I am in everywhere but for the most part. Monday, I'll have seventh and eighth graders and we'll do health… And then after that, I will have the fifth and sixth graders and I'll work with either health or drama, depending on the

> schedule. From there, I'll have um, second and third grade. And I'll have them for computer and I work with them on different basic computer fundamental skills. We've actually been participating in the stock market game this year, which is exciting. Then I have the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders again and I have them for computer. So if I have a class twice, I have them once for health or and if I have them again, I'll have them for computer technology.

Mr. Lance explains he was drawn to Afrocentric schools because of the flexibility found in using nontraditional methods. He believes drama and the arts are important for student learning.

Ms. Jones

> Ms. Jones is the school's administrator, and currently serves as principal. She has been at

Sankofa for two years, and was hired by the school's founder to help run day-to-day logistics. In addition, she was hired to meet the school's growing needs. Since she is the study's administrative participant, her day-to-day schedule is unique to her role within the school community. She shares:

> Well I come in… and make sure that I greet all of my students and staff. And then the day begins. I talk to [the office receptionist], she runs down the day, we may give a special event or need to arrange correspondence with parents. I usually observe classes and evaluate teachers. That's a typical school day I guess. Um, I don't have many discipline problems so that's something I don't have to deal with too much. But if I do, then of course, I just kind of deal with the students as they come in the office.

Before serving as Sankofa's principal, she was as a former teacher and Instructional Coach in the surrounding public school district. Although she is one of the newer faculty members on staff at Sankofa, she has over ten years of prior experience in the public school system.

Table 6: Student participant snapshot

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade	Years at Sankofa	Attended another school?
Akeem	Male	12	7th	7	Yes
Brandon	Male	13	8th	9	No
Chris	Male	12	7th	7	Yes
Destiny	Female	12	7th	9	No
Ethan	Male	13	8th	1	Yes
Felicia	Female	12	7th	7	No
Gavin	Male	14	8th	8	No
Harmony	Female	12	7th	9	No
Ian	Male	14	8th	5	Yes
Jeremiah	Male	13	7th	1	Yes
Kayla	Female	13	8th	3	Yes
Lindsay	Female	12	7th	1	Yes
Melia	Female	13	7th	1	Yes
Nasir	Male	14	8th	2	Yes
Olivia	Female	12	7th	2	Yes

Akeem

Akeem is a seventh grade student who has been attending Sankofa Academy since preschool. He describes a moment when he left for two years – third and fourth grade – in attempts to "[try] a new experience," at a larger public school, "but eventually came back." His personal interests include soccer and marine biology, in which he hopes to pursue both of his dreams. When asked to reflect on his daily school routine, Akeem describes the following events in a "typical day at Sankofa:"

> I talk to people, socialize, and I do work, then um, we'll have P.E. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and on Fridays, um, we have art classes. And, yeah Monday through Thursday have our core classes, so we'll have like drama, health, P.E., literature, grammar, math, science, and history. And on Fridays, we have French, art and we have a class with our counselor.

Brandon

Brandon is an eighth grade student who has been attending Sankofa Academy his entire academic career. He too, started attending Sankofa in preschool. Brandon has ambitious dreams of becoming an entrepreneur because of the apparent need within the Black community. He shares:

> I want to start my own business, my own companies. I want to be able to help the black community out when I, um, grow up because I see now, it's a struggle for Black people. Like I want to bring markets to the store with low, lower prices because nowadays, prices are very high and like… I want to help my community and help myself out because I do know if you do put like a, a big, a store where you know where people needs things, and you know people will go there, you will make money off of that. But, that's also helping my community out, not just thinking about myself.

Brandon's expressed interest in the Black community comes from an expressed interest in helping people. He demonstrated, more than once, his desire to change the world. When asked to describe a typical day at Sankofa, he describes the following events:

> Ok, well a typical day, first we would go to [literature] um, I would probably, I would get somewhat frustrated if we would have to write a paper that day, only

> because I'm not that good at writing. Um, next would be either have um, [drama] or [history]. Mr. [Gregory] is Wednesday through Friday and Mr. [Lance] is Tuesday.

Chris

Chris is an energetic seventh grade student, who has been at Sankofa for seven years. For preschool, he admits to living in another city and attending Catholic school. Chris is a self-described "class clown" who loves to make his peers laugh. Chris appreciates the social aspects of school, and describes "hanging out with friends." He notes:

> So it's like a twenty-minute drive so… I wake up around 5:30, get dressed and wake up my mom around 6:45. We leave and we get here around 7:20. Then I wait for the rest of my friends to get here. So, um, a typical day for me is hanging out with my friends and that's pretty much it. And just learn…

Although his peers describe him as silly, many teachers consider him a leader throughout the school. Chris is also a known vegetarian who enjoys explaining to his classmates why certain foods are "unhealthy" for them and/or the environment.

Destiny

Destiny is a seventh grade student who has attended Sankofa for nine years. When asked about her long tenure, and only being in the seventh grade, she explains that she started in Pre-K3 and Pre-K4, before kindergarten. Destiny is an out-spoken, poised young lady who has dreams of becoming a zoologist, because of her interest in biology. She describes loving to watch *Animal Planet* at home, and thoroughly enjoys biology and life science. When asked to describe her typical day, she states:

> Um, well usually our first class will be literature and on Monday we'll have it for an hour and a half, and on maybe Tuesday will have it for just an hour and then we go to either history or math, and we go homeroom later and then we go straight to lunch. And after lunch, we go to health, and then history again. Or we'll go to…um, health, or then we go to science and or band.

Destiny is also proud "big sister," who has siblings that attend Sankofa as well.

Ethan

Ethan is a quiet eighth grade student who recently transferred to Sankofa from a nearby private Christian school. When asked about transferring schools, he asserts that, "… the academics were better [at Sankofa]." When asked about his typical day, he gave a brief description: "I come in here, I probably go to homeroom, Devotion, we sing and state poems. Every day they give us a speech on Africa. Then, I go to my first class and get started on work." After college, Ethan than has plans of becoming a chef, because he "loves to cook."

Felicia

Felicia is an energetic, bubbly seventh grade student who has attended Sankofa Academy her whole academic career. Felicia's favorite class is literature because of her interest in reading and writing, and her favorite author is Maya Angelou. She describes her typical day consists of "rotating" schedules:

> Um, mostly um, we go to our lockers and then after that we go to homeroom. So then we do Devotion and [my teacher] tells us what announcements we have. And then, we go to our couple classes um, they're basically except like we'll have something different so on like Mondays and Wednesdays. On Monday and

> Wednesday we'll either have Mr. [Lance] or Mr. [Gregory] then we'll have literature then science, then lunch. And then, math, then music, then science again.

Felicia has dreams of becoming a physical trainer when she graduates.

Gavin

Gavin is an eighth grade student who has attended Sankofa his entire academic career. His best friends are Chris and Ian, and they typically are seen together at lunch and throughout the day. Gavin provided commentary on his typical day at Sankofa, and shares: "My typical day, um, usually I stay in the cafeteria and we start Devotion. Where we um, we first state *The Seven Principles of Nguzo Saba*, and then we um, say a list of poems." Gavin's favorite class is history, and it is evident through observation and in his interview. Gavin beams with excitement whenever his classmates talk about history, or when they want to engage in historical debates with him. He describes his interest in history and Mr. Gregory's class:

> Um, history's never been a challenge for me because um, I've always had a love for history, like when I had a chance to read, I'd read about like, people, Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, people like that. But um, there's not really a challenge for history so my teacher, um, gives me extra assignments… When we go to history class I feel it's on a way higher pedestal because like, um, our teacher is very free, like, if we're talking about another topic, he can talk about a topic that relates. Maybe we're talking about the Civil Rights Movement, he can talk about a personal story in his life that probably affected him and made him like, appreciate what we did, what happened in the Civil Rights Movement. Um, and basically the

> reason why we're here today, like why he appreciates that and how it applies to that story he just told.

Gavin has an interest in working in Congress when he grows up, because he wants to better "run this country."

Harmony

Harmony is a seventh student who has been going to Sankofa, "… since I was able to go here." She has attended Sankofa for a total of nine years, which includes starting in Pre-K3 and Pre-K4. She describes a typical day:

> Well, a typical at [Sankofa] Academy would probably consist of a series of classes.
>
> My favorite of course would be um, literature and math. We stay in two buildings, on Mondays we stay in this building most of the time and for second to last period we go to the other building. And, it's a pretty good day.

Harmony has interests in becoming a veterinarian when she grows up, because of her love for both dogs and cats.

Ian

Ian is an eighth grade student who has been attending Sankofa for five years. Prior to Sankofa, Ian attended another small private school in the city. When asked about his typical day, he shares:

> Oh, so when I first arrive at school, um, what I do is I go down to my lockers and I switch
>
> out the books I need for next class or put away my books or anything I don't need for any of the classes. Then we go to our first class, which is on Monday um, sex

> ed. [education], and then after, after that we go to language arts and literature. Then we head from there to science and then from science to math class, and then from math, uh, to music class.

His favorite classes are mathematics and science, and he hopes to become a mechanical engineer after graduation.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a seventh grade student, who recently transferred to Sankofa this school year. Prior to Sankofa, he attended a well-known prestigious private school in the city. When asked about his recent transfer to Sankofa, he shares that diversity at his former school was an issue. Jeremiah shares that a typical day at Sankofa consists of:

> Um, let's see, so morning either health, history or [literature] class, which is really Fun. And all those classes, they have usually good discussions and stuff, stuff like that. And uh, after that is either science or math and those are my two favorite subjects, other than literature, because I love to write. And, I like math because, I'm just pretty good at it.

Jeremiah loves mathematics, and has accelerated to one of the top math classes at the school. He has an interest in becoming an international marine geologist after graduation. He shares, "I like languages and I like different cultures. At the same time, I'm really into geology and the study of rocks and uh, just under water because I feel like it can tell us the past, and some stuff in the past is just not as clear as it could be so, certain things could tell us the past, in, among rocks and certain things, yeah, like that." Jeremiah is also a devout vegan – who, like Chris – likes to share the importance of sustainable eating with his peers.

Kayla

Kayla is an eighth grade student, who has attended Sankofa for three years. She is Student Government Association (SGA) president, and many of the younger students look up to her. Before coming to Sankofa, she attended a local charter school in the area. When asked about transferring to Sankofa, Kayla admits that her former school, "… focused on behavior and disciplining the children [and] didn't get much education. My mom that [Sankofa] was a very good place for education." When asked about her typical day, she shares: "Um, so I usually go to all my classes, then I work on SGA, cheer practice and I do homework after school and then I help with the little children, then I usually go home or to soccer practice with my best friend [Destiny], who also goes here." After graduating high school, Kayla plans on becoming a marine biologist or journalist.

Lindsay

Lindsay is a new seventh grade student, who transferred to Sankofa this year from a local public school. She expresses that transferring was a "big change," and likes that Sankofa, "…because it is more hands on and I understand [things] better. But at [my old school], it was just you would either got it or you don't." When asked about her typical say, she shares: "Um, my typical day is I go to all my classes, then I have cheer practice, sometimes I have dance practice, sometimes I'll have SGA meetings, different stuff of that nature." Like Kayla, Lindsay is also an SGA representative and likes helping people. After high school, she plans on becoming a dental hygienist or an orthodontist.

Melia

Melia is a new eighth grade student who recently transferred from a public school in Florida. She admits that Sankofa is the smallest learning environment she has been in,

but she enjoys it because of the teachers. When asked about her typical day, she provides great detail about how the school is organized each day:

> Well, um, we go a lot of classes. We have after schools programs that are also provided… So when I first walk in, we usually go sit in the cafeteria 'cause that's where we usually go. Sometimes I might go downstairs to get my books for the first period class. The first period we have homeroom, it was like, we say our Devotion and then that's when we split up to go to classes. We have 7A and 7B. Um 7A is with 8A. Then they split all the eighth graders up so we're with 7A, 8A they're with 7B, 8B. Um, Monday through Tuesday, we have health and then the rest of the week, for the first period we got history. So on Monday, we go to health then we spend like thirty minutes in there then we go to [literature], we go to science, and then we eat lunch and have homeroom. And we go to math, and then we go to band and on Monday, we have five classes. On Tuesday, we have six classes, so it changes up. And then, that's when we also have to bring our band materials to school for band practice.

Melia's favorite class is literature, because she really enjoys the books. Her favorite book so far is Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Nasir

Nasir is an eighth grade student who transferred to Sankofa last year from St. Louis, Missouri. He describes transferring to Sankofa as "different," because it is much smaller than his previous school. When asked describe his typical day, he shares: "When I get to school um, we first get together, we do Devotion in the morning to uh, lift our spirit up each day, even if we're going through something at home. Then we, uh, go to

class." Nasir is also an avid dancer, and is often seen with dancing in the cafeteria with his friends gathered around. When asked about his dreams after high school, he desires to be an entertainer.

Olivia

Olivia is a seventh grade student who also transferred to Sankofa last year. She moved from the suburbs into the city, and described the transition from public schools to a small private school. She enjoys the smaller environment, and likes how the curriculum focuses on topics that interest her. She compares the curriculum to her previous schools, and admits in the public setting, "[Students] talk about what they had to do to pass or whatever." Instead, she describes that at Sankofa, "…[teachers] go into lots of detail about other things and here, it's more of a free environment. Like you can talk about what you want to, or have a group discussion on something that you feel is very important." When asked about her typical day, she describes, "Well I usually, I just walk through the door and if I'm early enough, on Mondays we go in the cafeteria and then we have Devotion with everyone. And then if it's like a Tuesday or other days, when we go in the cafeteria and then we go downstairs and then we go to our lockers and go do Devotion in our class." She has plans to become an entrepreneur when she grows up, "…because I want to open up a business to help like my community out, depending on where I live."

Part III: Themes

The third part of the chapter presents the study's findings that emerged from the participants' interviews, student essays, and field notes. Based on the interview questions (see Appendix A-C), participants provided their perceptions and experiences of attending an Afrocentric school, and also elaborated on Afrocentricity's role within educational

inclusion. The collected narratives provided enriched descriptions that served as the primary source from which themes emerged. In order to be identified as a theme, at least half of the participants had to share that common experience. Themes were arranged and organized into categories during the data analysis process, and grouped according to their association with the two research questions. Teacher, student, and administrator data was analyzed using the same emerging themes, in order to capture each unique component's role within one cohesive study. After themes were analyzed, subthemes were also identified for more in-depth perspectives within the data. In order to be identified as a subtheme, at least three to four participants had to share that common experience (see Table 7). The process of constant-comparative analysis allowed for continuous review throughout the data analysis process. All new themes that emerged within the study were aligned with the corresponding research question (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). The overall themes specifically highlight the participants' experiences at Sankofa Academy, which is an Afrocentric school. Six primary themes and subthemes emerged:

1. Familial Learning Community: "It's a Family Here"
   Subtheme(s): Caring Environment; Tough Love; Collective Responsibility

2. The Pros and Cons: Small School Environment
   Subtheme(s): One-on-One Attention; Accelerated Learning; Issues of Diversity

3. Beyond February: "We Celebrate Black History Everyday"
   Subtheme(s): Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba; It Takes a Village; Devotion is Key

4. Historical Realignment: The Power of the Ancestors
   Subtheme(s): Imhotep's Legacy; Increased Confidence

5. Edification and Positive Imagery: Know Yourself and Know your Worth
   Subtheme(s): Corrective History; Response to News Media; Inspiration from Ferguson; Being a Black Male

6. Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: Africa is the Motherland
   Subtheme(s): Afrocentricity is Not Anti-White; Racial Respect; The Diaspora is Diverse; We Include All Cultures

Table 7: Major themes and subthemes

Research Question(s)	Main category	Themes	Sub-themes
1. *What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school?*	Student Perceptions	Familial Learning Community: *"It's a Family Here"*	Caring Environment
			Tough Love
			Collective Responsibility
		The Pros and Cons: *Small School Environment*	One-on-One Attention
			Accelerated Learning
			Issues of Diversity
	Teacher Experiences	Beyond February: *"We Celebrate Black History Everyday"*	Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba
			It Takes a Village
			Devotion is Key
2. *How can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion?*	Collective Reflections on Afrocentric Curriculum Frameworks	Historical Realignment: *The Power of the Ancestors*	Imhotep's Legacy
			Increased Confidence
		Edification and Positive Imagery: *Know Yourself and Know your Worth*	Corrective History
			Response to News Media
			Inspiration from Ferguson
			Being a Black Male
		Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: *Africa is the Motherland*	Afrocentricity is Not Anti-White
			Racial Respect
			The Diaspora is Diverse
			We Include all Cultures

In order to better capture each of the six (6) theme's alignment to research questions, graphic organizers have been provided in the form of flow charts. Figure 8 provides a pictorial example of how three (3) themes aligned with the first research question: *What*

are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? Additionally, Figure 9 provides an organized snapshot of the remaining three (3) themes' alignment with the second research question: *How can Afrocentricity be used a tool of inclusion?* All of the participants, including teachers, students, and the administrator, provided data that support the six themes that are displayed in Figures 8 and 9. Each participant, however, contributed unique perspectives based on their own personal experiences.

