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SBA (TEACHING, WISDOM, AND STUDY): AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED AN AFRICAN CENTERED SCHOOL.

By

Joyce Hafeeza Piert

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ABSTRACT

SBA (TEACHING, WISDOM, AND STUDY): AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED AN AFRICAN CENTERED SCHOOL

By

Joyce Hafeeza Piert

At various points within the history of America's public education, the nation has attempted to educate an increasingly diverse student population. It has been argued that almost since its inception, the nation's educational model has been utilized as a vehicle for sorting and maintaining a social structure of inequity (Carnoy, 1974; Bernstein, 1977; Giroux; 1983). Certainly not immune to this undergirding ideology, African Americans have engaged in an on-going struggle with the paternalistic European American perceptions of what constitutes an appropriate education for African people in America. This tension fueled the desire for agency and self-determination among African American communities and contributed to the rise of Black Nationalist and Pan Africanist ideology during the 19th and 20th centuries. Throughout historical moments within this nation, these ideologies have shaped the African American community's response to the un-kept promises of the American educational system.

In recent times, American public schools have demonstrated a clear inability to equitably instruct African American students. This inability has manifested in poor academic performance in public schools and this inability has fueled alarm within the African American community, which has contributed to dissatisfaction and frustration with the public schools. Consequently African American parents have sought viable alternatives for successfully educating African American students as manifested in the

African-centered educational movement. But what is an African centered education? In the body of literature that has accumulated, an African centered education has been defined in various ways, as a history supplement of African centered facts, as a curriculum immersion, and as a complete cultural and curriculum immersion within schools. Also, researchers have examined the implementation of this educational model in various settings, both private and public; and researchers have examined the academic outcomes of this implementation. However, there is a paucity of data on the experiences of young people who have experienced this educational model. In this study, the researcher explored the experiences of African American young people who have attended an African centered school. The findings of the study revealed that the educational experiences of these African American young people aligned substantially with the intended outcomes of the school's philosophy and purpose.

Dedicated to the Creator
--who purposed me for this task and sustained me through it
And to the ancestors who have come before me and prepared the way
For such a time as this
Also to my father, Oscar Mitchell (1932-2000)
And
To my mother, Deolar Aubrey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It helps to bring the spirits of other people into your life.
It gives you many more eyes to see and helps overcome limitations.
--Sobongu Some

I give praise to the Creator for this educational journey and acknowledge the ancestors who have prepared the way before me for this task. I acknowledge the spirits of Afrikan people throughout the Diaspora.

I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Christopher Dunbar, Jr., my dissertation committee chairperson, who was a constant inspiration throughout the dissertation process. I also express my gratitude for the encouragement of the members of my dissertation committee, Reitumese Mabokela, Susan Printy, and Francisco Villarruel.

My deepest gratitude goes to my best friend, Linda Frye, who endured my frustrations and doubts. She always provided me with words of encouragement and she added much needed humor to my life. Special thanks to Kefentse Chike, a friend who came into my life to stretch and challenge my thinking. Thanks and gratitude to Carl Robinson, a colleague who took the time to invest in my dissertation journey by reading my work and assisting in the refinement of my thinking on my research topic.

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CHAPTER I

Introspection

The Afrocentric research paradigm that I chose to employ in this study requires that the researcher undergoes *introspection* before entering into the research process. Similar to other research paradigms, the Afrocentric research paradigm requires the researcher to examine his/her philosophical stance which encompasses assumptions, biases, and beliefs concerning the phenomenon under study prior to engaging in the research process. The objective of this introspection is "to ascertain what obstacles exist to an Afrocentric method in the researcher's own mind" (Asante, 1990, p. 27). Through this process the researcher increases the likelihood that the research undertaken will be reliable and trustworthy.

I grew up during the turbulent sixties, a period when the issues of social injustice and inequalities were constantly in the news and on the forefront of everyone's mind. When I reflect back, I realize that in pre-puberty I was groomed in the struggle for social justice for African American people. At the age of twelve, I became a member of the Black Muslims. The Black Muslims was an African-American organization perceived by European Americans as threatening and militant, while perceived by African Americans as nationalist and self-determining. The Black Muslims operated independent schools and businesses in African American communities throughout the United States. In fact, at the age of seventeen, I became a teacher in one of the schools in central Michigan. The school endured for five years but experienced financial difficulties and closed down.

My experience as a teacher in that school had a tremendous impact upon my philosophy regarding the responsibility of African American people in providing education for their own children. Malcolm X, a former minister of the Black Muslim

movement once stated concerning the American education for African American people that "it is insanity to expect the oppressor to provide a liberating education to those they oppress. It is as insane as expecting the Germans to provide a liberating education to the Jews" (Malcolm X, 1996).

Years later, the struggle to get my own children through the American public school system was the vehicle that moved me towards this research. My son had to continue an additional year in school to graduate, and my daughter dropped out of school, eventually completing a GED. My children were raised in a middle-class setting, and both, their father and I were attending college during their childhood and adolescence. Education was promoted as the key to success, and our cultural values within the home were closely aligned with the values of the school. Yet, I could not convince my children that the education they received in the public schools was valuable to their future. They were rejecting the education of the public schools. When I looked around, I found so many of my African American neighbors, friends, and relatives in the same predicament with their children. What was going on? Why didn't these young people see the value in education?

As I attempted to navigate my children through the educational system, I became a volunteer parent at their school. In this capacity, I encountered some very uncaring teachers and administrators and realized that my children were not the only ones falling through the cracks. At this point, I decided to quit my job as a Maintenance supervisor with General Motors and complete my degree in Secondary Education.

While pursuing my undergraduate degree, a friend and I developed and coordinated a four-week summer program for urban children in grades 5 through 12. This program offered courses in Language Arts, Mathematics, and African American

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History. We were able to secure volunteer teachers for the program from the local university. Our program continued for five years. Student enrollment progressed from approximately 50 students to over 100 students and had a waiting list by the fifth year. We discovered that our students responded positively to the smaller class size, caring teachers, and instructions in African American history from an Afrocentric worldview. Many of our students demonstrated academic achievement by becoming honor roll students when they returned to public school.

Prior experiences with education, the summer program, the African centered curriculum movement, along with the charter school movement, nurtured the desire to create schools that would address the issues of African American children. Research on the issues of African American student achievement has attributed their school failure to cultural deficiency (e.g., lacking the cultural values needed to be successful in school) (Valentine, 1971) or cultural incongruence (e.g., having cultural values that do not align with the culture of the teachers and the school) (King, 1994). When examining the problem of the academic achievement of African American students from a Eurocentric worldview, I may draw these or similar conclusions. The problem is that the "minority" culture is unable to attain to the "dominant" culture's standards and norms. However, I propose looking at this problem from an Afrocentric worldview, which suggests that the public school system is culturally deficient for students of color or culturally incongruent from their students of color. I return to the statement that I heard in my earlier years by Malcolm X . . . . Perhaps he was on to something.

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Introduction and Overview

What purposes do Americans ascribe to schooling? Americans believe that schooling is the means to offer all children an equal opportunity to achieve economic success (Ballantine, 1997; Carnoy, 1974). According to the many theorists in the Sociology of Education (Ballantine, 1997; Mulkey, 1993; Bennett, 1990), the outcomes for schooling in America's public educational system are varied and overlapping but can be delineated as follows: 1) to provide students with the opportunity for intellectual acquisition of knowledge, 2) to produce future citizens for participation within society, 3) to prepare a labor force, and 4) to transmit the social and moral values for the perpetuation of American society. Some theorists have posited that education in America serves as a system of social and economic reproduction (Carnoy, 1974; Bernstein, 1977; Giroux; 1983). According to these theorists, schools do not promote "democracy, social mobility, and equality . . . they see the school as a mechanism that reproduces the values of the dominant social group" (Mulkey, 1993).

At different historical moments, Americans, as a whole, espoused one of the aforementioned purposes for education more intently than others, but for many in the Afrikan[1] American community, the purpose of education has always been understood as the key to upward mobility for their children. Historically, the Afrikan American community has diligently struggled to ensure that their children were provided educational opportunities. After the Civil War, this diligence manifested in the form of sacrifices and determination to create schools which would teach their children to read and write. This desire for schooling, which would pave the path for participation within

[1] The spelling of Afrika with a "k" represents the spelling in the Kiswahili language and is adopted from usage by the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) and this researcher chose to use this spelling of Afrika except when used in quotes throughout the rest of this document.

the American society with all the rights and privileges of first class citizenry, was in conflict with the interests of the capitalist elite of both the North and the South. The result of this conflict was a dual system of public education, particularly in the South, which was legitimated by law as separate but equal (Anderson, 1988). Separate but equal translated into dilapidated buildings, poor funding, and poorly qualified teachers for the Afrikan American community (DuBois, 1935).

For almost fifty years Afrikan Americans endured this disparate but legal system of public education for their children. In 1954, the Brown versus Board of Education decision declared that this dual system of education was, in fact, separate and unequal. This decision gave hope to the Afrikan American community that their children would receive a quality education and have opportunity to fully participate in acquiring the American dream through upward mobility. Today, fifty years later, Afrikan American parents are still frustrated with the inequitable education that the majority of their children are receiving within the American educational system. This frustration and disillusion with the public educational system has been the impetus for seeking alternative educational options for their children. One option that has emerged within the last several decades has been the adoption of an Afrikan centered educational model within public schools as an alternative means of educating Afrikan American children. What is an Afrikan centered educational model? An Afrikan centered educational model is one that provides students of Afrikan descent with an education that deconstructs the hegemonic influences of this society, promotes a positive self-concept, and acknowledges their cultural heritage (Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Theorists of an Afrikan centered educational model argue that this educational model will produce Afrikan American young people who demonstrate cultural awareness

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and positive self-concept (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Also, they will develop "the intellectual, moral, and emotional skills for accomplishing a productive and affirming life in this society" (Giddings, 2001, p. 463), as well as work to advance cultural pluralism with a focus on justice and equality (Akoto, 1992). However, some proponents assert that the fundamental purpose for an Afrikan centered education is nationbuilding (Akoto, 1992; Lomotey, 1992). According to Akoto (1992), "Nationbuilding is the conscious and focused application of our [Afrikan] people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours" (p. 3).

