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USING AFRICAN CULTURAL AND LIBERATING CONCEPTS

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A dissertation proposal submitted to the Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education in education with an emphasis in Educational Practice.

May 2019

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Abstract

The purpose of this autoethnography is to explore the impact on learning for a delineated cultural and ethnographic student population when the instructional process is interwoven with a plethora of student-reflective cultural and ethnic information and knowledge gained through the process of in plethora of knowledge and valuable information of retelling rich stories of students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders conveyed from an emancipatory perspective. I believe that these stories can assist in improving the educational conditions of children of African descent in the United States and the diaspora. Throughout my life, I have wondered about the absence of my history and culture in textbooks, media, economics, the medical industry, the military, and the educational system. As a young male child of African descent growing up in the state of Mississippi, I can recall my mother telling me that I would always ask questions about society because the educational system never seemed right to me. In this autoethnographic journey, I explored my life experience by becoming conscious about my history and culture, which changed my entire vision as a college graduate and motivated me to become an educational liberator teaching African people about their history and culture.

This autoethnography integrates Africology and the culturally responsive pedagogical framework to capture the rich cultural experiences of parents, students, teachers, and community from my personal viewpoint. These exciting stories intend to support the powerful benefits of sending children of African descent to an African-centered institution.

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As a member of the human family, I would like to first acknowledge God, the creator of all things in the universe. God has put me in a position and mindset to understand how to appreciate the great elements of the universe that many of us take for granted. I appreciate the wisdom, knowledge, love, education, and guidance from my ancestors who paved the way for me to be where I am today. My great grandparents purchased land in the early 1900's and my family still owns the land. My grandparents on both my mother's and father's side of the family have given me so much guidance and wisdom that has helped me immeasurably in becoming successful in real life. Laura Razell, Earl Nixon, Gertie Lee Garrett, and Samuel Nichols, who are now ancestors, were all wonderful grandparents to me. It was from their true spirit, that I gained a strong personality with a determination to be successful in the world. These grandparents gave birth to my parents John Henry Nixon and Lena Maxine Nichols. The experiences I had growing up in this strong, resilient, and loving family has shaped me into the man I am today. I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Makini Nichols and my wonderful son Jasiri Nichols for providing me space for completing this autoethnography. I am deeply honored to have selected stories from students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders that have been open and honest to allow me to engage, listen, and highlight the school family. In addition, my students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders have taught me a lot about building an African themed school. Also, my deep appreciation is expressed toward Kujaliwa Kennedy, Chinelo Bandele, Mama Njoki, Mwalimu Bynum, Mama Bolanle, Baba Kumana, Jaledi Franklin, Mama Gerry Riley, Baba Kujaliwa, and Progressive Emporium, and all of those who supported African-centered concepts in and outside of

the school. Asante Sana to all of my dissertation committee members who supported me in challenging the status quo and providing me with rich feedback to complete this written journey. It is my intent to continue to transfer all the information I have acquired to my young students. Asante Sana (thank you very much)!!!

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Background

It all started when I was attending my junior year at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi when I discovered that there was something wrong with our system of education in this society. Growing up on a small farm in a small town in Camden, Mississippi imparted me with great wisdom. My professors, members of the community, and socially conscious students gave me lots of exposure to rich traditions of history, culture, and active movements of social change. This exposure helped me learn about diverse African American traditions, culture-responsive pedagogy, and to better appreciate our conjoined African – African American history and culture. In addition, a plethora of cultural, political, business, and artistic activities were regularly made available to students at Tougaloo College. One example of a great experience I had on campus was my attendance at a gathering at the college church with the Honorable Louis Farrakhan and African liberation artists like Tupac, liberating lawyer Chokwe Lumumba, and other great advocates for the African community. It was not until the Black Liberation Day conference, a conference to reinforce values of fighting against systems of oppression, that I appreciated African-centered approaches, humanistic alternatives, alternative school-reform efforts, various African centered themes, family involvement, and developing curriculum and teaching skills to bring out the best in people of African descent in the Americas and around the world.

Although majoring in education was not on my radar at the time, there was very little room for me to do anything in my major of economics and finance. However, a passionate urgency to start educating people in my family and community about the historical significance of our ancestors' contributions to society and to the world was ignited by my great experience at the African Liberation Day conference. This conference connected me to multiple individuals fighting against oppression and white supremacy and confronting challenging issues on the frontline. These committed freedom fighters were encouraging young people to start asking questions, and to become a part of the solution instead of a problem. Tougaloo College's mission was to teach college students to be active in family and community development, to develop pride in students, and to foster a desire in students to give back to others. The idea of using your college training to liberate people of African descent was the farthest thing from any of our minds. All the knowledge that I acquired from the elders at the conference transformed me into a man committed to help raise the educational consciousness and liberation of my community. Hilliard's (1998) opening quote of his book states that "these fundamental deviations weaken the body's functioning and individual self-healing power, the best healer of any individual and, therefore, society. It is mortally dangerous to deviate from certain traditions. ... it hurts to lose certain traditions; these are practical principles of life. The loss can lead to self-destruction of the individual, society, the world, and its civilization." The main point of this statement is that there is no individual without your history and culture.

Presenters of the workshops discussed issues such as African liberation and cultural awareness all over the world at the conference on Tougaloo College's campus.

These speakers were free to speak about the ongoing systems of white supremacy and the manmade barriers that we should fight against to liberate people of African descent through education. African liberation is a concept used to start integrating effective strategies for African people to be free to integrate their culture back into the lives of African people after living under an oppressive European system that ignores African culture and concepts in education. Another aspect of the conference featured an entertainment program that included the rapper by the name of Tupac Shakur, a consciousness rapper at the time, to attract and recruit other young people to become involved in the movement to fight for the liberation of African people. Tupac's mother and father who were both members of the Black Panther Party, raised him in the Black Power Movement with knowledge that can be used to attract and inspire other young people like myself to become a part of something greater than ourselves. As I engaged in conversations with other students at Tougaloo College, I could not help but to be inspired by the legacy and energy of the history of the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party inspired me by providing me with a platform to start resisting the status quo and not be afraid to start doing for self to uplift our community. They were instrumental at setting up positive programs throughout the country that provided free breakfast programs for black children, various resources for families and research information about black people that inspired people of African descent to resist the norms (Karenga, 2010).

It was that weekend that I met so many young peers and elders in the movement that I wanted to make black people living in the United States keenly aware of the miseducation of black people. That was the first time that I had started reading the book *The Miseducation of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson. By reading this book, I could

clearly understand that not only would my vocabulary need to be enhanced but also, I needed to be able to articulate many of the things that I did not understand before about oppression in this society. Woodson (1933) notes that “the educated Negro has the attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own, as well as in their mixed schools Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin, and the Teuton and to despise the African. Of the hundreds of Negro high schools recently examined by an expert in the United States Bureau of Education, only eighteen offer a course taking up the history of the Negro” (p.23). To put things concisely regarding Woodson’s work, he struggled against a system of white domination that has educated black people to hate themselves. Reading *The Miseducation of the Negro* gave me the richest understanding and wisdom that helped conceptualize the miseducation that continues to create cycles of stress on black people struggling every day economically, socially, politically, and spiritually. According to Hilliard (1998), as he says without any hesitation, that we Africans, however, have not viewed our problem holistically. After I have been living under conditions of extreme oppression, I feel that people of African descent have been forced to accept another group’s culture and not their own. The stories that my grandmother shared about the evil and gross injustice of harassment and segregation violated the civil rights of African people that lived in our small community. In one her stories she shared with me, a white police sheriff used to come by her home often to harass her about finding specific African American men in the community by pointing shotguns at her children as a threat to make her give him information. As you read my experience as a young man of African descent, it relates that it was necessary for me to fight for civil rights in order to both advance and protect family and the community

from such cruel injustices. Concomitantly, however, I also had to fight along with other youth and elders for greater equal education opportunities for African American youth. The goal envisioned as success for these ongoing struggles was to create a space of peace, healing, equality, and progress for the community and for all people of African descent.

Since 1992, I have worked with various grassroots organizations like the National Black United Front (NBUF) and many others who taught me different things about my history and culture. According to Karenga (2010), the National Black United Front involved ongoing challenges of Black people in American. He continued to add that the National Black United Front is ongoing struggles to defend community service programs, human rights laws and the opposition of racism in all phases of white institutions (Karenga, 2010). One thing they helped me with was to find African books, knowledgeable people who worked in the community, and a number of conferences that helped me see things from a different perspective. Other experiences at Tougaloo afforded me an opportunity to meet people who were knowledgeable about the research in the struggle of resistance who challenged me to learn even more about African history and culture. This experience helped me make a connection with a great book called the *Stolen Legacy* written by George M. James (1992). James notes that the term European philosophy is a contradiction and it did not exist. The group who possessed the highest and most intricate religious command were the ancient Egyptians. There was another central theme which helped me understand that black people with their rich history and culture had a foundational role in the development of the highly acclaimed advanced civilizations of ancient Egypt. This book really inspired me to start resisting the

educational norms in this society and start creating a new way of integrating African history and culture in education. A highlight of James' research shows that the Romans were instrumental at sabotaging the African educational and cultural systems which resulted in the fall of these rich African societies (James, 1954). As you may know, As-Saheli, a famous African architect who built lots of buildings in Mali, built the University of Sankore at Timbuktu, the first known documented university in 1324 (Karenga, 2010). In western history books, little is written about African people that is positive. Ironically, in far too many history textbooks selected by public and private schools, there is an implication that African Americans should feel happy about being kidnapped into slavery because they were living like savages in Africa before they were rescued to freedom in the western world.

Problem Statement

This autoethnography aims to look at integrating African history, culture and concepts in the school curriculum as opposed to using the same European system of education that has continued to fail children of African descent. As principal/leader of a developing African-centered urban school, it was my responsibility to oversee the growth of this emerging educational concept – culture-responsive pedagogy in a culture-reflected environment.

Background of Problem Statement

There were a number of reflections generated as I carried out this sometimes challenging but extremely rewarding charge. As a result of my experience, I can now critically compare the impact of traditional public education that seems to promote the idea that people that are intelligent, productive and successful came from Europe and

people from Africa have made no or very limited contributions to society and the world. I have other observations/reflections as well. The meaning I place on the above referenced phenomenon is that there is an expectation that African American students are supposed to be academically inferior to white students. This assumption ignores the claims from educators that the educational system in America is not designed to educate Black children (Nobles, 2011). Therefore, teachers at the elementary, middle, high and college school levels all taught not only a Eurocentric curriculum but also taught from a Eurocentric perspective. Given the unequal educational circumstances that African American students have long endured, Kafele (2013), states that regardless of the challenges students may experience today, they need to be taught that people who look like them grew up with similar challenges, but defied the odds and accomplished great things in their lives. Cognizant of these facts and the current inequitable education system, I initially felt a fear of teaching students their rich African history and culture and felt paralyzed about the prospect of connecting with students to solve problems that existed in my community. Initially, I didn't know how to approach the challenge of guiding students through the processes of healing the large scale social, economic, family and community problems that impacted the students and community. It was not until I left my hometown in rural Camden, Mississippi to attend Tougaloo College, that I discovered students, professors, and community activists who were not afraid to challenge the status quo and seemed to have the knowledge, wisdom and experience to do it well. After considerable reflection, I concluded that it is critical that students receive a rich foundation of knowledge connecting to their culture at a very young age so that there is a high level of respect for their identity, purpose, and direction in life moving

forward. My question for educators today would be what have students in urban settings learned during their educational experience that will help them academically and that would help them rebuild themselves and their communities with an African frame of reference? Other questions for consideration are: Why work in an African-centered setting? What are some of the examples of the beneficial experiences of working in an African-centered setting? Can you predict the challenges of working in an African-centered setting? I believe that an African-centered school would have a huge positive impact on the entire African American community. Many African American communities have been challenged in their efforts to have an African-centered school assigned to their district. Some met with success but most did not use collective efforts to get a school with teachers, parents, and stakeholders who feel that black students attending public schools need to learn information about the culture and history of Africa (Shapiro, 2019). In her article, parents in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community were intentional about choosing a school specifically for their black children (Shapiro, 2019). As principal, I continue to struggle with the lingering impacts of a Eurocentric curriculum in terms of finding African-centered teachers, developing African-centered texts, and developing the most effective pedagogical frameworks possible. At Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy @ Cole Elementary, great experiences and opportunities continue to occur for students, staff, and parents and more of the same results are expected to continue well into the future.

Significance of this Autoethnography

What is autoethnography? Autoethnography is an anthropological approach that has been utilized for over thirty years and involves keeping a log of research and writing methods that join the individual to the cultural (environment) (Ellis, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). According to Ellis & Bochner (2000), the term ‘autoethnography’ was first used by David Hayano in 1979. He used the term to refer to the anthropologists involved in study of their own people, where the researcher is a comprehensive insider within the cluster being studied (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Notwithstanding the disparity between this approach and other more traditional approaches, authors using this approach have a higher probability of embracing their individual consideration of character and further relations more sympathetically for observations of social living or any specific questions concerned (Das & Mullick, 2015). Crucial advantages of autoethnographic research provides personal and rich narratives of the researcher’s own world. The researcher is the primary foundation of information. Evidences about the other lives are generally presented in a commiserating manner, so that the descriptions become mechanically expressive. In addition, according to Mendez (2013), while autoethnography as a research method was an unknown and tough tool for me to use, understanding my own experience was a phase of the research procedure that later allowed me to construe my participants involvements and epitomize them through writing. This is the best alternative for me to share these rich stories that had a huge impact on my childhood experience and shaped who I am as a person today.

Theoretical Framework

While reviewing the chronicles of my personal experience at an African-centered school, you will clearly recognize the benefits of attending an African-centered school and understand why it is very appropriate for me to utilize the Afrocentric pedagogy theoretical framework viewed from Shockley & Cleveland (2011) at our school. Africology studies are an inextricable link to of the mutual factors and mutual difficulties of ancient and knowledgeable Africa, their interconnection, the clarification of African mindset in terms of human activities and their importance to human circumstances and growth today (Uzong, 1969). Asante (2009) explains his adoption of Africology in his own journal article, "Africology and the Puzzle of Nomenclature:" It is based on sound intellectual principles and rational grounds. For example, it is broadly the `study of Africa." Flemming (2017) claims that more African people should engage in Africology in order to correct European culture and replace it with aspects of African studies and culture. Other frameworks such as culturally responsive pedagogy discusses a student-centered method to instruction in which the students' select cultural assets are acknowledged and cultivated to promote students cultural background (Gay, 2010). Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as teaching to and through students' personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual competences, and their prior actions; culturally responsive pedagogy is premised on close relations in ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement. Africentric (Afrocentric) ideas require a reorientation of knowledge on problems pertaining to education because when traditional western lenses are used, they are not enough for understanding the black phenomena (Asante, 1990). Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers students knowledgeably,

communally, passionately, and constitutionally by using ethnic referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Both Woodson and Dubois argued that race was that core of fully understanding inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Cultural identity through knowledge of the values, beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals, and sensibilities have sustained us as a people in education, in difference to schooling, and is our means of providing for the intergenerational transmission (Shujaa, 2003). Woodson (1933) innovated the thinking about African Americans by analyzing the uniqueness of the African American experience to help others recognize and fight an oppressive system. In these chronicles that have been gathered, you will get a clear sense of how students, parents, and staff in an African centered environment believe that they can heal their community by using an African-centered approach. The theories are designed to improve culturally relevant pedagogy and to recognize the encouraging and complementary relationship among education and schooling (George, 2013).

African beliefs previously stated that the creation of writing and the appearance of classical African civilizations are the essential elements from which all training of African people must emanate (Flemming, 2017). Some believed that the Civil Rights Movement was a good example of whites forcing blacks to integrate into white communities, which destroyed and devastated black communities, schools, businesses, and other various institutions (Karenga, 2010). It is critical that people of African descent study their own history and culture from their own perspective.

Purpose of this autoethnography

It is my strong intent to ensure that this information of retelling stories is approached from an emancipatory perspective that works toward improving the conditions of African descendants in the United States and all over the world.

Definitions

Africology-interdisciplinary academic discipline that studies the culture of Africans and the African diaspora.

Autoethnography— According to Maréchal (2010), “autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing” (p. 43). A well-known autoethnographer, Carolyn Ellis (2004) defines it as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. xix).

African-centered education-The Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), defines African-centered education as the means by which Afrikan culture -- including the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed to maintain and perpetuate it throughout the nation building process -- is developed and advanced through practice. Its aim, therefore, is to build commitment and competency within present and future generations to support the struggle for liberation and nationhood.

Afrocentric- Afrocentricity is an epistemology that seeks to re-center/ relocate African people Black Africans on the continent of Africa and people of Black African descent in the Diaspora—in their own, yet connected, cultures for the ultimate

purpose of their social, political, and economic liberation (Asante, 1998; 1999; Hilliard, 1998; Wilson, 1998).

Africology- The Africological Movement, emerging in the mid-1980s, was trans-generational and transcontinental in scope. On the basis of a reflection on the term "afrology," the study of African phenomena, Winston Van Home of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, derived the term Africology.

Cornerstone Story—Stories from my life transitioning to an understanding that I was miseducated in school along with millions of other students. The idea of taking an approach to start reteaching students about connecting to their history and culture.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy—Culturally responsive pedagogy, as defined by one of the most prominent authors in the field, Geneva Gay (2002), is “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106).

Delmar Divide--refers to Delmar Boulevard as a socioeconomic and racial dividing line in St. Louis, Missouri.

Diaspora- the dispersion of any people from their original homeland.

Field Negro- a black American slave who worked in the fields in distinction from one employed about the house of the master.

House Negro- (also house nigger) is a historical term for a houseslave of African descent. Historically, a house Negro was a higher status than a field slave or "field Negro" who worked outdoors, often in harsh conditions, and might perform tasks for the household servants. House Negro is also used as a pejorative term to compare a contemporary black person to such a slave.

National Black United Front -The National Black United Front (NBUF) was officially founded in 1980 in Brooklyn, New York after being hindered by assassinations and FBI counterintelligence work of the 1970s. A politically radical, grass-roots organization supporting the Pan-African movement championed by Marcus Garvey, the NBUF focuses on the advancement of all people of African descent. (Karenga, 2010)

Nguzo Saba- These values are called the Nguzo Saba which in Swahili means the Seven Principles. Developed by Dr. Ron Karenga, the Nguzo Saba stand at the heart of the origin and meaning of Kwanzaa, for it is these values which are not only the building blocks for community but also serve to reinforce and enhance them.

Race—a socially constructed ideology based on melanin in the skin, privileging whites over people of color.

reAfricanization- reAfricanization can be thought of as a process of decolonization, wherein people of African descent seek to reconstruct their cultural practice in ways that augments the core elements of traditional culture, deconstructs the vestiges of cultural disruption, and adapts these reconceptualized cultural forms to the modern exigencies of the African world. (Rashid, 2017)

White Supremacy—the systemic and individual mechanisms in society which create and maintain power differentials with power and privilege for whites at the expense of people of color.