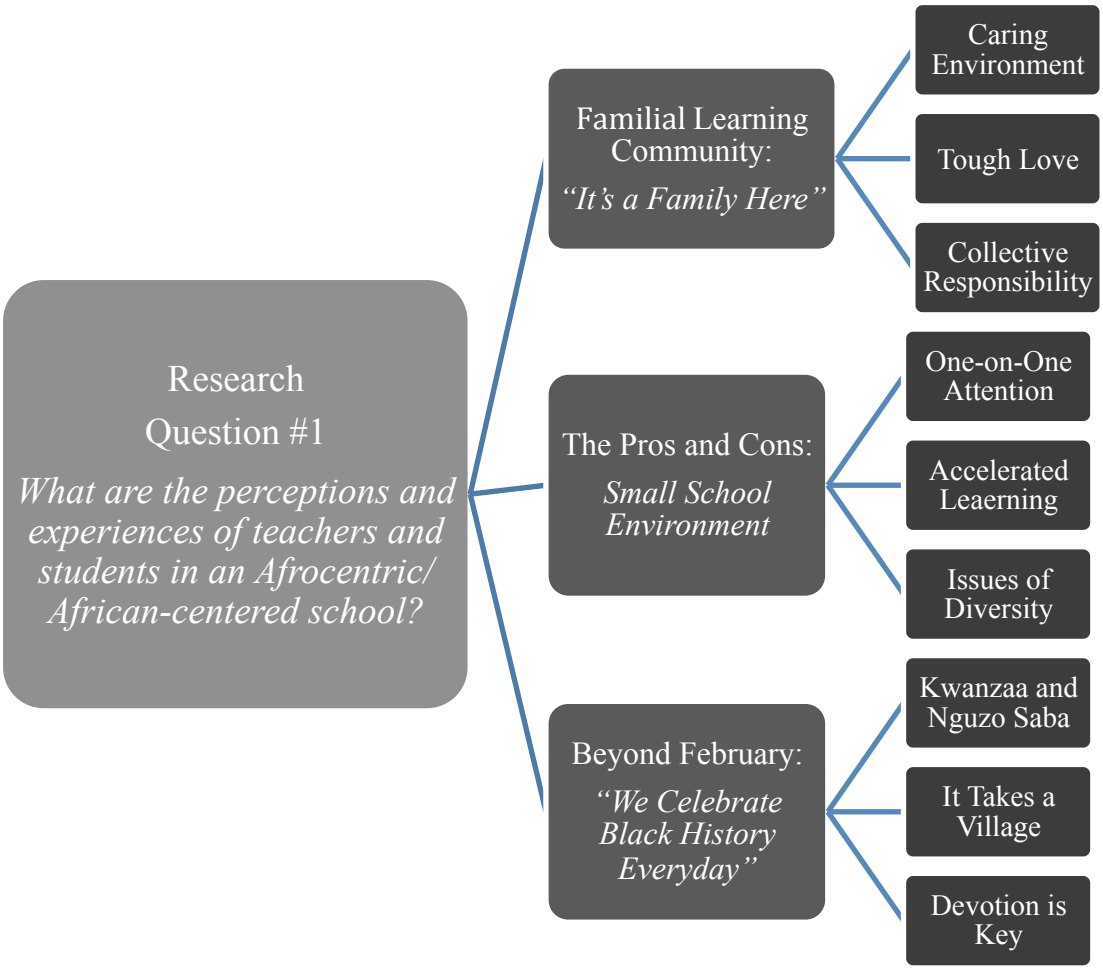

Figure 8: Themes and subthemes (Research question #1)

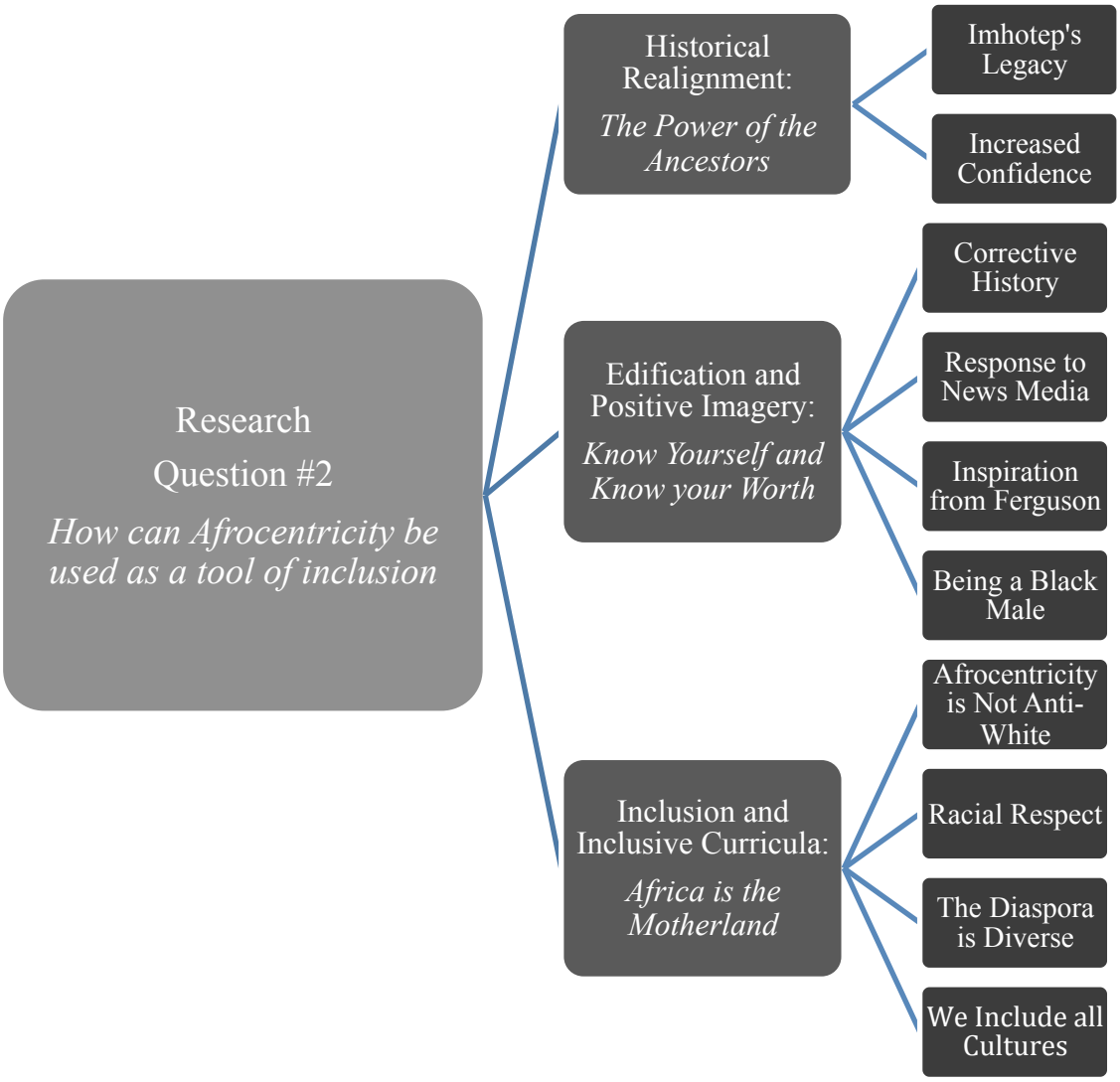

Figure 9: Themes and subthemes (Research question #2)

During the interviews, participants were asked demographic questions. In addition to obtaining background information, teachers and students were asked to provide an overview of their tenure at Sankofa Academy. Each participant was also asked to elaborate on previous educational experiences in order to provide context for interviews and discussion. For example, students were encouraged to reflect on previous schooling

experiences. Additionally, teachers and the administrator were asked to provide information on prior teaching experiences. Gaining this demographic information allowed for constant comparison of Sankofa's uniqueness with other learning environments. During the course of the interviews, participants began to offer a more critical, in-depth description of their Afrocentric education. The first emerging theme that surfaced was the presence of a *Familial Learning Community*, which centered on the theme of "It's a Family Here." The evidence of a communal family atmosphere at Sankofa Academy is elaborated on through the participants' voices. Additional subthemes including *Caring Environment*, *Tough Love*, and *Collective Responsibility* also provide context for participant's perspectives on Sankofa's noticeably different learning environment.

Theme 1: Familial Learning Community: "It's a Family Here"

When asked, "What is the most enjoyable aspect about this school?" the theme of *"It's a Family Here"* emerged from the data from all twenty (20) participants. One student, Brandon, comments that he enjoys how Sankofa is: "… a family environment [and] a loving environment." The feeling of learning in a loving environment was not only important to Brandon; it was also evident in Ian's response as well. Ian describes, "… it's a really true bond here at [Sankofa], you know, especially with friends and with teachers." Harmony has a similar viewpoint and describes the "welcoming" family environment found at Sankofa. She notes, "[teachers] care about you and they welcome you. Every day they say good morning, it sounds like little things, but in the end, it's really usually a big help." While Brandon, Ian, and Harmony's narratives provides an introduction to the theme of family, additional students described detailed accounts of the

familial aspects they witness on a daily basis. The theme of "It's a Family Here" is divided into three subthemes, which include: *Caring Environment*, *Tough Love*, and *Collective Responsibility*.

Caring Environment

The participants were able to articulate how they viewed the learning environment at Sankofa, and many specifically mentioned concepts of care. To start this discussion, it is appropriate to begin with Lindsay, a student who transferred to Sankofa from public and charter schools. She states that she enjoys, "… being able to know I can learn in an environment where they really care about me. Because most teachers, they just go to work so they can get money and they really don't care for the students." Lindsay's observations comparing Sankofa to public and charter schools yield noticeable differences in learning environment and teacher compassion. Another transfer student, Nasir, also commented on the noticeable compassion found in teachers at Sankofa. He notes: "I like seeing the teachers, even though I get on their nerves a lot sometimes, they still love me and care about me. And, like, they're like family, too." Chris, a veteran student who has attended Sankofa for seven years, extends the conversation on the family environment found at Sankofa to include his peers as well. He mentions:

> Yeah, we make fun of each other and we argue. Sometimes we're friends and sometimes we're like enemies but we all love each other. Even the new kids who come to the school, it's like it's an immediate clique. I don't think any of my classmates ever try to hurt anybody else. 'Cause they teach us to treat other people how you want to be treated and all the lessons that we learn, it's as if, um,

> they're preparing us for life. So, [Sankofa] isn't just a school environment it me, it feels like home.

Another student, Olivia, expresses a similar perspective as Chris:

> Well teachers, it's more like family figure I guess, because you can always, you always know that you can go to them if you have something to say or like they can help you out with things. And, students, like my friendships, I made lots of friends. I've always had, it was always easy for me to make friends, but here, I know they're like long-lasting just because it's not a lot of people you're trying to hang out with… everyone is just one big family.

Sankofa's caring environment was evident to the teacher participants as well. One teacher, Mr. Gregory explains:

> This school has a family connection. I mean, we literally care about everyone here. I mean, I've never been in a school like this, even when I would teach in like religious schools. Um, I've never seen this type of family connectivity. Um, like you literally feel like your vice principal, your director or whoever is really just a part of your family, like, you know, it's not just my teacher… but she's a mother figure or the male teachers are father figures or big brothers and that sort of thing.

This sense of care and compassion was evident at both the teacher and student level. In fact, this trait was explained as one of the most enjoyable aspects of attending Sankofa Academy. However, the subtheme of *Caring Environment* led to another related, but distinct, theme pertaining to family: *Tough Love*.

Tough Love

Over half of the students provided feedback on the evidence of "tough love" or high teacher expectations at Sankofa Academy. Interestingly, this theme is supported in the narratives of 75% of students who were recent transfers to Sankofa. Each of the students spoke of this in a positive way. In essence, many students associated *strictness* with *teacher care* and concern. It is appropriate to begin the discussion of "tough love" with Brandon, who explicitly used the words "tough" and "love" in his narrative. He comments:

> [Teachers] are very tough on their students, like they don't give up on you easily. They stay on you like 24/7. I've been here all my life and it's sometimes frustrating when your old teachers still constantly stay on you about work sometimes. It's like I'm always their student. And every teacher is still my teacher, even if I don't take their class anymore. They like, love us forever. But it's helpful because they don't want you to fail or just give up on yourself too easily. They say we should be moving higher and they have high expectations for us.

Similarly, Gavin mentions:

> I think my teachers are kind of assertive, to be honest. Because, I feel I have good behavior and they won't allow me to slip up, even though I have good behavior, like, they make sure when you graduate, that other teachers say, "WOW! I've never seen a student like this"… So if one of us gets in trouble, the whole class is punished automatically. Because we're family. Like, the teachers say we have to act as a whole because like, we're all affected. It's not good for one person to be left out.

Melia echoes Brandon and Gavin's comments, and also associates strictness with long-term benefits. She suggests: "The teachers are really funny and also, like the reason why they're strict is because they want you to learn something, they don't want you to be lost. They make sure that you do earn it and they help you with stuff that you don't, you might not know." Additionally, Kayla mentions that the teacher's strict rules stem from a desire to instill character development within each of the students. She suggests, "The teachers spend their time making sure that you get your education and also that you build up your character the proper way because they don't want you to turn out like being a 'crappy' person just with good grades." When probed on her opinion of their approach, she further asserts: "Um, they say character is important, and I think they're right."

Jeremiah, a seventh grade student who transferred to Sankofa from another more "elite" private school, mentions that the teachers, "… [are] not afraid to push you and challenge you." Although this is Jeremiah's first year at Sankofa, he is already in the most advanced mathematics class and enjoys that the teachers push him to excel. He describes his connection with challenging teachers and notes, "I truly feel like these people are like my uncles and aunts and grandparents and stuff like that… it actually makes me, for me, do a lot better with my work because you just don't want to disappoint them and let them down. So, it, it makes you try harder." Jeremiah's comment about his academic effort is directly attributed to his teacher's high expectations. In short, not working hard would "let them down."

To further capture this notion of "tough love," it is also important to consider an educator's perspective. Ms. Henderson, a veteran teacher, provides rationale as to why expectations are so high at Sankofa. She mentions how the communal aspect multiplies

when an entire school is concerned about each child. Whereas that can seem overbearing to students, it's an integral part of the school design. She states:

> It's a family atmosphere and you know, everyone says that the parable that it takes a village to raise a child and I think a lot of times it's used pretty loosely but it's so true. In this building, if there, if there are successes, everybody celebrates everybody's success. If there are some challenges, all of the teachers will address the child with those, with those concerns. If a child is not doing what they're supposed to do, the teacher will address it and then another teacher that perhaps is not that child's teacher, will talk to them as well. Verses in a public school setting, um, it's not that family atmosphere. It's not my problem, it's not my student so I don't have to deal with it but here it doesn't work that way.

Ms. Henderson's perspective suggests that the familial atmosphere comes with added accountability for students. Whereas in traditional public schools, students report to one primary teacher, students at Sankofa are held responsible by the entire staff. Ms. Henderson's comments capture Sankofa's "tough love" environment and the importance of *collective responsibility* among staff and students. Collective responsibility is the next subtheme connected to the larger family theme.

Collective Responsibility

Part of Sankofa's familial environment is attributed to the shared responsibility among staff, teachers, and students. The vignette below describes an observation witnessed in the school cafeteria, which serves as an opening example of the subtheme: collective responsibility. Collectively, students and the cafeteria staff worked to prepare and serve the younger students during lunch. Whereas in traditional schools, roles and

responsibilities are compartmentalized based on job description, at Sankofa staff and faculty worked together. This became a routine almost every Friday in the cafeteria:

Friday, November 21st
11:00am

The cafeteria manager and head cook let a select group of middle school students help cook and serve the younger students for lunch. This was an embedded component of their Home Economics class. The younger students enjoyed seeing the "older kids." There was an evident sense of "community" between the younger students and older students. Some of the younger students clapped and cheered "YAY!!" when the older students served them their lunch.

Students fulfilled their Home Economics requirements by cooking and serving the younger grade levels, demonstrating collective responsibility. Mr. Lance, opens the discussion about why collective responsibility is so integral to Sankofa:

> When I see Africans across the diaspora, I think we are a caring people… and we teach that to them. So when I see some of the seventh graders making sure that the kindergartners are ok or seeing some of the fourth graders making sure that, you know, their third grade classmates are on task, I think that that's really important.

Three students explicitly describe a feeling of "collective responsibility" at Sankofa. "Collective responsibility" manifests in many ways, but is most vividly seen with the older students. Seventh and eighth grade students are the oldest in the school, and are required by administrators to "set an example" for younger children. Destiny describes:

> It's like one big family because some of the little kids, they look up to the older kids. In band, I've been playing flute the longest so I had to like teach the lower grades. We have to help them and everyone who's more experienced has to help

> the younger and the older students as well. It's like, um, the Kwanzaa word ujima, which means collective work and responsibility.

As mentioned, collective responsibility is a subtheme of *It's a Family Here*. Destiny further states that the task to help others is also directly tied to the family and kinship feeling associated with the Sankofa learning environment. She continues:

> We help each other out and we're always close. I know, I have been known to do this and there's a lot of other student that have been known, when we see someone down, we usually tend to crowd around them in a big circle to make them feel better. We ask questions, and we see what we can do to help them and make them feel good about themselves…They try to increase our kinship, they try to teach us that you should never be rude to anyone, you should always be nice, you should always be caring, you should always be there when someone needs you, someone should always have a shoulder to lean on, and stuff like that.

Felicia also notices a shared responsibility among the teachers. Although she has not attended another school, she mentions that her friendships with students outside of Sankofa allow her to see how different her schooling experiences are from her peers. She mentions that teachers at Sankofa share responsibilities among each other:

> [Sankofa] … is not like most private schools where it's so prestigious. This is school is family friendly. The school is so small that you know everybody's name and the teachers are close. The administrators, they're not always in the office, they're around. They actually do some teaching. It's like everyone pulls their weight to help out around the school.

Olivia mirrors Felicia's sentiments and also spoke about the staff and teachers. She mentions the friendliness of the family environment, but also alludes to a sense of community that is evident. She mentions how teachers and staff share the responsibility of helping other students: "It's a very welcoming environment so even if you're feeling down, everyone will be like, 'Hey how's your day?' or 'Good morning' or something like that. So, everyone is very close… if you have like an issue you can always talk to an administrator about it." The shared responsibility across the entire school demonstrates that the family environment is evident, especially through a sense of collectivity and unity between teachers and students.