When theories supporting the purposes of an Afrikan centered educational model are contrasted with theories supporting the educational model of the traditional public school, there were obvious points of convergence and divergence. Both models intend to provide students with the opportunity to acquire intellectual knowledge, develop cognitive skills, and prepare young people for participation as citizens within society. However, the Afrikan centered educational outcomes of preparing workers for labor though murky are clear on specifying that Afrikan cultural norms and values will be transmitted to Afrikan children for the perpetuation of Afrikan sovereignty. Though multiple theories support the educational outcomes of an Afrikan centered educational model for Afrikan American children, research does not provide empirical evidence of the actual experiences of the young people who attended these academies. Given that an Afrikan centered educational model has both similar and different educational outcomes as public schools, some fundamental questions need to be considered regarding its impact upon young people and their lives. Are these outcomes for education so different that obstacles are created for young people to participate as productive citizens of the local,

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national and global society? Or does the educational experience provide young people with the needed tools and attitudes to negotiate mainstream culture, as well as provide tools for agency and self-determination?

Statement of the Problem

Historically, the American educational system has not effectively educated Afrikan American children and this failure to meet the academic needs of Afrikan Americans has been manifested in numerous ways. The majority of Afrikan American students continue to lag in educational achievement when compared to European American students. One noted example of this lag is that Afrikan American students' Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores in both verbal and mathematics are 100 points below that of European American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The high school drop-out rates for Afrikan American students are substantially higher than the drop-out rates for European American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Afrikan American students are more likely to be assigned to special education classes (Robinson, 2004) and lower level academic courses (Oakes, 1999; Hacker, 1992; Kershaw, 1992). Additionally, Afrikan American males are disproportionately expelled and suspended from schools more than their European American counterparts (Expose Racism and Advance School Excellence, 2001).

Some Afrikan American scholars, educators, and parents viewed these academic problems as dissonance with the Eurocentric hegemonic structure of the public school system (Ogbu, 1990; Fordham, 1988). Also, some researchers assert that these difficulties fuel the psychological and social deterioration of the psyche of many Afrikan American students and contribute to the diminution of their life chances (Akoto, 1994; Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1996, 2000). A myriad of solutions have been offered to

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alleviate the academic problems of Afrikan American students, such as Independent Black Institutions, Head Start programs, Rites-of-Passage programs, Upward Bound, alternative schools, charter schools, and even the immersion of Afrocentric curriculum into public schools (Dunbar, 2001; Ginwright, 1999; Hopkins, 1997; Irvine, 1990; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Lomotey, 1992). More recently, the immersion of the Afrikan centered educational model into the urban public schools has been perceived as recourse to continued Afrikan American student failure. The proponents of an Afrikan centered educational model believe that this model would not only increase Afrikan American student achievement but would also promote the student's self-esteem, provide a positive racial identity, and increase the life chances of Afrikan American students (Lee, 1994; Akoto, 1994; Asante, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

However, there is a paucity of research that reflects the impact of an Afrikan centered educational model upon self-esteem, racial identity, and life chances of Afrikan American young people. Specifically, there is no research that appropriates the voices of Afrikan American young people to glean insight from the experience of an Afrikan centered educational model. The lessons learned from these too often silenced voices of Afrikan American young people, their parents, and the school administrators of one Afrikan centered school in the Midwest can assist the educational community to refine its understanding of how to promote academic and life success for all students, specifically, Afrikan American students.

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Purpose of the Study

Within the last decade, researchers have evaluated the impact of an Afrikan centered educational experience upon Afrikan-American students' academic achievement (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ginwright, 1999, Biggins, 1999). Academic achievement is only one dimension for determining the effectiveness of this educational experience (Shujaa, 1992; Akoto, 1992). Additionally, the significance of an Afrikan centered education can be assessed by exploring the values that young people acquire as participants in this educational initiative. To date, there are no studies that have been conducted that examine the impact of an Afrikan centered educational experience upon the lives of young people. In my research, I explored the experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school. The question that guided the research was "What were the educational experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school?

Significance of this study

Currently, research is emerging that explores the impact of an Afrikan centered educational model upon the academic achievement, educational motivation, or life chances of Afrikan American students, but this research is in its infancy and is sparse in quantity. Several researchers have analyzed the implementation process of this educational model (Giddings, 2001; Murrell, 1999) and its impact upon the academic achievement of Afrikan American students (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ginwright, 1999). Other researchers have examined forms of this educational model upon student achievement (Biggins, 1999; Rocquemore, 1997), and one researcher has examined the impact of a form of this educational model on the achievement motivation of Afrikan-

American students, but none have explored or investigated the experiences of the young people who have attended an Afrikan centered school.

This study would contribute to the scholarly conversation on the viability of this educational model by presenting the perspectives and experiences of young people who have attended an Afrikan centered school. Theorists have asserted the outcomes of this educational experience, but, to date, there is very little empirical evidence substantiating the outcomes. The voices of these young people have the potential to articulate and provide insight into the dynamics of this educational model as conveyed through their experiences.

Educators can utilize this research to re-evaluate what is done in the traditional public school classrooms as reported by these young people and select proved methods of teaching that can enhance the learning and life outcomes of Afrikan American students. The results of this study can substantiate what is already being done in the classrooms, or the results can introduce new pedagogy for instructing Afrikan American students.

The significance of this research to policymakers is that it can provide empirical evidence to the methods that proved effective to the education of a small group of students where traditional methods have not produced academic success. America's quest to fulfill the adage of "no child left behind" requires on-going examinations of innovations that may prove beneficial to students. Even though this educational model appears to target one specific group of students, proponents offer that this model will indirectly improve the education of all children by preparing the recipients to function holistically in a pluralistic and global society.

Theoretical Framework

According to Creswell (1998), "Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview; a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiry" (p. 74). These assumptions are founded upon the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives. The ontological perspective is based on how the researcher perceives the nature of reality. This perspective addresses the question of "What is reality?" according to how it is apprehended by the knower. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The epistemological perspective is the researcher's perception of how knowledge is created. Ladson-Billings (2000a) asserts that "the concept of epistemology is more than a 'way of knowing . . . [it] is a 'system of knowing' that has both an internal logic and an external validity" (p. 257). The axiological perspective reflects the researcher's sense of values and qualitative research acknowledges the value-laden propensity of the research inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In this research, which focuses on discovering how Afrikan American young people experienced an Afrikan centered educational model, I have chosen to use an Afrocentric paradigm as my theoretical framework. The Afrocentric paradigm is derived from the theory of Afrocentricity formalized by Molefi Asante (1988) to address the cultural and intellectual dislocation of Afrikan people. Asante (1991) posits that an Afrocentric perspective is an "epistemological centeredness" (Mazama, 2003, p. 5) that establishes:

> a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the Afrikan person . . . it centers on placing people of Afrikan origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world . . . . This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project . . . it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field (p. 171).

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An Afrocentric paradigm is a constructivist's mode of inquiry and seeks to understand how subjects construct meaning in their lived experiences but undertakes this inquiry from the Afrikan worldview or cultural reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explicate the aim of constructivism is "understanding and reconstruction of the construction that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (p.113). This framework recognizes that individuals or groups make meaning of phenomenon from mental constructions (Harris, 1992). The philosophical assumptions that underscore this paradigm are listed in the Table 1.1:

Table 1.1 Assumptions that Guide Afrocentric Research and Theory

1. Reason for Research	▪ Relocating Afrikan people to their "Afrikan" center(s). ▪ Describing and explaining the agency of Afrikans in the shaping of their life experiences. ▪ Empowering Afrikans to positively affect their life chances and experiences. ▪ Generating "authentic" knowledge.
2. Nature of Human Beings	▪ All people act from a cultural center and in their own best interest.
3. Role of Common Sense	▪ Common sense consists of intuition and individual and group understandings based on historical and cultural context.
4. Theory as an Approach and Orientation to Data	▪ Connects Afrikan people to their common heritage. ▪ Rejects the agenda of any oppressor (historical and cultural specific). ▪ Seeks to ensure harmony throughout humanity. ▪ Searches for "truth".
5. Place of Values	▪ All research begins with a value position. ▪ The research must reflect an understanding of the subject group's value system.

SOURCE: Adapted from Terry Kershaw "Black Studies Paradigm" In Conyer, Jr., J.L. (ed) *Afrocentriciy and the academy: essays on theory and practice.* (2003) p. 34.

There are several reasons that I have chosen an Afrocentric paradigm as my theoretical framework. First, to understand how Afrikan American young people perceive their experiences with an Afrikan centered educational model in its complexities, I must analyze the evidence from an Afrocentric perspective, i.e., a

perspective that views the phenomenon from an Afrikan cultural worldview that encompasses the cosmology, epistemology, ontology, and axiology of Afrikan culture. Asante (1998) adamantly argues that when Afrikan meaning does not originate from an Afrikan center, then "psychological dislocation creates automatons who are unable to fully capture the historical moment because they are living on someone else's terms" (p. 8). As a researcher, attempting to interpret Afrikan cultural phenomenon from a Eurocentric or nonAfrikan worldview will lend to an inaccurate account of that phenomenon.

Next, this framework acknowledges that knowledge is co-created resulting from the interactions of the researcher and the subjects. Rooted in the Afrikan cultural worldview, the Afrocentric paradigm advances the concept that the researcher must submerge himself/herself within the social and cultural context of the subjects under study (Harris, 1992, Mazama, 2003). The Afrikan cultural worldview acknowledges the interrelatedness of all being (Ani, 1994) and thus, promotes the premise that the researcher and the subject concomitantly create new knowledge (Kambon, 1998; Asante, 1998). As the researcher, this paradigm required that I not distance myself from the research but rather that I immerse myself within the cultural context to gain familiarity with the history, language, philosophy, and traditions of the people and site under study (Asante, 1998).