Eurocentric Curriculum-- Removing the Euro-Centric Curriculum. ... from "Courageous Conversations" "Euro-centrism is the practice of viewing the world from a European perspective and with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the preeminence of European culture." (Sep 20, 2011)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

An African-centered education framework and African cultural concepts recognize the theory of a cultural context of education and acknowledges views of students' culture as vital in improving student academic achievement (Ware, 2006). People of African descent especially in the United States of America, have been struggling for centuries to uplift themselves and their community in the areas of education, economics, politics, and other forms of power that can facilitate a people becoming productive and independent in a society (Hillard, 1995). A considerable amount of research on African American education focuses on the achievement gap, which compares Black and White students' test scores without even identifying disparities and structural barriers to achievement (Watson & Wiggan, 2016). Dumas and Nelson (2016) discuss in their work the idea of schooling having a severe negative impact on children in this society where there is very little input from students about their identity and oppression of the gifts that children bring to the world. Even with the educational discrepancies mentioned, there are several high-performing urban schools such as Centennial Place Elementary in Atlanta, Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School in St. Paul [Minnesota], M. Hall Stanton Elementary in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania], and Osmond A. Church School in The Bronx [New York] which operate as variances of their school district (Chenoweth, 2009). Afrocentric schools that are high performing encourage the use of operative teaching practices and nonhegemonic course resources that will explore the ways in which the curriculum progresses student triumph (Watson & Wiggan, 2016). Key aspects of education for people of African descent in the

United States have benefited a lot of African Americans but overall as a people in this country, African people in the United States continue to lag behind other groups financially, educationally, and socially, says (Hilliard, 2002). Research by Dumas and Nelson (2016) depicts the long history of dehumanization, disrespect, and social chaos that have been huge barriers for the growth of black boys. Therefore, a culturally relevant education plan designed for African American students that places understanding Black culture at the center of learning and facilitates understanding about African and African American history and culture is quintessential for the positive growth and development of black boys and for students of African descent in general (Akoma, 2008). (Lomotey, 1992) added that a culturally relevant curriculum in a culturally responsive environment of a school family strengthens the students' role in society. Also, these students tend to assume an obligation toward self-development and toward restoring the African American community. Shockley (2007) expressed that the inability of the American educational system to properly address the cultural and educational needs of Blacks is one of the most perplexing problems in U.S. society (Hilliard, 1997; Hopkins, 1997). As Asante (1991-1992) states in the Portland African American Baseline Essay (1990) that since Africa is the cradle of civilization then, education should be taught from an African worldview and African thought. In further reflecting on the importance of Afrocentric curriculum, Akoto (1994) informs us that the goals of the Afrocentric syllabus are connected to matters like self-determination, autonomy, the finding of truth, and the undertaking to humanize the world.

African Centered Studies

The first book I read while attending Tougaloo College that propelled me to start researching about the history of Africa was the *Stolen Legacy* (James, 1992). It was at that time in my life that I felt an urgent need to go back to the source of wisdom from my ancestors to learn as much as I could. While not knowing the name of reeducating myself, my heart was moving toward African-centered/Afrocentric education. Asante (1988), helped coin the term Afrocentric/Afrocentricity as an epistemology that seeks to re-center/ relocate African people—Black Africans on the continent of Africa and people of Black African descent in the Diaspora—in their own particular, yet connected, cultures for the ultimate purpose of their social, political, and economic liberation (Asante, 1998; 1999; Hilliard, 1998; Wilson, 1998). This was the first time I read something about my history and culture that helped me bridge the gap between ideas from the *Stolen Legacy* by Dr. George M. James (1992) to concepts and ideas that I had previously read and heard from many other sources. James (1992) started the central theme which helped me understand that black people have a rich history and culture, for example, their roles in Ancient Egypt. Asante (1980) introduced the term Afrocentricity as a perspective of the Black Studies project and launched multiple discourses discussing academic and social suggestions and values. The impressive work of Patricia Reed-Merritt (2008) asserts in her study that the popularization of Afrocentricity, the hypothetical concept developed in the conservatoire of primarily internal investigation, has made huge gains into popular culture. Bankole (2006) adds that Afrocentric research has profound implications for the development of the discipline Africalogy with essential goals of this inexhaustible literature forging a solid foundation for a permanent area of Africalogy. Okafor (1996)

notes that Africalogy, is "the Afrocentric study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa" (as cited in Asante, 1990, p. 14). Parents, teachers, and community leaders have been frustrated by the seemingly sluggish pace of American education moving toward an inclusion in the curriculum of African centered pedagogy that is rooted in the cultural identity of people of African descent. These advocates are, therefore, demanding more than merely providing children with activities but requiring that teachers in the classroom provide for students a deeper, more comprehensive level of understanding of African culture. Therefore, teachers, themselves, should be active learners and knowledgeable about African centered pedagogy (Durden, 2007). There is other evidence that recommends that we expand on cultural learning by integrating a variety of fundamental cultural melodies in learning and performance by expanding the number of different cultures studied in the classroom. The underlying assumption of this approach is that we can get the most out of the cultural benefits of a wider range of children engaged in a more diverse set of cultural experiences. (Gay, 1988). In a sharp departure from this premise, Akua (2012) discussed the central theme of Afrocentric and African centered education as common educational models to reshape the minds of our African American children.

Eurocentric Pedagogy in Education

Although a very small percent of African Americans can navigate successfully in education, most students of African descent continue to lag behind other groups academically as well as in other categories in this society. As explained by many of the authors above, there is a serious problem with the education of children of African descent with European curriculums. Nykiel-Herbert (2010) asserts that the major reason

minority students and newcomers perform poorly in schools is that their home cultures are not sufficiently utilized as a resource for their learning. The inconsequential view of culturally relevant pedagogy results in reducing it to just another program rather than as an effective way of gaining a more complete understanding of the fundamental structure for improving academic achievement. Sleeter (2012) and Klarman (2004) further explain that traditional laws that have been institutionalized in the top three institutions around economics, education, and social systems obstruct the broader acceptance or inclusion of African-centered curriculum into the existing public education system. While working in education, reporters like Crocco and Costigan (2007) discussed teachers' frustration with implementing components of culturally responsive pedagogy because of a possible fear on the part of the established elite and whites of lowering the established hegemonic role of the elite in the education system and in this society. Shockley (2007), asserts that there is a history of Blacks lagging behind in educational and social tiers aligned with disproportionate incarceration rates and income disparities. More researchers are now studying this marvel and are competing that there is a need for an African-centered pedagogy in schools (Shockley, 2007). Hilliard (1997) reported similar activity among other non-white ethnic groups citing that African-centered education promotes unity for the people instead of promoting religion and outside allegiance to other cultures. Unfortunately, according to Hilliard (1997), leaders of the African Centered community have been largely unsuccessful at convincing the public, including people of African descent, that African Centered education is the favorable choice for people of African descent living in the United States and around the globe. Despite overcoming some challenges in other African-centered public schools in Detroit, Indianapolis, Philadelphia,

and other major cities to make the philosophy and curriculum work, there were still concerns about the limited knowledge of teachers committed to the purpose and to the struggle to implement an African-centered pedagogy (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). The educational systems for African people in the United States historically have been in a struggle with racism and white domination. In Carter G. Woodson's (1933) book he states ... "In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum... You would never hear Africa mentioned except in the negative... of his originality, if his efforts are directed from without by those who socially proscribe him" (pp. 17-28). African Americans are still faced with the same challenge of being ignored in history, culture, and considered irrelevant in context of contributing to the world. In one conversation with a teacher, Gillian (2014), reported that this educator did not embrace the idea of people of African descent living in the United States learning their history and culture because they now live in America. Goggins (2011) notes how African Americans are continuing to fail in traditional school settings due to the prevailing school practices and/or policies of little to no African cultural-relevant teaching. Still, there has been no significant concerted, system-wide effort to look at different instructional approaches that might better meet the needs of another race of people. One of the pillars of African Centered education by Council of Independent Institutions or CIBI, (2014), emphasizes that African identity is embedded in the continuity of African cultural history and that African cultural history represents a distinct reality continually evolving from experiences of all African people wherever they are and have been on the planet across time and generations. Akua notes (2012) that the theoretical base for Afrocentric Education was deeply inspired and informed through the work of Carter G. Woodson's *The Miseducation of the Negro*

(Woodson, 1933; Asante, 2007). African people who were born and raised on the continent of Africa have different experiences from African people born in the east and west. Even though these experiences are very different, there is a commonality of culture among African people all over the globe. Akua's (2012) theory of African Centered Education standards is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of western education separating African culture from the education curriculum. He further explains how the idea from some scholars is absolutely alien to the African worldview (Ani, 1980). African people brought their strong cultural experience to everything they did in every area of human endeavor, including reading, writing, language, literature, architecture, engineering, mathematics, medicine, science, and technology (Hilliard, 1995; Karenga, 2003).

Rebuilding an Academic Healing Environment

Other institutions across the country helped students adopt the principles of the Nguzo Saba into the school culture and curriculum by allowing them to clearly understand their role and moral obligation to the community based on Nguzo Saba principles (Durdin, 2007). Dr. Maulana Karenga and the US organization comprised the call by many African leaders like Sekou Toure and Malcolm X to recover the best African values for the lives of Black people toward liberation from western culture (Karenga, 2010). Karenga (2010) further expressed that he and Us' greatest accomplishment was to create a pan-African holiday called Kwanazaa and the Nguzo Saba (the Seven Principles). In 1966, Kwanazaa was created as a pan-African holiday that celebrates family, community, and culture with over forty million people celebrating around the world (Karenga, 2010). The goal of Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole

Elementary School is to create a liberating educational approach that teaches students the obligation to restore and support their communities. Morris (2015) further discusses how communities are now facing challenges connecting the school with the community. An African centered school called Mary McCloud Bethune Institute successfully used surveys as indicators to get input from students, parents, and others to ensure there was a commitment to the African-centered philosophy (Kifano, 1996). Whereas, at the school named Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @Cole School (BKGPCS), as principal, during my more than seven years tenure at the school, worked to build strong relationships with the surrounding African American community, developed school intergenerational connections, fostered academic achievement and kept parents informed of student progress, encouraged and praised student academic performance and also encouraged students in their future goals and aspirations. Hilliard (2002) agrees with and promotes the methods used in this school (BKGPCS) by this principal to rebuild an academic healing environment. It was clear in Asa Hilliard's perspective that if you are not interested in me, then you cannot teach me.

Higgins (1996) provides ample evidence that claims classes should become student-centered around issues where teachers are able to engage in a form of self-reflection that allows students to acknowledge unsuccessful educational ideas prevalent in this society. Cooper (2003) asserts that racial socialization can be served when teachers' high expectations are joined with a promise to community members and norms. Monteiro-Ferreira (2014) researched institutional racism and student-centered pedagogy. His findings convince some that there must be ongoing research and studies about oppressive forms inherent in their own educational practices. As an example, students in

a student-centered environment by Hooks (1996) described her own positive early educational experience of attending an African American segregated school where six of the teachers took interest in the students and viewed them as the future of the school, neighborhood, community, and world. Teachers in those days took pride in their students in becoming successful and saw their students as reflections of themselves. Within this school, Hooks (1996) and her classmates felt excited about coming to school because their teachers were directly connecting to the students and their experiences of the past, present and future.

Equally important, many students sitting in urban settings classrooms continue to perform below other races in the United States. Therefore, it is essential to review the goals and benefits of an African-centered school experience that would adhere to the ideology of African people and implement instructional practices that support a unique experience for black students (Durden, 2007). One of the three exemplary African centered schools called New Concept Development Center in Chicago used teacher and student relationships to explore patterns of interaction and other dynamic forces using scientific investigation (Lee, 1992). At another school in Los Angeles called Mary McLeod Bethune Institute taught geometry lessons using cultural designs to make connections of the Ndebele people in South Africa (Kifano, 1996). The third example of an exemplar African-centered school was called the Nairobi Day School in California that used African languages in music, songs, poems, and speech to foster respect for African culture and language (Hoover, 2005). Despite the evidence provided by these studies and other similar research, there are still firm obstacles to the inclusion of or the

offering of a choice of using African-centered pedagogy to more effectively teach children of African descent.

Therefore, it is imperative that we keep in mind the Monteiro-Ferreira's (2014) idea that African people's urgency toward revolution is not a new phenomenon, given the aggressive trauma caused by the political and social suppression imposed by Western capitalism and Eurocentric superiority that keeps the mind of African people stagnant.

Construction of and Developing an African-centered Environment

There is a plethora of research supporting culturally responsive pedagogy and Afrocentricity as an excellent tool to reach African American students in urban and rural settings. Bankole (2006) carefully notes, Afrocentricity used as an academic and exploration tool continues to produce a logically liberating and remedial ethos for many of their intellectuals. In this body of work, Afrocentric scholars and researchers have been able to move students beyond the repetitive narratives and analysis that falsified Africana history and culture, critically engaging racist scholarship and bodies of knowledge that have previously falsely and negatively influenced generations while allowing many others an original framework in the academy (Bankole, 2006).

Based on the findings of Monteiro-Ferreira (2014), it can be argued that implementing African-centered education will liberate the minds of African children of the diaspora, by returning to the source and creating a national Pan-African identity with an urgent Black agenda and knowledge of ancient African cultural traditions. In addition, Maquet (2009) explains that unifying black people means to look back at the African continent and acknowledge the commonalities amongst people of African descent anywhere in the diaspora. Shockley (2007) stated that the American educational system's

inability to properly address the cultural and educational need of children of African descent has been the most challenging problem in the United States today (Hilliard, 1997; Hopkins, 1997). Shockley (2007) adds valuable information asserting the challenges between African culture and the dominant culture offered at the school is causing a complete change for black children and their communities creating cultural mismatches for black students. Oyebade (1990) notes that an Afrocentric perspective does not aim to change Eurocentricity as a universal perspective but to integrate Afrocentricity as a distinguishable cultural perspective quintessential as a pedagogical framework for effectively educating students of African descent.

Another way used in developing an African-centered environment is through developing strong relationships with students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders who have contributed to building an African centered school community by integrating a value system of African principles called the Nguzo Saba (seven principles). The Nguzo Saba (seven principles) signifies the start of an examination and analysis integrating ancient African values into the daily experiences of African Americans in the United States as a tool to start reconnecting them to their history and culture (Karenga, 1998). Prior to this movement, there were many other efforts made by multiple proponents of African-centered education whose culminating efforts symbolically failed when trying to engage St. Louis Public Schools in a collaborative planning effort for an African centered curriculum. In spite of this rough start, African-centered education has since been approved by superintendent Kelvin Adams of St. Louis Public Schools and the St. Louis city school board. Following this long-awaited approval, a strong partnership has since developed between the school district and the community. Working together, the school

district and community have provided many rich cultural experiences attended by students, parents, African centered teachers, families, community members, and stakeholders who want to help heal the lingering impact of slavery in St. Louis. I think the world should know the power of acknowledging these philosophies and gathering and sharing African centered practices that only exist in an African-centered setting. The rewards for learning about one's history and cultural are exponential for students, parents, teachers, and interested members of the community.

Some authors believe that traditional western education will not solve all of the tragic conditions occurring in the African community (Hilliard, 2002). Nobles (2011) adds that a society defined by white supremacy, educational systems grounded in racial objectification and white domination clearly is incapable of educating those considered racially inferior. It is both the knowledge of skills and learning African culture that will provide a conduit based on an African framework to solve problems in their community instead of moving out of them.

Afrocentric Education Compared to Eurocentric Education

At Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole Academy, infusing an African language and value system like the Nguzo Saba has been a standard we use to measure the success of the school. Cleveland and Shockley (2011) acknowledged in their findings that low academic performance of African American children continues to be a huge barrier to academic achievement in the American educational system. Therefore, if there is not an African-centered plan in place to provide a comprehensive culturally centered approach, then there will be ongoing problems of brainwashing and major miseducation of students of African descent in the classroom (Cleveland and Shockley, 2011). At Bertha Knox

Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole Academy, one example is that all students have to use African greetings in the school all day. One example is that students must say, “hodi” “hodi” and wait until someone in the room says “karibu” before entering the classroom. Another example is that everyone must respect the age of the person in the school community by asking the teachers or the oldest person in room “may I have permission from my elder to speak?” used in all student and adult settings.

Fu-Kiau (1991) discusses the significance of initiation (p.17) as essential if we are to put substance into Afrikan Rites of Passage. His in-depth discussion of “The Naming Process” (p.10-17) tells us why those who colonized and enslaved us had to rob us of our names as well. Even decades ago on the continent of Africa, there were multiple concerns about African people around the world struggling to maintain identity and culture for their people. In a speech made by Kwame Nkrumah (1963) asserting that one essential function of this Institute must surely be to study the history, culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in new African-centered ways in entire freedom from the propositions and pre-suppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those professors and lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment (Nkrumah,1963; Kambon, 2016). Based on his findings (Durden, 2007) claims that African-centered schools across the country report about the benefits of using an African-centered pedagogy. These schools have found that the following list of student culture responsive-learning activities brought positive responses from students: nurturing and supporting students holistically, exploring African knowledge, integrating traditional African cultural rituals, teaching African language, building strong relationships with other African-centered institutions in the

community and beyond, promoting male and female rite of passages in the school, developing world views around the Nguzo Saba, and teaching students their cultural identity while critically analyzing views that impact African people. As Asante (1991-1992) states in the Portland African American Baseline Essay (1990) that historically, Africa is the cradle of civilization and that education should be taught from an African worldview and African thought. Akoto (1994) further informs us that the character-elevating goals of an Afrocentric curriculum are related to matters like self-determination, self-sufficiency, the discovery of truth, and the undertaking to civilize the world.

Durban (2007) detailed how important the principles of an African worldview are as exemplified by standards which constitute the African-centered paradigm. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley and Chavous (1998) strongly noted that if there is an applicable African-centered model in place, it will allow learning experiences and intellectual thought processes to be expressed from an African-centered perspective that must be analyzed through the African experience using values developed through African culture. Hale (2001) discussed the importance of operating an African-centered school model with passionate teachers that planned appropriate instructional lessons and concepts that reinforce the ancient African values with unique learning styles in African culture. The example used was the phenomenon that children of African descent experience a lot of incitement from African arts that is visible, musical, spontaneous, and engaging. George (2013) notes that the African mind has an adjoining rich learned history combined with the wisdom collected in the present age; both must be desired so that both past and present are merged to move toward a healthy future. Given our situation, there are many

students, parents, and adults struggling to embrace these concepts of because the values being taught in our school are very different from perspectives being taught in western education. However, African-centered education being taught in our school Pamoja shows significant positive results such as reports of an increase in students' sense of self-worth and self-confidence, increased interest in learning, spontaneous cooperative learning, and increased goal setting and goal achievement. Critics like Morrow (1995) purport that Afrocentric curriculum destabilizes the chances for people of African descent to work with other ethnic assemblies to develop pedagogics. Other critics address what they perceive as the limitations of African centered curriculums stating that these curriculums do not value academics but rather focus of character-building initiatives that do not prepare students for careers (Grant & Sleeter, 2003). Hilliard (1995) further adds that knowledge of African American history does not help students pass assessments to get into college or prepare them to move forward in the traditional classroom.