Theme 2: The Pros and Cons: Small School Environment

When asked, "What do you like about this school?" and "What do you dislike about this school?" three-fourths of the students mentioned Sankofa's "*Small School Environment*." The majority of students mention the school's small environment in a positive way. The "small school environment" theme contains three subthemes: *One-on-One Attention*, *Accelerated Learning*, and *Issues in Diversity*. It is important to note that this theme emerges more profoundly in student narratives versus teachers and administrators.

One-on-One Attention

Many students recognize Sankofa's small size in a positive way. With approximately 100 students across Pre-K through 8th grade, the size is a noticeable change for many students. To start this discussion, Kayla, a third-year transfer student, mentions that although Sankofa's size initially was an adjustment for her, it proves to have some added benefits in the classroom. She states, "Classes are smaller so there's

more individual input into each child's education and here, every teacher may see you at once and like sit you down and tell you here's your grade, what you need to do, how to fix it, or what's wrong, and they talk to your parents." Kayla continues to mention that Sankofa's small size is why her mother decided to transfer her to the school.

Brandon, a veteran of Sankofa, mirrors Kayla's thoughts about the teachers' individualized attention and comments:

> With the teachers, they give you one-on-one treatment. It's not special treatment, because it's like with that every student. But, it's like, when you need help, they help you. And the students, they um, they encourage me to keep going like during the day, I guess. Say when I want to stop, they will keep me focused or they'll inspire me to keep going and try.

Both Brandon and Kayla express how the one-on-one attention is academically beneficial and available to all students at Sankofa. Like Brandon, Gavin also mentions that the teachers' individualized attention is helpful, but speaks on the pacing of classroom lessons. He notes, "I like um, the teachers um, teach at your pace. If you're, if you're slow on a topic, they'll stop to make sure you're proficient on that topic and that you know what you're doing. You have know questions on that topic so in the future you can apply it to different things that you have to do." Gavin's appreciation for the one-on-one attention stems from the teachers' ability to adjust to each student's individual learning needs. He mentions that in history class, the teacher is able to give him additional assignments, since that his is favorite subject; but in literature, the teacher is able to slow down and accommodate his learning needs.

Felicia, a long-time student at Sankofa, remarks on how different her learning experiences are from her peers in public schools. She notes:

> I notice in public schools that the teachers don't care. Like, they'll, if you don't turn something in, you, it's your decision to make it up. Here, they give that extra edge to where you have to do that or to where if you don't do it, we're going to keep reminding and reminding you, if you still you don't do it, we'll make you do another assignment to keep your grade up. They care about your grade more than just getting a paycheck every day.

Felicia's comments about her friends in nearby public schools suggest that the learning environment, specifically the benefits of Sankofa's small size, is noticed and appreciated. In terms of academics, all of the students who noted Sankofa's "one-on-one attention" appreciate knowing that their teachers are genuinely concerned with their grades.

Accelerated Learning

In addition to one-on-one attention, accelerated learning is another subtheme that emerged from students' comments about Sankofa's small size. Four students felt that their learning was ahead of their peers in other schools. Students attributed their accelerated learning experiences to Sankofa's small environment. Olivia, a second-year transfer student, begins by mentioning the "higher standard" Sankofa teachers hold their students to. She notes, "Well, because they have like higher standards, they push you to do more, because they know that you're capable of doing it. They just want to you to let yourself know that you can do it. So that you can reach your highest points." Gavin adds that the teachers' high expectations help students excel in accelerated learning concepts, sometimes even above grade level:

> Like you know, like literally terms, devices, um, prepositions, like we were drilled on that even like in third grade, even though that's something that sixth graders learn. [The literature teacher] drilled us on that. We wouldn't work on anything else until we were drilled on certain topics. She made sure of it. And I believe that helped me in my literature and my writing.

Ian explains that there is a feeling of pride associated with learning advanced concepts. Ian states:

> Um, well let's see, when I first came here in fourth grade um, at my previous school they weren't teaching me above my level and now that I'm getting, that I'm being taught above my level, I'm farther than I would be at any other school, it's a lot…it's a lot more rewarding to me because I feel better that I'm learning above a level so I don't have to worry about anything like when I go to high school or college.

Destiny, a veteran student, comments:

> We have at least two or three students that have skipped grades, and we some that they're advanced in their classes. It's because of the way [Sankofa] teaches, they teach advanced. So if you're new, they will work from the standard you started with and they slowly advance you. But I think that it's very good the way they teach because eventually you end of advanced and you understand everything you teach in your new environment.

Students' comments on accelerated learning opportunities help to support the potential benefits of Sankofa's small environment. The compilation of one-on-one attention and accelerated learning substantiate that students feel positive about the academic aspects of

Sankofa's small size. However, the next subtheme demonstrates there are lingering drawbacks from isolated, close-knit communities.

Issues of Diversity

Many students express that Sankofa's small school environment is beneficial for them academically. However, three students provided a contrasting look into Sankofa's small size. According to Brandon, Chris, and Ian, there are some social disadvantages to a small environment. They provide critiques regarding the school's lack of diversity. When asked what they disliked about Sankofa, they each mentioned the school's small size. Brandon, who originally said that one-on-one attention was helpful in the classroom, offers commentary on the social aspects of the small learning environment:

> I dislike I guess the small size. I'm a people person so I do say it is a disadvantage because I like to be around people, I like to have a group of people I can talk to at certain times because sometimes I don't want to talk to the same people over and over, like I do every day. So I say a bigger environment would be an advantage because it's such a small school here.

He continues that there is a lack of racial diversity as well, which is a point of contention for him. "We don't have diversity, it's like all one, one thing, or one people, like, 'cause we're all Black at this school." Ian comments that he would like to see more diversity as well. He admits, "One challenge is that it's a really small school so there's not a lot of diversity here…And that's kind of a turn off for me, you know, 'cause it's just the same thing all the time." Brandon and Ian offer some social critiques of small schools, however Chris provides greater detail on the disadvantages of having minimal diversity:

> I would want it to be more diverse. Because I know a lot of kids here, and our parents love [Sankofa] and I love [Sankofa] too, but I feel like, it's, we've been kind of shadowed from the rest of the world, so we haven't been prepared. Like, for me, I've never heard somebody outside of my actual race call me the 'N word' or something racist. I don't want that to happen to me but I feel like it's a part of the experience. Like, we've never, we've been sheltered, I feel like we've been sheltered from the real world and how we're actually going to be treated and I feel like that's what [Sankofa] is supposed to be preparing us for.

Chris' critique of Sankofa's lack of diversity comes with a fear of the long-lasting repercussions of isolation. As demonstrated in the teacher and student narratives, Sankofa's community is observably close-knit, but Chris considers the lack of racial diversity as an unrealistic snapshot of the real world. Whereas he advocates for the sense of cultural pride within Sankofa, he wishes that the student population would diversify to provide him with opportunities to position himself in various multicultural contexts.

Theme 3: Beyond February: "We Celebrate Black History Everyday"

Sankofa's family atmosphere and small environment are two distinct themes that emerged from the data. However, these characteristics are presumably found in other small private schools as well. The next relevant theme is unique to Sankofa's Afrocentric learning environment. The third theme that emerged from the data is the evidence of Black history. The theme "*We Celebrate Black History Everyday*," emerges from the participants' testimony regarding the unique culture and learning environment at Sankofa. Black history manifests in many ways, as displayed in the data, but is most profoundly found in the school's curriculum and pedagogy. According to teachers and

students, this is what makes Sankofa's learning environment unique. Ms. Henderson, one of the longest tenured teachers at Sankofa, appropriately addresses the topic. She states, "At [Sankofa], we celebrate Black history every day, it's not just in February, we celebrate who are, our ancestors, contributions, every single day. Um, so that's how it's honored, how it's valued because it's the utmost importance." Brandon also mentions, '[Sankofa] teaches the students about Black history like, they want you to know your culture and your background and where you came from and why you should be thankful for what you have now." Brandon and Ms. Henderson's opening comments provide a contextual example of how Black history is embedded within the school culture. The manifestations of Black history are vast, and are evidenced by three subthemes. The subthemes that emerged from the data include: *Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba*, *It Takes a Village*, and *Devotion is Key*.

Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba

The first subtheme that submerged within the theme of Black history is Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba. Kwanzaa is a holiday celebrated in December that is guided by the principles of Nguzo Saba (see Appendix G). Both Kwanzaa and Nguzo Saba are interconnected, so participants spoke of these terms interchangeably. The Nguzo Saba principles include: umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith), which guide the school's mission and vision. Students, teachers, and the administrator each provide descriptions of Nguzo Saba and attest to its evidence at Sankofa. Ms. Simpson provides the opening discussion on how these principles are used throughout the school year. She asserts, "We teach it immediately.

Um, and we emphasize it. You know, nia, you know, umoja, ujima, ujamaa; we look at all of those values and we talk about them on a daily basis. Not just during time of Kwanzaa, it's every day." She continues:

> There have been so many success stories from [Sankofa] Academy. And I think it's based on the principles that they learn, they take with them into life. Unity, self-determination. If you feed those things into your body, they stay with you, you know. Um, collective work and responsibility to the community that you live in. I believe they stay with you and it causes you to make better choices. It doesn't mean you're going to have a perfect life, but it makes you have better choices.

Brandon, a student, also witnesses Kwanzaa and the principles of Nguzo Saba throughout the school year. He notes, "We celebrate Kwanzaa every year, and we talk about it everyday. To not celebrate it would feel weird, like the school year is incomplete." Brandon and Ms. Simpson describe how Nguzo Saba is embedded within the school; however, Olivia states how important these principles are to her life. She notes, "Kwanzaa is something we celebrate everyday here. It teaches me that even if someone tells me just because I'm Black, I can't do anything, it lets me know that my ancestors had it worse and they still made it far." Olivia's comments demonstrate a sense of confidence received from learning the principles of Kwanzaa on a daily basis. Gavin also expounds on how important these principles are to his life:

> Kwanzaa is important, because it gives you an insight on the African Diaspora such as our culture… and the Nguzo Saba. Because like, those are values like, um, the famous Dr. Karenga says that if those values are applied correctly, there's no way you cannot prosper as a people. Like, um, coming together, starting Black

> businesses, bringing money to our community, like, making it more fitting than we acquired it, like, there's no way that we cannot succeed.

One evident way the school supports the principles of Kwanzaa, as captured in the field notes, is through community partnerships and outreach. The following narrative reflects primary field notes taken from an art class observation on Friday, October 24th:

Friday, October 24th
1:15pm

A local artist from the community led middle school students in an art lesson. Students studied 20th Century Panel Art and took inspiration from Jacob Lawrence, a famous Black painter.

Students recognize Sankofa's concerted effort in supporting Black philanthropy and Black businesses. The art teacher observed on October 24th is a free-lance artist in the surrounding community, who frequents the school to help the students at Sankofa. For the Sankofa community, inviting the artist into the school is an exemplary evidence of *ujamaa* (cooperative economics). Akeem notes:

> Here at [Sankofa], they take time out their day and our day to bring in other people who can teach us life lessons and other things that will help you in the future. And sometimes, they'll bring people from different places, like one of them does like programming and stuff and every once in a while, they'll come in and they'll like talk about it, like the robotics. That's cool because they're right here in the community.

Akeem's recognition of the school's cooperative economics efforts demonstrate the school's mission and vision put into tangible practice.

Ms. Jones, the school's administrator also highlights another tangible use of the Nguzo Saba principles. She specifically highlights umoja (unity) and its role within the learning environment. She notes: "It takes all of us, you know to um, teach the children. It takes a unified front. We're all involved in some way and we respect our roles." Nguzo Saba's evidence throughout the school day seems to undergird the spirit of the school's mission. Seemingly, students, teachers, and the administrator recognize the importance of Kwanzaa and describe appreciation for its principles.

It Takes a Village

The proverbial phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child," is evidenced throughout the teacher, student, and administrator narratives. To start, Ethan mentions that Sankofa's communal atmosphere is a way to stay true to "African education." He states, "In Africa they're usually in villages, they work together." Throughout the participants' narratives, the Nguzo Saba principle umoja (unity) was a common referencing point when alluding to Sankofa's "village" environment. Ms. Henderson notes:

> We have an opportunity to work together and look at the whole child. The key words are "work together." Not just um, it's not just about academics for me, but it's about what's on the inside, and nurturing who they are as an individual and reminding them that this is a community and they're able to learn about the community as well as their academics…That's what education is supposed to look like, and we do that here.

She adds that umoja (unity) is a principle that Afrocentric schools must base their programs on. She adds, "It's very important to have unity and community. That's umoja.

I can't stress enough how community and family unity is so important. I know it sounds redundant but for me that's the basis of any learning, any type of education."

Mr. Gregory provided insight on his perspective on why the "village" approach is important for educating Black children. He states, "If we look all the way from ancient Africa 'til now, the way just our people learn, it's always, it's always been a community setting." He continues by stating that community and fellowship is embedded within the Black child. He adds:

> A lot of, I believe, is still embedded in our DNA. I mean, I don't know if that's true for real, but I truly believe it. And if we look at the way that many, especially Black children, they just learn, they just learn a lot of times not just reading books but being in conversation, being in dialogue, being in community with people like them and being in a positive environment.

Overall, the "village" and community environment at Sankofa was described among participants as positive and beneficial for students.

Devotion is Key

The previous subtheme captured the village environment at Sankofa. An observable evidence of this "village environment" is found in daily Devotion, which the next subtheme. Devotion is a non-religious daily routine where teachers and students gather together to recite positive affirmations and poems (see Appendix G-K for examples). Devotion is the next subtheme that is aligned with the overarching theme of Black History, since students learn important "Black History Facts" on a daily basis. At Sankofa, Devotion is held at the beginning of the day for thirty minutes. On Mondays, students participate in Devotion together as a collective school body in the cafeteria. And

during the rest of the week, it is held in students' individual homerooms. In more than half of the interviews, Devotion surfaced as an integral part of school culture at Sankofa. Additionally, half of the new first-year students mentioned Devotion as an important part of their day. Because of its relation to the daily evidence of Black history and identity, it is classified as a subtheme versus its own theme.

Brandon provides appropriate overview of what Devotion entails. He shares, "We normally say: The Nguzo Saba, *The Seven Principles*, *The Ultimate Student*, *Can't*, *I Have the Power*, and *Nobility*. We also sing *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, by James Weldon Johnson. Then we say our grateful moments or things that we're thankful for and that's usually it." Melia adds, "Devotion is like the Pledge of Allegiance for us." Although it might appear trivial and ritualistic to outsiders, students recognize its importance. Akeem mentions:

> Saying Devotion makes me feel like I'm going to have a good day if, I'm not already in a bad mood. I try not to be in a bad mood, 'cause I don't like it. It puts like a bad flow energy into the air so I, it kind of helps me one, if I'm in a bad mood, I'll get into a good mood and, um, it says to me that I have something to stand for and live for. And I am something and I can be what I want.

Chris also mentions the power of Devotion for saying daily affirmations. He speaks to the power that words have in fostering positivity:

> Uh, Devotion's a very powerful thing for me… I believe in speaking things into existence, so I feel like if you saying a daily powerful Devotion that is very positive, I feel like it's important to say, 'cause when we say *The Ultimate Student*

> for example, it's speaking powerful words into our life and it's empowering us! So I feel like it's a very important part of my daily routine.

Jeremiah, Harmony, Nasir, and Gavin mention the additional benefits that Devotion brings, besides providing daily affirmations. Jeremiah mentions, "I use it as a time for like, gathering my thoughts and internalizing the different affirmations that we do." Another student, Harmony, mentions that Devotion improves her self-esteem:

> Um, to me it's like the ego booster or um, self-esteem booster because it let's you know that you are control, you are in control and whatever you want to do, you can just put your mind to it. You can't like, can't is the worst word that's ever spoken so, never use that word as an excuse or something to say that you can't do something, 'cause you can, you just have to try harder or approach it in a different way.

Nasir believes Devotion will help him in the future because, "You find the powers within. And you just have to try to find it and you can use that in life." Gavin also adds that the poems and affirmations remind him that he is a "scholar." He notes, "[Devotion] informs you that you are a scholar and we have potential to be great and it basically says if we apply ourselves, we can like be future presidents." Student narratives such as these provide the long-term benefits of Devotion at Sankofa Academy.

Like students, teachers and the administrator also believe Devotion is important. Their comments suggest that Devotion is important not only for daily affirmation, but for shaping student identity as well. Ms. Jones mentions:

> It's the most important part of the day. It's time for them to reflect, it's time for them to be thankful, it's time for them to get their minds, body and soul ready to

> receive any knowledge, or whatever they're going to receive for the day. We're clear about the expectation, you're trying to be an 'ultimate student,' and we say that so that you remember that you are the ultimate student, that you solve your problems, you don't cry over them. It's the 'internalization' of positivity, you know?

Mr. Lance mentions:

> Devotion is key. It tells young people: I am worth something, I am important, my people have done great things and continue to do great things. I think having that be normal part of their academic journey, I think that's empowering… If children woke up and they came to school and they were able to recite you know, I just think it really does something positive for their psyche and does something for a sense of identity, a sense of identification, and self. I think that that's one thing that we could definitely implement into a public school system. All kids need to be affirmed, daily… So I think, if students were able to get that, I think that just helps, it goes so far with having a sense of self. You know, that's just that's the smallest (and I say the smallest because you can do it without a big budget). It's just you're teaching them to be proud of who they are, to have and identify with something that's rich and very strong, you know what I mean?