Finally, an Afrocentric paradigm requires that the researcher draws upon modes of inquiry that respect the historical, social, economic, and cultural perspectives of the subjects. The experiences of the Afrikan American young people participating in this study must be interpreted from their standpoint. The fact that the lived experiences of this group of young people's occurs within a socio-historical context of oppression

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mandates modes of inquiry that seek to capture and legitimate these experiences. Since the Afrocentric paradigm is yet evolving, methods of inquiry particular to this paradigm have not been fully developed (Mazama, 2003). Proponents of this paradigm encourage researchers to utilize components of the traditional methods that respect the cultural, historical, and social standpoints of the subjects and that generate knowledge that empowers those researched (Mazama, 2003; Asante 1998; Kershaw, 1992, 2003).

In this research, the aim is to give voice to a group who are often marginalized and silenced within society. Oftentimes, this groups' perspective is declared by those who have objectified them. The intent of this study is to offer the empirical findings as a resource for evaluative consideration of this educational model for the Afrikan American community.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

A definition of terms is needed to clarify words and concepts used in the study. Sources are given to facilitate further research.

Afrikan/Afrikan American/Black: People of Afrikan descent residing in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Afrikan centered/Afrocentric/Afrocentricity: Interchangeable terms representing the concept of epistemological "centeredness" in which the location for the consciousness of Afrikan people is where the Afrikan and the interests of Afrikans are at the center of their approach to problem-solving (Asante, 2003; Mazama, 2001).

Afrikan centered curriculum: An Afrikan centered curriculum is a guideline for the delivery of Afrikan centered instruction.

Afrikan centered educational model: A model of education that provides students of Afrikan descent an education that promotes a positive self-concept, acknowledges their cultural heritage, and deconstructs the hegemonic influences of White supremacy (Asante, 1992; Ladson-Billing, 2000).

Afrikan centered pedagogy: The methodology of teaching which goals are "the acquisition of self determination and self sufficiency for Afrikan people, but ultimately with truth" (Akoto, 1992, p. 91).

Black Nationalism: The ideology that people of Afrikan descent on the Continent[2] of Africa, as well as, in the Diaspora, share a common heritage of language, culture, and religion; and that this heritage, way of life and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups. This shared heritage demands racial solidarity which promotes self-determination, self-respect, and self-sufficiency as Afrikan people (Essien-Udom, 1962; Kambon, 1998).

Ethos: "Ethos is intimately related to culture; both influencing it and being influenced by it. Ethos refers in part to the emotional substance of a cultural group . . . ." (Ani, 1980, p. 2).

European-centered/ Eurocentric/ Eurocentrism: "The conceptual framework of orientation to reality (values, beliefs, definitions, rituals, customs, practices, etc.) based on the history, culture, and philosophy of Western European people (as a race family)" (Kambon, 1998, p. 529).

[2] The term "Continent" used throughout this document refers to the Afrikan continent, unless otherwise specified.

European/European American/White: "Being of, or descendant from, indigenous Caucasian/West Aryan-Nordic (Geo-historical Western Europe) genetic-cultural origin expressed in discernible/overt biophysical traits" (Kambon, 1998, p. 529).

Kawaida: A value system of formal teachings derived from ancient Afrikan philosophy which was introduced into the Afrikan American community by Maulana Karenga (1998).

MAAFA: Kiswahili term that means "disaster", (Ani, 1989) "It refers to the terroristic interruption of Afrikan civilization that was occasioned by European and Arab slavery and cultural aggression" (Hilliard, 1997).

Nguzo Saba Principles: These are seven principles of values associated with the Kawaida faith. They consist of the principles of 1). Umoja – unity; 2) Kujichagulia – self-determination; 3) Ujima – collective work and responsibility; 4) Ujamaa – cooperative Economics; 5) Nia – purpose; 6) Kuumba – creativity; and 7) Imani – faith (Karenga, 1998).

Pan Afrikanism: The ideology that Afrikans on the Continent of Africa and throughout the Diaspora should unite against the European colonialism and white supremacy (Moses, 1962).

SBA: A Kemetic term which means "teaching, learning, wisdom, and study or collective deep thought" (Hilliard, 1997, p.6).

Worldview: "Worldview represents the distinct unifying cosmological, ontological, epistemological and axiological principles representing a racial-cultural group's natural cultural orientation, outlook or perspective on and the construction of reality" (Kambon, 1998, p. 120).

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on Afrikan centered education. The Afrikan centered educational movement did not arbitrarily happen, but emerged from the struggle of Afrikan Americans against an unjust and oppressive society in America. Given is an overview of the historical moments and key players that shaped the Afrikan American determination to provide an alternative educational model for their children. Next, this chapter details how this educational model is manifested in various school settings for educating Afrikan American students. Finally, the current empirical findings are examined that identify academic and social outcomes for this educational model.

In Chapter 3, the qualitative design utilized in this research project is discussed. The rationale for choosing a multiple case study design is explained. Also, this chapter details and explain how data was collected as well as the rationale behind the decisions for site selection, subject selection and sampling procedures. Further, in this chapter the methods utilized to collect data, such as, participant observations, interviews, artifacts and life narratives are explicated and why these methods are most appropriate for this study. Next, the methods for ensuring the trustworthiness of the data through triangulation are detailed. This chapter concludes with reflections on the role of the researcher in this study and points out the limitations of this study.

In Chapter 4, I introduced the director and founder of the school in this study. Through her narrative, the school is contextualized within the political, social, cultural and historical moments of its creation and development. In Chapter 5, I offered the profiles of the parents and the participants in this study. The parents profile frames the narratives of each participant, providing insight into the familial influences which were instrumental in determining the educational location of the participants.

The findings from the data analysis are presented in Chapter 6. The findings are the results of a thematic analysis of the young people's experience in attending an Afrikan centered school as interpreted through the frame of the three documents which delineate the outcomes of the educational experience. The frame provides four outcomes for the educational experience, they are as follows: 1) Outcomes grounded in nation building, 2) Outcomes cultivating cultural knowledge and identity, 3) Outcomes cultivating the principles of self-advocacy, and 4) Outcomes developing their personhood.

In Chapter 7, the discussion of the findings is presented and recommendations are given for future research. The discussion attempted to highlight the challenges and tensions of the educational experience of the participants who attended the Shule. In the discussion, I offer considerations for implementing an Afrikan centered educational model within traditional public schools settings. Finally, I make recommendations for further research in this area of study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Historically, education has been highly prized and sought after by Afrikans in America. As this nation fought for its independence, Afrikans perceived education as the key which would open doors, allowing one the right to participate as an equal within America society. In the South, it was perceived as a forbidden fruit that once partaken would enlighten the mind and release the body into liberty. These perceptions of education fueled the desires of Afrikans, both free and enslaved, to possess it. Yet, their desires were confronted with the realities of their experiences in the North and the South as they attempted to attain access to an education.

For Afrikan Americans in America, achieving an equitable and excellent education has always been synonymous with struggle. Historically, the European American concept of a suitable education for Afrikan Americans was at odds with the Afrikan Americans concepts of the appropriate education for their liberation. In the midst of these experiences, the roots of the Afrikan centered educational movement were developing. Utilizing the related literature, a brief historical overview of the origins of the Afrikan centered educational movement is presented. A definition of an Afrikan centered educational model is defined drawing from the theorists of an Afrikan centered educational model. Next, an examination of contemporary Afrikan centered educational options for Afrikan Americans in schools is reviewed and finally the current empirical findings on the viability of an Afrikan centered educational model within schools are examined.

Roots of the Afrikan centered Educational Movement

The Afrikan centered educational movement in the United States was the collective and self-determined efforts of Afrikans in America, both free and enslaved, to provide education for themselves and their children. This educational model, which existed in a rough structure in the 17th and 18th centuries, was perceived as a necessary component in the drive towards liberation, freedom and independence of Afrikans in America. It is the consensus of current research on Afrikan centered education that this movement has it roots in Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikanism (Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1992; Ginwright, 2004).

E.U. Essien-Udom (1962) defines Black Nationalism as "the belief of a group that it shares, or ought to share, a common heritage of language, culture and religion; and that its heritage, way of life and ethnic identity are distinct from those of other groups . . . that they ought to rule themselves and shape their own destinies" (p. 20). The Black Nationalist movement is integral to Pan Afrikanism. Pan Afrikanism is the belief that Afrikans on the Afrikan Continent and in the Diaspora should unite against European colonialism and white supremacy (Moses, 1978). The aforementioned ideology was the philosophical guide that drove the Afrikan centered educational movement.

Essien-Udom (1962), Moses (1978), and Redkey (1969) have documented the genesis of the Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikanist ideology with Paul Cuffe, a free born Afrikan in America in 1815. Despite being a free Afrikan ship owner in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Cuffe had become disillusioned with America's hypocrisy in keeping Afrikans enslaved while ringing the bells for their own liberation from England. He founded the Friendly Society for the Emigration of Free Negroes from America and using his personal funds took 38 Afrikan Americans to Sierre Leone (Clarke, 1994).

Martin R. Delany, also a Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikanist during the mid-19th century, championed the establishment of a state by Afrikan Americans in the Niger Valley. In fact, he was instrumental in negotiating an agreement with several Afrikan kings for this project (Clarke, 1994). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were other Afrikan Americans who articulated the Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikan ideologies, such as Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, Alexander Crummerll, and W.E.B. DuBois.

However, the most influential proponent of the Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikan movements was Marcus Garvey, who through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), advocated self-determination and the economic, social, and political uplift of Afrikan people in America and in the Diaspora. He preached the "confraternity of the Brotherhood" between all Afrikans. Garvey also espoused the reclamation of Afrika, which was established in this chant of UNIA members, "Africa for the Africans, those at home and those abroad" (Maglangbayan, 1972, p. 21).