Opponents of African centered education

African centered education is a movement that is mostly embraced by many African people in the diaspora that understand the impact of slavery and the history of oppression of African people all around the world. Not all people agree that African centered education will help heal the challenges of people of African descent. Some opponents like Mary Lefkowitz (1996) believe that those supportive of Afrocentric education need to be closely monitored and sees this approach as oppositional rather than supportive of its inclusion into the existing traditional education paradigm. She further claims that proponents for African centered education often ignore the invitations to answer valid questions about what is being taught to students. She fears that there may be

some form of teaching that promotes resistance to the current system of western teaching and infers a form of hate.

Further critiques of African-centered education articulated by Lefkowitz and other opponents is that African-centered viewpoints do not truly reflect the opinions of all African Americans; but rather go against the reality that this society of people share the same frustrations of all groups which require something different to improve academic performance. (Lefkowitz, 1996; Leo, 1990). This perspective infers that in this case, something different is required for improving the academic achievement of African Americans students. Leo (1990) wages another critique against African-centered education when he argues that resistance to American and western society starts with ignoring the history and culture of what is being taught in this society. Mazama (2014) further expounds that African-centered education lacks the ability to teach students to deal with situations and life events in western society. Authors continue to claim that learning African history and culture is a waste of time and will eventually limit African American students' opportunity to prepare themselves to live in a society with other people who have multiple skills in traditional schools. Stelly (1997) another opponent of African-centered education critiqued scholar Molefi Asante saying, "In terms of making moral appeals or engaging in challenges, debates, arguments, and rhetoric, ideas such as those posed by Asante are continually bogged down when these "scholars" waste valuable time chasing "the wild goose of racism." Morrow (1995) claims that an Afrocentric curriculum undermines the opportunity for people of African descent to collaborate with other ethnic groups to develop pedagogy.

Therefore, the idea of anyone trying to challenge the status quo of western education is wasting their time and will not reap the benefits of living in the western society. Clearly, opponents of African-centered education do not believe that learning their history and culture of African will not help the overall challenges of African people living in the United States of America. According to (Dixson & Lynn, 2013), whites tend to start getting involved in justice when they see that there is something in it for them. This has been a serious concern from grassroots community leaders as well as intellectuals that voice their concerns about the white racist power structures that are designed for whites, to not only protect whites, but also to develop systems of oppression that put selected African American leaders in place as buffers to help maintain white supremacy (Karenga, 2010).

Historically, during slavery in America, there is evidence that supports the cultural system of white slave owners through immediate and overt divisional systems that were put in place to keep African Americans divided to avoid massive or collective uprisings against the systems that had been put in place to uphold slavery (Karenga, 2010). Gabriel (2007) notes during of slavery, white slave owners worked many of the darker skinned blacks in the field called field negroes and lighter skinned blacks, oftentimes those that were selected to have deeper relationships which resulted in black women becoming impregnated by their white slave masters. These blacks who were called house negroes and field negroes were deeply divided by the slave master so that the ongoing control slaves was reinforced by the resulting division in black families and a lack of trust among slaves (Gabriel, 2007). Gabriel (2007) further notes that slavery, therefore, created a culture that some African Americans continue to carry today

which sees any African American that has a white parent as someone who is not black enough or not African American because he or she has white blood in their body.

Although in many biracial children that are raised by an African American parent, that parent tends to teach the children that they are African American because their parents are clear that whites in this society will never accept them as being white (Gabriel, 2007).

Historical Practices

As many of the researchers believe, it is critical that people of African descent are given an education that helps connect them to their history and culture, which allows them to integrate their experience through education in order to help children heal and fight their struggles in and outside of the classroom. Pushing students to go outside of their communities does nothing but show disrespect for your community. O'Neal (2015) refers to one example when he writes about Ms. Minnie Liddell, a black mother who didn't want her son sent by bus to a school in a rough neighborhood. Instead, she wanted their children to remain at Yeatman School near O'Fallon Park in 1971. Overall, Ms. Liddell prevailed in this issue but resented the St. Louis Public Schools' way of assigning students and teachers. On February 18, 1972, Liddell and the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis filed suit in U.S. District Court, calling the system racially biased. It is very alarming to hear many of the outcomes like this where parents felt that they did not have a voice in who would teach their child and where they are going to be taught. If you take racism out of this scenario, then this could have been easily solved. Charters schools have made the education divide even more complicated in the city of St. Louis by having the right to deny students an opportunity to attend a school in their own community. Parker (2012) writes that charter schools are separating out students who have the most

challenging needs for the best education into different schools while there is evidence showing that those schools are predicted to fail. Chung (2017) states that school districts struggling academically are concentrated in racially minority communities. Given a map of St. Louis' Delmar Divide, there is significant low birth weight, lead poisoning, low income and higher crime rates shown in north St. Louis.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, there is a strong movement to continue the growth of charter schools despite some claims that charter schools should not continue to be funded because they are, in effect, returning communities back to the days of legal school segregation (Frankenberg, Kotok, Schafft, and Mann, 2017). Although some people may see African-centered educational models as a “feel good” curriculum, some researchers see it as means of starting to heal the community. The Nguzo Saba (2011) teaches the importance of the fourth principle called Ujima collective work and responsibility as a great tool to start helping students see themselves as a collective instead of an individual. Debates over African-centered education tend to dominate discussions of European education. But these debates obscure the far more important issue of why children of African descent are failing academically all over the country. At this point, one might object that children of African descent can be academically successful without learning anything about African history and culture. While it's true that some African American students can acquire good grades in school without knowing anything about their history and culture but, I still maintain the position taken by authors like Asa Hillard (2002). Hilliard discusses how people of African descent have lost their way in regard to raising their children. The traditional systematic socialization structure for the masses of African children has been

lost. This loss is compounded by the weakening of vital function of intergenerational cultural transmission. The problem is far more complicated based on the findings of Hillard (2002), who states that it can be argued that African culture will not and cannot be established unless there is a curriculum designed to support the culture of African people.

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Critical coordinating methodologies used to retell stories are included in this chapter for thoughtful research in prior chapters. Research methods will entail qualitative research focusing on Afrocentricity, ethnographies, and historical analyses from (a) the populace and sample to be studied, (b) instrumentational utensils used for the process, (c) evidence to be collected and (d) explanation of how evidence will be analyzed, expressed, and reported. The Handbook of Qualitative Research by Denzin & Lincoln (2005) states that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). As we are introduced to Africology, Akua (2016) states in his research, it was critical that this method integrates an African centered perspective that Winston Van Horne coined “Africology” as defined as “the Afrocentric examination of African phenomena related to African people” (Asante & Mazama, 2005, p.59). I concurred with Akua (2016) and his rationale for choosing Africology as a research methodology in order to avoid the tendency in western culture to interpret African experience from a European perspective. An African perspective can facilitate a connection that totally liberates African people toward healing themselves and their community (Akua, 2016). Winston Van Horne played a major role in coining the term Africology (Asante, 2009). Asante (2009) further states that Van Horne continuously claimed at these seminars that Africology, a word carefully associated with him, was the experiential analysis into the life pasts and life in general of peoples of main African origin and their descent.

This is the fact that the African experiences, most times, are interpreted from a Eurocentric perspective and As we discuss autoethnographies, these two researchers (ELLIS, 2004; HOLMAN JONES, 2005), state that autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) to thoroughly understand people (parents, students, teachers, stakeholders) of African cultural experiences (*ethno*) of a group of people in and outside of the school environment. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and values research as a political, socially necessary, socially appropriate for documenting experiencing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Research Design

In the process, we collected experiences of this school community, it is critical that everyone reading this research understand that these observations, conversations, and feedback allowed me to reflect all the party's cognitive thoughts and behaviors within the context of acquiring and gathering research stories toward developing an African-centered community with a high quality of learning. In ethnography, this collection of stories is focused more on a vigorous collaboration between the scholar and the school/community culture during the study and less on time in the field (Creswell & Garrett, 2008). In this autoethnography, my typed and written reflections helped me understand the daily norms occurring in and outside of the school. Other rationales for selecting the African Centered Methodology method used by Akua (2016) states critically that the Africological approach as a methodology is recommended strongly in this study because outdated European methodologies are deficient and unsuitable to study individualities associated to the African experience. He further acknowledges how one

author has cautioned that European methodologies should be used on Europeans instead applying them to discuss the African experience (Smith, 2012).

Therefore, it is my strong intention to ensure that knowledge and information of retelling stories is approached from an emancipatory perspective that works toward improving the conditions of African descendants in the United States and all over the world. Through this process, I could observe, memorize, record memories, challenge contrary philosophies, celebrations, develop rich thoughts, rich discussions, rich collaborations, and powerful observations within a six-year period. These rich stories helped everyone understand the benefits of attending an African-centered school using African-centered concepts, rituals, and traditions in a preschool to 8th grade urban school setting. A second purpose of this autoethnography is to present critical knowledge that describes contributing factors motivating students and staff to demonstrate and describe how the benefits of attending an African themed school has help students improve student character. There is consistent information that supports students that have early experiences with African-centered education and use their knowledge to bring new ideas and lead others to be involved in helping the community. In the sixth year of implementation of becoming an African-centered school, there is evidence of insurmountable growths and healing many challenges that have been identified by students, staff, parents, and stakeholders that created a culture that cannot be duplicated anywhere in the United States. Regardless of many challenges, there is a huge push from community, staff, and parents who struggle daily to brand Bertha Knox Gilkey a model African-centered school for the country.

Cornerstone Stories

Each day, I set aside some time to reflect and write on these rich experiences and challenges of developing an African-centered school community. Although documentation or journaling may not occur at the same time daily, Saturday evenings have been consistent for me to write and type up daily experiences that occurred during the week. Between my calendar, staff, and secretary, multiple conversations with deep dialogue have occurred daily that has motivated me to document these experiences. There are two different journal sections written weekly. The first journal section from my observations included entries of conversations with students, staff, parents, and stakeholders of daily/weekly events and factors that had an impact on developing an African-centered environment. These narratives included classroom observations throughout the school and in the community. My goal is to find patterns of cultural norms and developing communities that support the values of the Nguzo Saba (seven principles).

While reviewing the second section of journaling, I could interpret observations, conversations, perceptions, and cultural interpretations. It was at this point that I looked for increasing patterns of behavior. I started to personally use my vivid memory to start recording rich information from parties around the school community. Many of my reflexive journaling used was gathered from documents from meeting surveys, agendas from meetings for grade level and school wide, district memos for staff, emails, PTO (parent teacher organization) meetings, conversations, and open feedback from staff, stakeholders, and parents. All the data collections began at the beginning of each school year with tracking of monumental experiences that stood out in my leadership and

engagement with the school, district, community, and the entire city of St. Louis. Again, the rich thoughtful stories that I have recalled from memory that will be used were approved from my committee chair to begin my research. The conduction of this autoethnography and historical analysis data collection is strongly supported and approved by my committee chair to drive the quality of this research.

Observation of These Rich Experiences

In this process, there are multiple stories collected from conversations, interactions with students, staff, parents, and invested stakeholders who desire an African-centered education in St. Louis Public Schools. Since the Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja's existence, multiple stories, conversations, and discussions have created healing spaces for students in St. Louis Public School's African-centered concept school. It is through these historical analyses and ethnographies that I have been able to discover creative opportunities to improve.

Researchers Role

As I am reflecting on my experiences on this project, it is my strong intention to ensure that all stories used in these experiences remain authentic and ensure that these stories are not written out of context or connected to an individual person. All parties understand that the reflections in this paper support the importance of memorizing important stories from students, staff, and parents, and the community. The entire world needs to read these reflections to understand that people of African descent should have an embedded experience in school that reflects their own history and culture.

Story Collection/Analysis

In this autoethnographic, all the stories will be from my interpretation from observations and conversations with people. As you read, I am the primary data source. The experiences in this autoethnography center around students, teachers, parents, administrators, and stakeholders. The collections of stories, conversations, emergence of identity, and change of practices are narrated by memory, observations of conversations, celebrations, dialogs, and external data (collected stories). These self-observational and reflective data connect the past and present sentiments of this school community. The external data source of student, teacher, parents, and stakeholder stories provides a rationale for the benefits and urgent need to have an African-centered school with an African-centered curriculum. The supporting stories for this autoethnography: detailed stories from my head, student written experiences, and my insightful journal was used to identify the rationale, needs, and benefits for the community to create an African-centered school in the city of St. Louis. In Chapter 4, I have identified key sections of these stories by identifying recollections from students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders that made their intentions to support this school's vision to be African-centered and discuss with me the ongoing benefits of being in a school like Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole.

Trustworthiness & Limitations

It is my intent to honor the valued trust in me of individuals who shared their stories of challenge and triumph. The stories I collected from conversations and observations gathered within the school environment are authentic and not misleading. Peers and colleagues in the school have all discussed and reviewed basic findings that

helped to shape the school's culture. According to Merriam (1995), regarding the reliability of this information, the implementation of three strategies for reliability of triangulation (multiple methods of collecting data) can be applied. These strategies include peer examination (check that the investigator is plausibly interpreting the data), audit trail (verifying the account of business). Also, this autoethnography should be trusted because of my years of experience as co-founder of the school, my years of working with school families, and my utilization of my extensive memory of the rich conversations sharing information daily for clarification and reviewing of our processes.

Summary

I have detailed conclusive summaries of collected stories and an historical analysis along with an extensive overview of foundational philosophies, theories, and practices pertinent to this qualitative research. In addition, I have comprised limitations of the study as well as the role of the researcher. Chapter Four entails findings and the historical analyses of these findings and Chapter Five provides conclusions and recommendations. With the approval of my dissertation committee, I have implemented historical methodologies that are less in-depth with my stories and I clearly understand these stories will change over time.

Chapter 4 Composites of African-centered Experiences

After graduating from Tougaloo College, instead of going to graduate school to further my studies in economics, I decided to move to St. Louis and start serving as a substitute teacher in the St. Louis Public School system. The St. Louis Public School System is where I started teaching young people about the history of black people and inspiring some students and educators to change their lives so that they could change their community. My experience as a substitute teacher was challenging, traveling to various schools where teachers, in many middle and high schools, did not respect anyone that was not a part of the school family. After substituting for a year, I found a more permanent job as a full-time teaching assistant in an elementary setting, which created a stable relationship for me to learn more about teaching in the school system. One day, while I was attending a professional development meeting in the St. Louis Public School district, I met a gentleman at Harris Stowe State University, who helped me acquire a tuition free certification to work in an urban district.

This meeting afforded me an educational advancement and books toward certification to be a certified teacher in the city of St. Louis for the next five years. Most importantly, the program at Harris Stowe State University, run by Armetta Whitmore, introduced me to many other candidates who wanted to teach in the St. Louis Public Schools. It was then that I started to meet many people who really wanted to have an impact on children by sharing knowledge to our youth of the history and culture of African culture across the world. To elaborate, it was then that I started to align with the views of Hilliard (1998) who acknowledged that to reawaken the African mind, we must ensure that the goal of our educational and socialization processes is to understand and

live up to the principle of MAAT. MAAT is a Kemetic (Ancient Egyptian) term that represents the singular whole for the concepts of truth, justice, order, righteousness, balance, reciprocity, and harmony. Ancient African socialization processes show us that communities can function and be productive when everyone, young and old, has a sense of purpose and value that contributes to the community's well-being. The principle of MAAT provides one such approach that African people can follow. One sees "justice" in ancient Egyptian culture as the idea of MAAT, who is seen as a goddess who would maintain order, harmony, righteousness, and truth (Ferguson, 2015).

After finally becoming certified as a teacher in the state of Missouri to teach middle school and high school students, I found a job in an alternative school setting and initiated creative ways to integrate African history and culture into my classroom instruction. As I expected from staff and my classroom students, there was a little resistance from administrators at the high school level, but when teachers and administrators noticed the attention my classroom students gave me for teaching them about their history and culture, many of them began to embrace a new type of thinking that they were not used to getting in instruction. Integrating African-centered concepts in my classroom curbed the oppositional attitudes of many of my most behaviorally challenging students. Also, by having African-centered advocates come into the schools to mentor my students and to provide ongoing conversations that helped students and teachers connect to their culture, my students began to understand, appreciate, and relate to how other people of African descent had to struggle to improve their own lives and the lives of their families and their community.

At this time, I also started my administrative Urban Leaders Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis under the leadership of Dr. Lynn Beckwith and Dr. John Ingram, who helped me develop a more refined approach to support student behavior and academics. During my first administrative assignment at a Northside Middle School in St. Louis City it was very difficult to teach African-centered concepts because of a lack of administrative and community support. Given these experiences in a new school as an administrator, there was a lot of push back from the students, parents, teachers, and community because there was a lack of trust in African American male leadership in this small Northside St. Louis community. Dr. Maulana Karenga (1993) informs us that black history involves struggle against exploitation and oppression. At some point, a struggle for self-definition and self-realization emerges:

“...the human character is often prone toward acquiescing to or tolerant of the immediate. But antiquity is made when people cooperatively and personally breakdown beyond the existing notion of self and discriminate between actuality, that which is; potentiality, that which can be; and reality, that which must be and becomes when a person, people, society or thing realizes itself, i.e., fulfills its essential ability” (p. 74; emphasis added).

After self-reflecting on this experience at the middle school level, I realize that my transition from high school was very challenging. Dealing with the transition into somewhat different systemic processes, and the daily challenges of middle school students, this experience trained me to be a new administrator that developed a strong foundation for that community to implement concepts.

My position at the new school had huge implications on the implementation of new ideas and concepts to a community that had been severely damaged by the lingering impacts of slavery, which I will demonstrate. During my leadership experience at Fresh Start Academy, a high school dropout recovery program for city students, I welcomed the opportunity to start integrating African-centered concepts in the classroom to reach African American students. Fresh Start Academy is a small high school designed as an optional model for students who have struggled in traditional high school settings. Therefore, Fresh Start Academy allowed teachers to teach from a nontraditional perspective that embraces learning elements of African-centered educational information that motivated students from dropping out of school. These radical approaches included multiple weekly meetings with students, relevant lectures from community leaders, African-centered texts, volunteering in the community, and creative ways to map their schedule for learning. For the first time in my career, students and staff were engaged in a higher level of consciousness that prepares them to think more before making decisions that impact their future. Our vision was to not only teach children skills, but to raise the level of knowledge about their identity, purpose, and directions in this society. For students, the thought of entering Fresh Start Academy helped them remove a fear of not getting a quality education and not being a positive influence for themselves and their families. Fresh Start Academy laid the foundation for Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Academy pathway to developing a passion to illustrate that there must be something in place to help not only people of African descent, but also that the entire world needs to learn about the experience of African people around the world.