Like Ms. Jones and Mr. Lance, Ms. Simpson also believes in the power of Devotion, and its important role in the student experience at Sankofa. She notes:

> Devotion is key… we remind ourselves who we are, talk about how important we are, how special we are, to tell ourselves that we love ourselves. In the morning when parents are in the hustle and bustle of trying to get the kids to school, and

> sometimes you mom and dad may not get a chance to say, you know, you're the best… Devotion is the opportunity for them to empower themselves and to say, you know, how important they are. Devotion, as I say to my students, is sacred, and it sets the tone of the day. If you're playing in Devotion, nine times out of ten you're going to play all day. You're going to be off task all day. But if you take Devotion seriously and you listen to what it, what you're saying and you digest that and you allow it to really become a part of you, then some of things that you see, the behaviors that you see will change.

As Ms. Simpson speaks to the transformative power of Devotion for students and its long-lasting influence on student behavior. It is also important to understand the importance of Devotion for students recognizing Black history. Ms. Henderson, a veteran teacher, is known throughout the school for her famous words, "Devotion is the most important part of the day." She asserts that Devotions serves as a daily reminder for students to become change-agents within their own lives and communities:

> It's important for them to know who they are… to talk about ancestors or people that went before them or people that are still alive today to hear the contributions that African Americans have made to this world. So they will know how they've benefited from them and how they are able still to contribute to the success of their community.

Throughout the participants' narratives, Devotion appears to be an important time to recognize and recite Black history, affirm positive identity, and cultivate positive behavior.

Theme 4: Historical Realignment: The Power of the Ancestors

The first three themes: "*It's a Family Here*," *Small Learning Environment*, and *"We Learn Black History Everyday"* are integral components of teachers' and students' daily experiences at Sankofa Academy. These themes directly align with the first research question: What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? As demonstrated in Figure 9, the next three themes connects to the second research question: How can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion? The next three themes capture the participants' specific views on Afrocentricity and inclusion. These themes include: *The Power of the Ancestors*, *Know Yourself and Know Your Worth*, and *Africa is the Motherland*. Students, teachers, and the administrator provide collective insight on how Afrocentric schools foster inclusiveness for all people

The first appropriate theme is *The Power of the Ancestors*, since it serves as a guide for the historical acknowledgement of Africa and Afrocentricity. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged, including: *Imhotep* and *Increased Confidence*. It is important to note *The Power of the Ancestors* was referenced, in some way, by each of the participants. It also served as a "starting place" for many of the participants' responses. Harmony notes:

> Knowing the ancestors teaches me that I am a very powerful person on the inside, even if I don't believe it, it's there and I come from amazing ancestors that have accomplished so much and they've done so much for myself, for this generation. And it just makes me want to um, like pay it back somehow.

She continues:

> [Sankofa] teaches [you] so much about your background. This school informs you about your ancestors and history. This school goes into great detail about the people you have come from. In my opinion, this information has empowered me; this information about my ancestors really helps because I will always know who I am and where I come from. I like that I get that here.

Jeremiah also adds that he gains a sense of strength from the ancestors. He asserts, "Yeah. I mean… we talk a lot about that type of stuff and that you have to be like stronger and because look at your ancestors and stuff like that. That, that there's nothing holding you back, so you just have to try your best." The students' narratives illuminate the importance of the ancestors. The narratives also suggest that recognizing the ancestors has given them *power* and *strength*.

From an educator's perspective, Ms. Jones explains her position on the power of the ancestors for Sankofa's students. She mentions: "[At Sankofa] students know that they matter and their ancestors mattered, that the people before them mattered, that their race matters, that their um, existence and culture matters. That we're influential [and] we have a place on this earth and we're very confident about it." Ms. Jones' opening comments served as contextualization to a recorded field observation at the school's Annual Kwanzaa Program:

Wednesday, December 17th
7:00pm

Students, teachers, staff, and parents engaged in a "libation ceremony" where they light candles to remember ancestors who had transitioned on. It was a time for everyone to reflect on person's legacy and life. It was also a time to share thoughts about gratefulness and thankfulness.

The above field note captures the sacredness of ancestors to the Sankofa community. At this described ceremony, students lit candles and verbally acknowledged prominent ancestors that were meaningful to them, including: Marcus Garvey, Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, etc. One reoccurring name that was offered, both at the ceremony and throughout participants' narratives, was Imhotep. This specific ancestor became an entire subtheme.

Imhotep

The importance of ancient Kemet (Egypt) to the participants was paramount. Participants continuously referenced the Nile Valley, especially when mentioning prominent ancestors and ancestral power. Akeem asserts, "Many of the first doctors and scientists, and mathematicians came from Africa, like in Egypt or Nubian Africa… and a lot of people try to erase Egypt's history." Chris mirrors Akeem's comments about the strategic removal of Egypt's history by acclaiming, "I think that the Egyptian dynasties are the most powerful era in African history. Because, like I said, Egyptian's were the first. Greeks and Romans, they copied our religion. Everybody based their religion, based their civilization, based everything off the Egyptians, we started it all." Chris' use of the pronoun of "we" within the description of ancient African history shows an acknowledgement and reverence regarding the importance of the ancestors to his own identity. Kayla admits that she also finds inspiration from ancient Egyptian history. Specifically, she notes that Imhotep was an influential leader because of his undeniable intelligence, which is an inspiration to her. She states, "Imhotep is inspirational because he was this multi-genius. He was a mathematician, astronomer, he created the whole papyrus paper thing, and he was very important in history." Akeem continues and

compliments Kayla's comments. He notes that his personal identity has been shaped by his knowledge of Egypt, Imhotep, and the Nile Valley:

> Knowing things from the Nile Valley tells me that I am great, so are my people. And, I have something that my people have done in the past, which puts weight on me because that makes me great. But I also have to make myself great and that makes me feel good about myself that my people have a good past and we're gonna have a great future.

Akeem is a veteran student who recognized the importance of Imhotep and Egyptian contributions to the rest of the world. New students also quickly recognize the importance of Imhotep to the Sankofa learning community. Olivia, a transfer student, describes how Imhotep is important. She notes, "I learned that Imhotep was a multi-genius, and he built like the step pyramid. And that's something that I learned like in the beginning, when I came here last year, and it was new because I never really knew about it fully until came to this school." After attending Sankofa for only two years, Olivia recognizes and acknowledges the importance of Egypt in world history.

Increased Confidence

When participants mentioned "the ancestors," many of them acknowledged an increased confidence level of personal confidence. Students and teachers expressed that knowledge about their ancestral history has a personal effect on their personal identity. It is appropriate to capture Chris' opening comments about how learning about ancestral history has helped him personally. He notes, "It's taught me that I'm more capable than just being a slave. We were kings and queens and rulers and architects and scientists. We were pharaohs. I also feel like we created, started the government we have now…we

were the first civilization and it all started with us." Harmony mirrors Chris' comments and suggests that learning about the ancestors has helped her with self-esteem and confidence. She asserts, "I think that's helpful to know about them in life, when maybe someone might be a little confused about themselves, when they're feeling down about themselves or who they are, you can just like take them aside, you can tell them how powerful their ancestors are, what they achieved, and what they can achieve." Jeremiah mentions that his knowledge of the ancestors contributes to knowing his "heritage." Jeremiah explains:

> I mean, it, they often tell us that we, if you look at our heritage, we were basically unstoppable and we have the power to be kings and queens and rulers of our generation since, so that's pretty cool. If you don't know your background and what your people have done, you're never going to have any courage in yourself that you can do the impossible and if you never strive for doing that, you're never going to get far.

Jeremiah's comments address the transformative power that ancestral awareness brings to his life. On the other hand, Kayla mentions that learning about the ancestors stimulates a sense of gratitude. She notes, "You have to be appreciative for what you have because a lot of people put in a lot of effort… The ancestors and your parents have put tons of time, money, hard work, and sweat into what you have and that you can't just sit around not taking it in. It's important!" The students' narratives highlight the transformative power of ancestral awareness, which seems to provide students with a greater awareness of their own history. Even more, as Kayla's comments suggest, recognizing the sacrifices that ancestors made has helped her work-ethic and determination to be a good student.

Teacher participants also recognize the importance of ancestors, and hope that teaching students about ancestors will increase their confidence as both students and citizens. Mr. Gregory mentions how ancestral knowledge positions students inside of transformative history. He notes:

> You have a higher sense of self. You see yourself in the stories of the ancestors, and then you want to contribute to that greatness. Once you see that greatness that you have, you want to contribute too. You know what I mean, to say "Ok now, what can I do to contribute to all these that all these people did before me?" And um, I think that's a huge benefit and I've seen it work.

Ms. Henderson adds:

> Really studying the ancestors shows you who you are, and understanding the struggle that went on before you. And not just studying that but also honoring that as well. Contributing to make who you are as an African American, um, better. Not just to think, this is what was done before me and somehow "We have arrived!" But now it's your turn to acknowledge your responsibility to continue the success, the progress.

Ms. Jones also describes the benefits students receive when they learn about their ancestors. She even notes that the act of not constantly recognizing ancestors is a detriment to the Black community:

> We have to go back to appreciating one another, appreciating who we are, where we come from, what our ancestors and things did before us and move toward growth. I think some of us have lost the way, um, or have conformed to ideas that

> don't match our people, or what we stand for, or good things, you know. So we definitely have to bring that back to our morals and values and things.

Acknowledging ancestor contributions is something that proves meaningful for students, teachers, and the administrator. Students assert that learning about the ancestors provides feelings of *power* and *strength*, especially when recognizing the accomplishments of African Americans. For students, this recognition builds self-esteem. Teachers and the administrator also acknowledge the power of ancestors. They assert that knowing African American achievements and accomplishments is beneficial for students to know, especially when considering the ancestors' various "struggles" and sacrifices.

Theme 5: Edification and Positive Imagery: Know Yourself and Know Your Worth

Students, teachers, and the administrator described in the previous theme the power of the ancestors for motivating students and adding personal confidence. The next theme, *Know Yourself and Know Your Worth*, describes the evidence of edification and positive imagery that was evident throughout the Sankofa participants' data. To begin this discussion, Jeremiah offers an explanation of how one is able to "know" his or her self. He explains, "… self-knowledge is knowing your history and background in order to succeed in the world." From a teacher's perspective, Ms. Henderson offers the following comments about "knowing yourself." She notes:

> I tell them is if you don't know your history then you don't know yourself. Once you know who you are, then you can take over the planet. Once you know yourself, you believe that the sky is the limit. That you can do anything you want to do because of where you've come from, having pride in that, and being willing

> to accept the responsibility of knowing you are able to do those things and, and trying to accomplish those goals.

Jeremiah and Ms. Henderson provide contextual definitions for the theme, "Know Yourself." Other students, including Akeem, Brandon, and Chris, also note the importance of self-knowledge. Akeem asserts:

> You should have a sense of self and know who you are, so you [can] do better in life… Because if you know who you are then um, you have a sense of self, you know what you should do, what you shouldn't do. How to represent yourself and how not to represent yourself.

Brandon adds, "You should know where you came from… and know where you are now. Because where you are now, is because of your past and the struggles and the events that you had to go through is what puts you where you are. I don't think you should really take that for granted, because I do think that's important." Chris adds self-knowledge also helps to counter negative stereotypes. He states:

> You got to know how valuable you are 'cause not everyone in this world will think of you in a positive way. Like for example, I feel like people put us out there like I'm a scary Black man. Don't mess with him 'cause he'll shoot you, he'll beat you up. Or for Black women, she's wild, or she's crazy. You can't go through life believing what other people say about you.

The students' narratives provide evidence for the major theme: *Know Yourself and Know Your Worth*. This theme contains the following four subthemes: *Corrective History*, *Response to News Media*, *Inspiration from Ferguso*n, and *Being a Black Male*, which

emerged from the participants' narratives. Each of these subthemes emerged from the overarching importance of "Know Yourself and Know Your Worth."

Corrective History

One step in obtaining self-knowledge is correcting and redefining historical facts. Many students commented on how attending Sankofa exposed them to historical facts that changed their identities. This allowed them to better see themselves, and in turn, definitively correct their perspective of Blackness. Gavin states, "No matter what people say, we were great, like we ran empires… That says a lot to me!" Harmony adds, "When people ask me about my history or my culture, I'm able to explain to them instead of just believing them. But, I can explain, I can go in to detail, I give you dates and history and people." Felicia also adds, "I can actually tell people that you were brought here, you didn't, your life didn't start here… your life and your culture wasn't originally born here. So it kind of changed my outlook on Africa. That maybe Africa is a motherland instead of just another continent." The awareness of Africa before slavery was an important subtheme in the students' interviews. Chris admits that this is one of his favorite topics to discuss. He notes:

> A lot of people don't know who they are. 'Cause to be honest, when we came from Africa, White men gave us new names, they tried to give us new personality, they even gave us a new religion. I don't think that most of the people who came from Africa where already Christian. They had their own religion and that was okay. So they pretty much renamed us, so a lot of people don't know who we are. And, I feel like it's important to that we know a place where we can come back to and know who we are. 'Cause if you were reading history books you wouldn't

> know the truth. I feel like they keep out the important things that are supposed to empower us, or anything that's supposed to lift us up. They don't put that in the history books anymore. The stuff that my school tells us, you will never see in the history books.

Felicia also notes that learning more about history exposes her to a heritage she had not originally known. She states:

> It's cool that I actually come from like heritage. It kind of, it just makes it seems like it helps you understand that your life didn't just start here in America. It lets you know that there are more things to learn then just getting on your phone every day, typing in something, writing it down, and answering your homework like that. It shows you that not everything was here in America, not everything happened while we were alive. It helps us understand that we actually did go through a struggle, but we're in the better ages now. Like, so when we have problems, it helps us realize that oh, maybe issues aren't that bad because our ancestors went through worse.

Brandon mirrors Chris and Felicia's comments and notes that his entire thought-process was reshaped when he was exposed to historical truths at Sankofa. He mentions:

> I should always be thinking that I am number one, I am better, I am the smartest, or I the most athletic, or I am just the greatest of everyone I am around. [Sankofa] really teaches you that you should be thankful for the color of your skin.

The students' narratives demonstrate an appreciation for corrective history. Each of the narratives acknowledge increased self-awareness that stems from "knowing yourself."

Response to News Media

The act of "knowing yourself" was also considered important when combatting negative images on the news and throughout media outlets. This reoccurring subtheme highlights how students and teachers at Sankofa emphasize positive Black images as a contrast to the negative portrayals on television. The act of countering negative media images is complimentary to better knowing yourself, according to Gavin. He mentions, "A lot of times what they see on television and things like that may not portray that and so, we hope that it shapes their identity in a positive way. Once they've been here for a while, they have a higher sense of self." Ian also demonstrates skepticism towards media outlets portraying the "truth" about Black people and shares why the Sankofa offers something different. He shares, "Well to me, [Sankofa] teaches me more than what I just see on T.V. Like African Americans did many great things despite our ugly past. We still did lots and lots of great things. And again, it's nothing that you see on T.V., you know you see like all the ignorant music videos, positive news nothing that you see."

Olivia mentions that the learning environment at Sankofa allows, and encourages, spaces to talk about negative images and provide counter-stories. She states, "Well, because the news, sometimes they don't tell you the full truth, here we can like have a group discussion and form opinions about it and just share everything or how you feel about it." Harmony adds a specific example of how Sankofa fosters opportunities for students to discover themselves define what is historically accurate about their history. She mentions:

> A lot of people will try to teach you about yourself, but they won't know the real information but then, at this school we go beyond what's just in the books. So, if the book says, "in nineteen or eighteen something, so and so did this," we

> research to see if we believe something or know something different. We would go look it up and we would maybe do a project or write a report about it just because, we know the truth is out there.

She adds that discovering the "truth" or corrected history, as exemplified in her above example, builds a greater sense of culture and community:

> Learning the true stuff in history definitely just building self-esteem, talking about the, the contributions that African Americans have made and continue to make, and to see people that they may not see on a daily basis doing things that will benefit the community, benefit people that look like them. Knowing those kinds of things verses seeing those snapshots of things that they may see on television and thinking that um, that's what your culture, you know, the things that make up your culture.

Like Harmony, Brandon also specifically addresses the importance of knowing your culture. He expresses:

> You don't really see on the news people talk about positive things that the Black people do, like people do in nowadays, or even in the past. But, I mean, this school has taught me to change the world you're in or try to make it better and don't base your life off of what other people say. Always choose your own path and go where you want to go and always be more positive than what others really say. And always know your culture, that's the main thing they like, force into your brain, know your culture.

Students attested to better understanding themselves through actively reversing the negative images found on television, the news, and throughout the media. The comments

above glean into the transformative power of Sankofa's teachings in reshaping student identities.

Inspiration from Ferguson

Another subtheme that was coupled with news media and imaging was in response to a current event that simultaneously occurred during the data collection process. Students' and teachers' thoughts on the shooting death of Black unarmed Ferguson, Missouri teen Michael "Mike" Brown emerged from the data, and complimented the *Know Yourself and Know Your Worth* theme. The Michael Brown case was a highly publicized news story and social justice issue. When asked, "How has this school shaped your knowledge about Africa, African history, or African American events?," one-fourth of the students and teachers mentioned the Ferguson case. To start, Mr. Gregory mentions his thoughts on the importance of schools talking about during social justice events and encouraging these conversations with students. According to Mr. Gregory, this is what *relevance* in the classroom looks like. He states:

> So, if we're going to talk, we should talk about the same things that the media and, and the same things that students talk about in their own circles, we should talk about that here… And I think that's something that public schools should do more often as well, be willing to talk about those hard things. Like when Ferguson happened, many public schools were like, "well we're not going to talk about it, we're not going to discuss it." Some even banned the conversation. I think that's the stupidest thing in the world because if we're talking about this is real stuff happening right now. So how you going to not talk about it? You know what I mean, like if anything, I feel like institutions like the school and the churches or

> whatever religious affiliate, like those places, those safe spaces should be the spaces where you are having, you should have these conversations first, before they even hear it in the street.