In the 1930s, Elijah Muhammad inherited Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikanism from the Garveyites (Ginwright, 2004). Muhammad advocated separate schools and a separate nation for Afrikan Americans within America. Like Garvey, Muhammad was a proponent of Afrikan Americans educating their own and establishing their own financial base. As Muhammad was organizing Afrikan Americans towards self-determination and agency, national unrest gave rise to the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements.

The decade of the 1960s was wrought with racial and civil unrest and this unrest was manifested in various degrees of protest through sit-ins, boycotts, marches and riots. Early in this decade, the Black Power ideology, which espoused racial pride and group solidarity, began to spread throughout the Afrikan American communities as a result of

the struggle against America's racist and oppressive social structure. Karenga (1988) referred to this decade as the period in which people of Afrikan descent made the "most severe and successful theoretical and practical criticism of the structure and content of U.S. society" (p. 125). Ginwright (2004) posited that Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikanism undergirded the ideology of the Black Power movement which placed Afrika as the nexus of the political and cultural agenda for Afrikan Americans.

In the midst of the Black Power movement, students on major college and university campuses across the nation were critiquing these institutions of learning as microcosms of the larger racist society (Karenga, 1988). Students, both Afrikan American and European American believed that these educational institutions promoted racism through the exploitation and oppression of people of color. Karenga (1988) contends that this exploitation of people of color was accomplished by their purposeful exclusion from knowledge, wealth, and power. Subsequently, Afrikan American students on college and university campuses began to demand the establishment of Black Studies departments that offered courses expounding the Black experience. They "charged that traditional disciplines had not given attention to Black intellectual experience, culture, and history" (Okafor, 1996, p. 693). As a result of this student protest, Black Studies departments were instituted in major universities across the nation.

As the rally for Black Studies intensified, a young scholar emerged who became an instrument for furthering the Afrikan centered education movement by providing a theoretical framework. Molefi K. Asante, while working as a director for the Center for Afro-American Studies at UCLA in the late 1960s, began formulating his thoughts for his insightful work, published in 1980, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change. Afrocentricity* is a theoretical perspective of "resistance and agency" (Robinson, 2004, p.

104) and is a term that is often used interchangeably with *Afrikan centered, Afrocentric* and *Africentricity.*

The ideologies of Black Nationalism (i.e., the belief that Afrikans share a common historical and cultural experience, and they should seek to determine their own destiny as a nation, race, and people distinct from others), Pan Afrikanism (i.e., the belief that Afrikans on the Continent and in the Diaspora should unite against colonialism and white supremacy), and Black Power (i.e., the belief that Afrikans on the Continent and in the Diaspora should be able to achieve self-determination, self-sufficiency, self-respect, and self-defense through the power that they possess) contributed to the theory of Afrocentricity. Asante (2003) adroitly explicates Afrocentricity as:

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

Contrary to critics' arguments, Afrocentricity is not an attempt by Afrikan American Supremacists, Separatists, or Nationalists to impose an Afrikan world-view upon others (Schlesinger, 1992; Ravitch, 1991). The theory of Afrocentricity does not promote a position of superiority in which it disaffirms other groups' perspectives but offers an alternative way of viewing phenomena. Afrocentrism theoretically challenges the Eurocentric perspective in three ways:

> First, it questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical. Second, it demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and pluralism. Finally, it projects a humanistic and

> pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, nonhegemonic perspective (Asante, 1991, p.173).

Theorists of Afrocentricity insist that an Afrikan centered educational model is the most appropriate educational model for children of color, specifically, Afrikan American children (Asante, 1991; Lee, 1992, Akoto, 1992; Shujaa, 1992). These theorists adamantly maintain that this educational model is the result of an Afrikan centered curriculum which is delivered utilizing Afrikan centered pedagogy (Akoto, 1992; Lee, 1992; Asante, 1991). In this next section, the components of an Afrikan centered educational model will be presented and elucidated.

What is an Afrikan centered Curriculum?

An Afrikan centered curriculum is a guideline for the delivery of Afrikan centered instruction. One prominent characteristic of an Afrikan centered curriculum is that it was established upon the theory of *Afrocentricity*. Although Molefi K. Asante was credited with formalizing the concept of Afrocentricity, the genesis of the Afrikan centered educational movement preceded Asante. During the 1960s, the Black Nationalist and Black Power movements fostered a climate for agency and efficacy among Afrikan American communities. Consequently, Afrikan American parents began to seek control over the public education of their children that currently manifests in the demand for educational initiatives specific to the needs of Afrikan American children. The increasing interest in implementing an Afrikan centered curriculum into the public schools has facilitated emergent definitions of what characterizes an Afrikan centered curriculum. The theorist, Molefi Asante's criterion for an Afrikan centered curriculum mandates that the curriculum must "center" the students within their own cultural information (Asante,

1992). In fact, Asante has developed an Afrikan centered curriculum guide, which can be located on the Internet.

Another theorist, Wade Nobles, a Professor of Black Studies at San Francisco State University and one who designed and implemented an Afrikan centered curriculum in a high school in Oakland, California, defined the objectives of an Afrikan centered curriculum:

> A curriculum infused with African and African American content must systematically guide the transmission of information and knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing in African-American students the desire to learn and encouraging the adoption of behaviors and attitudes consistent with the historical excellence of African people (Nobles, 1990, p.10).

He further states that an Afrikan centered curriculum should fulfill several criteria:

1. Refer to the life experiences, history and traditions of African people as the center of analyses;
2. Utilize African and African American experience as the core paradigm for human liberation and higher-level human functioning; and
3. Assist African American students in the self-conscious act of creating history (Nobles, 1990, p. 20).

Geoffrey Giddings (2001), a Professor of African and African American Studies, studying the immersion of an Afrikan centered curriculum into a traditional public school, summarized various researchers' perspectives on the criteria for an Afrikan centered curriculum into five elements in his study:

1. Assist students in developing the necessary intellectual, moral and emotional skills for accomplishing a productive, affirming life in this society.
2. Provide such educational instruction as to deconstruct established hegemonic pillars and to safeguard against the construction of new ones.
3. Provide students of African descent with educational instruction that uses techniques that are in accord with their learning styles.
4. Assist students of African descent in maintaining a positive self-concept, with the goal of achieving a sense of collective accountability.
5. Serve as a model for Banks (1998) "Transformation" and "Social Action" approaches to multicultural education (Giddings, 2001, p. 463).

Kwame Agyei Akoto is the co-founder of a K-12 Afrikan centered independent Black institution located in Washington D.C. With over thirty years of experience with an Afrikan centered school, Akoto insists that an Afrikan centered curriculum must be established on the tenets of nation building and liberation for Afrikan people. Akoto (1992) provides a concise definition of an Afrikan centered curriculum in his work, *Nationbuilding: Theory and Practice in Afrikan Centered Education.* Akoto, in fact, developed the Afrikan Centered Thematic Inventory (ACTI) as a guideline to the "curricula domains" (p. 129) of an Afrikan centered curriculum. He delineates five curricula domains for an Afrikan centered education: 1) Cultural/ideological; 2) Spiritual/Psycho-Affective; 3) Socio-Political and Economic; 4) Technology; and 5) Nationbuilding. Akoto contends that the purpose of an Afrikan centered curriculum must be "(a) to advance the Afrikan American nationality, its cultural and ideological goals; and (b) to facilitate fully functional and/or exceptional performance in a white dominated American political economy" (p. 169).

As varied as the definitions of an Afrikan centered curriculum appear to be, many researchers and educators posit that this curriculum cannot effectively impact the lives of African American students unless it is instructed from Afrikan centered pedagogy.

What is Afrikan centered Pedagogy?

The term "pedagogy" is used in reference to the methodology employed in the instructions of curricula. Fundamental to the pedagogy utilized within the educational process are the values, perceptions, and philosophy of education. In the traditional schools, the pedagogy is shaped by the values of the dominant culture; a culture in which "normative" and "universal" are white and middle class. This pedagogical perspective is

Eurocentric. It negates the cultural attributes of Afrikan American children and attempts to assimilate or acculturate the student into the dominant paradigm.

An Afrikan centered curriculum provides the frame or guidelines for an Afrikan centered education; however, the delivery of the instructions will impact the quality of an Afrikan centered education. This instructional delivery is encompassed in the pedagogy utilized by the educational institution and is the pedagogy that teachers employ in their interactions with students. Various scholars and researchers have delineated the objectives of Afrikan centered pedagogy (Murrell, 2002; Lee, 1994; Akoto, 1994).

In defining Afrikan centered pedagogy, Peter Murrell (2002) explicates that Afrikan American historical experience and cultural position must be a vital part of this pedagogy:

> [This pedagogy should] provide teachers with a unifying framework for how they are to apply understanding of human cognition, learning, and development...but also guides teachers in how to situate those understandings in practice—and to use these situated understanding to take full account of the lives, histories, cultures, and worldviews of children in diverse urban communities (Murrell, 2002, p. x).

Murrell's perspective of Afrikan centered pedagogy is one in which he does not focus so much on the teacher's exhibiting the qualities of an Afrikan centered pedagogy as he does on the "system of practices" that produces achievement outcomes for Afrikan American children (Murrell, 2002, p. 16).

Carol Lee (1994) posits that Afrikan centered pedagogy is critical to the education of Afrikan American children. She notes that this pedagogy is a necessary defense to the pervasive Eurocentric influences in education and society (Lee, 1994). She also iterates that Afrikan centered pedagogy is needed "to produce an education that contributes to pride, equity, power, wealth, and cultural continuity for Africans in America and

elsewhere" (Lee, 1994, p. 296). She puts forth principles for an effective Afrikan centered pedagogy:

1. Legitimizes African stores of knowledge;
2. Positively exploits and scaffolds productive community and cultural practices;
3. Extends and builds upon the indigenous language;
4. Reinforces community ties and idealizes service to one's family, community, nation, race, and world;
5. Promotes positive social relationships;
6. Imparts a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others; and
7. Supports cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness. (Lee, 1994, p. 297).