Fresh Start Academy was strongly supported by grassroots community organizations of citizens from the Ville Collaborative neighborhood, politicians, and activists like Better Family Life wanted St. Louis Public Schools to take a risk to save African American students who had dropped out of school. Sam Moore, a council member for the city of St. Louis and state representative at the time, state senator Jamilah Nasheed, were huge advocates for Fresh Start Academy for ensuring that school buildings remain open in the historical Ville neighborhood. Across the street from Fresh Start Academy is the first black high school west of the Mississippi River in the 1800s called Sumner High School. St. Louis City government recognized the Ville in the early 1900s, and it became one of the few areas of St. Louis where African-Americans could own property, and by the 1920's and 30's the Ville became the place to live for black culture in St. Louis. Today, the Ville Community leaders continue to work as a collaborative to bring back the unity of African Americans working together to build strong institutions to support the community. The experience of hiring teachers to work with students that no one wanted to teach afforded me an opportunity to launch campaigns to obtain resources for these students who later had testimonies about learning more about their history and culture while attending Fresh Start Academy than at any other school. There was nothing greater at that time than to collaborate with students, leaders, politicians, alumni, and valued stakeholders in a community with a rich history of success of African Americans that fought to make things better for their community.

One day while we were having a routine meeting at central office someone mentioned to me that there was going to be an African-centered School in the St. Louis

Public Schools and I became inspired immediately after hearing about this. I spoke to the superintendent about my interest in supporting him in this endeavor and he recommended that I join a committee to learn more and research how this can benefit the district. The information that we acquired about African-centered education made a lot of us nervous, being that it can be controversial. The concept was sent to the Board of Education for approval. It was approved and we have not looked backwards since. Immediately after recruiting and developing support groups for our new theme, I recommended that it would be good to get someone to run the African-centered School because I did not have elementary experience to know what to look for in elementary classrooms. After deep discussions with the superintendent and his recommendations, he thought that it would be a good idea for me to run the new school, and I reluctantly accepted the position and started getting more information needed to start promoting the new school.

It was the experience that I had at Fresh Start Academy that prompted me to collaborate with the community towards bringing an African approach to public schools in the city of St. Louis. I had often studied an African-centered School in Kansas City Public Schools called J.S Chick Shule, who started a great legacy in Missouri, who had great success in developing strong academic and cultural norms for their school. The Christian Monitor (2008) states, “Chick Shule’s success is measured not only by test scores that are above the statewide average, but also by students learning to see themselves as leaders, entrepreneurs, and contributors to the community”. Just to be clear, The African-centered approach, like many school-reform efforts, focuses on various themes, relies largely on family involvement, and developing curriculum and teaching skills to bring out students' strengths. This was the same approach Bertha

Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy @ Cole used to motivate the community to get involved. Many of the elders who supported the African-centered concepts to be implemented in St. Louis complained to me that they met a lot of resistance in St. Louis and felt thrilled that there was an opportunity to live to see this happening in the city of St. Louis. The Christian Monitor (2008) further highlights:

“One recent example of how Chick has reversed the oft-cited achievement gap between white and black students: On the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) fourth-grade math test in 2005, 48 percent of Chick students scored at the proficient or advanced level. Statewide, only 24 percent of black students and 36 percent of white students scored that high.”

A very important part that I would like to discuss in the introduction was established in 1988, 24 years ago. J.S. Chick Shule, the first African-centered public school in Kansas City, Missouri’s public-school system serving 350 students K-12 motivated our school to model after their school. J.S. Chick Shule and the community behind it were the inspiration for our school to learn from their unique design and develop a system of strong pride and academic excellence for all our students. Repeatedly, one would hear people of African descent saying that this can never be done in St. Louis, but we knew that we can be successful in the public-school system. In addition to all the culture and history of J.S. Chick Shule, their academic and cultural success was a critical part of acquiring motivated and experienced teachers to work in our school. In the early nineties, other school districts across the country used J.S. Chick Shule as a model to create a climate of cultural and academic success for students of African descent. This success inspired many elders in the community to collaborate with

the St. Louis Board of Education and superintendent to bring African-centered Education to the city of St. Louis. Bertha Knox Gilkey, a strong proponent of African-centered education, coordinated our district to bring this concept to the St. Louis Public Schools. I remember years prior to becoming a teacher in St. Louis public schools, Mrs. Bertha Knox Gilkey would hire African cultural groups to perform for people who lived in affordable housing communities. I was one of those drummers and dancers that performed for her and was motivated by seeing someone bring African culture to her community.

The Dream of Integrating a Liberating Concept to Save Students

As the leader of the African-centered school, the greatest challenge I faced was finding and developing teachers who had no experience implementing an African-centered curriculum or had never heard anything about African-centered education. This challenge led to reaching out of the community to start recruiting teachers who want to come and work in an African-centered education environment. In discussions of African-centered education, controversy has swirled around teachers who do not understand the importance of African-centered education, and believe that it is biased and possibly the result of a racist attitude towards white people. Some teachers of African descent I have worked with in urban areas have mentioned to me that if you teach beyond slavery, it can get “a little too black”. Basically, they want you to believe that people in Africa do not like African people in the United States. This is because the western educational system since 1492 until now taught African people in the United States that Africans sold other Africans to Europeans. Therefore, western education teaches students in school and church that their African ancestors turned their backs on their own people. The western

educational system continues to promote the idea that learning about Africa is not a good thing and that African Americans do not need to know about Africa to survive in this world today. Therefore, it is critical that there is an understanding of what an African-centered education means; the Council of Independent School defines African-centered education (2017) as:

as the means by which Afrikan culture -- including the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed to maintain and perpetuate it throughout the nation building process -- is developed and advanced through practice. Its aim, therefore, is to build commitment and competency within present and future generations to support the struggle for liberation and nationhood.

The purpose of African-centered education is to provide students with knowledge of history and culture from an African-centered perspective that will help them connect to their identity, purpose, and direction. These experiences created multiple opportunities for our school to start a mission of healing anew; to start educating adults “as well as students” about the healing effects of learning one’s history and culture.

It became apparent that many universities in the St. Louis region did not have connections with their communities to help support community needs. To combat this, we encouraged families from the city to enroll their students in a small school of 150 students. Therefore, the struggle of African American families during the 1960s to integrate African-centered education into public schools made the work a little bit easier to provide to district leaders historical evidence that a movement must take place to change the state of education. Lomotey (1992) further highlights that the focus on African-centered curricula has occurred partly because parents and educators are looking for new ways to improve the education of African American children. Mention is often made of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville (New York City) controversy of the 1960s. This

conflict, which ensued when African American parents and other community members sought local control of the public schools in their neighborhoods, was, in part, the outcry of African Americans for culturally relevant curricula for their children (Weusi, 1973). A culturally relevant curriculum would include not only ancient history and culture of African ancestors but would also recognize historical and present patterns of African culture throughout Africa. The school's mission was to start a campaign in the community to launch an education initiative to promote alternative learning environments in St. Louis public schools by doing something radical to inspire the community. Bertha Knox Gilkey, who was an African-American activist of tenant management of public housing properties, advocated with passion to bring an African-centered school to St. Louis that built systems of support for parents advocating for their children. After a few years of the school being named Pamoja at Cole Academy, the St. Louis Public Schools' Special Administration Board renamed it Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory at Cole Academy. Just like the 1960s, the community gained a voice by taking back their schools and developing a curriculum that was relevant to the needs of the community. Pamoja felt very confident that this community of people would embrace the African-centered concepts because of that community's history of promoting the integration of African history and culture into the school's curriculum. Many of the students who had attended Fresh Start Academy were very motivated through their experiences at the school to send their children to an environment where students learn the truth about themselves. Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy at Cole Elementary School needed a cadre of teachers that would work relentlessly to improve the lives of students academically and culturally.

Since the opening of Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy @ Cole Elementary School, the enrollment has grown significantly despite the competitive charter schools across the city of St. Louis. Parents often mentioned to me upon enrollment that they are looking for a curriculum that is not only rigorous but also rich with and cultural knowledge of their children's identity. During the first two years, Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy @ Cole Elementary School grew so fast that we were not able to hire teachers fast enough to accommodate classrooms. Despite some changes around district curriculum since the school opened its doors, the integration of African-centered knowledge and concepts has been very rewarding for students who would never have learned anything about the history and culture of Africa from a positive perspective.

Most students enrolling in our school come to Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy @ Cole Elementary School with a negative mindset about themselves and the continent of Africa until they see teachers, students, and other stakeholders who have developed a rich climate of respect for Africa and their elders. A culture of learning about Africa should not be limited to Bertha Knox, but should be made available to all students. If all schools were gaining the type of knowledge and information that we teach in our school, then I believe that there would be fewer statements describing African slaves as "immigrants" instead of telling people the horrible truth about slavery (Stack, 2017). Stack (2017) is describing a statement by Ben Carson, current secretary of Housing and Urban Development, which frustrated a lot of people by saying that African slaves were immigrants instead of slaves. When people of any race lack information about the African experience, it misinforms people about the

history of Africa. According to Rhodan (2017), another alarming statement made by Betty Devos, secretary of education, was highly criticized for using Historically Black Colleges and Universities as an example of “pioneers” of the school choice movement. The criticism centered around the failure to acknowledge that racism forces people of African descent to open their own schools with an African-centered approach to learning instead of trying to attend a white school that refuses to accept them. Therefore, it is critically important that knowledge and information about the history of African people before slavery is taught in all schools across that United States because then a more informed public could quickly challenge such erroneous statements. would be more because people would be more likely to challenge any statement. If leaders of the people lack information about the experiences of people they are leading, then we will continue to alienate the challenges and problems that continue to oppress African Americans in this society.

A great example of developing students into leaders comes from Marva Collin’s (Collins & Tamarkin,1982) philosophy saying if you give her any student, any class, any school, regardless of social economic status, and not allow anything to get in your way of teaching, student in urban areas will be successful. Despite ongoing low student performance in Chicago’s public-school system, Collins opened her own school and worked with students who would have ordinarily been failures in traditional public settings. It was the nontraditional approach of connecting to students to their history and culture and love of themselves and helped students become more successful in her school. An example of this approach would be training teachers to expand students thinking with positive images and stories of their ancestors to become successful despite

the conditions they are in (Collins,1982). Today, many school districts across the country are not working toward integrating positive reinforcement a national curriculum that is consistently ignoring the values of the students they serve. We must take control of our educational system and serve our students with culturally responsive pedagogy that meets their needs in the classroom.

Lomotey's (1992) article states that many have argued that academic achievement of many African American children across the country-- as measured by standardized achievement tests, suspension rates, special education placement rates, and dropout rates – has deteriorated considerably over the last 20 years. Several factors have been identified as contributing to this dilemma, including teacher attitudes (Fine,1991) and inadequate facilities (The Council of the Great City Schools, 1987).

As I reflect upon my experience as a student at University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), it appears that living in the United States can become a great place for anyone to live or it can become the worst place for someone to live. Working in education in the city of St. Louis' public-school system has taught me a lot about aligning resources to help urban communities move forward. When I speak about communities, I want to be clear that I live and work in a community of people of who care for the people living in them. However, there seems to be a huge systemic challenge around illuminating the impoverished conditions of some African American families in the city and their efforts to rise out of poverty. There is no coincidence that people of African descent have struggled to have a quality of life in the western part of the world outside of Africa during and post slavery. Blake (2014), states that there is strong historical evidence now that shows how white domination has been extremely organized, coordinated, intentional, and

supportive of oppressing African people so that there is no competition with their race. Evidence of one of many forms of oppression is revealed through a study focusing on housing discrimination. Professors at the University of Chicago and MIT sent 5,000 fictitious resumes in response to 1,300 help wanted ads. Each resume listed identical qualifications except for one variation -- some applicants had Anglo-sounding names such as "Brendan," while others had black-sounding names such as "Jamal." Applicants with Anglo-sounding names were 50% more likely to get calls for interviews than their black-sounding counterparts.

Many of my friends who have Muslim or African names complain to me all the time that they are being judged by whites because of their names. Some have even stated to me that they will not name their children African names because they do not want their children experiencing the same racist lifestyle they had to experience. It is critical to understand the trauma of any family who must suppress their identity and culture to fit into someone else's culture. No family or culture of people should have to experience such racism in their daily life because it creates trauma, stress, depression, and other challenges in the family. Ginwright (2016) highlights that we must view structural issues associated with racism such as poverty, unemployment, underfunded schools, incarceration, and lack of access to quality health care and poor-quality housing as the root causes of violence and trauma. Since the beginning of slavery in the United States, refusal to acknowledge the atrocity of slavery has been traumatizing to the world. If the United States plans to continue oppressing African people by ignoring African history and culture in public school curriculums, there is still a motivation from people of African descent to develop African-centered institutions like public schools as a

foundation to help students start thinking about healing their community. White institutions were to be able to oppress any type of organizational process to allow white dominate groups to analyze any system that threatens the dependency of people of African descent to feed, clothe, educate, medicate, and defend themselves. Asante (2006) claims that liberation for the African American completely from institutional White racial control in descriptions, philosophies, pressures, behaviors, and patterns will change the thinking of people of African descendants and inspire communities to build educational institutions for themselves. If power and resources are to be controlled by the status quo, then there must be systems of support in place to protect and maintain that order of control.

One important strategy that whites have used to marginalize people of African descent is to regulate their financing, family culture, reading materials, economic base, and select leadership members that represent white interest. A clear example of this control is that Bernie Sanders, a former candidate for the president of the United States, stated that for young people who have graduated high school or dropped out of high school, who are between the ages of 17 and 20, if they happen to be white, the unemployment rate is 33% (Singer, 2016). Singer (2016) continues to assert that if they are Hispanic, the unemployment rate is 36%. If they are African-American, the unemployment rate for young people is 51%. Winters (2016) claims racist systems of white domination continues alienate blacks from whites in this economy and from the broader social world, thereby producing divisions within the Black Sea. In other words, this idea reflects social conditions that prevent black Americans from completely "fitting" into the democratic polity. The following question remains with many people of all races,

“Many white people question why they can’t do things for themselves?” Many white people question why can’t they create their own shops instead coming into our communities causing problems? Many white people question why do they destroy their own community? Many white people question why can’t they get along with themselves? Many white people say that when we move out of the neighborhood, they continue to follow us like children following their parents. Nonetheless, it appears that people of African descent continue to move into white communities, but white people continue to move out of the community. Many white people question what is going on with this picture of black people following us when we move? Many white people question what can we do to get African Americans to understand that we do not like them attending our schools and living in our communities? Why do some white educators say that minority African American students (subgroups) bring down our test scores? In one of our classroom discussions, some of my white/Caucasian classmates stated many white schools districts do not want a lot of African American students in their schools because they have perform below state standards on state assessments. These questions are frameworks and ideas for this dissertation around helping students clearly that African-centered education must come from a community of African descent willing to the liberate of children of African descent to acquire basic skills from an African-centered perspective. In the past five years, our school has had one parent of African descent who made it clear she does not want her child learning anything about Africa. She feels African-centered education is not a good fit for her child because it is “too black.” When I prompted her to explain “too black” to me she replied, “there needs to be more diversity for her child in this school.” Although the school was 100% children of African descent

before the African theme came to Cole elementary, she felt that learning about African history and culture would be not be good for her child. This initiative by the School Administration Board (SAB) and the superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools, wanted this school to reflect the same type of thematic school that opened in Kansas City, Missouri in the early 80s. Since the opening of this school, hundreds of families have come to register in our school and it continues to increase enrollment and partnerships with the vision of the school. The support of the community has built artistic, mentoring, and rite of passage programs within the school that will help sustain the culture of the school. A pre-k through 8th grade St. Louis city school strives and works diligently to integrate the principles of the Nguzo Saba (2001) which teach traditional African values of most African societies in the diaspora. Developed by Dr. Karenga, the Nguzo Saba stand at the heart of the origin and meaning of Kwanzaa, for it is these values which are not only the building blocks for community, but also serve to reinforce and enhance them. The Nguzo Saba principles are ranked in the order of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Prep Academy at Cole uses these principles as a value system for developing school culture and climate for developing and reinforcing ancient African value systems of order and respect. If parents, teachers, staff, and students in the school community integrate these African cultural values in their lifestyle, I am confident that the culture and climate of our school system will change.

The course that I enrolled in at the University of Missouri-St. Louis with professor Davis in the fall of 2015 gave me the confidence to start writing and

researching about healing educational tools to liberate children of African descent. African-centered education is doing just that to help liberate African American children. Since the 60's, there have been strong attempts for African people in the United States to start developing schools that speak to the needs of African people and start a process of healing internally so that the pain and suffering that people of African descent have experienced, is not causing trauma on ourselves and other people. In the next chapter, respected authors and researchers will provide knowledge and information supporting educational approaches geared to solve our problems in the African American community. In spirit of Umoja (unity), people of African descent must struggle hard to work as a collective unit around the values of the Nguzo Saba because no other group will save people of African descent from the terrible conditions of this society. Therefore, the major part of this cultural movement is moving towards passion to learn more about one's history and culture so that an innovative spiritual awakening evolves in education. This evolvement in education should be a cultural awareness that reteaches ancient traditional African values and customs that have been taken from African people during slavery to heal the community. I agree with Winters (2016) that a unified vision of black peoplehood, by downplaying division, tension, and conflict, renders black history and experience more susceptible to being assimilated into neat, reassuring accounts of American history and progress.

But it is also important to remember that while Du Bois adopts a holistic notion of the folk in his description of the sorrow songs, he also troubles this notion by highlighting the traumas, dislocations, and gaps that mark black history, qualities that don't easily coincide with coherent, united notions of peoplehood and racial identity. The United

States of America educational systems worked diligently to ensure that people of African descent had no connection to learn their identity, history, language, culture, and land. If one studies the current public education system, there is no credit toward any person of African descent that built the United States of America. Students of all races need to learn a deeper, perspective of the history and culture of what people of African descent were doing before they were kidnapped into slavery and brought to foreign lands to work for free, and what life was like. What was life like for people of African descent before they learn how to speak European languages? They need to learn how this process only allowed room for their ancestors to survive and depend on western society instead of fighting against those systems that continue to oppress and repress the culture African people. Under this type of oppression, children in 2017 still are being forced to join ruthless street gangs in Chicago because our current educational systems, economic systems, broken families, depressed communities, underfunded schools, and poor healthcare have ignored teaching children of African descent about their history and utilizing their traditional culture that create solid solutions to heal their community. With culture and effective resources there will be an increasing degree identity, purpose and a clear sense of direction organized around identifying the greater needs of the entire community. Most African cultures round the world respond to cultural norms that support communities as a collective community instead of allowing communities to be divisive. The fourth principle (2001) of the Nguzo Saba, Ujima (collective work and responsibility), to make our sisters and brothers problems our problems and solve them together, is a common value system that people of African descent across Africa

integrated as a part of the culture has not been an integral part of the lives of people of African descent under the system of white domination.