Jeremiah, a new student, offers his thoughts on the Michael Brown case:

> Like, Eric Garner and Mike Brown, they really put things into perspective for me because I don't think any other school would have taught me and told me that that could be me and that I have to be careful and smart about everything that I do and all the choices that I make. Because, that could very well, could've been me and yeah, you just gotta think about that type of stuff and that's what [Sankofa] did to me, it helped me think about that.

Mr. Gregory and Jeremiah's comments about the Michael Brown case demonstrate their awareness of the importance of talking about these issues in a school setting. Mr. Gregory explains that when teachers fail to address current issues like the Michael Brown case, it is counterintuitive to the educational process. The following field note highlights an art lesson that incorporated discussion about the Michael Brown case.

Field note: Friday, December 5th
10:00am

Art teacher engages middle school students in a discussion about the Eric Garner case. He opens class with a loud announcement. "CLASS! WE HAVE A PROBLEM! A man was choked to death for illegally selling cigarettes!" Students immediately offer their opinions about the case, either for or against the decision. Everyone engages in dialogue about the criminal justice system, hypocrisy, and how each of them is impacted. Without prompting, they begin to centralize themselves within their own education. The teacher played devil's advocate for a couple of the student's points, while the students reenact the scenario. The class was outraged and immediately created social action signs for anti-police violence demonstrations.

The above field note captures the students' passion and interest in social justice issues, especially when they are relevant to their lives. Felicia mentions how several of her classes discussed the Ferguson case, and incorporated it into the curriculum. She mentions:

> My literature teacher talked about Ferguson. She talked like twice about it today. My science teacher talked about it like three times. My French teacher talked about it and so did my math teacher. They actually tell you about it, like they tell you they're going to be truthful, hundred percent truthful, they're not going to "sugar coat" it. They're going to be straightforward with you. It's important to talk about it at school.

Gavin adds:

> We actually dedicated a whole class period to talking about Ferguson, 'cause like the first week it happened our, my classmates as well as myself, were not informed about the
>
> situation. So we spent a whole class period dedicated to that. Looking it up, looking at the videos, seeing how the protestors were reacting to the situation. They let us talk about how we felt about what was going on.

The relevance of the Ferguson case to the Sankofa school community emerges from the data as a case of social justice, more so than simply a "Black issue." Student narratives explained that teachers allowed the class to formulate their own opinions about justice, protests, and democracy.

Being a Black Male

The previous subtheme surrounding the Michael Brown court case prompted first-hand accounts on what it means to be a "Black male." Since the Ferguson case involved an unarmed Black male, three students saw a parallel between Michael Brown and their respective lives. When asked, "Do you feel your education here at [Sankofa] has helped you?," *Being a Black Male* surfaced in many of the students' responses and became a subtheme centered on the importance of "knowing yourself" and combatting negative imagery. Gavin's comments pungently capture what being a Black male means to him and how Sankofa offers ways to create positive spaces for students. He mentions:

> They teach us to stay alive. I think it's important to be informed of that so like, they, you know when you're out, you know when you're out in areas that you're not familiar with or just walking down the street, you know to be, um, attentive, being informed of where you are, like be on the watch, know your rights too, that's an important thing. That's what many Black males don't know, it's how some of us get in trouble a lot because didn't know our rights.

Like Gavin, Brandon recognized the importance of learning practical "life-skills" and he expressed a feeling of appreciation for Sankofa. Brandon adds:

> It teaches me a lot actually because it teaches me how the struggles of the Black man in the real world are very serious and how you can't really joke around. Like, we talk about current events and past events and what went on and what you should be, what you should look out for like, when you're by yourself you should look out behind you and know your surroundings. So, if you like, are called to court one day, like as a Black male people are scared of you for one, and people don't really take us serious nowadays because they see us on the street sometimes

> or they see us on the streets and like thugged-out. Part of being Black mostly is just really not caring about what anybody else really says because, I mean we've gone through so much in our past, like slavery, discrimination, blatant discrimination, um, lynching and if you really look back at that it says a lot about us now because, right now we are, we're together still like we came from Africa, or we were forced to come from Africa and we stayed together like a pack. Today, we should still stick together. You see like Black people killing Black people but, it does not move people out of like a Black community.

Chris comments that Sankofa positions Black males, and all people, in a place of importance. This contrasts the negative portrayals of Black males in society. He adds:

> I wouldn't be the same person I am today 'cause, a lot of people my age don't know who they are and I feel that's one of reasons why you see the stereotypical Black guy, people think of people with their pants sagging down and crap like that. But I feel like part of the reason they are like that is because they don't know who they are and I'm glad that I've had the chance and the um opportunity to be able to experience something like this so now nobody else can tell me who I am and now I can know how to prevent myself from letting history repeats itself.

Chris, Gavin, and Brandon recognize the importance of Black male identity within the larger theme of *Know Yourself*. Each of these narratives provides a tangible example of how Sankofa combats negative stereotypes and socially uplifts Black male students.

Theme 6: Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: Africa is the Motherland

The final theme that emerged from the data is *Africa is the Motherland*. Teachers and the administrator were asked to explicitly comment on their perspectives about

Afrocentricity, and were asked questions like: “What is the role of Afrocentricity in teaching African American student?” “How would you describe an African-centered education?” And, “What are the benefits of African-centered curriculum models for students of color?” Students, on the other hand, provided their thoughts when asked, “Do you believe anyone could attend this school? Why or why not?” Throughout the teachers, administrator, and students’ responses, the theme of *Africa is the Motherland* surfaced as a starting point for many of their answers.

Students, teachers, and the administrator provided their initial perspectives about racial inclusion. It is appropriate to start with Mr. Gregory’s comments.

> Well if you tell the truth, you know, everybody came from Africa. Every human being, the oldest human fossils… prove that all human development, at least modern human development came from or can be traced back to East Africa.

Similarly, Destiny also commented on Africa being the "motherland” and mentions how because of this, Blacks provided inspiration to other cultures. She asserts, “All [of our] roots really relate back to Africa. Everyone is connected when you think about it. Everyone has branched out. The identifications may have changed but eventually we’re all centered around one thing, just in different ways… We’re all connected because of the motherland.” Brandon adds, “Africa is the motherland, because that’s where our, our original home and our original um, cultures came from. They came from Africa. Like [many] instruments came from Africa, the first government came from Africa, the first civilization, the um, black people came from Africa.” Harmony also mentions Africa as the motherland. She notes, “I would say Africa is the motherland because… I think of the Black people of course. I think of developing businesses, doctors, architects, and all these

phenomenal people. They paved the way and made it possible, so they remind me this is where I come from too." Each of these participants' mention Africa's preeminent role in history and consider it as the starting place for subsequent civilizations.

The above narratives frame Africa as the historical starting place. This is important to consider when discussing racial inclusion within school curricula. This is also important to mention when considering the study's second research question: *How can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion*? The historical perspective that centers Africa as the dawn of humanity is taught at Sankofa each day. Additionally, this perspective surfaces throughout each of the subthemes. There were four subthemes that also emerged include: *Afrocentricity is not Anti-White*, *Racial Respect*, *The Diaspora is Diverse*, and *We Include all Cultures*. Teachers, students, and the administrator were asked questions about how their school is, or is not, inclusive of all racial groups. Each of these subthemes focuses on the role of inclusion within Afrocentric schools and curricula.

Afrocentricity is not Anti-White

It is important to examine what Afrocentricity means to participants, especially teachers who instruct students at Sankofa Academy. Concurrently, it is important to dispel any myths regarding this theory as well. Mr. Lance adamantly states:

> I think a lot of people think being pro-Black or Afrocentric is being anti-White…and that doesn't, it's absolutely not what it means. It just means being proud of who you are, and being proud of who are will take you so far. I think it's so important for children to really understand their self-worth and if you give them that and they will be better human beings, you know. I just think they'll be better citizens, I mean it just goes across the board. They will be able to navigate

> um, a lot more assertively in the society that they live in, because they know who they are and where they come from.

Mr. Gregory also explains what Afrocentricity means from his perspective. He mentions, "Afrocentricity means that you take your cosmology and the way you look at the world out of a European contexts and instead, you're placing the African person and the African experience at the center of that understanding." Additionally, he mentions that this "centeredness" helps shape Afrocentric education. He adds:

> I think an African centered or Afrocentric education isn't just necessarily the facts that you learn, that you're just learning all these Black history facts, but that the Black student becomes the center of his or her own education. And they have a sense of self, first, before they begin to start understanding all these things around them. And then that way, that's established and then everything that they learn, that they can learn, they're able to say whether it's true or false, whether it applies to them or not. Whether they take it, they learn it for a test and then they leave it, because they're understanding things from their own Black perspective, their own Black centeredness.

Mr. Gregory provides additional insights into the role of Afrocentric education in restructuring curriculum. He states:

> With Afrocentricity you, you reverse all of the things that was taken away from us during segregation and during colonialism and during slavery and during the Middle Passage, and you give all that back and bring all that out of our students when you give them an Afrocentric education. So that they can have that connection to greatness, and once they have that connection to greatness and they

> can walk in greatness, and then that makes for a much, much better future for our communities.

In regards to teaching Black students, Mr. Gregory emphasizes how important culturally centered pedagogy is for effective teaching. He adds:

> I always believe that if you can see yourself inside of what you're learning, then it's more applicable to you. You know what I mean, if you're, if you're looking in a book and you don't see nobody that looks like you or you're learning about all these things, you learn about math formulas and all this stuff, and none of traces back to you, you might know it but it doesn't really stick with you. Because you can't, you can't relate to it, you know what I mean. But if you're learning math, when I was teaching math I would start off every year by saying that the Pythagorean Theorem was not created by Pythagoras, it was created by ancient Egyptians and all this other kind of stuff, so that they see that people that look like me came up with this stuff. So this whole notion that Black people can't or they just don't understand math, is preposterous because the first mathematicians in the world was Black and so this is in me, I can do this. All I have to do is just go inside myself and pull it out, but I can do this because all the people that came before me did this, you know what I mean. And when we talk about engineering, you know that the laying out the foundation of Washington D.C. was designed by Benjamin Banneker, so they understand that they are completely capable.

In addition to providing students a culturally centered outlook, Mr. Gregory states the importance of Afrocentric education. He believes this aspect is missing from many "traditional" school contexts. He shares:

> I think Afrocentricity is necessary. I believe having an understanding of who you are first before you come to the table of diversity, it's absolutely necessary for education, it's absolutely necessary for disseminating education and receiving an education. Um, and I tell my students all the time, yeah you're in a predominately Black school where you understand who you are and your history and that sort of thing, but how silly would you look if you went, you know, you're at a table with some Asian guys and White guys, Latino/Latina people, all these different people from all these different walks of like and they're all talking about who they are and where they come from and what they eat and important people in their history and all you can say is Dr. King. You know what I mean? Like, you, you have nothing to contribute to overall knowledge, you have nothing to contribute to human understanding if you don't know who you are, so you've got to know… You've got to have an understanding of yourself and your history so that when people come to you, they don't just see you based on what they see on television, they don't see you based on what someone else thinks you are, but they see who you are based on what you know about who you are. This is why Afrocentricity is absolutely necessary for these students.

Mr. Lance's and Mr. Gregory's comments dispel many misconceived beliefs regarding Afrocentricity and its role for students. Their narratives affirm Afrocentricity as a humanistic approach, not an anti-White approach.

Racial Respect

Also coupled within the *Africa is the Motherland* theme, students' knowledge of Africa's historical place in history prompted discussions regarding racial respect.

Whereas teachers provided commentary about their perspectives on Afrocentricity and Afrocentric education, students also commented on whether they would consider other racial groups benefitting from Sankofa's teaching styles. One-fourth of participants expressed their desire to have increased racial "respect" from non-Black students. Nasir states, "I believe that all people, like Caucasian, Mexican, Latino/Latina, they should come here 'cause they get to learn our history more and to see what um, what African Americans and their race did together." Gavin adds, "Considering that [Sankofa] Academy is predominately Black, of course we're going to learn about our history. I feel that it would be great for a non-Black person to attend this school because they can get an insight on the Black world. How we live everyday life, it may be different from how they're living." Akeem also affirmatively adds, "The education here is good even if you're like of a different racial background, the education is still good... It'd be cool if everyone learned Black history because not everybody thinks of Black people as, as a great people." The semi-structured interview style allowed for additional prompting with Akeem's response. In response to the follow-up question, "What could non-Black students learn if they came to this school?" he states, "I think they would have a higher level of respect for um, for others. 'Cause, not everybody knows where you came from. What you've been through."

Chris also provides insight regarding the benefits of all students learning from an Afrocentric perspective. He states:

> I feel like there's a reason why people turn out these ways… So I feel like, every race should be taught about our history… Actually I feel like White students should know, I mean not to single them out or anything 'cause not all White kids

> are racist or anything like that… I feel like they should know what their ancestors did to us and how cruel, and rude and cruel they were to our people so they should know what we went through and know to not let it ever happen again.

For Chris, Nasir, Gavin, and Akeem, having other students learn Black History was considered a benefit for the primary purpose of achieving increased racial understanding. Their responses are supported by Africa's place in history, and non-Blacks can also benefit from learning about Black history. Ms. Simpson mirrors these same sentiments in her response. She notes:

> I believe that all cultures need to know about the beauty of the African American culture and the truth behind it… I think the truth sets you free. You know, if people had a more well-rounded curriculum and more culturally sensitive curriculum in all situations, I believe we might have a better world, personally. I mean, I am an optimist, but if we could understand each other a little bit better…and then maybe we're able to work some things out and change some point of views about other groups of people. You know, all Black people *can't* dance, you know, all White people are not against Black America. You know, and just to have those truths out there because we're not always teaching our kids the truth. And that's where hatred comes, and that's where racism and isolation and all that comes.

In Ms. Simpson's view, all students should learn Black History in order to help improve race relations in the U.S.

The Diaspora is Diverse

Many participants solicit racial respect because of the interconnectivity of people across the Diaspora. As noted, this is connected to the larger theme of *Africa is the Motherland* because of Africa's expressed place in history. The subtheme *The Diaspora is Diverse* emerged from the participants' interviews, and specifically surfaced when students and teachers mentioned their opinions about Black history. Mr. Gregory states:

> [We] are just so connected in so many different ways we don't even realize it. So when you talk about the African Diaspora, it's world history. I went to Paris recently, I never seen so many Black people! I didn't know there was that many Black people in Paris. It was crazy! Man, the Diaspora is just, so diverse. I had no idea but when you don't talk about the African presence in France and in all these different places, then we don't know how much we're all connected.

Students also recognized the historical influence of Africa in other cultures. Destiny explained her appreciation for all of "Black culture." In her written narrative, she noted African American's influence on world history:

> When you think about it, every culture came to Africa to either capture or overcome. The Europeans came and they tried to take us to America. And I think that we may have influenced the world spiritually because… no matter what we always overcame. When we were whipped, we still had joy, we got married, we went to church, we were determined to do whatever we can, and I think that's in so many cultures that have come into Africa. Like overall, they have learned lessons and they may have taken it back to their countries and talked about it.

Kayla adds there is a "multicultural" component to understanding the Diaspora. She notes in her written narrative:

> I've gone on field trips and learned about the different people in the Diaspora. It's more multicultural, so I've become more of a multicultural person. I have learned about so many cultures in my classes because, like they say there are African people on every continent. That's really cool… When they told me that, I didn't believe it. But now I do, because African people all look different and you can't really tell what's African or Black anymore.

Mr. Gregory, Destiny, and Kayla each provide insight on the African Diaspora and cultural diversity. These three participants acknowledge Africa's influence around the globe.

We Include all Cultures

The last subtheme that emerged from the data concludes the findings in an appropriate way. The larger theme of *Africa is the Motherland* undergirds the subtheme: *We Include all Cultures*. This subtheme surfaced throughout interview narratives and field observations. Cultural inclusion, as noted, is premised on historical facts that position Africa as the starting place of humankind. Teachers specifically mentioned this subtheme in their narratives.

When teachers were asked about the benefits of Sankofa's curriculum design, they commented on the importance of Africa. Ms. Simpson explains that she covers all disciplines in her class, but mentions that introducing a non-European perspective is important. She describes:

> We teach about European settlers, but we tell them the truth. The kids here will tell you that they know what they know. That Christopher Columbus a person who must've been 'intoxicated' to think that he discovered something when

> people were clearly already living there…He wasn't really stable in his mind and how could he really find a place where the Native Americans lived. They talk about their African American history and they about Native American history, because you know, it's comparable history.

Similarly, Mr. Gregory explains:

> Before I got here, I thought that an Afrocentric education was where you just learn Black history… nothing White, nothing or anything else. Now I see it as very different. Um, I think an African centered education does not necessarily mean that you don't know anything else, that you don't understand anybody else's history or understand British literature or Spanish literature. All it means is that you're putting the education and the African student in the center and you're showing them that all of these things come from you.

He continues:

> So when I teach history, I teach history from all over. Like right now, we're learning Russian history and you know, and European history and all this other kind of stuff but I start off every year with Africa so that they understand that was the beginning of civilization. [African] civilization was the first, you know what I'm saying, human civilization and so, they understand that all these things that happen, come out of them.

The introduction of non-African cultural groups in Mr. Gregory's history class was also observed in Ms. Henderson's social studies lesson. The field notes from this observation are as follows:

Thursday, November 20th
10:20am

Ms. Henderson led K-1st grade students in a discussion about the Wampanoag Indian Tribe. One of the students said that the English settlers helped the Native Americans – but before Ms. Henderson could say anything – children interrupted and said "NO! The Native Americans helped the settlers! They were there first!" Later in the lesson, Ms. Henderson asked, "What kinds of foods do you think the Native Americans ate who lived along the coast?" One of the students said corn. Another said fish. Ms. Henderson said, "Very good… why do you think they ate fish?" she asked. After about three tries, one of the students said, "Because they were near water and rivers and that means they were fishermen!"Ms. Henderson then proceeded in a lesson on how the Native Americans were resourceful and kind.