She also notes that Afrikan centered pedagogy is established upon the principles of Maat, which is an Egyptian concept put forth by Maulana Karenga. The principles of Maat acknowledge the 1) the divine image of humans, 2) the perfectibility of humans; 3) the teachability of humans; 4) the free will of humans, and 5) the essentiality of moral social practice in human development (Lee, 1994, p. 297). She further states that the cultivation of this paradigm is essential to the "resistance to political and cultural oppression but also to sustain independent development" (p. 297).

According to Akoto (1994), Afrikan centered pedagogy "is concerned with the acquisition of self-determination and self-sufficiency for Afrikan people . . . .It is ultimately concerned with truth and the 'Afrikan centered mission to humanize the universe'" (p. 321). Afrikan centered pedagogy is not about adopting "ancient rituals, values, behaviors, and relationships that have no relevance to modernity" (Akoto, 1994, p. 323), but Afrikan centered pedagogy should highlight those traditions and values of former societies that benefit humanity irrespective of time and place:

> An Afrikan-centered pedagogy is a pedagogy derived from the Afrikan historical continuum and cultural dynamics. It endeavors to stimulate and nourish creative

> and critical consciousness and to inculcate through study and application a firm conscious commitment to the reconstruction of true Afrikan nation-hood, and the restoration of the Afrikan historical/cultural continuum (Akoto, 1994, p. 325).

When considering Afrikan centered pedagogy, several scholars have noted that the valuing system of Nguzo Saba is the foundation of Afrikan centered pedagogy (Akoto, 1994; Lee, 1994; Kenyatta, 1998). This valuing system, also known as the Black Value System, was created by Maulana Karenga (1989) and is comprised of seven principles. These principles are 1)Umoja - unity; 2) Kujichagulia - self-determination; 3) Ujima – collective work and responsibility; 4) Ujamaa – cooperative economics; 5) Kuumba – creativity; 6) Nia – purpose; and 7) Imani – faith (in one's self, one's family and one's people). The utilization of these principles in Afrikan centered pedagogy denotes that instructors must "commit to engage in democratic decision-making processes, have faith in the possibilities of leadership that each person possesses, and dedicate themselves to serving the African American community" (Lee, 1992, p. 167).

Akoto (1994) and Lee (1992) assert that a critical element in Afrikan centered pedagogy is the teacher, who is the transmitter of culture. This point is further illuminated by Lee (1992) who notes that having a knowledge of Black History and a love for children does not indicate that a teacher can "effectively teach using an Afrocentric pedagogy" (p. 167). Shujaa (1994) substantiates this point that teachers are crucial to an Afrikan centered education through the utilization of Afrikan centered pedagogy. He asserts the following:

> Working with and in independent Afrikan centered schools for nearly 20 years I have seen good teachers grounded in African-centered thinking use European-centered racist materials to teach brilliant African-centered lessons. I have seen European-American as well as some African-American public school teachers grounded in European-centered thinking use curriculum materials written by our best African-centered thinkers in ways that trivialize and mis-represent the content. These experiences have convinced me that it is the African-centeredness

> of the teacher's thinking that determines the African-centeredness of the teaching (Shujaa, 1994, p. 256).

As clearly expressed by the above researchers, Afrikan centered pedagogy must recognize the cultural specificity of the African American community and its continuation. This pedagogy has to facilitate the holistic development of the student by the recognition of and valuation of the student's language, culture, and cognitive styles, as well as, cultivate their ability to create history. Now, how does Afrikan centered pedagogy and an Afrikan centered curriculum contributes to an Afrikan centered educational model?

Afrikan centered Educational Model

Traditional education in America has been instituted with the objective of inculcating the values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant culture e.g., European Americans. "Formal educational systems," according to Akoto (1992), "are integral organs of the nation-state and of the cultural ethos that engenders that state" (p. 45). As a nation-state, America's educational system operates as a vehicle of perpetuation for the cultural, sociopolitical, and economical structures of the dominant ideology (Carnoy, 1974; Ballantine, 2000). Traditional public schools provide instructions to students from a White Nationalist curriculum while utilizing a Eurocentric pedagogy for its delivery. This pedagogy uses methodology that delivers instruction from a Eurocentric perspective; utilizing the values and norms attributed to European Americans or the dominant ideology in a hegemonic methodology. The cultural and historical epistemologies of the students of color are not considered in giving instructions and the knowledge is delivered from a Eurocentric bias.

The consensus by many scholars, educators, and parents in the African American community is that an Afrikan centered curriculum should be immersed within the traditional school curriculum. An Afrikan centered curriculum can provide the guidelines for instructions for students of various ages and ethnicities, specifically for Afrikan American students who now comprise the majority population in urban schools in most major metropolitan areas. However, the immersion of an Afrikan centered curriculum without the complement of Afrikan centered pedagogy will not provide Afrikan American children with an Afrikan centered education.

In many schools where an Afrikan centered curriculum has been infused in instruction, it has been ineffectual in improving academic outcomes. In most cases, the missing component is Afrikan centered pedagogy. When Afrikan centered pedagogy is neglected in teaching an Afrikan centered curriculum then the result is not an Afrikan centered education, but an education that is Eurocentric in presentation and results. Teaching history using Afrikan centered facts but presenting those facts from a Eurocentric worldview will situate the Afrikan American child on the periphery of Europe as an object rather than a subject of history (Asante, 1992).

Many researchers challenge the authenticity of the Afrikan centered educational models that are currently implemented in charter schools and traditional public schools (Akoto, 1994; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1992). These researchers argue that these curricula models do not address a key component of an Afrikan centered education, which is "maintaining and perpetuating the Afrikan culture throughout the nation building process" (Hotep, 2001, p. 212). This effort to promote the Afrikan cultural continuum must be manifested through nation building, the transmission of values, and the

acknowledgement of Afrikan spirituality. In fact, they contend that an authentic Afrikan centered educational model cannot be taught within the mainstream school system.

This educational model requires teachers who are consciously engaged in the Afrikan centered personal transformation, who acknowledge and cultivate the spirituality of Afrikan people, and who can deliver the instructions with Afrikan centered pedagogy (Hotep, 2001; Akoto, 1994; Shujaa, 1994). At present, there are no teacher preparation programs in traditional college settings that are preparing teachers to teach an Afrikan centered educational model. It is the contention of these researchers and also leaders in the CIBI organization that the Afrikan centered educational model that emerged with the advent of Independent Black Institutions has been adulterated and co-opted into the public school setting (Hotep, 2001; Akoto, 1994; Lee, 1992; Lotomey, 1992). Metaphorically, it is like taking a branch from an oak tree and then presenting the branch to the world as the oak tree.

Contemporary options in Afrikan centered education

With the passing of the Brown versus Board legislation, Afrikan Americans wanted to believe that America's espoused values of democratic morality had finally convinced its national conscience to acknowledge the humanity of Afrikan Americans by providing them with a quality education and bestowing them with first class citizenship status. However, Afrikan Americans soon discovered that the privilege of sharing a classroom with European Americans was not to be without concessions on their part. Afrikan Americans had to relinquish their own schools and their own teachers.

The integration and desegregation of schools did not achieve the educational outcomes that many Afrikan Americans had hoped for, and by the early 1970's, Afrikan Americans found their schools as segregated as they had been before the Brown decision.

The condition of the schools had only minimally improved. Many of the schools in the Afrikan American communities were closed down as Afrikan American students were bussed to European American schools. Consequently, the academic achievement for Afrikan American students did not increase substantially as had been hoped for by the proponents of the Brown decision. Once again, Afrikan American parents began to look for alternatives, particularly in Afrikan centered schools.

The realization that American public schools had made little progress in providing an equitable education for Afrikan American students re-ignited grassroots efforts within the Afrikan American communities to ensure the education of their children. Historically, these efforts had never ceased; however, the betrayal of the Afrikan American community by the legal, social, and educational structures intensified the struggle for equitable and meaningful education for Afrikan American children. After the Brown decision, the first schools which offered an Afrikan centered education model for Afrikan American students were independent Black institutions.

Independent Black Institutions (IBI)

While the Black Power movement was spreading throughout Afrikan American communities within America during the 1960s, Afrikan American parents began to seek control over the public education for their children. A significant example of this push for community control took place in New York City with the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy (Doughty, 1973; Lomotey, 1992; Hotep, 2001) where Afrikan American parents and other community leaders sought to establish local control of the public schools in their community. This effort was met with conflict and resistance and resulted in community leaders starting one of the first independent black institutions, Uhuru Sasa (Hotep, 2001; Lomotey, 1992; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987).

The success of Uhuru Sasa precipitated the establishment of many Independent Black Institutes (IBI's) within New York and throughout the United States (Uhuru, 2001). These schools were started as small private schools, after school programs, and Saturday schools. Oftentimes, IBI's were started by parents who were frustrated with the lack of local control over public schools and the curriculum (Lomotey, 1992; Lee, 1992). For the most part, these schools were supported by the communities in which they were established through donations or through low cost tuition. These schools have small enrollments, generally 50 to 200 students (Lomotey, 1992).

The curricula in these schools were often Afrikan centered because parents and educators were looking for innovative and culturally relevant ways to ameliorate the education of Afrikan American children (Lomotey, 1992; Lee, 1992). In an effort to establish a standard Afrikan centered educational model and provide resources and ideas to other IBI's, a unifying organization was formed. In June of 1972, the Council for Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) was created in Frogmore, South Carolina (Doughty, 1973). According to Hotep (2001), the mission of the CIBI required has these requirements:

> [B]uilding Pan African nationalist educational institutions rooted in not only academic excellence, but also self-reliance and self-definition, not for mainstream integration, but for independent nation building, that sets it apart from all other educational institutions that serve the African American community (p. 35).