4.1 Parent Stories

4.1.1 The Power of Parents In the School Community

According to Goss (2015), few studies identify evidence that parent and community involvement or ethnically sensitive methods have made noteworthy impacts the critical change in student behavior. Goss (2015) states, “school-to-prison pipeline research and scholarship point to a need for parent and community involvement in addressing school discipline policies and culturally sensitive approaches to reducing disparities in school discipline (p. 797).”

It was a quiet late morning during the July 2017 when a parent of an 8th grader called me to ask about her son transitioning to high school. She was concerned that he has now started making some delayed progress and wants him to attend a school that will help him start nurturing that talent that he has experienced at the school within the past five years. There were a lot of experiences shared by this parent, but she wanted the school to know that her son, the 8th grader is finally inspired to start educating the people in his family and community. She even describes how her son has told her that teachers did not know that he was listening to them, but he is a changed student and your school is credited for saving her son. Our son is now providing in depth lessons to the entire family and giving us information that we did not know, and he is very inspired. I was truly inspired that our school has spread to each family member in ways that has a huge impact on the family. The older brother, who experienced a few challenges during high school, recently graduated from high school, and is being coached culturally by his

younger brother who recently completed 8th grade at the school. The parent described another inspiring moment concerning her granddaughter, who also attends our school, and who experienced a young boy (near kindergarten age) on the playground bullying her by calling her names that degraded her dark skin. The grandmother told me that she was surprised that her granddaughter told the bullying on the playground, "thank you so much for calling me black." This demonstrates that granddaughter has now embraced her skin color as being positive and is happy with the culture of her ancestors due to her curriculum. She stated that this was the most amazing experience that she has ever seen. When a parent of an 8th grader, Ms. Jay, called me to ask that we should not ever let anyone think that we are not making an impact on these students, parents and community. She also explained that her son has made a huge impact on helping her love herself and what god made her. She further stated that she used to come into the building with wigs on and now I am wearing African locks because of my son. The parent continues to say, "I am wearing locks now because of my son telling me to love myself. At this point, the feeling of emotion is taking over me. She continued saying that she was educated by white private schools and they really made me feel that my skin is ugly and brainwashed me to not want to be black or have anything to do with being black. I am so happy that I sent my son to this school because I would not have been able to find myself. "Finally! Mwalimu Nichols, you all have not only saved my son, but you all have saved my entire family, including me. The more that our family discovers their history and culture, the better off we are going to be in this society, said by the parent." As I reflect on this conversation with this parent, I realize that this is further evidence that we are doing the right thing for our students. This is what we have been looking for in our

parents. Parents that are invested not just involved. Parents that struggle against the current educational system of oppression may not have all the answers now but see this process as a movement to liberate African children toward their own culture resulting in greater student success in academic achievement, leadership, and personal growth and development. Now that I have been in this role as principal for close to eight years, I know that parents at this level of development are the ones that will be able to go out to recruit other families to be a part of this movement.

4.1.2 Parents Looking for an Alternative

According to Goss (2015), education and the development of indigenous leadership remains a worthwhile pathway for people today to establish their communities and dismantle white dominated educational systems of oppression. Shapiro (2019) states in many parents would stop sending their child to other school outside of the community if school in their community would offer more Afrocentric options.

There are several employees who work for the district who have friends and family members who have a deep interest in sending their children to an African-centered school. When I receive calls from potential parents who are seeking a school that promotes African-centered pedagogy with a strong program in African history and culture, it is always a refreshing opportunity to introduce parents to the African-centered movement. One district employee stated that the reason they are interested in sending their child to our school is because they wanted their child in an environment that promotes resistance against the system of white domination and teaches African-centered history and culture. As I reflect on this story, many of the parents that brought their students to our school gained a lot of respect from colleagues in the building because

they had a choice to put their children in white schools but continued to place their child in our school because they believed in African-centered education. Parents at this level should be celebrated for investing their child in a new system of education that makes their child feel loved about being African. Also, I know that parents at this level of awareness are the ones that will be able to recruit other families to be a part of this movement.

4.1.3 Spiritual Connection

An assembly's ethnic legacy informs the communal histories and identities that lay the foundation of organizing work while complementing the value system (Goss, 2015). Culture regulates, ultimately, how active a group will be in approaching its essential objectives (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000).

My experience of spiritual connection is to capture opportunities that will help build trust with students, parents, and their community. When you are spiritually connecting to the students, it makes you obligated to ensure that you are giving their parents a voice and engaging them in leadership roles to promote African-centered education as the only education for people of African descent. Both parents and students are using each other to build an institution absent of western culture and ideas. There is a story from a female parent who recently enrolled her two daughters in our school because another female parent and daughter, friends of the female parent, always promoted that our school is a great school for their children to learn their history and culture. Sadly, both the female parent and her child tragically died in a car accident in February 2017 which inspired the other female parent to place her daughters in our school because it gave her and her daughters a sense of her a positive sense of identity

and culture. The female parent recognized that from prior conversations with the deceased parent that her daughter had not only grown academically, but also, the entire family experienced some cultural growth toward learning about their heritage and recognizing the importance of having African-centered pedagogy for children of African descent and their families.

Another communal support for parents was the partnership with an African American Greek Organization called Kappa Alpha Psi. One of the African American men of Kappa Alpha Psi is a strong supporter of African-centered education and is always at the forefront to ensure that this partnership with the school is ongoing. It was really motivating to see how African American men have come to adopt the school and support students and families with food, school supplies, and other resources to motivate families to keep their children in school. They have been out front to support African-centered education for students in the community because they feel that students learning about their history and culture in a school system is integral for their learning. One gentleman from the fraternity approached me and presented me with a flyer called “Breaking Through the Matrix: Unity Economic Revolution.” The organization called “New African Paradigm Study Group Lecture and Sabayet Inc” introduced Professor James Small and Dr. Bayyinah E. Bellow on August 19, 2017 to educate the community about economics. The gentleman further caught me by surprise to inform that he is active in the community, educating them about being independent and developing stability in the black community. He wanted me to know that he is collaborating with other African American organizations that promote the comfort of the community. More parents from our school are seeking resources beyond home and at school to ensure their communities support

improving the academic experiences of their children. If this concept of African-centered education is going to work, then it is imperative to partner with those agencies that will help you meet those needs of ensuring that families remove those barriers impacting them from loving themselves. This means that as principal, I clearly understood at the front end of this process that our school will not be able to liberate our students alone. There will need to be some serious partnerships put in place to take the pressure off the school family and to get culturally responsive partners/support partners involved right away.

An example used here shows how approaches of demonstrating and mentoring are observed as instruments customarily used by Africans to amplify spiritual cognizance that reinforces African morals, the treatment of God, nature, and knowledge delate inculcated in African-American youth (Long, 1992). *In one of my experiences there was nothing that we could do at the school level to reach this child, but the parent was able to connect us with stakeholders from a local black book store where adults from the neighborhood reached out to that student to share knowledge in the community setting. This black book store was a few blocks from this student's home and he would go there daily to talk to the people working there about his day in school. I would periodically drop in the store from time to time and see this student talking to the stakeholders about this student's behavior. This was a great example of connecting students to people in their community and allowing them to connect naturally instead of forcing African-centered education on them.*

4.1.4 Parent Support of Women in Leadership

An organization representing some parents reminded and informed parents of this nation's organizing history and how individual lives benefit greatly from collective

struggles of people with a communal past and culture (Goss, 2015). Goss (2015) explained the power of strong parent leadership by sharing about the commitment of two single female African America parents who helped develop a strong “village” not only for their children but for other children in their families and in the community. There was a consistent effort from both women who recognized the needs and challenges in the community as well as coordinated efforts to ensure the “village” is the foundation of the family.

While greeting parents during parent teacher conferences, one of our partners approached me to discuss a program lead by one of the elder female leaders in the community who was expected to garner thousands of women of African descent in the city of St. Louis within a few weeks. She was excited, explaining to me that the climate has changed. People in St. Louis are eager to be a part of something that will change the narrative of what is going on in the city. Initially, she asked if I could disperse flyers of the event to parents and teachers, but she did not have enough copies for the entire school. An hour later, the community partner had left the building to make copies to disperse to teachers that evening. It really helped me see that the community really seeks the support of our school to help educate our parents about what is going on in the community. It was not surprising to see that staff members really embraced supporting something that speaks to the African experience of the female and things that they can do to educate themselves and bring resources to the classroom. This also helped me realize that in the struggle to liberate African children toward their greatness, that the struggle to liberate African females is different in certain important aspects from the struggle of liberating African males. The stories that have been shared with me about young African

girls and mothers continuing to be raped, abused, and oppressed within developing communities, signals loudly that there is an immediate need for strong community involvement and leadership to heal and restore principles of Nguza Saba in this area. In this situation, deference should be given to the knowledge and wisdom of female leaders in the community who should lead this effort. It is important to consider that in the struggle to liberate our students, it is imperative that our female students have a differentiated approach that will model experiences differently from young black men. I have been told stories of some men who have dominated females and mistreated them in ways that are not good for rebuilding the African family. It was thrilling to know that many people are taking a variety of roles to have African liberation for our students at all levels.

4.1.5 Parents Promoting African-centered Pedagogy

Numerous Black parents supportive of African-centered public schools (such as at ACPS) are beginning to demand that the districts increase the kind of ethnically-centered and affirming experiences needed for their children in public school settings (Shockley & LeNiles, 2018).

One parent expressed to me the importance of sending her child to Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Academy this year (2018) because she is very comfortable sending her child to an environment that embraces their family culture and perspectives.

There were other parents in the school, whom I observed, that participated in cultivating relationships with African people in a collective quest to heal the African American community. Another parent with a child in the school makes it his goal to ensure that children are not just learning academics, music, and culture in the school, but also

learning how to connect in the community and find ways to solve problems in our community. These parents' children have grown so much that they are now consistently using creative opportunities for them to be a part of the collective community. There was one experience when a teacher of a different race was sent over to the school by central office to work in one of our lower grade positions who met a lot of resistance. Many parents were not concerned about the race of the teacher but complained about the culture that the new teacher was bringing to the school and classroom. This teacher refused to integrate culturally responsive books in the classroom and students and parents started to complain to me. I met with this teacher repeatedly to express my concerns and often explained cultural-responsive education concept to her, but she wanted to get out of the school immediately because she felt that the school was just "too black" for her to work in. This teacher was a very traditional teacher who lacked a lot of culturally responsive training on how to make her classroom setting more accountable. My greatest concern was not the teacher resisting the concepts but the idea of the school human resource department, knowing the theme of our school, refusing to follow any of the guidelines of our school curriculum. After speaking with the human resource person, they replied that our school should accept any teacher that is available, and you are no better than any other school. The person stated, "a school is a school and you should not complain." After receiving no cooperation from the human resource division, the parents were able to contact the superintendence and moved this teacher out of our building immediately. The idea of a someone that looks like you refusing to embrace their own culture and not supporting the very school that will help uplift the culture of the district was somewhat surprising.

4.1.6 Empowering Parent Training

Shockley & LeNiles (2018) assert that it takes courage to be honest with parents and to be willing to try to make parents and community comfortable about the decisions being made as a collective component of African-centered education.

I would like to discuss the story of the former parent support staff employee who was working to orient parents to the African-centered education approach by helping them attend parent orientations so that they could learn and understand more about the instructional goals and activities of the school. During these orientation sessions, parents were encouraged to partner with the school in support of their child's and other children's success. In addition to this responsibility, this parent support staff member also described how she, in her effort to encourage her own child's interest in cultural-relevant books, learned how to create books for African American children and how and to promote products to students in the school and children in the community. This parent further explained to me that she is working at our school because there is no school in our city that teaches students to struggle to learn their history and culture. She complained that one of the teachers rubbed her the wrong way and explained that she does not like working with this teacher most of the time but instead of concentrating on the negative, she focuses on the collective goal of how we are trying to bring all parties together to heal divisions so that everyone is on the same page. She made a strong statement about talking things out with the collective family instead of running from the problem. The fear of thinking that the other teacher will harm her child was out of her mind. Instead, she felt that the teacher should know how she feels and get more onboard with implementing the African-centered concepts while working with students. The parent

felt that the teacher is a good teacher but needed some support and lacked courage to align their character to African-centered behavior in the culture and climate of the classroom. Nonetheless, sometimes teachers do not want to let parents know that they lack knowledge and information about African culture but they may have a lot of valuable experience in the subject. This was an uplifting experience that teachers needed to hear because most teachers often hear parents complaining about them. I feel that there is a community of African parents what want schools that work to heal and build relationships in the African-centered perspective.

Students Building an African-centered Community

4.2.1 Connecting To Students Using African-centered Activities

Lewis et al. (2012) claim that sometimes racial uniqueness is utilized when describing group relationships shaped in dealing with societal oppression, while cultural uniqueness is most often associated with attaining and maintaining ethnic expressions, traditions, and language. Several teachers spoke to me afterwards to express to me that there needs to be more said to students to help them understand that the “high spirit” is only there to motivate them spiritually and be used in ancient traditional African cultural connection to remove the barriers to a good harvest and blessings to the community/family. Lewis et al. (2012) note that there is some research that suggests ethnic identity may also help buffer the negative effects of racial/ethnic discrimination for ethnic minority youth (Chavira & Phinney, 1991; Wakefield & Hudley, (2005) also consider ethnic identity as a protective factor against the negative effects of perceived discrimination regarding academic achievement of African American youth (Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006), p.263.

Cokley & Chapman (2008) claim that cultural distinctiveness to be circuitously related to academic accomplishment through academic self-concept.

The excitement again really triggered students to believe that life is full of love and community and to improve and be more kind to each other. On African School Harvest day, the sight of Caribbean food, clothing, jewelry, music, songs, and culture all captured my eye. It was amazing to see how all of this was pulled together for students to bring family and friends to an event that motivates the entire community. This was the most powerful event that we have ever had at our school. It was pure love of family and friends.

The African School Harvest Festival, one of the most profound experience at Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole Academy was the first annual harvest festival on a Saturday afternoon with students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders excited about the path of students learning the connection of seeing what hard work in school and home can do for you. The African Harvest Festival event which was created by two volunteers, sparked a lot of attention in the school. The two volunteers also did some creative painting around the school that flashed a new look of the African experience around the school. A former support staff member recently acquired dynamic artistic skills teaching students painting, sewing, drawing, and designing throughout the school. During each of our major events for our school, this Mwalimu (teacher-kiswahili) designed appropriate murals in many spaces in the gym. She always makes the mural appropriate for whatever season that takes place at the school. This former staff member and dedicated volunteer is always making outfits for the students and putting on shows for them. After an exciting week of various presentations, the “high spirit” (stilt walker) that comes once a year

during late October or early November, electrified staff and students. As students sit on the floor reading silently, a teacher who is organizing the entire event, opens one of the emergency doors of the gymnasium, signals the student drummers to start drumming on the drums, and signals the “stilt walker” to come into the gym and dance in front of staff and students. I would surround the “high spirit” so it would have a clear path to walk around the entire gym. The “stilt walker” walks around the gym to see various levels of students with some of them being afraid and many of them eager to run up and feel the arms and hands of the “high spirit” The energy of the gym is so high as parents come into the gym, they stop to pull out their phones to take memorable photos and join in thanking the school for such a great event. The comments of new teachers and students reference the fact that they have not ever seen anything like this in their life. All the sharing and joy that you see on people’s faces reveal that joy and happiness is taking place in this connection among students, parents and staff.

The next day, “Kumpo” another masqueraded figure used in many Caribbean and African societies, walked through the building with two drummers while students sat on the walls of the school. The presenter of masqueraded “Kumpo” explained that he was there to represent having to have a good harvest for the rest of the year with knowledge and wisdom from our ancestors. Our community learned great lessons of unity and respect for others. I feel that our school has created a culture that will provide students an outlet to start healing the community immediately. There had been small components of homecoming activities in the school previously, however, now seeing the culturally responsive connections of integrating the meaning of those festivities around the struggle to fight oppression and use the culture to heal challenging experiences made

me feel fantastic. There is nothing that can replace the idea of seeing the faces of students during the day when we are introducing culturally relevant approaches that inspire our students to become involved.

Cultural identity would have a constructive impact on African American youth's academic achievement due to positive, reaffirming ethnic socialization messages. This example emphasizes the critical need for student-centered, cultural-responsive education and the role it can play in disabling current and future discrimination (Eccles, Wong, and Peck, 2006).

Mwalimu, the teacher who organized the event, asked me what I thought, and I replied, "are you kidding me, sir? Upon my arrival, there were close to 80 people coming in and out of the parking lot of the school." Although it was a little cloudy, staff and teachers took time out of their schedule to volunteer, students performed, and parents volunteered to help and all were a part of the clapping to the beats of the songs and dancing at the event. Students were dressed in African clothing, wearing sweaters with the African symbols from the school, and painting murals on walls. There was a bounce house for little children, a stage for entertainers, a table to expose students to planting for a harvest for the fall, a Caribbean food table, percussion and brass bands, and many other vendors that helped to create a blended festive atmosphere for all of us. One of the teachers who co organized the event, performed with a brass band on stage, and pulled a lot of students, parents, and teachers to the front of the stage with magnetic sounds from New Orleans. The music was not only hypnotic, but difficult for anyone to fight against the smooth rhythms moving through your body. I was moving around in my chair until one of the stakeholders came over to me and pulled me up to the floor to dance. After

going to the floor, a close relative of mine followed and it was all history after that. I encouraged other teachers, parents, and friends to come out and show their love of dance as one family. It was a powerful experience to make all of us laugh and come closer together as a unit. This event provided a great pathway for students in the school to find creative ways to solve problems by integrating African customs and celebrations with their family members, their school family, and members of the community. The laughter was so powerful that everyone was talking about planning for the next festival in 2018. They are already looking forward to the next school year of festivals.

Unfortunately, despite the many positive results realized by students, parents, and the community from the existence of African-centered schools, many Afrocentric schools are still struggling to afford an education for African American students to help them consider their ethos and to learn analytical skills useful in solving problems in their community (Shockley & Burbank, 2015).