The above narrative describes Ms. Henderson's K-1st grade classroom, where they explored another culture in-depth. Ms. Henderson moved beyond the proverbial and trivial "First Thanksgiving" story, and allowed students to critically explore a local Native American tribe's lifestyle, adds a counter-narrative to the "traditional" American history story. Mr. Lance adds that Afrocentric curriculum can be used in interdisciplinary context. He states, "Of course we teach other cultures. That's the cool thing about us. For example, we have war history and Georgia history, and so on." He adds, "Afrocentricity can be used across-disciplines… For example, if we talk about Harriet Tubman, she understood how maps worked, you know. She was a mathematician as well, she was also an astronomer. Topics can go so many different ways." Mr. Lance's testimony regarding the applicability of Afrocentric curriculum across disciplines compliments Ms. Simpson's and Ms. Henderson's classroom examples. Teachers observe how Afrocentric curriculum is both interdisciplinary and intercultural. This highlights the cultural fluidity and flexibility of Afrocentric school designs.

Summary

This chapter presented the study's major findings in response to the two respective research questions: *What are the perceptions and experiences of teachers and*

students in an Afrocentric/African-centered school? And, how can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion? The first part of this chapter captured a description of Sankofa's learning environment. The second part of this chapter provided demographic information about the participants, including students, teachers, and the study's administrators. Last, the third part of the chapter presented the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the study's data. Data for this study included interview transcripts, field notes, and student essays. The compilation of varying data types is consistent with the case study research design. The next chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the themes presented and merges the study's findings with the Afrocentric theoretical framework and existing literature. This chapter also presents implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As it is presently constructed for delivery in public schools from kindergarten through graduate school, the standard American school curriculum simply does not present the complete facts of history, literature, art, music, drama, science, or other aspects of America's diverse cultures. In particular, through omissions, distortions, and outright lies, Americans of African descent appear only negligibly in the history of national or global life. (Barbara Sizemore, 1990)

Racists will always call you racist when you identify their racism. To love yourself now is a form of racism. We are the only people who are criticized for loving ourselves. (John Henrik Clarke, 1992)

In chapter four, the study's findings were presented and grouped into organized themes. The six themes that emerged from the data were: 1. Familial Learning Community: "It's a Family Here," 2. The Pros and Cons: Small School Environment, 3. Beyond February: "We Celebrate Black History Everyday," 4. Historical Realignment: The Power of the Ancestors, 5. Edification and Positive Imagery: Know Yourself and Know your Worth, and 6. Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: Africa is the Motherland. In this chapter, the findings are discussed and analyzed using an Afrocentric theoretical lens. Additionally, this chapter also provides suggestions for future research studies.

This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students at an Afrocentric school, and explored the role of Afrocentricity as a framework for inclusion in schools. To accomplish this task, the theoretical framework of Afrocentricity helped the analysis of the participants' responses. Afrocentricity strategically places the African experience at the center of analysis (Asante, 1993). It responds to mis-education

by re-centering the curriculum. Based on the findings of this case study at Sankofa Academy, this chapter is organized surrounding six themes.

Each of the six (6) theme's headings provides a discussion of the findings and their connection to the theoretical framework and existing research. The second part of this chapter explains the implications of the study and provides directions for future research. The first three themes, "*It's a Family Here*," *Small School Environment*, and "*We Celebrate Black History Everyday*" are examined in connection to the first research question; while the remaining themes, *The Power of the Ancestors*, *Know Yourself and Know Your Worth*, and *Africa is the Motherland* are explained in relation to the second research question.

Theme 1: Familial Learning Community: "It's a Family Here

When teachers and students were asked what makes Sankofa Academy unique, all twenty participants mentioned the theme of "family." Students expressed an appreciation for teachers who demonstrated concern and assertiveness. This finding is also supported in other studies (Ani, 1994; Gbaba, 2009; Piert, 2006). From an Afrocentric perspective, having a supportive family learning environment is central to delivering high-quality education. The participants' narratives regarding the familial environment at Sankofa Academy connects to Rodney's (2011) research. Rodney (2011) states, "In Africa, before the fifteenth century, the predominant principal of social relations was that of family and kinship associated with communalism" (p. 36). Whereas European ethos often promotes individualism and competitiveness within schools and society, Afrocentricity does not (Akbar, 1998; Dei, 2012; Murrell, 2002; Obenga, 2004; Rodney, 2011). Dei (2006) asserts that Afrocentric education embraces community and unity. In this sense, Brandon,

a student participant, described the familial environment he experienced at Sankofa Academy. He noted in his written narrative, "It's a family loving environment, and they pretty much take you under their wing like a son or a daughter. A couple of my teachers actually call me their grandson." Brandon's comments illustrate the nurturing school environment at Sankofa. Piert (2006) and Shokley (2011) found that teacher relationships are important in Afrocentric schools. Shokley (2011) explains that home and school relationships are strengthened when schools have caring teachers and they create a family environment. Similarly, Piert (2006) describes the positive role that teachers and positive adult mentors have in Afrocentric schools.

Similarly, Hopkins (1997) and Evans-Winters (2011) investigated effective strategies for teaching Black boys and girls, and they found that students are better engaged in learning when they are supported in schools. Both Hopkins (1997) and Evans-Winters (2011) found that for Black boys and girls, having additional support on the school-level increased the students' sense of belonging. This culture of learning and support is also found at Sankofa Academy (Akbar, 1998; Dei, 2012; Murrell, 2002; Obenga, 2004; Rodney, 2011).

Additionally, Sankofa students described their long-lasting relationships with peers. Chris explains:

> Ok, with students I've made lifelong friendships, I believe. Because I used to go to school with um, some people who used to go here and now we're like, we get together like every event [Sankofa] usually has or we get together outside, like, say we would go to Dave and Busters or we would go to the skating rink or to the movies, or we would just do activities together and we don't even go to the same

> school anymore… I've kept in touch with a lot of people and it um, it's changed uh, my life I believe.

Chris describes "lifelong friendships" with his peers. For students, these friendships contribute to the familial environment at Sankofa Academy. Connecting to the theme of family, the second major theme addresses the school's size.

Theme 2: The Pros and Cons: Small School Environment

New students Ethan, Jeremiah, Lindsay, and Melia found Sankofa's small size to be a benefit. Lindsay explains, "… the small classrooms [help] me get one-on-one learning, [which] is better for me." Similarly, Hopkins (1997) and Mitchell (2003) found that small learning environments are positive for students. Hopkins (1997) examined several Afrocentric schools across the Midwest, and found that more intimate schooling environments were beneficial for Black male students. Hopkin's studied various Afrocentric school designs, including inclusion programs, afterschool programs, etc. Like Hopkins, Mitchell (2003) found that small learning groups were helpful for struggling students attending MAAT Academy, an Afrocentric school in California. Similarly, Sankofa's small size emerged as a theme that most of the participants mentioned in a positive way.

As noted in chapter four, veteran and new students found Sankofa's small size to be an advantage. Participants from Sankofa Academy describe *positive* school experiences, especially with one-on-one attention and accelerated learning. Students also perceive their education to be rigorous and meaningful, which is also attributed to Sankofa's size.

Although the more intimate and personable learning environment at Sankofa would appear advantageous for prospective families, many parents choose not to enroll their children for reasons like finances and lack of resources. The administrator, Ms. Jones, highlights reasons for Sankofa's small size. As the administrator, Ms. Jones has experience with student enrollment that extend beyond the teachers and students' narratives. When asked, "What do you think are people's misconceptions about this school? Why do you think more families don't explore [Sankofa] as a viable option for their children?," Ms. Jones provides several reasons. First, she notes that Sankofa has limited special education services. Second, she states that the school lacks city-wide exposure and has very little marketing. Furthermore she explains, "Our downfall is business and marketing, a lot of people don't know about us. That is our downfall." Lastly, she states that the school's tuition and salary is often an obstacle. Ms. Jones states:

> There's so many wonderful things that go on in this building on a daily basis, so much love for the children here. You think since it is a private school, we're making big bucks, but teachers don't make that kind of money. And many prospective parents can't afford us either. So I guess money is a stumbling block on both sides.

Also noted in Ms. Jones' narrative, many prospective parents want extracurricular activities that Sankofa currently does not offer – like a formal athletic program. These issues help to explain Sankofa's small size. While parent perceptions are beyond the scope of this study, their feedback is still important to note.

Although there are some perceived limitations to the school's size, the academic advantages were important to students. Many students found Sankofa's small size to be a

positive characteristic. However, three veteran students critiqued Sankofa's size based on their views about racial diversity. Brandon, Chris, and Ian's desire for non-Black students to attend their school demonstrates that Sankofa is a non-exclusive environment. These students did not view their education as separatist or unwelcoming, instead they wished for increased racial diversity. It is important to note that all of the teachers and the administrator expressed that any child is welcomed at Sankofa.

Theme 3: Beyond February: "We Celebrate Black History Everyday"

The third theme describes an important characteristic of Sankofa's learning environment, which is the presence of Black history in the school. Students and teachers explain that Black history is taught beyond the month of February at Sankofa. Ms. Henderson states:

> Unfortunately, most public schools and most private schools teach Black history in February and that's it. And there's so much more, there's so much history that we have, so many contributions that we made… [Students] here get an opportunity to, to realize and understand the greatness that they too, have.

Additionally, teachers describe that Black history is interdisciplinary and applicable in various subjects. The assumption that Afrocentric schools pontificate Black history without teaching other subjects is false. This is often a common misconception regarding Afrocentric schools. Many teachers at Sankofa expressed a desire to change this assumption. Sankofa's teachers and students describe their typical school day, which includes various subjects such as mathematics, art, science, social studies, language arts, foreign language, and drama. Each of these subjects are taught using an Afrocentric approach, which aims to remove hegemony from the curricula.

Teachers and students at Sankofa describe the use of non-hegemonic curricula that positively displays Black heroes and their contributions. It is important to note that Black historical figures are not *specific* to Black history (Akbar, 1998; Dei, 2006). This was first demonstrated in the *Portland Baseline Essays*, which provided Afrocentric curriculum guides for social studies, science, language arts, mathematics, art, and music (1987). Teachers and students describe how the curriculum at Sankofa comprehensively covers world history, not just Black history, by offering multiple classes and subjects. These classes aim to expose students to non-traditional ways of thinking and learning. This demonstrates Sankofa's *holistic* approach to education.

Additionally, Afrocentric curricula can be considered holistic because it is based on the seven virtues of MA'AT. These virtues include: truth, justice, harmony, balance, order, reciprocity, and propriety (Hilliard, 2002; Hilliard, Williams, & Damali, 1987; Murrell, 2002; Nobles, 1990). Karenga (1966) re-coined MA'AT into 20th and 21st century principles, known as the Nguzo Saba. Elements of the Nguzo Saba include: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith (Karenga, 1966). Teachers use the Nguzo Saba in their daily teaching practices (as displayed in Appendix E).

Students at Sankofa recite the Nguzo Saba during Devotion, which is another example of how the school is African-centered. As mentioned, Devotion in this case is a non-religious daily ritual, where teachers and students gather together and recite affirmations. Many students positively mention Devotion when describing their daily routine. Kayla explains that her favorite part of the day is when she gets a chance to recite the poem *Nobility* (see Appendix H), which is said in Devotion. She states:

> I like saying *Nobility* because it takes time to learn and by the time you learn it you've got the meaning of it. It's mostly that, no matter where you come from or what you look like, you have the ability to do any and everything and that people should accept and you should accept other people, no matter what the skin color, their background, or what you think they are.

Brandon also adds that his favorite moments in the school day include singing *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and reciting *The Ultimate Student* (see Appendix L and Appendix I). He states:

> I like *Lift Every Voice and Sing* because it's more saying how you should look at your past because you should know where you came from and be thankful for what you have today. I also like *The Ultimate Student* because it always encourages me to be better at my schoolwork and what I'm trying to do and try to be the best at it.

Additionally, Mr. Gregory explains the importance of these affirmations. He notes:

> The Devotional affirmations just kind of remind the students that they can be successful if they put their minds to it. Just to give them a sense of inspiration in the beginning of the day. Our hope is that what it does it just kind of puts them on the right foot… and remember these things as they're being examined. As they go through the whole academic process, they can kind of just reflect on these affirmations and hopefully that will give them kind of an edge.

The school's devotional practices are directly aligned with African "centeredness." The MAAFA, or damages caused by the Transatlantic Slave Trade, created an abrupt disconnect between Africa and African Americans (Ani, 1994; Hilliard, 2002). An

opportunity for students at Afrocentric schools to rediscover knowledge lost from the MAAFA is provided during daily Devotion. The school's Devotion reconnects students with ancestral history and "centeredness," because it allows time for positive affirmation and unity among students and teachers. Although participants explain that Devotion is not religious, the spirit of affirmation and daily meditation is beneficial. Marimba Ani (1994) explains that the "spirit" of Africa is found in the people of the Diaspora. Additionally, students learn about lesser-known Black history facts in Devotion. This connects students to information lost in the MAAFA.

Gbaba's study also focused on Black history within Afrocentric schools. Gbaba's (2009) study found that Black history systemically confronts hegemony and dominant ideology. Additionally, Afrocentric curriculum models "… produce equity pedagogy for children of color" (Gbaba, 2009, p. 33). This distinguishes Afrocentric schools from traditional schools. Rodney (2011) describes the colonial framework found in traditional schools. He notes:

> The [colonial school system] was not an educational system that grew out of the African environment or one that was designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. It was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African societies, but one which sought to instill a sense of deference towards all that was European… Colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion, and the development of underdevelopment. (Rodney, 2011, p. 240-241)

Similarly, Dei (2006) explains that students are disserviced when schools use traditional curricula. Dei advocates for the implementation of non-traditional curriculum methods, which counter colonialism's negative and pervasive damages. In order to accomplish this task, Dei (2006) suggests re-centering the curriculum and using updated and more historically accurate approaches. Dei's curriculum suggestions align with the Afrocentric theoretical framework and advocates for greater inclusion of African contributions in the curriculum (Asante, 1991, 1998). These non-traditional curriculum practices are found daily at Sankofa Academy. The importance of Black history for students leads to the next theme, which is the power of the ancestors.

Theme 4: Historical Realignment: The Power of the Ancestors

Students describe positive Black role models and ancestors who are considered influential. Jeremiah describes his favorite ancestor – Malcolm X. He states:

> Yeah, my favorite person is definitely Malcolm X… Because, I see a lot of myself in him. I tried to be, I try, I strive to be like him and stuff like that and I, he just seemed like, in my opinion, he came the closest of actually doing something big, like everyone else like marched and he actually made a movement.

Additionally, Kayla explains that her favorite ancestor is Maya Angelou. She states, "[Maya Angelou] had a lot, a lot of struggles going on in her life and she still came out on top doing more than she thought was possible." Jeremiah and Kayla's descriptions of Malcolm X and Maya Angelou demonstrate the importance of recognizing ancestors. Both of these historical figures proved meaningful to Kayla and Jeremiah.

Students, teachers, and the administrator describe the role of the ancestors at Sankofa. Ancestors are important when re-centering history (Akbar, 1998; Ani, 1998;

Asante, 1991, 1998, 2000; Karenga, 2002; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). One of the most influential ancestors to Sankofa's students and teachers was Imhotep, who was an Egyptian multi-genius. Motley (1969) explains, "… [The] first physician of antiquity of any fame was the black Egyptian Imhotep, who lived about 2980 BC during the Third Dynasty… and he was so highly thought of in his day that he was worshipped as a kind of [God] centuries after his death. He cured physical and mental sickness" (p. 42). As stated in the literature review, primary Greek sources confirm the significance of Egypt to the rest of the Hellenic world (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1966; Herodotus, 440 B.C.E./2014; Plato, 348 B.C.E./1968). The students in this study explain Imhotep's positive influence on their academic careers. Students describe that learning about Imhotep provides inspiration and increased academic confidence. The participants' acknowledgement of Imhotep demonstrates a command of history. This suggests that Sankofa re-centers the importance of Africa in its curriculum.

Afrocentricity argues for the African perspective to be *centered* versus marginalized (Asante, 1998). While acknowledging the Greeks or Romans as influential contributors to their education, students at Sankofa also see the value and significance of Ancient Kemetians (Egyptians). Additionally, students uncover the historical truth about their ancestors, which is often ignored in public school settings (Akbar, 1998; Dei, 2006).

In addition to Imhotep's influence on the students, the libation ceremony detailed in chapter four is another example of ancestral recognition (Asante, 2003). Asante (2003) highlights the importance of ancestral reflection.

The psychology of the African without Afrocentricity is a matter of great concern.

Instead of looking out from one's own center, the non-Afrocentric person operates

> in a manner that is negatively predictable… The person's images, symbols, lifestyles, and manners are contradictory and thereby destructive to personal and collective growth and development. Unable to call upon the power of ancestors, because one does not know them; without an ideology of heritage, because one does not respect one's own prophets; the person is like an ant trying to move a large piece of garbage only to find that it will not move. (Asante, 2003, p. 3)

Knowledge of the ancestors, along with corrected history, positively affirms the students at Sankofa. Chris explains, "We learn about [ourselves], [our] people and [our] ancestors. I feel like it's a positive influence on my education because I feel like I am being pushed to do the best." Kayla adds, "[Sankofa] has taught me that the Afrocentric ideas have true background and meaning. It shows me that being black is more than your skin tone. It's what's inside you and behind you. Your ancestors have moved you to be where you are and you need to keep pushing on." Kayla explains that ancestral connectedness is beneficial for self-knowledge, which leads to the fifth theme.