The educational philosophy of the IBI's reflects the integration of the ideologies of Black Nationalism (self-determination), Pan Afrikanism (unity), and Black Power (agency) in the emphasis of three areas for an optimal student educational experience:

1) Creating a strong family and community cohesion,
2) Incorporating the value system of Maat and Nguzo Saba (Kiswahili for "The Seven Principles of Blackness") introduced by Maulana Karenga (1988), and
3) By what Lomotey (1992) refers to as "Revolutionary Pan-African

Nationalism" (p. 458).

The creation of a strong family and community cohesion is encouraged through the tradition of students referring to teachers as in Kiswahili familial terms of baba (father) and mama (mother). Teachers are encouraged and expected to treat their students as if they were their own children (Lomotey, 1992; Lee, 1992). Also, parents are expected to be involved with the community of the school. In fact, the IBI's understood that accepting a child into the school was in effect adopting the child as part of the school family with all the rights and obligations. So parents were found working in the office, on committees, and in the classrooms.

The IBI's use the value system of Kawaida, a system of formal teachings derived from ancient Afrikan philosophy which was introduced into the Afrikan American community by Maulana Karenga (1998). Doughty (1973) asserts that Kawaida is both "a religion as well as an ideology" (p. 98). He further explicates that Kawaida provides a value system that assists Afrikan Americans in self-determination, self-respect, and self-identity. The Nguzo Saba principles are values associated with the Kawaida faith. According to Doughty (1973), "as a part of Kawaida, the Nguzo Saba is a describer of life, how one lives, in what manner and for what reasons" (p. 99).

Maat is also a value system of the Kawaida philosophy incorporated within the IBI's educational philosophy. Maat is a formal system of character instructions that is expressed in the "Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and order" (Karenga, 1998, p. 37). The IBI's utilizes various activities to inculcate these values into the daily learning experiences of their students, parents and staff.

Revolutionary Pan-African Nationalism is defined by Lomotey (1992) as "part of a new system of education to replace the existing 'mainstream' system that is inappropriate for Afrikan Americans, provide a means by which Afrikan Americans can identify with Afrikans around the world, and acknowledge the view that Afrikan Americans make up a nation within a nation" (p. 458). This ideology is fundamental to the objectives of nation-building, self-determination and the unification of Afrikans throughout the Diaspora and is emphasized throughout the educational experience.

Independent Black Institutions can be found throughout the nation. However, because these schools are tuition based, only a small percentage of Afrikan American parents can afford to send their children to them. Recently, the charter school movement has provided another option for the Afrikan American community to provide equitable and appropriate education for their children.

Afrikan centered Charter Schools

The charter school movement started in the early 1990s as a school reform effort. Policymakers and parents were concerned that bureaucracy and large student populations hindered schools from being productive and efficient. Charter schools are independent public school academies which receive their charters from chartering agencies and are managed by groups and organizations rather than the central office of a traditional school district. These schools are initiated by teachers, parents, educators, community leaders, for-profit companies, and other community stakeholders (Murrell, 1999). These schools hire their own teachers and develop their own curriculum; however, their students are not exempt from meeting the state's educational standards in which the proficiency of students is demonstrated through standardized testing.

Afrikan centered charter schools, which have been established across the nation, were created by parents, community leaders, and educators who wanted to exercise control over the education of their children. These stakeholders were not only interested in exercising agency but also wanted their children to learn about their Afrikan heritage. Generally, these charter schools have a small student enrollment similar to the independent black schools and are concentrated in the K-8 grade levels. Unlike the independent black schools, charter schools receive per student public funding from the same sources as public schools.

The exercise of autonomy over the structure of Afrikan centered charter schools has not proceeded without a challenge (Watson & Smitherman, 1996). In one instance, Detroit, Michigan attempted to start an all-male charter school, which would specifically target educating the Afrikan American male population. Research had revealed that this particular student population was experiencing an alarming rate of school difficulties, but state law prohibited the Detroit school district from operating this all-male school and forced the proposed schools to open enrollment to all students (Watson & Smitherman, 1996).

These Afrikan centered charter schools have experienced some academic success with Afrikan American students (Rockquemore, 1997). However, the No Child Left Behind legislation has presented these schools with a tension by creating a dichotomy of goals for the school. The charter school community must determine how to continue to maintain an Afrikan centered educational focus, while teaching to the state standardized test. Substantiating this difficulty, Murrell (1999) found that Afrikan centered charter schools often succumb to the pressure of ensuring that students achieve on the state's standardize test and will give less focus to maintaining the Afrikan centered focus. The

end result is "school as usual", in other words, an educational experience for the student that is no different from a traditional public school education.

The charter school movement provided alternative educational opportunities for Afrikan American children, yet similar to Independent Black Institutions, were limited in their ability to reach the large populations of Afrikan American children in urban schools in large metropolitan areas. Grassroots efforts in the mid-90s provided the momentum to implement Afrikan centered educational models within traditional public schools, where Afrikan American students were the predominant student population, most often in large urban centers.

Afrikan centered Traditional Public Schools

Within the last decade, Afrikan centered curricula have been implemented within traditional public schools in urban centers such as Milwaukee, Portland, Philadelphia, Newark, Detroit, Oakland, and Washington D.C. (Pollard & Ajirotutu; 2000; Murrell, 1999, Ginwright, 1999). This model of implementation has been referred to as Afrikan centered Immersion projects. The impetus for this movement within urban schools was rooted in the frustrations of Afrikan American parents and community leaders with the continued failings of Afrikan American students, particularly Afrikan American males. White flight from and de-industrialization in urban centers created urban school environments in which these schools were under funded, and the student population became predominantly composed of children of color. In fact, studies have demonstrated that children of color, specifically Afrikan American children, are now more likely to attend predominately Afrikan American schools than before the Brown decision (Orfield, 1996).

For parents residing in these urban settings, options to acquire an equitable education for their children through access to private schools or Afrikan centered charter schools did not exist because of their inability to afford tuition or provide transportation to these schools. Coupled with the urgency of ameliorating the crisis of Afrikan American males as manifested in high drop out rates, high suspension rates, and underachievement, Afrikan American parents, educators, and community activists confronted school board and demanded the immersion of an Afrikan centered curriculum into the traditional public schools. The rationale for this demand was that students receiving instructions from a culturally relevant curriculum would enhance learning by providing an environment in which students were not alienated from the instruction and materials presented.

The Afrikan centered educational movement has been in the heart of Afrikan Americans from the beginnings of civilization in Afrika. Since initial contact with Europeans and involuntary sojourn to America, Afrikans have fought to maintain their humanity through education. Whether through education by organized efforts of free Blacks or through stolen moments in the night, Afrikan Americans have been determined to acquire the key that would open the door to liberty. When the key did not give them access to that liberty because of the enactment of federal and state legislature created barriers to first class citizenship, they contemplated education for a separate nation, whether in the United States or in the motherland. The Brown decision renewed hope in a "united" nation. By the 1980s, however, Afrikan Americans knew that once again they had experienced "a dream deferred". Now, grassroots organizations in Afrikan American communities comprised of teachers, parents, and community members are pushing for an Afrikan centered education for their children, whether in Independent Black institutions,

Afrikan centered charter schools or Afrikan centered Immersion projects in traditional public schools.

The current empirical findings on an Afrikan centered educational model are examined in the next section.

Current Empirical Findings of an Afrikan centered Education

Today, education is still considered by the Afrikan American community to be the key to upward mobility within American society. This orientation towards education is demonstrated by their continual search for viable options in the education of their children. Nationwide, Afrikan American parents, educators, and community have become frustrated with the failure of the public school system in educating Afrikan American children. As a result of this dissatisfaction, grassroots movements have emerged throughout the nation creating Black Independent schools (Lomotey, 1992), opening Afrikan centered charter schools (Murrell, 1999) and demanding the immersion of an Afrikan centered curricula within the tradition public schools (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). Increasing numbers of Afrikan American children are now receiving an Afrikan centered education throughout the nation's schools.

Research on an Afrikan centered education began in the early 1970's with the advent of independent Black institutions. Much of this research has focused upon explicating the socio-historical need for an Afrikan centered educational model for Afrikan American children (Doughty, 1975; Akoto, 1992; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1992; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987; Hotep, 2001). Some researchers have examined the parental motivations behind decisions to seek this educational model for their children (Dove, 1998; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987, Shujaa, 1994). For example, Joan Ratteray and Mwalimu Shujaa (1987) conducted a study examining the rationale that supported the

choices of Afrikan American parents to send their children to Afrikan centered independent schools. Researchers were interested in this decision-making from the perspectives of how parents defined the needs of their children, the extent of commitment that they were willing to make to fulfill their child's academic needs, and whether they perceived the needs of their child as being met (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). Another researcher, Nah Dove (1998) performed a study in which she examined the motivations that undergirded the decisions of "Afrikan" mothers to send their children to Afrikan centered independent schools in both the United States and the United Kingdom (p. xiii). Nevertheless, currently little research has been located that suggests that an Afrikan centered educational model in an Independent Black institution has increased student academic outcomes, or more generally, that an Afrikan centered education has impacted the life experiences of Afrikan American students.

The creation of Afrikan centered charter schools coupled with the demand for Afrikan centered Immersion schools has intensified within the last decade. This proliferation of Afrikan centered schools offers opportunity for greater access to educational choices for the Afrikan American community. As a consequence of the novelty of this innovation within both of these school settings, research which examines the outcomes of this Afrikan centered educational model is sparse (Biggins 1999, Lake, 1996; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ginwright, 1999).

However, one study that looks specifically at the academic outcomes of Afrikan American students attending an Afrikan centered school was conducted by Jennifer Biggins (1999). Biggins engaged in a five year descriptive study that sought to determine if the achievement test scores of students improved as a result of receiving instructions from an Afrikan centered curriculum. She studied an urban elementary school (K-5)

located in the Midwest that had adopted an Afrikan centered curriculum. Utilizing the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Biggins compared the achievement test score gains of the students in the school that had adopted an Afrikan centered curriculum with the test scores of students from a school which had a traditional curriculum. Biggins reported that her study found students who attended the Afrikan centered school scored higher in both reading and mathematics than students in the comparable local norm group (See Table 2.1, p. 43). She also noted that the test scores for these students revealed an overall maturity in the area of science, a fact which was unmatched in the control group.