In addition to this festival, the African Fashion Show is an experience at Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy that caused students and teachers to start embracing not only African features but also, changing the style of clothing being worn daily by students. Teachers and students would wear multiple styles of clothing endemic to various countries throughout Africa during the annual fashion shows that we have at our school. These fashion shows are very engaging for both teachers and students. Upon entering the gym, you would find a t-shape stage at the top of the gym floor with lights all over with a huge background of African art in the background. On the left side of the stage, a group of students were sitting down with instruments playing live music before and during transitions throughout the stage floor. The room was nearly dark with a

student at the front of the stage pointing a light at students as they came out on stage. The audience of parents, teachers, and students screamed as individual students came out of the background with the most creative African print outfits in the school. I was amazed to see that creative things will automatically come out of students, teachers, and stakeholders if you craft the environment that you want them to have in their community. It is my intention to support teachers in helping to use these programs and activities to start socializing our students every chance we get. I believe that if teachers/staff had the capacity to do it, it would have already been done nor should you expect teachers to do it if you have not taught them.

For this reason, it is important to consider interventions with cultural socialization messages that can help foster higher levels of ethnic identity among African American youth (Lewis et al., 2012). Some outfits are donated to the school and some are made by staff members who are very motivated to encourage students to wear African clothing. The power of these fashion shows promoted dignity and confidence in themselves that students will never see in a traditional setting. Studies clearly indicate noteworthy effects of the younger students who were exposed to African-centered pedagogy and philosophy early in life (Shockley & Burbanks, 2015).

Students 4.2.2 Reflective Experiences of Elementary, Middle, and High School

High School Student #1

A plethora of knowledge noted by the authors claim that African-centered emancipatory education literally means “Freedom Education” and refers to a process of preparation that releases Black people from racist philosophies and social institutions in modern-day society (Lewis et al., 2012).

Many of our former students are always coming back to the school to visit because of our African traditions we hold for the community. The connections that we make with students encourage their parents to ensure that their younger siblings are coming to our school to connect with our culture. Former students of our school were captured in the hallway this school year, and I asked them about the impact of the African-themed experience at Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Academy @ Cole on the high school life and beyond and the male student replied that they have never gotten the African experience at the high school level. I do understand that this was not a surprise for me especially since I have worked at the high school level for years and observed the curriculum does not address the culture and history African people. In the current system of education, African culture is included in the textbooks but it only provides a small snapshot of the culture of African people before slavery. It has been frustrating to see multiple teachers at the high school level that do not understand or really embrace the idea that African culture is not being taught in public schools. If a teacher does not possess the passion, struggle, and resistance of the oppressive system of education, then students will never have the source of knowledge and energy necessary to change traditional education to include significant cultural-responsive pedagogy. Our students of African descent need teachers who want to resist the status quo and teachers who want to change how education should be taught in this society.

High School Student #2:

One goal of an African-centered emancipatory education includes connecting African American culture with Africa through the introduction and permeating of

Afrocentric ethnic approaches and ethnic socialization communications into syllabuses and daily exercises (Lewis et al., 2012).

She started with her name as Kayla B and she used to go to Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja School and it helped her to realize about her history and culture and to see things differently and see other things like black people suffering from a racist culture. It helps her in knowing the difference in knowing her rights as well as how racism affected her life. Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja has also helped her to grow stronger in the community with black people especially after her experience in Ohio in a small town full of Caucasian people. She was happy to have had a life and the privilege to learn her culture when she was a Pamoja. However, when she was in class in Ohio, she asked her teacher a question about our history and culture the teacher would deny it or say that they will teach us that later. Throughout this female student's experience in this all white town, she explained to me that she never felt connected nor ever saw herself as a part of the school community. There were times when she explained that her self-esteem was able to maintain itself after knowing that her history and culture was something great instead being ignored in the dominant society. I really felt terrible for this student because she is only one of the thousands of students who leave urban areas to live in small white towns so that they can escape the vestiges of slavery, crime, low teaching expectations, minimal resources, and troubling students. Although this student was not happy about being ignored in this small town, there was a strong sense of feeling safe in the school but not safe in terms of trusting what white teachers were saying about African culture. She felt that white teachers felt a huge sense of dominance and superiority over

African people and she did not want to fight daily just to survive in an all-white environment.

High School Student #3

Potts (2003), who conducted student evaluations at the Benjamin E. Mays Institute, an emancipatory schooling program at a public middle school in Connecticut, found that the GPAs of students attending the Benjamin Mayes Institute were higher and had advanced scores on the Connecticut Mastery Test compared to the national average of students' scores throughout the United States.

This student's name is Ismaha and he was in the first 8th grade promotion class of 2013. He was not sure his experience after leaving Pamoja has been different because his first couple years of high school were without any black history. They were not teaching us what we learn at Bertha Gilkey Pamoja. Teachers are different, they are telling us stuff that we didn't learn such as Adam and Eve, considered white, were the first people on the planet. It was kind a hard for him to grasp this history because he learned real stuff from our school and they will teach me fake stuff there. The white teachers were telling us that the first people on the land were Indians and not Africans. I remember his saying that they were just telling us everything wrong and when it's his time to talk and his right hand was up in the air so he could tell the teacher and students the right answer, they would not call on him because they did not like what he was going to say to the class. What I have understood about many of the high schools that students attend after graduating from our school is that there is a lack of interest from administrators, teachers, and staff to promote cultural awareness for African American students. I feel that if our students are given the opportunity to build on African-centered perspectives at

the higher level, I believe many of the challenges impacting our communities will embrace younger leaders of change. As I reflect in one conversation with a student, he felt that learning about Africa was just an elementary and middle school experience that will not fit well at the high school level.”

High School Student # 4

One of the few studies that investigated the effects of an after-school-based culturally relevant intervention on African American adolescent girls found that this culturally relevant intervention had a significant and positive impact on their ethnic identity (Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo (2008).

Another student who was asked about her experience of learning about her history and culture explained that leaving Pamoja was very difficult for her especially when she began going to high school. Her experience learning an African-centered curriculum and participating in an afterschool rite of passage program really helped her learn about her history and culture. She immediately understood being away at a large high school was very different. She was learning more stuff beside our African culture and felt that her culture was being ignored by whites and other people who look like them. She says that she thinks about our school a lot when you think about “Black Lives Matter” all over the city. She thinks about the school because it helped her see things that she could not see before. After our students complete their middle school experience with us, we try to follow them to see how they are doing in society. In this instance, the community of stakeholders that worked with this student stepped up to ensure that this will be one of our star students who will return to our school to give back. I am happy to see this student was not afraid to challenge something because it comes from the

dominate culture but is willing to step outside of her comfort zone. I am pleased that students can see beyond the status quo and understand what is really going on and not to blame the community for their circumstances. Many of our students have always blamed their people, parents, and stakeholders for the circumstances of African people but knowing that we have made a huge connection to this student is an outstanding benefit and accomplishment for the student, our school and the community.

High School Student # 5

More research is desirable to understand the association between African-centered emancipatory public-school day interferences and cultural identity development particularly (Lewis et al., 2012).

This is another former student who recently graduated from high school who came back to visit the middle school. He said that high school was different and he must adjust to having little or no African American teachers in the school. Students from Africa were the only students on campus who understood the importance of learning your history and culture. One day, he and another student used a few Kiswahili words with each other and they got the African students' attention. All of them wanted to know what school they came from. Now, when he often speaks to students from Africa who speak Kiswahili, they automatically become enthralled that they can relate to someone in America who has taken time out of their schedule to learn their language and expand their knowledge of African culture. My former students saw that light in other students' eyes when they were able to connect to someone who was from a different environment (in this case, from the United States). These former Pamoja students were able to get that experience from Pamoja and no other place in this city. Connecting with students

and others from Africa, is a new passion for some Pamoja graduates. Hopefully, these students will one day recognize that they need to ensure that their children acquire an African-centered education or become a teacher in an African-centered school.

High School Student # 6

Researchers note that no western form of education will fully integrate African culture, history, heritage, present-day community needs, circumstances, and conditions within the African communities (Shockley & Burbank, 2015). Kambon (1992) discusses several abilities: (a) consciousness and acknowledgement of a collective African identity and heritage that African is not a country but a continent, (b) general philosophy and activity imports placed on African existence and liberation to understand that African very diverse with multiple languages, (c) specific action such as self-knowledge, African-centered values, and (d) a posture of firm struggle toward anti-African powers and intimidations to the continent of Africa.

This former male student wanted us to know that African-centered education helped him understand that we have adopted to a European culture. They said that we came from a slave culture. When I asked my teacher in high school about the history and culture of black people before slavery, then they explain how it was good for us to come to this country for a better life. They feel that they do not like black people and black people are bad people because they are out-of-control.

Students 4.2.3 Cultural Collective Student Kazi (work)

4.2.3.1 African Court for students

Innovative concepts are needed to understand the connection between African-centered emancipatory public-school day interventions and traditional individuality growth particularly (Lewis et al., 2012).

Typically, students that report fighting, bullying, and harassments to administration have traditionally been handled privately behind closed doors with the victim and the accused. In African tradition, we have tried a more restorative approach with the parents of both parties, teachers, and students in the entire classroom. After using this approach a few times, we have seen tremendous reduction in bullying amongst students. Students would state their claims against the person in front of their class and both will explain to the collective not knowing that there are always witnesses. After using this approach, students feel embarrassed and afraid that they may be singled out as being the “bad” person who is causing chaos in the school. Although we do not do this as much as we would like to, this is how all of the conflicts between students should be done. It takes a tremendous amount of time implementing this concept because it works for the entire school and family. Although some Eurocentric models work, many of them do not solve the challenges of African people inside and outside of school settings. I was moved to see this concept work on our school campus through the lives of the students, staff, parents, and stakeholders in our school. There were rich relationships built on that day with tears rolling down the eyes of parents, students, and staff. No one had ever experienced anything like that before and everyone was eager to do it again. Students felt that they were needed there to start talking about this process more because

they did not want to harm anyone anymore. I was amazed that this can be done in our school.

4.2.3.2 Kwanzaa Celebration

“Culturally pertinent” means an education will identify the knowledge of people of African parentage as well as draw from the cultural involvements and history of people of African origin (Shockley & Burbank, 2015).

The experience of attending a Kwanzaa program is amazing for students, parents, teachers, and families. Kwanzaa at our school is organized by teachers, parents, and stakeholders. One of our teachers and one of our staff partnered with the business community to show the community and parents the power of celebrating Kwanzaa through music, song and dance. That partnership allowed both our staff, parents, and stakeholders to utilize outside vendors at the building for free. The experience of seeing Watoto (children) dancing and participating in the fashion show was very powerful. The band from the school sang seven songs and celebrated the seven principles of Kwanzaa and accentuated what it means to integrate these values/principles in one’s daily life. There were teachers selling items to promote black business owners and a diverse community of people of African descent who brought in African cloth from all over different parts of African to sell to the community. Students from our school who participated in the fashion show wore clothing made by one of the former staff members from the school. Prior to this date, it was amazing to see our students performing on the news station to promote the value of learning and celebrating African culture in your home. Our students sang a total of four songs on the show and were able to clearly articulate why they were celebrating Kwanzaa and what the songs meant to them. It was

the first day of celebrating Kwanzaa 2017, December 26, where students came to the school at 7 pm under frigid conditions, to travel to the news station to promote the importance of celebrating Kwanzaa. A few weeks ago, one of our 8th graders conducted an interview on a local tv show discussing the importance of attending an African-themed school. She did a great job explaining the lessons she has learned from teachers and recognizing that our school made her who she is and challenged her to see things in life from a different perspective. To recognize that African culture did not start from slavery opened the student's eyes to see that it is a privilege to attend our school. Last year, around the spring time, a man who observed our student choir performing during our Kwanzaa celebration donated some funds to our school because he was highly impressed with young people eager to learn about African culture, as well as being impressed seeing an African-centered culture environment with students. For Kwanzaa, the tradition elders implement is to pour libation using a plant with soil and pouring water into it before any event at the school. As the elders explain, the libation calls out the names of those ancestors who are aligned with the values of fighting for black liberation and ensuring that the spirit of those ancestors is present with the event and beyond.

In 2017, I walked into a store and saw that same man, and he told me how impressed he was with what you all are trying to do to raise cultural awareness among black children in the community. . I would like to provide you with another donation this year because I told my wife that I have been blessed and I plan to bless a lot of people around me that really inspire me and make me feel better about who I am. He began to explain to me that he is working with a young man who served time in prison for being in a gang and other activities and later discovered that this young man that he has been

working with for ten years is a friend of mine and we know each other quite well. He later understood that the young man that he's talking about is also out there in the community trying to help raise awareness and help children develop better self-esteem and respect for each other by learning the history and culture of their ancestors and developing that in their character so that they can be successful in whatever skill they are passionate about.

Lewis et al. (2012) asserts one of the components of implementing African values involves learning about African past and ethnic values, as well as building collective activities based on antique African practices and rites and learning occasions that deal with guidance and social modification for African teenage students.

4.2.3.3 Rite of Passage Trip to Atlanta's Historically Black Colleges and Universities

During the second week of the October 2017, eight of our students had the opportunity to participate in the annual "Imani Rite of Passage" tour of black colleges in the city of Atlanta during October of 2017 school year. Rite of passage rituals were intended to rejoice in the spiritual and physical revolution and transitioning African youth from infancy to adulthood, from being single to marriage, and from life to afterlife (Long, 1992). Some of our volunteers, staff, and supporters traveled with the students to show how much support the rite of passage program held at our school. The tour of African American colleges throughout the United States shows the ongoing connection of how there should be a conditioning and cultural connection of higher education to education from the African experience in the United States. Each significant period of life in Africa was noticeable by a rite of passage indicating proficiency in a level of life (Long, 1992).

Urban youth not only got an African-centered experience in the Bertha Gilkey School but were also encouraged to make lifelong connections with a plethora of other students of African descent from all over the world. The excitement of some of the written letters from students will amaze you. One of the organizations that is implementing a rite of passage in our school planned a trip for students to travel to Washington D.C. to visit Howard University and then on to Virginia to visit Hampton University. It was through this experience that students were able to connect to other students of African descent learning to establish a brotherhood from each other and to extend that to explore other institutions started by African Americans. The Rite of Passage is planning a trip to Atlanta to visit Historical Black Colleges (HBCU)s that have made it their mission to maintain a proud cultural connection to students, families, and the community. This experience has inspired both students and teachers to be a part of this process to motivate students to have a strong sense of pride in themselves, family, and community.

Another empowering component used was equipping youth with applied methods through which they could positively alter their own lives and that of their societies (Lewis et al., 2012). The organizer and chair of the Rite of Passage is always determined to show students their self-worth and to let them know that they are valued in the community. Long (1992) asserts that rites-of-passage rituals indicate the deliberate cultivation of "spiritual qualities" that can facilitate appropriate decision-making and ordinary regulators to unconstructiveness among African-American youth as they face the present temptation to succumb to their antagonistic and discriminatory environment. One significant part of organizing this trip was that a parent of one of the female students was really worried about her child going out of town without her or another loving family

member but she decided to allow her to go because of the powerful relationship building that occurred between the leaders in the Rite of Passage and the families. Researchers note that African-centered education is an educational framework that exploits an ethical approach that is axiologically, epistemologically, and rationally ethnically relevant to students of African ancestry (Shockley & Burbank, 2015).

Teachers (Walimu) Stories

4.2.4 Integrating Healing Pedagogy and Curriculum/Activities Using the Nguzo Saba

A lady named Anna Julia Cooper recognized this balance as a purpose of the African way of thinking about complements, about more than five female and more than male beings, and about the way persons should function and conduct business in their lives (Hubbard, 2009).

The power of staff members doing something about building wealth in the community by developing a real business plan/practice, shows a level of building Ujamaa (cooperative economics) in the school and community. Every two weeks, teachers that elected to be a part of this process, know that \$120 paid by each teacher is given to the chairperson as payment in the collective. Twice a month, the name of one person will be pulled to get the entire \$1250 payment once a year. No one can collect a second payment until all in the group has taken a turn. This process has been a driving motivator for getting staff members involved and working together as a unit to show their potential to build wealth by supporting each other.

4.2.4.1 Walimu Kujichagulia (Teachers' Self-Determination)

Goss (2015) further explained that in this community tradition, the co-founders privileged the material and information among members of the public and made choices with them collectively.

Two teachers whom we have worked with over five years have been a true inspiration to not only students but staff and the entire community. Both teachers have followed the principles of the Nguzo Saba by taking these principles to more of an active engagement in the community. The principles of Ujima and Kujichagulia were critically important to both teachers, with whom I have developed a strong relationship, decided to open their own school. At the close of the year, these two teachers implemented their plan to open a school with an African-centered concept in their suburban community because they were inspired to work as a collective while they were working in Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole Academy. The idea of opening your own independent school is a very powerful endeavor to accomplish. One day, one of the teachers approached me to inform me that she had saved her money to open her own school. I said, "wow"! The idea of having someone that you have worked with, trained, built a relationship with made me proud that both teachers are now moving in a direction to build their own African-centered institution. Although we have lost two valuable teachers at our school, their school will be a partner school with our institution. Both of those teachers learned a lot from our school and we learned a lot from them which will help both schools build relationships with each other. Our teachers that have worked in our school have discussed with our council of elders and with other teachers about an African collective -- the idea of expanding African-centered concepts and getting

guidance on a path for them to be successful. Therefore, they talked to the collective unit of African-centered staff about their endeavor and we will start building from there.

4.2.4.2 Highly Qualified and African-centered Walimu (Teachers)

Asante systematically critiques the problems within the prevailing academic and cultural system while erecting an innovative set of standards and identifications based upon the renaissance of African historical and knowledgeable foundations (Asante, 2015).

There are consistent conversations amongst teachers, staff, and parents about not having enough teachers with an African-centered background to teach with an African-centered pedagogy. Some teachers at the school have mentioned that it has always been a concern of many researchers and African-centered scholars around the country of not being able to recruit teachers with an African-centered background. However, there is an opportunity to grow your own teachers, but the process and training can take a toll on other staff and students. Prior to opening Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja, teachers from the old staff mentioned to me that they would love to stay at the school and teach the new curriculum, but after keeping them on board and working with them an entire year, they complained about the work of integrating the culture with academics and struggled to integrate new ideas to improve their overall instruction. After they realized how much work and change was needed to develop competency as an African-centered pedagogy, all but one left. Many complained that it was just too, much to do and the capacity of a seasoned staff to assist and to train or work with these transitioning teachers was very limited due to a consistent decrease in enrollment and teachers and disenchantment with other changes going on in the district. One of the major concerns

from the district was the fact that the enrollment was dropping. Central Office had the student enrollment figure for Bertha Knox down to one hundred and forty students. There was also a very challenging staff to work with. Fortunately, however, once the word spread about the dilemma of our African-themed school, many of the grassroots organizations in the community reached out to me to help promote the school and its values in an effort to increase enrollment so that Bertha Knox-Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole School could stay open. Grassroots organizations such as the New African Paradigm Study Group and Sabayet Inc have been at the forefront of helping to increase community awareness of African-centered concepts, businesses, information, and activities. During the process of increasing enrollment at the school, another challenge surfaced - to recruit more teachers to work in the school, but there was no plan in place for administration and staff to accommodate new teachers. Therefore, classroom size increased. Trying to provide rebirth of students at the school with an increasing enrollment and not enough teachers to cover the increase in students, inadequate space and resources for students and some teachers needing assistance transitioning to African culture-relevant pedagogy. This was a new experience for all of us, some teachers started to complain about too many students in the building because classrooms were cramped. Some staff members wanted the middle school students to relocate to another building a few miles from the existing elementary school. However, there were no immediate solutions to moving the middle school students, but multiple staff members became creative and we were able to work things out collectively. Despite all the changes that have occurred at our school, some of my teachers have been guilty of complaining about not having enough students or having too many students. From a positive perspective, as the cofounder of Bertha

Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole, we started the school with less than one hundred and forty students and have grown over seven years to over four hundred students. In the larger picture, many schools were losing students but we were gaining students despite the charter school growth. Some teachers found time to complain during this period of rapid changes but later they discovered that their complaints were minor compared to the commendable growth and development of the school that occurred over the following seven years.