Theme 5: Edification and Positive Imagery: Know Yourself and Know Your Worth

The participants in the study described the concept of self-knowledge or "knowing yourself" (Akbar, 1998). They explain that Sankofa's learning environment fosters identity formation and reflection. This ultimately brings healing and historical realignment, which is known as "sankofa." As noted, the concept of sankofa is an Akan proverb, which literally means, "go back and fetch," and is pictorially symbolized as a bird looking behind or in the past (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014). The concepts of sankofa respond to the MAAFA, which are the traumatic effects

left from the African Diaspora. The MAAFA has negatively influenced education, especially in regards to student learning and identity.

Today's public schools propagate the ideologies of colonialism. The psychological damages of hegemony are important for educators to address, especially at the curricular and pedagogical level (Akbar, 1998; Dei, 1996; Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2011). Onyeweueni (2005) adds:

> The Western educational system has extolled the achievements of Europeans and denied African contributions to that white students' knowledge of Africa and Africans is limited to the usual stereotypes of the primitive, the savage, the inferior. They have been taught that Africa was stagnant before the arrival of the Europeans, who brought civilization and education. (Onyeweuenyi, 2005, p. 33)

Onyeweuenyi's (2005) findings are troubling, and sadly the reality for most students. Students in traditional school settings who presumably do not have access to 'right-knowledge,' run the risk of never *knowing* themselves. Similar to Onyeweuenyi's research, over eighty years ago, Carter G. Woodson's (1933/1977) *Mis-Education of the Negro* explained the connection between schooling, mis-education, and identity development.

In Afrocentric schools like Sankofa, however, students are exposed to alternative and more historically accurate information. "Knowing" oneself, as described by the participants, reverses the pervasive damages left from the MAAFA and positively corrects student identity. Na'im Akbar in his work *Know Thy Self* (1998), asserts that Black identity, consciousness, and cultural awareness are all connected to education. In traditional schools, cultural hegemony undergirds curriculum practices (Dei, 2006);

Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2011). This disserves students and psychologically damages their self-concept (Akbar, 1998). Ighodaro and Wiggan (2011) coined the term *curriculum violence* to describe, "[t]he deliberate manipulation of academic programming in a manner that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners" (p. 2). These damages are most pervasive towards African Americans, who have been continuously type-casted to be *objects* rather than contributors in history (Asante, 1998). This results in today's African American students not knowing themselves, their culture, or their ancestry (Akbar, 1998). This speaks to the *exclusive* nature of traditional schooling, versus the Afrocentric framework found at Sankofa.

From an Afrocentric perspective, the participants' comments regarding their positive cultural identity and historical outlook are best understood as benefit of teaching truth, which does not equate to ethnic superiority or arrogance (Piert, 2006). Ms. Simpson states, "When you feel like you are worthwhile you will do whatever it takes to be ultimate, when you know your worth." The process of realigning history with right knowledge allows students to "know" themselves. Additionally, Mr. Gregory states, "We feel if kids understood who they are, understood their history, and then understood how valuable they are, then hopefully tapping into that will help them look at themselves in a better light." He adds, "We hope that it shapes their identity that way and they are proud of what they see when they look in the mirror, and they're proud of their classmates and they're proud of their community." Mr. Gregory's comments connect with Akbar's (1998) research, in which he explains that when students know themselves, they are able to make more meaningful contributions to society.

Theme 6: Inclusion and Inclusive Curricula: Africa is the Motherland

The sixth theme describes the participants' views on Afrocentricity and inclusion. Sharma's (2010) study focused on students' initial perceptions of Afrocentric (or Africentric) schools, and found:

> 1.) Youth desire a representative and inclusive school system, 2.) … [Black] youth interviewed supported and the social and cultural tenets of Africentric education, 3. There were mixed reactions regarding youth desire to attend a potential Africentric high school, and 4. stereotypes and racial stigmas associated with Africentric schooling were of concern for the youth interviewed. (p. 66)

Sharma's participants demonstrated "mixed feelings" regarding Afrocentric schooling and noted, "… although African inclusion in the curriculum would be great, [students] would still want to have other cultures incorporated into their daily learning experiences" (p. 70). As mentioned, it is important to note that student participants in Sharma's study were not enrolled in Afrocentric schools, rather they provided perceptions on the learning environment and described their concerns with these schools. The study at hand, however, researched participants who were *already* attending an Afrocentric school.

At Sankofa, the site of this study, the teachers and students believe that Afrocentricity is in fact, an *inclusive* framework. Sankofa students and teachers expressed a desire for non-Black students to be a part of their school, and described how their education is meaningful and relevant to all students. Afrocentricity is not racially oppositional. Sankofa's environment promotes the understanding of Africa's historical role, which is the *motherland*.

Sankofa teachers and students describe Africa as the "motherland." As a result, teachers believe that an Afrocentric curricular approach is *inclusive* of all cultures. Mr. Gregory describes how the current model of Eurocentric education disserves students. Mr. Gregory explains:

> If you have a Latino/Latina person who is only understanding things from a Eurocentric perspective, that's problematic. As well an Asian person or whoever. It's problematic because number one, it's false. Europe doesn't really come on the scene and contribute to world knowledge until thousands and thousands of years later. So you're not accounting for all of this knowledge and all of this understanding that other people are bringing to the world. So it's false, it's not real.

He continues to mention that Eurocentric curricula falsely portrays other minority groups as well. He adds, "With an Afrocentric perspective, Latino/Latina students for example, would see themselves in their history and understand that the Mayans, Aztecs and Incans… contributed to math, contributed to the number zero and predated the Greeks." Mr. Gregory believes that *only* an Afrocentric curriculum, which situates Africa at the beginning of human history, can include *all* students.

Mr. Gregory's description of Afrocentric education is similar to Asante's original definition of Afrocentricity. It is important to once again highlight Asante's (2003) definition of Afrocentricity in order to make a case for its utility for all people. He notes:

> [Afrocentricity is] a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interest, values and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena.

> Thus it is possible for anyone to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomena. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus to be [Black] is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia and white racial domination. (Asante, 2003, p. 2)

Asante's definition of Afrocentricity dismisses any form of exclusion or oppression. This, by definition, is inclusive. As an additional point of reference, it is important to also historically explain how in pre-colonial societies, Africans philosophy was *inclusive* of outsider ideas.

> [The] mind of Africa is inclusive and can accommodate many different ideas at the same time. It is not an exclusive world that prevents other ideas from surfacing. In fact, Africans accept strangers, admit ideas, and absorb cognate cultures into their own canopy of values. The reason for this has a lot to do with the idea that everything is everything in the African view, that is, everything is related, connected, and nothing is discrete, isolated. (Asante, 2000, p. 5)

This distinguishes Afrocentricity from other educational perspectives. It is the acknowledgement of Africa's rightful place in history that *includes* students.

Afrocentric schools, like Sankofa Academy, are examples of educational models where counter-hegemonic narratives are taught (Dei, 2006, 2012; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith & López, 2014; Murrell, 2002). Thus, Afrocentricity should be explored as a *human* project, not a race-specific project. The realignment of historical

fact with positive self-concepts and positive self-imagery, are pedagogical techniques that could benefit all students, not just African Americans (Akbar, 1998; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith & López, 2014; Nieto, 1992).

As mentioned, Afrocentric schools teach all core subjects, including: mathematics, language arts, history, science, etc. This is important when identifying Afrocentricity's utility for inclusion. Mr. Lance notes:

> We are a caring people and we are a loving people. I think that in and of itself is inclusive. With Afrocentricity and the principles of the Nguzo Saba, I that's very, inclusive because it's not saying "don't like others," it's saying, "you know what, umoja, uh, we have unity with ourselves first then we can definitely go out and have unity with everybody else…" I think that all those principles are very inclusive.

Whereas European history marginalizes every other cultural group (Asante, 1998; Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2011; King, 2005; Loewen, 1995; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003), African history does not. Afrocentric curriculum teaches world history, which includes diverse cultural perspectives, including European. Brown (1996) contends:

> Afrocentrism is not intended to be, nor is it in fact, a racist orientation. Children of dominant group members will benefit as well as with the inclusion of the Afrocentric perspective in the curriculum. Nor is Afrocentrism a replacement for anything currently being taught beyond correcting certain myths, stereotypes, and presenting a factually documentable version of human history. Afrocentrism is a fundamental, integral and essential element of curriculum which will result in improved performance for all students. (p. 111)

Mr. Gregory additionally mentions how even with an Afrocentric education, students receive quality instruction, not specific to any particular race. He uses Malcolm X as an example of how learning about people in the margins of traditional curricula is beneficial for all students. He notes:

> Whenever I talk about Malcolm X, I always tell people not to limit him to just understanding the Black experience, but they read his autobiography. This man is just, he knows everything about everything, you know. He knows everything about all different philosophers from all different walks of life, from all different, ages throughout history and that's what we try to do here. So the education that the students receive here isn't just a good Black education. It's just a good education period.

Many Afrocentric schools teach the traditional school curriculum standards and supplement with Afrocentric perspectives. Under this model, the Afrocentric curriculum framework challenges *hegemony*, not Europe. Afrocentricity removes the "lens" of colonization from self-perception and re-centers Africa to a more historically accurate starting place. Students and teachers suggest that all students should learn from an Afrocentric perspective in order to increase racial respect and understanding.

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, students, teachers, and the administrator overwhelmingly believe that Afrocentric education is positive and important. The participants noted increased self-awareness and academic success. The data directly supports the participants' positive experiences at Sankofa. Students especially noted the benefits of learning about themselves and their ancestral history. Yet, the majority of

students in the surrounding school district do not receive this same information. Dei, Asgharzadeh, Bahador, and Shahjahan (2006) suggest that the traditional curriculum is still colonized and not necessarily historically accurate. They state, "Despite many gains in education, local schools and communities have to contend with historic and new forms of colonial subjugation as capitalist globalization expands and continues to script human lives" (Dei, Asgharzadeh, Bahador, & Shahjahan, 2006, p. 6). In the U.S., negative stereotypes and misunderstandings undermine Africa (Traoré, 2007; Traoré & Lukens, 2006; Wiggan, 2011). This is because textbooks often reflect propaganda, not fact (Loewen, 1995).The fortunate case for Sankofa's students is they are exposed to non-traditional curricula and anti-colonial histories on a daily basis.

Again, it is important to note that Afrocentric schools teach traditional subjects like mathematics, reading, science, history, arts, etc., and usually follow state curriculum standards (King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014). It is incorrect to assume that Afrocentric schools *only* teach African American history. Teachers explain this is a common misconception. Additionally, teachers note that many people incorrectly believe that being "pro-Black is anti-White." These misconceptions are important to address when considering Afrocentricity's utility for *all* students.

Overall, students and teachers describe the value of Sankofa's educational model, especially when considering traditional public schools. In light of today's federal curriculum and assessment reform initiatives, such as *No Child Left Behind*, *Common Core State Standards*, and *Race to the Top*, the educational landscape is shifting towards quantitative measures of student achievement. With high-stakes state assessments and neoliberal curriculum policies that quantify student learning, traditional methods of

public education are suffocating the natural genius within all children. African American students are suffering the most (King, 2005; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Wilson, 1992). Qualitative research consistently demonstrates the importance of cultural relevancy for students (Gay, 2000; Ladosn-Billings, 1994). According to student and teacher narratives, Sankofa Academy provides *relevancy* for students. Murrell (2002), a researcher on Afrocentric pedagogy, explains the importance of Afrocentric education. He notes, "African-centered pedagogy is necessary to appropriately address the social, cultural, and historical context of the schooling experience of African American children and the disconnection between African American cultural heritage and contemporary educational practice" (p. xxix). When reflecting on the students' narratives regarding the Michael Brown case, for example, it is evident that 21st century education must continuously provide spaces for critical inquiry and discussion.

Students and teachers describe many benefits of Afrocentric schools. Since traditional public schools are underserving many students, it is important to further investigate the role of curriculum development in educational reform. Additionally, there are some direct implications for further research on Afrocentric school designs. It is recommended for future research to explore the role of curricular relevancy within 21st century Afrocentric schools. It is also important for future research to investigate diverse student perspectives in Afrocentric schools, which will extend the conversation of racial inclusion. It is also recommended that parents and families explore Afrocentric schooling options for students. Although Sankofa is a private school, there are several public Afrocentric schools across the U.S. in cities like Kansas City, Columbus, and Detroit.

The overwhelming positive feedback from teachers, students, and the administrator confirms that Afrocentric schooling could be beneficial for *all* students.

Limitations

This study's site was a small, private Afrocentric school, which is separate from the surrounding public school district. Sankofa's small size and low student-teacher ratio could have solely contributed to the positive learning experiences of participants. Because this study's intent is to explore Afrocentric schools in general, the ability for this small private school to represent the surrounding population is limited. In addition, it is also difficult to measure Afrocentricity as a tool of inclusion without having students who classify as "outsiders" (i.e.: racial, religious, socioeconomic diversity, etc.). All participants included in this study were African American. Sankofa Academy is comprised of 100% African American students and teachers. Participants therefore responded to questions about school inclusion based their personal perceptions and predictions. However, these participant's predictions were important for determining their ideologies about inclusion and school culture.

Last, Afrocentric schools vary in their design and curriculum. There is no one generalizable Afrocentric school model; however, there are some common tenets that most Afrocentric schools have. Additionally, it should be noted that school-level implementations are governed by individual school leaders and administrators. As with any case study, it is important not to generalize the findings beyond the case, because the contexts of each case may differ (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

Inaccurate research surrounding Black education fails to account for the innate genius found in all children (Murrell, 2002; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Wilson, 1992). Sankofa Academy continues to counter negative stereotypes about Black students through its demonstration of rigor, relevancy, and cultural affirmation, which are embedded in the Afrocentric learning environment. Findings demonstrate that students and teachers at Sankofa find the learning environment to be engaging, relevant, and interdisciplinary. Additionally, the participants view their Afrocentric education as both culturally and socially important. Participants at Sankofa expressed increased self-awareness, greater ancestral knowledge, and a comprehensive grasp of world history from a non-hegemonic perspective. These are outcomes that are presumably beneficial for all people. When considering the lack of multiculturalism found in traditional public schools, it is important to consider Afrocentricity as an alternative model of education and inclusion. The implications for large-scale implementation may rest of the willingness of policymakers to explore best practice in education.

In closing, an excerpt from Plato's *Laws* provides an excellent summation of the final points of this study. Plato displays an interesting dialogue between two Greek citizens – Athenian and Clinias – in 348 B.C.E. about Egypt's exceptional education system. This seemingly comical exchange between two unrelated Greek figureheads, surprisingly has direct educational relevance today.

> Athenian: *One ought to declare, then, that the freeborn children should learn as much of these subjects as the innumerable crowd of children in Egypt learn along with their letters. First, as regards counting, lessons have been invented for the merest infants to learn, by way of play and fun – modes of dividing up apples and chaplets, so that the same totals are adjusted to larger and smaller groups, and modes of sorting out boxers and wrestlers, in byes and pairs, taking them*

> *alternately or consecutively, in their natural order. Moreover, by way of play, the teachers mix together bowls made of gold, bronze, silver and the like, and others distribute them, as I said, by groups of a single kind, adapting the rules of elementary arithmetic to play; and thus they are of service to the pupils for their future tasks of drilling, leading and marching armies, or of household management, and they render them both more helpful in every way to themselves and more alert. The next step of the teachers is to clear away, by lessons in weights and measures, a certain kind of ignorance, both absurd and disgraceful, which is naturally inherent in all men touching lines, surfaces and solids.*
>
> Clinias: *What ignorance do you mean, and of what kind is it?*
>
> Athenian: *My dear Clinias, when I was told quite lately of our condition in regard to this matter, I was utterly astounded myself: it seemed to me to be the condition of guzzling swine rather than of human beings, and I was ashamed, not only of myself, but of all the Greek world.* (Plato, 348 B.C.E./1968, p. 819).

As displayed in the above conversation between Athenian and Clinias, the Egyptians continuously baffled the rest of Mesopotamia. The Hellenic world, as described by Athenian, was too late in matters of educational reform, even before the first century. The Egyptians mastered effective ways to educate their students, and made sure to embed *rigor* and *relevancy* within the curriculum as early as infancy. Clinias, unknowing of the Greeks' ignorance, was baffled by Athenian who provided first-hand accounts of Egyptian education. In this brief exchange, Athenian and Clinias share "shame" in Greece's outdated approaches for its students.

Just as the above dialogue captures Africa's immortal place on the human record, the power of the Egyptian ancestors continuously traverse time. Just as Athenian and Clinias wish to disseminate the Egyptian's knowledge and teaching methods across their Grecian world, so too does this study aim to highlight the necessity of Afrocentric educational practices for the Western world.

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APPENDIX A: TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ONE

Goal of the Study:

I want to better understand the teachers and administrator experiences at Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) and identify how Afrocentric education can have utility for all students.

Type/Focus of Question	Question
Background	Tell me about yourself. How long have you been at [Sankofa] Academy?
Descriptive	What do you do here at [Sankofa] Academy? Tell me about your typical day.
Descriptive	What are the joys of teaching here? What are the challenges?
Descriptive	What is (or has been) your most rewarding experience since teaching here.
Introductory	What do you like about the learning environment at this school? What do you dislike about the learning environment at this school?

APPENDIX A (continued)

Reflective	Do you feel that the teaching environment at this school is helpful for students? Why or why not?
Reflective	How do you observe African values and traditions displayed at this school?
Reflective	What is your favorite moment in Black history? Do you have a favorite historical figure or role model?
Theoretical	What does the word "Afrocentricity" mean to you?
Reflective	What are your perceptions about Africa? What are some words that immediately come to mind?
Theoretical	How would you describe an African-centered education?
Curriculum	What are the benefits of African-centered curriculum models for students of color?
Prediction	How do you believe these curriculum designs could benefit all students?
Prediction	What improvements would you suggest for the curriculum at this school?

APPENDIX B: TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TWO

Goal of the Study:

I want to better understand the teachers and administrator experiences at Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) and identify how Afrocentric education can have utility for all students.