Another realm of emerging research focuses on this educational model by examining the process of implementation within the public school setting. Three studies were located which utilized the findings in diverse ways (Murrell, 1999; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ginwright, 1999). Two of the studies shall be focused upon here because these researchers were interested in determining whether implementing the Afrikan centered educational model increased student academic outcomes. One study employed the findings to clarify how the presence or absence of various school factors such as leadership, collegiality and financial resources, impact the resultant student outcomes in Afrikan centered immersion schools (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). The other study also looked at the academic outcomes of students resulting from the implementation process of this curriculum, but concluded that economic class affected the students' outcomes (Ginwright, 1999).

Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) performed a five-year study which evaluated the implementation process of an Afrikan centered curriculum for two traditional public schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The disheartening academic performance of children

Table 2.1. Characteristics of the Studies on Afrikan centered education outcomes

Author of the Study	City	Type of Study	Program Design	Implementation Process	Level of School	Academic Achievement	Dropout Rates	Suspension
Pollard & Ajirotutu (2000)	Midwest urban	Qualitative	Immersion Public	SC; LC; FS	Elementary	Increase	N/A	decrease
Pollard & Ajirotutu (2000)	Midwest urban	Qualitative	Immersion Public	US; no LC; no FS	Middle	No change	N/A	No change
Ginwright (1999)	West coast urban	Qualitative	Immersion Public	US; no LC; FS	High School	No change	No change	No change
Lake (1996)	Midwest urban	Quantitative	History Supplement	N/A	High School	No change	N/A	N/A
Biggins (1999)	Midwest urban	Quantitative	Immersion Public	N/A	Elementary	Increase	N/A	N/A

SC = Stable Leadership; UL = Unstable Leadership; LC = Learning Community (School environment in which teachers work together to develop curriculum and practice collegiality); FS = Financial Support (additional funding provided for the program); N/A = no information provided in the study.

of color, particularly Afrikan American males, engendered a collaborative effort of educators and professionals in establishing schools to address the needs of these students.

Two schools were designated for the Afrikan centered Immersion project, one elementary school and one middle school. The researchers utilized in-depth interviews, observations, and surveys of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, as well as analysis of artifacts to gather the data for their study. Using various methods of assessment, such as statewide testing results, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the district's testing results, and grade point averages, the researchers were able to capture academic outcomes of students over the five year period of the study. The study concluded that when the elements of strong, stable leadership, shared vision, teacher collegiality, and financial support were present, an environment was created that fostered increased academic outcomes for Afrikan American students. These outcomes were manifested as increased academic achievement, increased student attendance, and lower suspension rates for the elementary school (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2001). Their study also demonstrated by the middle school's implementation process that when these elements were not present, student academic outcomes, suspension rates, and attendance rates remained unaffected (See Table 2.1, p. 43).

Shawn Ginwright (1999) conducted a study similar to Pollard and Ajirotutu. He examined the implementation of an Afrikan centered curriculum in a traditional public high school in Oakland, California in 1992. The movement for the immersion of an Afrikan centered curriculum into this traditional school curriculum was a grassroots effort that resulted from poor academic outcomes of students at this high school. As a result of budgeting deficits in the school district, the school board proposed to close this high school whose student population was steadily declining. A task force composed of

community leaders, educators, parents, and professionals was developed and approval was given to restructure the school into an Afrikan centered focused school.

Ginwright studied the implementation process for three years, while performing interviews with community leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and students. He also collected data through observations and school document analysis. The results of Ginwright's study revealed that implementing an Afrikan centered curriculum within a traditional public school required the commitment of all stakeholders. Ginwright was able to employ documentation of trends for the three year period in student academic performance, drop-out rates, suspension rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates to ascertain student academic outcomes. His results revealed that there was no significant change in student outcomes (See Table 2.1, p. 43).

However, Ginwright did not attribute the lack of change in outcomes to the implementation process, but rather he concluded that the failure of the Afrikan centered curriculum to impact the academic outcomes of Afrikan American students resulted from the misdiagnosis of the problems of Afrikan American students in urban schools. His contention is that an Afrikan centered educational model is the imposed prescription of middle-class Afrikan Americans to resolve the social and economic blight of lower class and working class urban students. He further asserted that urban Afrikan American students cannot relate to this curriculum and, therefore, instead of offering a cure for the academic problems of Afrikan American students, this curriculum can only exacerbate the outcomes.

Current research that investigated the intrinsic values of exposure to an Afrikan centered course was found in a study conducted by Joyce Lake (1996). Lake performed a study of high school students in a Midwestern school district to determine if

participation in Afrikan American history classes affected the self-concept and achievement motivation of Afrikan American students. Lake posited that this determination would be the first step towards improving academic achievement of Afrikan American students. She used a pretest-posttest control group quantitative research design involving three high schools in which students participated in an Afrikan American History course for twelve weeks. Lake concluded from her findings that the participation of Afrikan American students in an Afrikan American History course for twelve weeks did not increase student self-concept or achievement motivation (See Table 2.1, p. 43).

There are limitations found in the aforementioned studies. Of the four studies reviewed, only one of the studies specifically examined the impact of an Afrikan centered educational model on the academic outcomes of Afrikan American students. This study by Biggins (1999) was limited in that it only examined the academic outcomes of students who experienced an Afrikan centered education in an elementary school. This research was performed as a quantitative study resulting in a missed opportunity to garner rich data from students explicating why this education was conducive to positive student outcomes. Nevertheless, this study provides a strong foundation on which to build further research in examining the impact of this educational model in middle schools and high schools.

Two of the studies probed the process of implementing an Afrikan centered curriculum within the traditional school environment. One of those studies analyzed how the implementation process affected student outcomes, while the second study analyzed factors of economic class and how those factors impact the implementation process. Pollard and Ajirotutu's study was qualitative. They collected essential data focused on

the implementation process through interviews with administrators and teachers in the schools. However, one limitation here is that the researchers did not draw data from students on their perceptions of and experiences with Afrikan centered education. The researchers relied heavily upon the assessments methods as the source of evidence to indicate if the implementation of the curriculum had been successful by an increase in student academic achievement. Since academic achievement was the only outcome targeted, the researchers limited the study and did not seek to determine if an outcome other than student academic achievement was a valuable product of this education.

In Ginwright's (1999) study, a portion of his data was garnered from interviews with working class Afrikan American students between the ages of 14 to 19 years old who attended the high school. Ginwright asserted that he wanted to allow their voices to be heard as they expressed their perceptions of the Afrikan centered immersion project. He discovered that the students were more concerned with "making money" than they were about learning Afrikan facts (Ginwright, 1999, p. 231). Ginwright conjectured that these values centered on economic concerns were a direct result of these young people's concerns external to the school environment. He felt that students of low economic status were less likely to see value in receiving an Afrikan centered education. However, a limiting factor is that his research was performed in a school environment that had unstable and unsupportive leadership and an un-invested teaching force due to high teacher turnover, which made it almost impossible to implement the Afrikan centered educational model effectively. So his findings of no increase in academic outcomes for students could be caused by poor implementation of the educational model as much as it could be a result of economic disparity between the implementers and the students.

These studies identified an increase in student outcomes as the fundamental and desired outcome for an Afrikan centered education. Only Ginwright's study solicited the students' voices to determine how they perceived the benefits of experiencing an Afrikan centered education. Yet, in Ginwright's study, the "successful" implementation of the Afrikan centered educational model was not attained because it lacked the elements of stable leadership, teacher collegiality, and additional financial support. Therefore, the fact that there was no documented increase in academic outcomes could be the results of an ineffective curriculum implementation. Ginwright's study comes closest to examining how this educational model affected the students socially, culturally, and spiritually, as well as how it affected their perceptions of its impact upon their life chances, but it lacks the credibility that their perceptions of the impact of an Afrikan centered education are the results of the model, since it was not effectively implemented. However, there is one study that did seek to identify outcomes associated with the experience of receiving an Afrikan centered education that went beyond academic outcomes.

In Lake's (1996) study that examined the intrinsic value of exposure to a twelve-week Afrikan centered course, there were several limitations. First, the length of twelve weeks for the study did not facilitate the comprehensive exploration of the targeted variables, while a study consisting of several years of ongoing exposure to Afrikan centered courses could render far-reaching results. When considering that Afrikan American children exist daily within a social context of racism in America, it seems highly implausible to expect a twelve week course on Afrikan American history to offset the many years of oppressive experience. Another limitation was that Lake's study only identified the areas of self-concept and achievement motivation as the intrinsic values of interest in this study. She did not examine whether students gained knowledge of their

cultural heritage, acquired a sense of social responsibility towards their community, or even developed moral consciousness resulting from this cultural-historical exposure. Consequently, another study will need to be performed to examine other values that may have been imparted to the students as a result of participating in the course.

The apparent scarcity of research on the outcomes of an Afrikan centered education upon the lives of Afrikan American students, academically, socially, and spiritually, offers opportunities for further research. Proponents of an Afrikan centered education espouse the importance of Afrikan American students both learning from an Afrikan centered curriculum and learning cultural values that proceed from Afrikan culture, such as the Nguzo Saba and the principles of Maat (Akoto, 1994; Karenga, 1998; Asante, 1992; Lee, 1992). Certainly, increasing academic achievement for Afrikan American students is an important component of this education to its proponents. However, transforming the Afrikan American student into a person who is conscientious of the humanity of all people is a more compelling outcome of this education (Asante, 1992).