I would like to point out that despite the setbacks mentioned above, that as noted by Shockley & Burbank (2015), the critical agenda is to utilize this approach to provide a culturally relevant education to students of African descent.

4.2.4.3 African Cultural Knowledge Using Story Paintings on the Wall of the School

The African-centered method works because it applies a culturally appropriate education that not only addresses achievement but also the whole child that entails all the community, family, and home (Shockley & Burbank, 2015). There was a lot of humility, a lot of collaboration, a lot of bonding, and a lot of energy that has been invested in the legacy of this school. I would have been remiss if I did not allow the artist who created these living works on the walls to explain the impact the painting of walls has on himself and everyone in the school community.

While preparing for an important presentation for the superintendent of our school district, one of my most passionate teachers of arts reminded me that I needed to see all the work that they had completed upstairs on the third floor. I told him that I had not seen the paintings and his response was “I’m glad you did not see it over the weekend because today would be a good surprise for you.” He asked all the grade levels

to go to the third floor where they noticed all the great artwork that was being displayed on the wall. The wall was very colorful, engaging, and positive. The teacher organizes his wireless microphone with speakers that are placed in the middle of the hallway for students to hear him talk about each painting on the wall. All the teachers, volunteers, and students' parents were there to witness the power and energy of our school family. It was very thrilling to see how quiet everyone was when our music teacher, who coordinated all volunteers, explained each major piece of art on the wall, as well. Depicted on the wall are the struggles of African people and the values that students and teachers must uphold daily. All the student and staff volunteers gave their time and energy, as the music teacher explained, investing over 40 hours or more into painting that wall throughout the semester. The power of hearing students, faculty, community, stakeholders, and all participating in making sure that that wall was finished was a true testimony demonstrating Ujima in the school community. They wanted to remind students that our school is a pillar for them to understand that they can become anything they want if they can see it and believe it. These pictures and paintings on the wall will not be described to their full extent until you look at them and hear the stories of how students connect them to their life experiences. I was able to notice closer relationships amongst students and staff as well as observe the passion the volunteers brought to the school community. After they completed this painting, there was an overwhelming amount of pride and passion to do more and to recruit more people to invest in this concept. There was no way for me to have come up with this experience alone as an administrator but to start encouraging and capturing the strong talents of people around you that you can trust to get things done and collaborate with those that support your vision.

4.2.4.4 Ethos of Academic and Cultural Struggles

Struggle # 1

Delaney believed that whites relied upon antique dishonesty as a means of Subduing African people (Asante, 2015)

There was another story I remember when we first opened the school that relates the challenges and concerns of many teachers who taught at the school prior to my coming as the new principal. The concern was the reaction of some parents. It was explained to me that some parents will not be keeping their child in the school because they did not like the new theme of the school which they thought had become “too black” for their child. One of the staff members introduced me to a parent who expressed that she is concerned about being around black students who are only learning about black history and culture. She felt that the new school theme was a little too black for her children. Although their current school environment prior to my arrival was 100% black with only one hundred and forty students enrolled, She felt that the new school theme would take her students academically backwards. As I reflect on this, this is another parent that is a victim of self-hatred who does not believe that anything affiliated with African culture can help her child learn or grow because this parent feels that she is an American and not an African. This parent feels this way because of her education and not being exposed to anything about her culture and history in the world. It is because of this lack of identity, purpose and direction that this parent will continue to miseducation her child about African history and culture.

The primary statement in this method to education is that children of African descent should not be required to regulate to an education that is unstable for them and

their community, acquiesce to existing in a community flooded with drugs, or suppress their resentment at structures of oppression (Potts, 2003).

Struggle # 2

Potts (2003) claims that major contributors to these difficulties are recognized as reserve asymmetries, structures of domination, and the compulsory rupture with African cultural traditions and therapeutic resources. Therefore, the culture of African-centered education is considered the normal education for students of African descent other educational approaches like western education, will not be aligned with students of African descent.

Teacher turnover was a huge challenge in our school for many reasons. As many of the staff members and teachers expressed to me, integrating the African themed curriculum, culture, and traditions were a tall task for many of them. On top of that, some of the students with behavior challenges created a very difficult transition for teachers and new teachers coming into education. For some reason, some staff, parents, and stakeholders unconsciously held our school to unrealistic expectations that all the students in our building should embrace African-centered education well and demonstrate great behavior always because they are in an Africa-centered school. People in the school community would be surprised hearing of a student having a fight in our school. Many of the new, inexperienced teachers working in the school showed very little desire to learn about African culture. This created a lot of frustration and disrespect toward more veteran teachers who expressed to me that there was a lack of desire to learn and study what the movement of African-centered education is all about. The new teachers' lack of knowledge about African culture and history was not in alignment with

state curriculum requirements. This situation was compounded by reports that new teachers did not demonstrate that they were learning or very interested in learning the subject matter. It created a challenging culture of discipline in the classroom which resulted in some new teachers continually struggling with building African-centered relationships with students and other staff members.

Struggle # 3

Potts (2003), states that one underlying assumption in advocating a critical Africanist pedagogy for children of African descent is that affirming a child's African identity may be associated with beneficial health and sociopolitical outcomes (p.4).

I remember when we were opening the school during the fall of 2010-2011 school year, we discovered that some of the people working for our school district mentioned to me that they do not believe that a school like an African themed school should exist because it created division in the community and teaches students to hate white people. In the conversation, I expressed to them the importance of helping students reconnect with their history and culture will develop healing in not only within themselves, but also, develop a sense of love for the entire human race. It was further explained to this colleague that if students felt this sense pride and self-esteem in the community, then, I believe, the African Americans will have fewer challenging issues.

4.2.4.5 Professional Development

After the life of the community is in danger, African ceremonies are used to provide a sense of structure, which enables society members to address their problems in a positive manner (Long, 1992). Although the administrative staff are the ones

traditionally given the respect, in African culture, the elder in the room ensures that the protocol of culture is adhered to in deference to African ancient traditions (Potts, 2003).

In our professional development meetings, there are opportunities for staff to address some of their concerns to administration the African way without being concerned about retaliation in front of the staff and elders. It is up to staff to share their experience or concerns if they are comfortable with speaking and looking at a solution to heal. The protocol of all staff members is to develop ongoing solutions for challenges, work as a team, and together develop strategies to address or solve problems. As part of our culture in our professional development meetings, the elder (with responsibility) in the room is responsible for keeping order during conversations. If anyone in the meeting wants to speak, they must get permission from the elders to speak before saying anything to the collective.

This shows a tremendous amount of respect towards African cultural traditions. Ritual is emotionally strong and permits the productive release of potentially damaging tensions and emotions (Long, 1992).

Stakeholders advocating for African-centered education in public schools

4.2.5.1 Stakeholders building alliances and renaming school ceremony

The 1968 Ocean-Hill Brownsville experiment in Brooklyn, New York, was one of the initial organized mass efforts of African American and Latino parents to resolve their concerns about the lack of public schools' commitment to meeting the cultural needs of children of color, in general, and the lack of culture-responsive pedagogy and curriculum, more specifically, (Giddings, 2001). The impact of these parents' strong, persistent protests is now historical. In New York City, The New York City Board of Education

selected the Brooklyn community to examine the increasingly demanded community-controlled school districts (Giddings, 2001). The findings from this examination resulted in the establishment of community schools in New York City and in other cities throughout the United States of America including St. Louis, Missouri. The following story relates how the St. Louis community honored their strongest proponent of community-controlled schools with a stipulation for African culture-centered pedagogy and curriculum. Bertha Knox Gilkey made an indelible imprint on her community of the principle of Ujima by leading the community in a long battle for culturally-relevant education for students of African descent. Present and future benefits to students, parents, educators, and the community are incalculable.

It was after the death of Bertha Knox Gilkey, that Richard Gaines, Special Administration Board (SAB) member, announced that he would like to rename Pamoja @ Cole School to Bertha Knox Gilkey School because it was her idea to bring the culture-centered concept to St. Louis Public Schools. It was through his passion and dedication to ensure that her spirit lives on as an advocate for students, families, and rebuilding our communities with African culture, that renaming occurred during a rainy evening in the school's gymnasium with hundreds of people coming out to see the renaming of the school along with political, social, and administrative figures from throughout the city of St. Louis. The Gilkey family had just come in from the state of Alabama to witness this great occasion. There were African dance performances from the community, songs from students, and prayers from elders who embraced respect for Bertha Knox Gilkey's legacy as an advocate for families in low-income communities and parents that needed support. It was clear that there was a lot of respect for Bertha Gilkey's Legacy in the city of St.

Louis and the work that she has done for the people. As I recalled from the ceremony, the name of the school was named after Bertha Gilkey because of her experience of traveling from St. Louis to an African-centered school in Kansas City with a board member, the superintendent, and members of the National Black United Front. Bertha Knox Gilkey, an affiliate of the United Black Front, urged the board and the superintendent to bring this concept to the St. Louis Public Schools. He explains how they met a student at the school in Kansas City being one of the most respectful young men in a while. The courage and energy Bertha Gilkey had for the fight to get the school to come to St. Louis was a huge challenge for many years.

There were times that I remember as a young man performing as a drummer for a program run by Bertha Gilkey in the city of St. Louis. She would have us bring out the stilt walkers as part of the theme for the community as well as promote African dancing to energize the spirit of the community. I'd like to discuss that experience of fighting for the rights of people in the community which was inspired by Bertha Gilkey with women and men in the community who met at that local high school, worked diligently, and improved the lives of people in the community. Fellow teachers, friends, parents, relatives, and former and current students were all out fighting and walking to help change lives in the community. What inspired me most was to see one of our kindergarten students who had the courage to march and support her parents because they were all actively involved in the movement. In this movement, there were multiple actions parents have taken to change the face of education using protest, resistance, and active involvement in the educational process. As I reflect on this experience, I feel that the resistance of

western education was the catalyst for this process. This resistance frames the cultural context and tools needed to help liberate African children.

Giddings (2001) points out that in 1968 an objection on the part of parents and the community resulted in the beginning of an African American mass movement of community members articulating concern about their children's academic future. The outcome of this movement was confirmation that African American people, through informed, well-planned community action can successfully make positive changes in their institutions.

4.2.5.2 Some Community Resistance

Our school partnership strengthens each year of our existence notwithstanding the variance in goals between multicultural and Afrocentric education, the major issue of multicultural reform is being thoughtfully deliberated on school boards and has reinvigorated Afrocentric reformers to add their voices to this conversation (Giddings, 2001). The current movement for Afrocentric curriculum reorganization is to expand its benefits to more students of African descent. This presumes more widespread inclusion of culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on African history and culture. Multicultural curriculum reform, therefore, lends a new tenet for resistance. There is a viable concern that multiculturalism would dilute the original purpose of using African history and culture to improve the academic performance and personal development of students of African descent, many of whom now struggle with a traditional western curriculum that does not reflect their image, culture, or life experiences. Giddings (2001) in commenting on this situation, states that proponents of Afrocentric curriculum claim that the opposition to Afrocentric education germinates

from a determined mentality rooted in the historically traditional purpose of schools which is to maintain the status quo.

Therefore, I believe that the western system of education continues to support the idea that African culture is inferior to European culture. Which means people of African descent will not claim their own identity because of repercussions of insulting white people or not being fully accepted by western culture. It was also disheartening to hear one of the alumni of an African American high school in St. Louis say to me that these students in this school need to be learning how to speak English before they try to learn any language or culture about Africa. This level of brainwashing of elders has not only made it difficult to liberate students, but also hurts the overall struggle of connecting students to their entire African history around the world.

Before the name modification to Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory at Cole Elementary, the elementary school was called Cole Elementary. Many of the people in the community and former graduates were deeply concerned that “Cole’s” name would be removed from the school. Cole Elementary was named after an educator, activist, and leader in the African American community in St. Louis. This resistance occurred out of fear that they would no longer have their former school and would have no connection to the new school. We informed all alumni of Cole Elementary that the school would always have “Cole” in the name and the new names are just additions to the name in case the school moves to a new location. Once they understood that “Cole’s” name is a brand name forever, there was immediate buy in to the school’s concepts and adopting partnerships to be a part of ceremonies. Alumni from “Cole” Elementary would bring students gifts and provide support for transitioning to the next level. Their excitement

toward being involved in the school was clearly evident. It hurts my heart to see people who look like me continuing to resist their identity as if something is wrong with our history.

In Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk*, he spoke of an African American “double consciousness,” a “two-ness” of being “an American, a Negro: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” makes a clear point that it is very difficult to live in a society that has a history of not embracing your true identity (Bruce, 1992).

Jordan & Hernandez-Reif (2009) reflect on the stunning results of the self-identity experiment that was conducted by Clark and Clark in a (1947) study revealing that 67% of Black children preferred to play with White dolls, 59% chose the White doll as the nice doll, and 60% chose the White doll as having a nice color. Additionally, 59% chose the Black doll as being the one that looks bad (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009). Interestingly, overall, only 58% of Black children selected the Black doll as the one that looks like you (Hernandez-Reif, 2009).

Today our schools and administration continue to struggle with parents and students that refuse to bring dolls to class that look like them. As an African themed school, it was most disappointing to see teachers that lack a full understanding of the implications of this cultural westernization of students of African descent. Some teachers even brought in white dolls for some of their students to play with in class. Another disappointing experience was to hear parents complaining to me that they send their children to our school for an African-centered experience, but that some of our teachers

need help in fighting against a self-hating experience as adults who seemingly grew up exposed primarily to western culture and values.

4.2.5.3 Supporting Elders of the African-centered Community

Molefi Asante asserts that Afrocentric agency is seriously necessary seriously necessary in the repossession of rationality for African people throughout the diaspora (Asante, 2015). Giddings (2001) used a great example of teaching African-centered concepts by saying Afrocentric curriculum reformers seem to believe that such reform would alleviate the epidemic challenges that plague African American youth by providing a cultural base that reinforces such traditional values as collective accountability (p.9).

One example of this process of going beyond the school and reaching out to the community (collective accountability) idea from a former teacher at the school who wanted to start her own business. The idea of supporting elders in the community is the kind of work toward liberating African people to their greatness. Several of our elders in the community have decreased physically in health and there needs to be support systems in the community that will keep them from struggling for basic needs to live. “Return the Favor Homecare Services LLC” partnered with Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy in March 2017 to help elders in our community who need assistance with their health issues. I remember a general statement made by this stakeholder saying something like, “the principal of Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory Academy, Sean Nichols, asked me to speak to the staff to discuss my companies’ mission, goals and objectives. Many of the teachers agreed to pledge a financial monthly goal to help pay for home care for two elders in the African-centered community. We named this project “Africans Helping

Africans.” We also had two fundraisers to help with this initiative. Other members of our community have donated money as well. “Africans Helping Africans” started with two elders: one had a hip replacement and the other senior is battling breast cancer.” In the spirit of Ujima (collective work), this Afrocentric agency tries to make the collective vocation available to help to seniors wherever they are in the diaspora. Africans Helping Africans views the elder’s problems as problems of the community instead of allowing them to be on their own. Now we are working with four elders, one of which is ninety-three years old and still lives in her own home. My company decided to work with these elders because they were unable to qualify for Medicaid and were unable to get a home-care aide to help them. Another agency, “Return the Favor Homecare” allocates two to four hours of free home care per week for the elders. This company provides the following services: light housekeeping, meal preparation, clutter reduction, taking elders to doctor appointments and food pantries, grocery shopping, and medication reminders. The elders are happier. They feel appreciated and secure knowing that members of their community have their best interest at heart.

One day last spring, an elder stated that he was very impressed with the culture of our school environment and with our school’s outreach to the community. This is an example of how the African-centered culture in the school had a major impact on people in the community. Mentors and models from the community who were mature respected members of the African family and society (Long, 1992).

4.2.5.4 District interview

Giddings (2001) highlights how Leeds Middle School produced positive results from integrating an African-centered curriculum with concepts to liberate children of

African descent. To increase African cultural awareness in the school, the entire eighth-grade class at Leeds Middle School established an Afrocentric academy identified as the Songhai Empire, where each class is called a nation from the 15th- and 16th-century of West African civilization (Giddings, 2001). Many lessons can be learned by students using this model. Students can relate academic studies to the processes of nation building, international relations, studying and selecting or creating a system of governance, developing financial and educational systems, planning for community development and much more. This model has been running for 6 years and has now been adopted by other educators and schools. The eighth-grade curriculum at the Morris Leeds Middle School could also provide the structure necessary for observable, quantifiable research based on the Carpenter- Huffman, et al. 1974 research model (Giddings, 2001, p. 14).

What does this mean for Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja Preparatory School? This means that students will eventually leave Morris Leeds Middle School with an in-depth knowledge of and a strong appreciation for African-centered concepts and, therefore, that these graduates will have a major impact on society. If another school is using an African-centered curriculum in the diaspora, then it is essential that our school is in collaboration with this institution.

Our school district has always been supportive of school and community outreach to the public to spread the word about the various schools in our community. Our school has had many interviews with all media stations and with various community organizations to help people understand the rationale for the school, the history, and culture of the school. There has been a lot of success in developing a strong support

system composed of people from the community. The St. Louis Post dispatch interview article was very helpful to those seeking information and knowledge about the vision of the school and how the school would help heal the community. Parents, students, teachers, and administrators have conducted interviews with media and community groups to provide a plethora of perspectives of the African themed experience in St. Louis city. Given the history of St. Louis' racism and white domination, there were a lot of people who assumed that the African-themed school was going to be anti-white and teaching hate to students. It was explained that African culture does not promote hate, but love of self, and functions more towards creating greater accountability of self-development for Africans and African Americans anywhere in the world. If there is anyone collaborating to develop a liberating environment to promote love of self and love of other humans, then you can see that other people will benefit from these restorative concepts.