Type/Focus of Question	Question
Reflective	How does teaching at [Sankofa] Academy compare to other teaching positions or jobs you've had?
Reflective	Describe a moment when you expanded your knowledge about African or African American history?
Reflective	Describe a moment when you witnessed a student expand their knowledge about African or African American history?
Reflective	What is the role of Afrocentricity in teaching African American students?
Prediction	Do you believe any child could attend this school? Why or why not?
Reflective	In your opinion, what makes this school unique?

APPENDIX B (continued)

Prediction	How can environment and school practices at [Sankofa] help other students in the community?
Prediction	What do you think are people's misconceptions about this school? Why do you think more families don't explore [Sankofa] as a viable option for their children?
Predictions	What are ways African-centered education practices could be implemented in a public school?
Predictions	How can Afrocentricity be used as a tool of inclusion?
Reflective	Why is Afrocentricity/African-centered education helpful in shaping student identities?

APPENDIX C: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Goal of the Study:

I want to understand how middle school students at Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) identify the benefits of Afrocentric education and its utility for all students.

Type/Focus of Question	Question
Background	Tell me about yourself. How long have you been at [Sankofa] Academy?
Descriptive	What do you do here at [Sankofa] Academy? Tell me about your typical day.
Descriptive	What is the most enjoyable aspect about this school? What are the challenges that you face as a student here?
Descriptive	What is (or has been) the most rewarding aspect about being a student here?
Introductory	What do you like about this school? What do you dislike about this school?
Introductory	How do you view your teachers here at this school?
Curriculum	What are some things you've learned at this school that remind you of Africa?

APPENDIX C (continued)

Curriculum	Do you feel your education here at [Sankofa] has helped you?
Reflective	What African traditions do you see at this school?
Reflective	How would you describe Africa?
Reflective	How have African traditions helped you view yourself?
Reflective	How has this school shaped your knowledge about Africa, African history, or African American events?
Reflective	What is your favorite moment in Black history? Do you have a favorite historical figure or role model? Who, and why are they your favorite?
Prediction	Do you believe anyone could attend this school? Why or why not?
Reflective	How is this school different from any previous schools you've attended?
Reflective	How would you describe the friendships you've made with teachers and students at this school? Have they been helpful?

APPENDIX C (continued)

Prediction	What are ways that this school could help other students?
Prediction	What improvements would you suggest to make the school better?
Prediction	What would you like to see in a high school here?

APPENDIX D: STUDENT WRITTEN ESSAY PROMPT

Goal of the Study:

I want to understand how middle school students at Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) identify the benefits of Afrocentric education and its utility for all students.

Type/Focus of Question	Question
Reflective	What are your experiences since going to this school? Describe ways that an African-centered education (Sankofa Academy) was either a positive or negative influence on your education? If you could tell someone about this school, what would you say?

APPENDIX E: AFROCENTRIC LEARNING OBSERVATION RUBRIC

Goal of the Study:

I want to understand how Sankofa Academy (pseudonym) facilitates an Afrocentric learning environment, as outlined in the school's mission and objectives.

[Sankofa] Academy has built its program around the concept, currently known as "African-Centered" education. Our holistic approach is based upon the premise that children will only excel academically and intellectually when the curriculum, teaching methodology, and environment reflects the builders of yesterday and the ideas of the future. Our belief in universal knowledge provides each student with the skills to meet the challenges of tomorrow. We use African Principles to teach and cultivate character and creativity with each student.

Name	Definition	Evidences	Observed Example
Umoja (Unity)	Unity stresses the importance of togetherness for the family and the community, which is reflected in the African saying, "I am We," or "I am because We are."	• Students work together in collaborative groups. • The familial environment of the school/classroom is evident. • Group collaboration is encouraged more than individualism.	Friday, November 21st 11:00am Cafeteria observation: The cafeteria manager and head cook let a select group of middle school students help cook and serve the younger students for lunch. This was an embedded component of their Home Economics class. The younger students enjoyed seeing the "older kids." There was an evident sense of "community" between the younger students and older students. Many of the younger students clapped and cheered "YAY!!" when the older students served

			them their lunch.
Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)	Self-Determination requires that we define our common interests and make decisions that are in the best interest of our family and community.	• Students and teacher have unified learning goals. • Classroom decisions are made with family interests and the community in mind. • Students exhibit self-determination and perseverance when completing assignments.	Thursday, November 20th 10:20am Ms. Henderson led K-1st grade students in a discussion about the Wampanoag Indian Tribe. One of the students said that the English settlers helped the Native Americans – but before Ms. Henderson could say anything – children interrupted and said "NO! The Native Americans helped the settlers! They were there first!" Later in the lesson, Ms. Henderson asked, "What kinds of foods do you think the Native Americans ate who lived along the coast?" One of the students said corn. Another said fish. Ms. Henderson said, "very good… why do you think they ate fish?" she asked. After about three tries, one of the students said, "Because they were near water and rivers and that means they were fishermen!" Ms. Henderson then proceeded in a lesson on how the Native

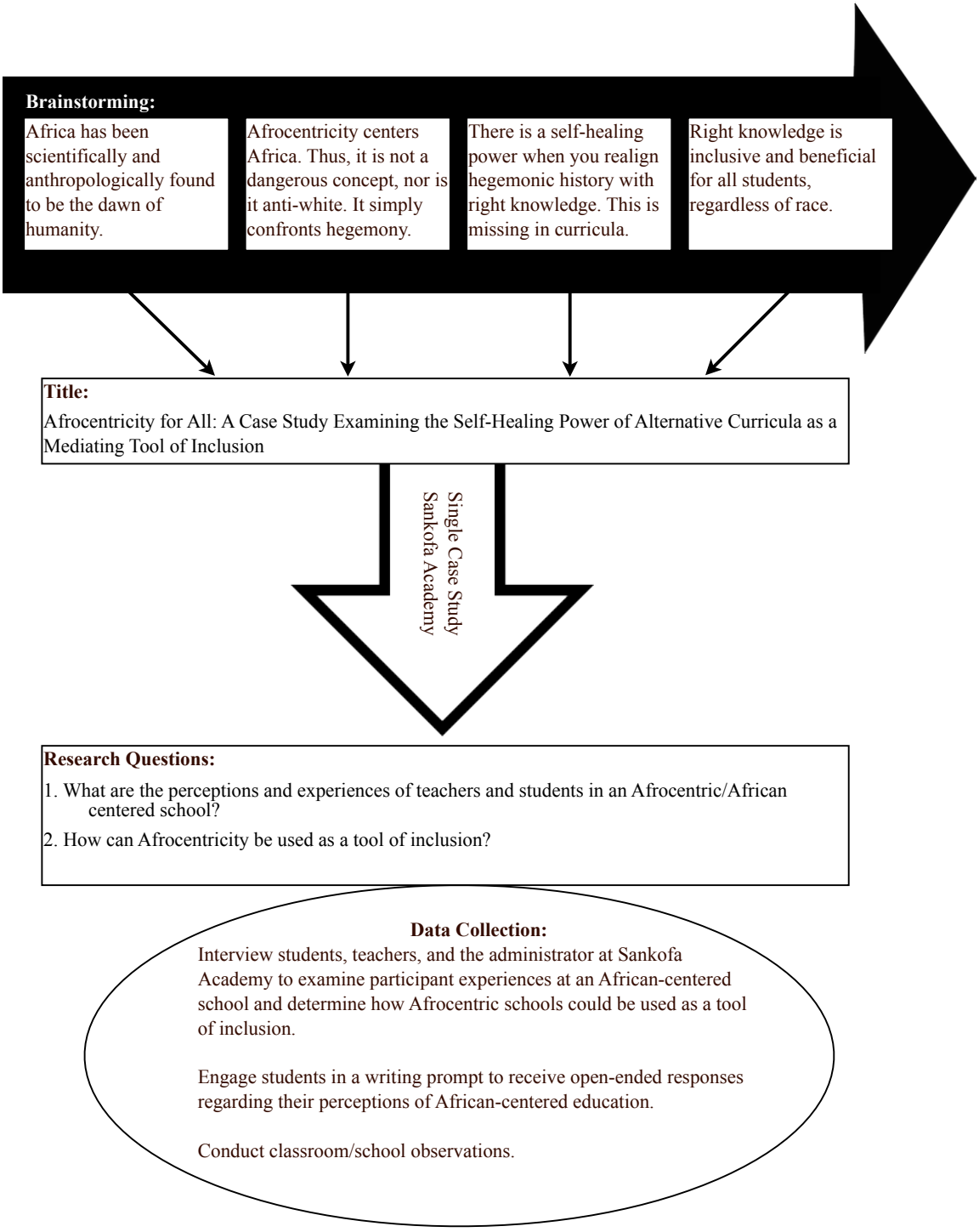
			Americans were resourceful and kind.
Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)	Collective Work and Responsibility reminds us of our obligation to the past, present and future, and that we have a role to play in the community, society, and world.	• Students critically discuss how lesson connects to past, present, and future. • Students discuss the significance of classroom assignments in relation to the larger society/ community. • Students identify their own sense of agency or "obligation" to collectively help society.	Friday, December 5th 10:00am Art teacher engages middle school students in a discussion about the Eric Garner case. He opens class with a loud announcement. "CLASS! WE HAVE A PROBLEM! A man was choked to death for illegally selling cigarettes!" Students immediately offer their opinions about the case, either for or against the decision. Everyone engages in dialogue about the criminal justice system, hypocrisy, and how each of them are impacted. Without prompting, they begin to centralize themselves within their own education. The teacher played devil's advocate for a couple of the student's points, while the students reenact the scenario. The class was outraged and immediately created social action signs for anti-police violence

			demonstrations.
Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)	Cooperative economics emphasizes our collective economic strength and encourages us to meet common needs through mutual support.	• Classrooms collaborate with one another. • Students participate in civic engagement and help the surrounding community and/or the surrounding community's aid is evident in the classroom. • The learning environment is welcoming towards visitors, administration, and anyone from the surrounding community.	Friday, October 24th 1:15pm Local artist from the community led middle school students in an art lesson. Students studied 20th century panel art and took inspiration from Jacob Lawrence, a famous Black painter.
Nia (Purpose)	Purpose encourages us to look within ourselves and to set personal goals that are beneficial to the community.	• Assignments connect to the larger surrounding community. • Classroom assignments serve a purpose and are not interpreted as "busywork." • Students are allowed to set personal goals for assignments.	Friday, December 5th 1:05pm After the Eric Garner decision, Mr. Lance, the technology and drama teacher, took time to teach life skills to the middle school boys that day. He continuously stressed, if a police office comes up behind you and you're driving a car– "KEEP YOUR HAND ON 10 and 2!!! DO NOT MOVE!

			Your life is too precious." In light of the news events, the lesson's purpose was connected students to current events in the surrounding community.
Kuumba (Creativity)	Creativity makes use of our creative energies to build and maintain a strong and vibrant community.	• Classroom environment/ Instruction is energetic and vibrant. • Instruction is engaging for various learning styles. • Instruction contains some "non-traditional" components to enhance effectiveness.	Tuesday, October 21st 8:30am Devotion observation: Ms. Simpson's class started singing and chanting about positive behavior and their ability to succeed. Students were given opportunities to dance and sing along with the chant, which was a fun and spirit-filled away to start the day. It was extremely engaging and energetic.

Imani (Faith)	Faith focuses on honoring the best of our traditions, draws upon the best in ourselves, and helps us strive for a higher level of life for humankind, by affirming our self-worth and confidence in our ability to succeed and triumph in righteous struggle.	• Students are verbally affirmed in a positive way. • Positive written affirmations are clearly displayed in classroom environment. • Teachers are affirmed in a positive way.	Wednesday, December 17th 7:00pm Kwanzaa Program observation: Students, teachers, staff, and parents engaged in a "libation ceremony" where they light candles to remember ancestors who had transitioned on. It was a time for everyone to reflect on person's legacy and life. It was also a time to share about gratefulness and thankfulness.

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH DESIGN FLOW CHART



APPENDIX G: DAILY DEVOTION (THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES)

"The Seven Principles"

We the students of [Sankofa] Academy believe that the seven principles will teach us the values of life:

UMOJA (oo-MO-jah) – Unity – to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

KUJICHAGULIA (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah) – Self-determination – to define ourselves, name ourselves , create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

UJIMA (oo-JEE-mah) – Collective work and responsibility – to build and maintain our community together and make our sisters' and brothers' problems our own and solve them together.

UJAMMA (oo-jah-MAH) – Cooperative economics – to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

NIA (NEE-ah) – Purpose – to make our collective vocation to building of our community to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

KUUMBA (koo-OOM-bah) – Creativity – to do as much as we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

IMANI (ee-MAH-nee) – Faith – to believe with our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

APPENDIX H: DAILY DEVOTION (NOBILITY)

"Nobility"

True worth is in being, not seeming -
In doing, each day that goes by,
Some little good – not in dreaming
Of great things to do by and by.
For whatever men say in their blindness,
And spite of the fancies of youth,
There's nothing so kingly as kindness,
And nothing so royal as truth.
We get back our mete as we measure -
We cannot do wrong and feel right,
Nor can we give pain and gain pleasure,
For justice avenges each slight.
The air for the wing of the sparrow,
The bush for the robin and wren,
But always the path that is narrow
And straight, for the children of men.
'Tis not in the pages of story
The heart of its ills to beguile,
Though he who makes courtship to glory
Gives all that he hath for her smile.
For when from her heights he has won her,
Alas! It is only to prove
That nothing's so sacred as honor,
And nothing so loyal as love!
We cannot make bargains for blisses,
Nor catch them like fishes in nets;
And sometimes the thing our life misses
Helps more than the thing which it gets.
For good lieth not in pursuing,
Nor gaining of great nor or small,
But just in the doing, and doing
As we would be done by, is all.
Through envy, through malice, through hating,
Against the world, early and late,
No jot of our courage abating -
Our part is to work and to wait.
And slight is the sting of his trouble
Whose winnings are less than his worth;
For he who is honest is noble,
Whatever his fortunes or birth.

APPENDIX I: DAILY DEVOTION (THE ULTIMATE STUDENT)

"The Ultimate Student"
By, Collins (Westside Prep) Fred Hampton, Franklin Philips

The world belongs to us…So gaze upon this triumphant piercing sight – the builders of the pyramids and vital contributors to the magnificent, glorious wonders of America's present and future.
We are the ultimate students…who attribute our extremely high self-esteem and our tough as nails disposition to our philosophical belief "that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent."
We are the epitome of the expression "Excellence breeds excellence."
We are tried, true and tested under fire in a tough, competitive environment. We reach for the unreached. WE take care of business. We are resilient, heroically bold, extremely candid, swift of mind, proud, yet humble.
We are the ultimate students who renew our quest for excellence every day. We seize the moment, we do not look back, we make big plans, we aim high. We always play to win.
We are the ultimate students…to whom much is given, much is expected.
We do not rest on our laurels, nor do we place any limits on our intellectual or spiritual achievement. We never settle for "just getting by, making excuses, taking short cuts, cutting corners, beating the system or goofing-off."
We are not eager to follow others; we are not impressed with glitter or glam, nor are we swayed by peer pressure.
We elect instead to soar like the eagle always striving to achieve the magic and honor of leadership before we settle for the lesser, easier role of following others.
We are the ultimate students…We measure our success not by what we are, but by what we could be; not by what we have done, but by what we can do.
We possess extreme confidence, character and self-abnegation.
We are not timid, intimidated or small minded.
Tomorrow belongs to us, and yesterday's accomplishments will pale in comparison without academic achievements…We are adventurous, creative, daring and willing to accomplish what others say cannot be done.
We are the ultimate students…Who are respected for inquiring, tameless, universal minds. We do not rest until our thoughts turn to actions.
We think beyond the traditional by reaching deeper into the unknown, by asking "What If," "What About," and "What Else?"
We are the ultimate students…When we try, we do not cheat. When we lose, we do not cry. And, when we compete, we take no prisoners – none.
The world belongs to us…The future belongs to us…And today begins with us…The Ultimate Students.

APPENDIX J: DAILY DEVOTION (I HAVE THE POWER)

"I Have the Power"

I have the power to choose, and that makes me a powerful person.
I have the power to make the right choices.
I have the power to choose to be honest.
I have the power to choose to be kind.
I have the power to ask my parents, caregivers, or teachers when
I'm not sure what choice to make.
I have the power!

APPENDIX K: DAILY DEVOTION (CAN'T)

"Can't"

"Can't" is a favorite word of some children.
Here is the case against it.
Can't is the worst word that's written or spoken;
Doing more harm here than slander and lies;
On it is many a strong spirit broken,
And with it many a good purpose dies.
It springs from the lips of the thoughtless each morning
And robs us of courage we need through the day
It rings in our ears like a timely sent warning
And laughs when we falter and fall by the way.
Can't is the father of feeble endeavor,
The parent of terror and half-hearted work;
It weakens the efforts of artisans clever,
And makes of the toiler an indolent shirk.
It poisons the soul of the man with a vision,
It stifles in infancy many a plan;
It greets honest toiling with open derision
And mocks at the hopes and the dreams of a man.
Can't is a word none should speak without blushing;
To utter it should be a symbol of shame;
Ambition and courage it daily is crushing;
It blights a man's purpose and shortens his aim.
Despise it with all of your hatred of error;
Refuse it the lodgment it seeks in your brain;
Arm against it as a creature of terror,
And all that you dream of you someday shall gain.
Can't is a word that is foe to ambition,
An enemy ambushed to shatter your will;
Its prey is forever the man with a mission
And bows but to courage and patience and skill.
Hate it, with hatred that's deep and undying,
For once it is welcomed 'twill break any man;
Whatever the goal you are seeking, keep trying
And answer this demon by saying: "I can."

APPENDIX L: DAILY DEVOTION (LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING)

"Lift Every Voice and Sing"
By, James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the listening skies, let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the day when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee,
Shadowed beneath the hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.