4.2.5.5 Teacher and Student Green Machine and Community of Harvest

People living in residences with zip codes just 10 miles away from our school community illustrate a health inequity that is alarming (Ferguson Commission, (2015, p.15). The commission report shows a wide disparity in the area of health and longevity between residents living in predominately-white communities and those living in predominately-black communities. While there are also significant disparities between these two zip codes in unemployment, poverty, and median household income, our school agreed to launch a program proposed by volunteers that would teach our students how to grow healthy, fresh food using an air water system inside our school. The goal of this ongoing program is to teach students a valuable skill used for growing fresh produce

indoors and to make healthy food available to students, parents, teachers and the community.

As volunteers gather yearly to talk to students about how they will use the plant systems to grow food inside the school each year, student passion for providing healthier foods for students, parents, teachers, and the community heightens. Students are also taught about how healthy eating can help heal the body and help maintain good health. These factor increase life expectancy (longevity).

The main volunteer reminded me of the yearly harvest that brings students and their families to eat all the food being grown inside of the school. Students maintaining the “air water systems” are responsible to picking the vegetables, coordinating the event, and preparing the food each year with other schools that participate in the program. In addition, our eighth graders have a luncheon held at the school each year which uses the vegetables from the water systems. It is the power of students growing their own food that motivates them to want to do more to heal their communities from poor eating habits.

4.2.5.6 The local book store

Jackson II & Hobb (2010) purport that the goals of African-centered institutions are to teach principles of Nguzo Saba to students from an African-centered educational framework so that collegiate students can go back to communities to build and inspire people who are dedicated and committed to improving African American communities and the world.

One of the greatest resources in the school community is the African-centered bookstore. This bookstore can be considered a grassroots books store that is connected to the face of the community. Multiple grassroots organizations frequently connect to this

local book store called Progressive Emporium because they believe in developing and sustaining systems of support for the African American community. Over multiple years, Progressive Emporium has hosted community health, economics, and musical events that have allowed Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja at Cole to meet and recruit parent volunteers from the community. During these events, parents can meet representatives of the school to talk about what an African-centered school environment looks like and how it functions. The partnerships that have been developed towards educating students from BKGP@C have helped parents and students tremendously by igniting students' interest in reading and learning more about their history/culture and spending lots of time at the store building relationships with grassroots people. BKGP@C prides itself in supporting black owned businesses and encouraging the community to buy from black owned businesses.

4.2.5.7 Howard University

A growing number of educators support Afrocentric institutions in their attempt to help students reinstate the African self in a vital and all-inclusive fashion and to help bring communities together (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010).

One day while sitting in my college classroom, other students and I were discussing people that would be on our dissertation committee, and I remembered a professor named Dr. Kmt Shockley, an African-centered scholar who spent some time working with the Congress of Independent Black Institutions. The Congress of Independent Black Institutions is a collaboration of private schools that promote African-centered education. While reviewing Dr. Kmt Shockley's resume, I decided to send him an email inviting him to be a part of my committee to support me in gathering

information about Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja @ Cole and to help me gather research and information that would deepen my understanding from an African-centered perspective. I was surprised that he emailed me back and mentioned that he would like to come to St. Louis to do some research on our African theme-based school. He mentioned to me that prior to accepting our offer to come to St. Louis, he was planning to select an African-centered school in the City of Chicago. However, in light of the height of the Ferguson disruptions in August of 2014, St. Louis was a good place for Dr. Shockley to invest his knowledge and skills in support the development of a new school program that could add to the expansion of African-centered education in this area and beyond.

Since its formal inception, Afrocentricity has had a tremendous effect on education, on social and civic institutions, and on cultural life in the United States, Africa, and throughout the African diaspora (Shockley, 2011). Afrocentrists have developed robust and complex theoretical and methodological frameworks that have subsequently resulted in Afrocentricity now holding a dominant position within the field of Africana Studies in higher educational institutions throughout the United States (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010, pg.5.).

The documentation capturing the African-centered experience of Dr. Shockley during his visit to our school in St. Louis has provided me with much information upon which to reflect. Dr. Shockley enlightened me about the movement of African-centered education in Washington D.C. and in other parts of the country. The lessons learned from this collaboration with Dr. Shockley and Howard University has challenged our school to look at things from a different perspective relative to how we teach our students and how we integrate community awareness using African-centered concepts. An

Afrocentric person with social knowledge benefits individuals inside the community, as well as fosters an environment of healing and, therefore, is properly understood as an important member in the community (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010).

As one can see, it is critical that students in urban school settings that are of African descent learn through an instructional approach that meets their needs of learning the culture and language of their ancestors. Elders of the recent past sought to affirm centuries-old African American ethics such as racial self-importance and self-respect. We struggle to impart to young people how to struggle against impressions of prerogative and redirect anger away from each other and toward total ineptitudes that crafted their displeasures and powered their distrust (McCoy, 2011). New elders feel that they have been given the responsibility to renew power and possibilities of our people (McCoy, 2011). McCoy (2011) further acknowledged that hope, and trust create prosperous and productive futures that strengthen family reunions, engage folks who have confirmed how to endure amid and despite judgement and institutional walls of failure (McCoy, 2011).

Chapter 5

“I was taught that Afrocentricity is a critique of all attempts on the part of Europeans to overreach their reality for some ideal universalism” (Asante, 2006, p. 662). The institution has transformed and so has the meaning of the village that was once limited to nothing more than a place for students to receive notification has become a place where there is a seat at the table for elders of the community to have a place in the school.

On January 5, 2018, there was a phone text sent to me from a community stakeholder at 4am in the morning reporting that one of my staff members, Mama Muymbi Bynum, the one who helped to open the school, passed away from a heart attack. This was devastating news to me and my family because not only did we know her well/see her often, but she was a long-time member of the African-centered movement. There were a few people in the community who explained that she was fine the day before. Those who saw her on that day, stated that she had expressed that she wanted to see the school involved in more Afrocentric activities that could engage staff members in professional development meetings. As I remember, in her last conversation with me, she said that other education is out there to heal our people, but that she had come on board to work at the school for African-centered education. Sometimes that place extends beyond the walls of the building and into various things that may be happening within the community. Within the community, I see students who graduate from high school and higher education who keep coming back and contributing their time and energy to rebuild the community. This allows greater opportunities for the adults, as well as the students and parents to learn about different approaches and strategies for

rebuilding and revitalizing their community. It was very amazing to see how people responded to the memorial of the staff member. One example is that many family members attending the memorial expressed how nice it was to receive an artifact from the ancestor given to anyone that attended the memorial. Mwalimu Bandulia, a Mwalimu at the school, showed the work that Myumbi Bynum put into the movement. She was of the African community and she remained affiliated with the African community. People appreciated who she was in terms of her character, dedication, and loving spirit. Although she never drove a car, she still managed to get a lot of the work done needed for the school and, she was able attend almost all liberating events. The life reception was well done with a lot of warmth in the room and laughter.

The Need for African-Centered Education

We live in this society of the United States that is constantly ignoring the issues around educating African children. A major court decision that was hard fought for and won at the level of the Supreme Court - Brown vs. the Board of Education - provided for equity in education for all students. However, the implementation of this Supreme Court order was sabotaged in many instances through the purposeful mismanagement and convoluted implementation of this new law at the state and local levels. The results of these state and local actions continued to divide students and not only terrorize African American students in the United States but also, destroyed the very communities where African American students lived. African American children that experienced transferring“bussing” to suburban communities to go to school talk about how these experiences were sometimes violent and they realized that attending schools with people

that do not know them and who continue to discriminate against them makes learning more difficult.

As the African Personality was being identified and developed in Africa, there was a growing movement for African Americans to start liberating themselves to freedom in the United States (Goggins, 2011). He further explained how this movement created a desire for African people to move away from European thinking and to connect with their own culture through education. The impact that the Brown vs Board of Education case had on the African American community is that it contributed to severely dismantling of the school systems in the African American communities across the United States based on the assumptions that white schools were better than black schools. Students that were recruited to attend schools in white communities were often those students that had the greatest skills socially, academically, and physically (athletes) from our schools. In Morris' (2009) text, he notes that "creaming" to recruit the best children to attend white schools leaves a gap in the black community. He further adds that when Black people departed from traditional integrationist ideology, according to Dawson, they often embraced elements of disillusioned liberalism, which maintained skepticism toward White people's true efforts to create a truly egalitarian schooling environment for Black children. At this point, there is no evidence that Brown vs Board of Education decision having positive implications for African American children or their communities. Therefore, it is critical that scholars believe proponents of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and African-centered education understand that the traditional educational system will not heal the challenges in our schools and community. Eurocentric education and concepts will not be able to equip African people with the knowledge and goal of

African-centered education that will help heal the challenges in their community. Therefore, it is critical that scholars at all levels support a plethora of research and experiences of student growth and development from all levels of education.

Summary of Autoethnography

Afrocentricity suggests that our main challenge as African people is our usually insensible adoption of the Western worldview and viewpoint and their attendant theoretical summaries (Mazama, 2001). Mazama (2001) asserts that our liberation and Afrocentricity struggles against displaced European culture while consciously working to replace them with ways that are connected to our own African cultural experience. Teachers and students were able to grow and learn together about African history and the culture of African people before slavery. Affiliates of a culture will recognize some defects by means of a review of their own ethnic presupposition (Verharen, 2000).

Despite many challenges implementing an African-centered curriculum in an urban setting, there are many achievements to celebrate at Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja at Cole. The adjustments made by staff to get all students on board was always challenging, but it was also fun. The greatest challenge was to remove the western views that students had been taught from other schools and parents. This source is saying that many people of African descent should collaborate with other African Americans that bring a different experience to the struggle of learning about their history and culture. My autoethnographies presented a custom-made interpretation of the benefits of an African-centered curriculum in an urban setting that created a strong sense of identity, purpose, and direction of learning for African American students. These rich experiences provide a thorough description of students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders who want to be

strong and positive agents of fundamental cultural structures and a different type of thinking. The intention was to demonstrate the power of an African-centered curriculum or pedagogy as you witness the lives of everyone involved in the school process. My autoethnography was designed to answer the question: What are the cultural benefits linked to the experiences and perceptions of students, staff, and parents attending and developing an African-centered environment in a preschool through eighth grade urban school setting? Afrocentric education, Africology, and culturally responsive pedagogy theoretically framed this autoethnography and contributed to integrating culture in teaching of students while learning traditional skilled education. These theoretical frames were from the foundation of core African values of ancient African and the Nguzo Saba. This autoethnography was a qualitative research approach that was used to collect data and the experiences of the school.

An autoethnography was used to conduct this project as well as utilizing a method of narrative writing that summonses and involves the reader into the cultural practices of the writer (Elli & Bochner, 2000). The literature analysis discussed African-centered educational frameworks and African-centered education and successfully implementations across the United States and beyond. I also examined literature on African-centered education as it relates to the culture of African American students and teachers building on experiences to heal the community. Finally, I examined the literature focused in an autoethnography and an expanding form of enquiry that expresses the importance of knowing your identity, purpose, and direction to a reader from the individual perspective of the researcher. This autoethnography was shown to contribute

to the frame of research where educators/practitioners are the scholars who transcribe about themselves and the important work involved in teaching.

Findings

The research inquiry which directed this autoethnography was to learn about the African-centered cultural benefits of students, staff, and parents while documenting the experiences and perceptions in an urban setting. My findings indicate that there are a lot of reflective benefits for students attending an African-centered school that creates experiences connecting students to their identity. This ethnography describes a plethora of experiences and practices that had a huge impact on the school environment and community. Reflecting on these rich experiences and practices in this urban school setting has allowed me to use the theories from Gloria Ladson-Billings, Molefi Asante, and Mwalimu Shujaa that provided the necessary research needed to support efforts to challenge the status quo and to promote African-centered education for students of African descent. These reflections allowed me to give an open space for everyone to see that attending an African-centered school will have a positive effect on students and will help to rebuild and heal their communities. Critical reflections of these stories helped me to understand clearly the path that will cherish the rich African experiences of students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders from an African-centered perspective. Multiple sources were utilized to support my reflections in these impactful conversations, observation of classrooms, journals, lesson plans, student observations, reminiscences, and my reflective thoughts. Reflections steered me to probe into my thoughts to recollect and designate how these experiences enabled me to engage the views of students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders. This autoethnography would not have been as comprehensive

without the thoughtful explanations from teachers, parents, students, and stakeholders collectively building this African-centered school community.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, a foundation for my autoethnography was provided by indicating that there was a strong need to develop more research about the benefits of developing African-centered schools to facilitate learning for students of African descent through the use of culture-responsive pedagogy. Reflective of the broadly accepted viewpoint of the important benefits of parental involvement in their child's education, culture-responsive education for African American students also prescribes the active involvement of parents as well as community collaboration and support. This cyclically beneficial relationship helps students, families, and also community as students give back by contributing their knowledge and skills to support community efforts. In addition, other research shows that students learn better when they are learning and using their own culture in the classroom. Therefore, Afrocentric curriculums must incorporate the role of the African-centered viewpoint that will allow African American students, parents, teachers, and community to be a self-governing center of African cultural interpretation (Verharen, 2000). No other education will provide the background that is necessary to start healing the African American community. "A community commitment sustains Africology centering the study of the African phenomena and events in the cultural voice of the composite African people" (Asante, 1990, p.12).

After careful analysis of this research, I described the experiences of students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders as a community of people restoring traditions of ancient Africa. The restoration of ancient African traditions will allow African people to

bring culture and order back into the families, communities, and nation. Once these principles of cultural order are back in place, people of African descent will see change in their community and African-centered schools will be the foundation of that change. I have recognized that African-centered curriculums promote inclusiveness of everyone in the community, and all challenges will be solved by the people in the community. This study showed me that there is a strong need to increase more funding in research to refine African-centered curriculum that will help African American students cope with their challenges (Asante, 2000). Africology proposes that liberation from European domination will result in a significant decline of the tension, anguish, misunderstanding, and displacement experienced by generations of people of African descent (Asante, 1990). The use of autoethnography afforded me a theoretical framework to develop a strong sense of identity, purpose, and direction to tell a story from an African-centered perspective. It also provided me with an unforgettable rich and rewarding experience. This was not an easy task, but if I had to do it all over again, I would jump in to do it.

Discussion

As I began my expedition teaching African-centered education in my classroom, I had no idea how to build an African-themed school outside of my classroom. Nonetheless, some African-centered experts from the African-centered school in Kansas City, Missouri allowed our school to visit their school and learn from them. The literature review provided research and knowledge that supported the need for culturally relevant pedagogy and African-centered education. The foundation of my research emerged from a book called “Afrocentricity” by Molefi Asante (1990). His book offered a framework from which my autoethnography could be clearly understood regarding the benefits for

students attending an African-centered school. Also, I engaged in various conversations, attended events, and collected numerous stories that helped provide examples of rich experiences that have occurred at this school and in the community, I was thrilled to find Afrocentricity because it helped me to more deeply understand how important it is for African American students to learn about and connect to their history and culture. Students learning about their identity and culture through an Africana syllabus are often inspired to transmit their cultural knowledge to others throughout their lives (Asante, 2000). However, African communal schooling needs funding to shelter these disciplines. Therefore, this generation and the next must be motivated to support this invaluable lifelong learning process (Asante,2000). When students are learning themselves in an African-centered curriculum, they see themselves in the curriculum as someone connected to their family members and their ancestors that look like them. After this wonderful experience, I cannot fathom mathematics teachers who teach students of African descent desiring to improve their teaching practices without knowing how to connect to their students. Critical reflections and reviewing their own teaching practices should be a major component of African-centered education before working with students of African descent. I think when teachers view themselves as liberating teachers to help students reclaim their ancestral heritage, they are more effective in not only changing their practices of teaching but also, helping students use mathematics as a tool to build and heal their communities. A quick example would be utilizing students to research ancient African mathematicians as well as bringing current black mathematicians to speak to your class and arranging for relevant class field trips.

Implications

The implications of my autoethnography are very powerful. To collect more stories about student learning in an environment that connects them to their language, culture, and history is a necessary approach to teach and reach African American students in urban areas. Despite a negative legacy of resistance to teaching African culture more extensively in American schools, African American students still have a strong desire to learn more about themselves and their cultural heritage. The fact that a rising number of African American students have heard about, have seen, and/or have experienced the multiple benefits of attending an African-centered school may plausibly be a major contributing factor for this phenomenon.

I selected this autoethnography because I saw the need to show the world the importance of giving African American students who have been deliberately denied their culture, an opportunity to connect with their culture. Therefore, I think parents, students, teachers, and stakeholders should start to record their experiences, voices, and ideas to add more impetus to developing African cultural themed education. Even though this method requires susceptibility and a great deal of persistence and patience, the students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders worked hard to build a strong of an African-centered school and community environment.

For this autoethnography, utilizing the theoretical frame to theorize my identity as an administrator has given me a wealth of knowledge and research that supports the systems to start healing African American students in the classroom. Toward this end, the Rites of Passage movement is engaged in the attempt to create no less than a new World African community (Okantah, 2016, p. 416). Bertha Knox Gilkey Pamoja

Preparatory at Cole can be a Rite of Passage for students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders because there is ongoing transformation of the school. From the research presented in this body of work, there is no doubt that there is a strong need for institutions to start teaching African American students about themselves and to start utilizing an African-centered curriculum that meets their needs to learn their history and culture. My autoethnography illustrates empowerment to teach students about their identity, purpose and direction toward helping students restore their community and heal as a community. My autoethnography has implications for shifting the thinking of educators, students, parents, and stakeholder to strongly desire using an African-themed curriculum that respects and connects them to their culture. My autoethnography also has implications for African-centered pedagogy being a deeply needed educational process for helping students of African descent fully understand their purpose in their race and culture. If students are not clear about their identity, then they will assimilate into the dominate culture (Woodson, 1990). The second implication deals with the greatest challenges for implementing an African-themed school that may occur during the beginning stages. However, teachers, parents, students, and stakeholders were able to thrive once the school was able to stabilize itself with the right type of teachers and staff. A last implication describes how the curriculum is aligned to Missouri state standards. The main goal is to integrate the African educational components with skills from the state curriculum. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a requirement for executing the African-centered curriculum components in my autoethnography. The traditional forms of knowledge, information, and skills have been aligned to an African-centered curriculum that reinforces the principles of the Nguzo Saba. In this traditional African way of life, parents

were accountable for raising their children and for positively completing the community level of their education as referenced in the proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child”, providing that the ethnic fabric is utilized that sustains the African communal concept (Okantah, 2016). The entire school reinforces the use of the Nguzo Saba as a measuring tool to help parents, students, teachers, and stakeholders participate collectively to ensure that there is ongoing success in the school environment.

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