Research needs to be performed that identifies the intrinsic values of this education in the lives of Afrikan American students. Is there more for students to gain from this educational model than just higher grades? Does this educational model enhance self-concept and increase the life chances of the students who attended an Afrikan centered school for a majority of their educational careers? In fact, how do Afrikan American students who have graduated from an Afrikan centered school perceive that school experience in retrospect? Currently, there is no research that examines the impact of this educational model upon the lives of students who have attended and graduated from an Afrikan centered school. The voices of the Afrikan

American students who have personally experienced this educational model can best tell the story of how this education has impacted their lives. The intent of this study is to engage in research that will examine what is the perceived value of this education to those who have experienced it. The search is for answers that will explicate what values other than academic achievement an Afrikan centered educational model offers.

CHAPTER III

Design and Methodology

Overview

Frustration with the inability of public school system to provide many Afrikan American students with a quality education has been the impetus for the Afrikan American community to seek an alternative educational option for their children. An Afrikan centered educational model has emerged as one option in the attempt to increase the academic success and life chances of Afrikan American students. To date, very little research has examined the influence of this educational model upon the academic outcomes of Afrikan American students. Additionally, no research has sought to uncover the influence of this educational model upon the lives of the Afrikan American young people who experienced it. Rarer still are studies that utilize the voices of students who have experienced this educational model to determine the perceived outcomes of this educational experience. The question answered in this study is "What are the educational experiences of Afrikan American young people who have attended an Afrikan centered school?

Research Design

This inquiry was undertaken by employing a qualitative research design. The qualitative research approach is established upon the premise that "reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing" (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). Qualitative research permits an interpretive approach to phenomena, that is, it offers methods that provide a venue for the researcher to ascertain how people make meaning as they interact with people and events in their world. According to Janesick (2000), qualitative researchers "study a social setting to understand the meaning of participants' lives in the participants'

own terms" (p. 210). This approach was best suited for this study, since the intent was to provide the participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences as they have come to understand the shaping of their experiences by attending an Afrikan centered school. To garner an understanding of the perceptions of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school and how that educational experience has influenced their lives, the qualitative research approach emphasizes methods, such as intensive in-depth interviews, narratives, observations, artifacts and document analysis which captures the intense meaning-making in which the researcher and the participants are engaged (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In this research, an integrated bounded interpretive multiple case study design was employed with an Afrocentric methodological approach. An interpretive design was selected because "knowledge is a social and historical product" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 4) and meaning can be discovered in what people do everyday. The goal was to grasp a glimpse in time and provide an understanding of "meanings made by both the social actors and the researcher" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8).

This design was integrated because there were several units of analysis in this study. One unit of analysis in this study was the Afrikan centered educational model. The study explored the outcomes of this educational model for the Afrikan centered school. Another unit of analysis was each young person. Each case consisted of the lived experience of a young person who attended a Midwestern Afrikan centered school. Each case was bounded by criteria established for participation in this study as well as by the educational model and the site under study.

The multiple case study design permitted a holistic understanding of each participant's perception of their experiences resulting from the Afrikan centered

education. Each participant's life told a different story as he/she interacted with this educational model, and the multiple case study method allowed these unique experiences to be captured and examined individually and collectively. Herriot and Firestone (1983) assert that "evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (cited in Yin, 2003, p. 46).

There were several reasons why an Afrocentric methodology was selected to conduct this study. First, the complexities involved in studying members of a historically oppressed and marginalized group whose stories are not often heard or are told as seen through the lens of their oppressors requires this method. Sharing the experiences of this group demands a method which will moderate unintended biases and the influence of the dominant culture's traditional methods; therefore, the Afrocentric methodological approach was chosen.

This methodology permitted a holistic approach for understanding the perception of experiences for each participant resulting from an Afrikan centered education; this approach insisted on the presence of the researcher within the work. Unlike traditional research methods that require the researcher to distance himself from the object of study, the Afrocentric methodology requires the researcher to take a collective approach to understanding the Afrikan phenomenon, that is, to join with the phenomenon under study. Asante (2003) asserts that the "Afrocentric method suggests cultural and social immersion as opposed to 'scientific distance' as the best approach to understand Afrikan phenomena" (p. 27).

The Afrocentric methodology allowed discovery of the lived experiences of the participants by "questioning all assumptions about reality that are rooted in a particularistic view of the universe" (Asante, 1990, p. 26), in effect, my philosophical

stance or assumptions were examined beginning, during and upon completion of this research. This examination of my philosophical stance was achieved through the process of "introspection" and "retrospection" (Asante, 1990, p. 27). According to Asante (1990) "[i]ntrospection means that the researcher questions herself or himself in regard to the topic under discussion" (p. 27). He further explained that prior to the study, the researcher should write down all assumptions, values, and beliefs about the phenomena for the purpose of identifying possible prejudgments that the researcher may have that would hinder obtaining a clear or accurate picture of the experience under study.

Afrocentric methodology also requires the researcher to be retrospective once the study is completed. "Retrospection is the process of questioning one's self after the project has been completed to ascertain if any personal obstacles exist to a fair interpretation" (Asante, 1990, p.27). It is the follow-up check to ensure that the knowledge generated must be empowering to people of Afrikan descent, the ultimate aim of Afrocentric methodology (Mazama, 2003, Kershaw, 1992, Asante, 1990). A journal was kept where thoughts and assumptions were recorded about the Afrikan centered educational experience prior to the research, during the research process, and upon completion of this study.

Finally, this methodology was best suited for this study because it lent itself to a variety of methods that were used according to the research question and the participants in this study. These methods were selected because they captured the historical, social, political and cultural context of the lives of the participants in their responses to the experience of attending an Afrikan centered school. This methodology encouraged the utilization of narratives, observations, as well as, documents and artifacts analysis.

Twenty months were spent in periodic observations of the school site, interviewing subjects, and document analysis.

Site and Subject Selection

The setting for this research was in a K-12 charter school situated within an urban community in the Midwest. The school opened as an Independent Black Institution in 1974 and operated under the auspices of the Council for Independent Black Institutions since 1976. In 1995, the school became an Afrikan centered chartered school; it offered an Afrikan centered education to Afrikan American students for well over 30 years and was chosen because its' curriculum implementation was well established. Previous research has revealed that the implementation of this educational model can impede or enhance the outcomes of the students, by selecting this site; the intent was to minimize the transitional impact of the initial implementation upon the student outcomes. That is, the educational model is already well-established in the school and will have minimum impact on student outcomes.

Another reason for the selection of this school site was that it experienced its first graduating class of seven students in 1996 and continued to graduate students each year thereafter. This meant that participant selection could be garnered from a pool of young people from at least eight graduating classes for this research. Each year the school had small groups of graduates (i.e., anywhere from five to fifteen students) and drawing from eight years of graduating students increased the likelihood of finding young people located within or around the city who would participate in the study.

Sampling

Several sampling strategies for selecting subjects were used for this study: 1) criterion sampling, 2) snowball sampling, and 3) extreme or deviant case sampling (Miles

& Huberman, 1994). First, "criterion" sampling was used to locate the initial subjects. This method of sampling was most appropriate because it facilitated the location of young people who fit the criteria of the study. The phenomena of this study are young people who had attended an Afrikan centered school, and the subjects were specifically selected because they had this experience. With the assistance of an informant, subjects were identified who met the specific criteria for the study. The subjects selected for this study were:

1. Subjects were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
2. Subjects had attended an Afrikan centered school for the a majority of their K-12 academic careers, and
3. Subjects were not currently enrolled in the Afrikan centered school.

A pilot study was performed to narrow the research interest on Afrikan centered education. As a consequence of the pilot study, an informant was located who provided access into the school setting. The informant was a former teacher in the Afrikan centered school and made initial contact with young people who fit the criteria for the study. The informant provided the initial list of names of those who were willing to participate in the study.

Next, "snowball" sampling was used to locate more subjects for the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), snowball sampling "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (p. 28). This sampling strategy appropriated knowledge of subjects in the study to locate and provide access to other potential subjects. Seven participants were located and interviewed for this study. Of the seven participants, the sampling consisted of two brothers, of the same family and their mother, a brother, and a sister from the same family and their father,

three individual participants, and their parents. Also interviewed were the school director and an administrator of the school.

Finally, the "extreme or deviant case" sampling strategy was used to locate subjects who would provide a different perspective of the phenomena under study. This sampling strategy also "serves to increase confidence in [the] conclusions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). One potential subject who had a different educational experience than most of the other participants was located, but refused to participant in the study.

Data Collection

In this Afrocentric method approach, several research methods were employed to collect the data. Intensive face-to face, in-depth interviews of the participants permitted me to construct rich descriptive narratives. A creative, structured open-ended interview method was used to gather data on the experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). According to Holstein and Gubrium (2000) creative interviewing allows the interviewer "to create a climate of mutual disclosure" (p. 117). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) point out that the interviewing process is a social encounter between the interviewee and the interviewer in which knowledge is constructed. These researchers elucidate that participants do not bank knowledge from which the interviewer comes and withdraws, but that knowledge is created as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Interviewing allowed the acquisition of data that could not be obtain through simple observations and since this research was established on the reflections and memories of the participants, there were no opportunities to observe the participants within the site as students.

Narratives. In this Afrocentric methodological study, personal life narratives were used as a method of creating portraits of the participants. In conjunction with the data collected from the interviews, two research methods were used to assist in answering the questions of "Who are the participants?" "What were the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their school experiences?" and "What are their experiences of attending an Afrikan centered school?" Catherine Riessman (1993) writes that "narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (p. 70). Ochs and Capps (1996) confirm that narrative "provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds." (p. 22).

This method of inquiry is best suited to the study of Afrikan people, since storytelling and oral traditions are historically found within the Afrikan culture and the Afrikan American community.

Procedure

Each participant was engaged in 60-90 minutes intensive in-depth interviews. The school setting was observed for two days a month during an eighteen month period. The purpose of this observation was to become familiar with the context of the school setting, that is, teacher and student interactions, the culture of the school as defined through symbolism and imagery, and parental involvement. Each participant of the study received a "Thank you" note as well as an electronic copy of the completed study. Additionally, a teacher's meeting; a Kwanzaa celebration, a school roller skating event, and the school relocation to another building were observed and in some cases active participation was necessary.

When clarification was needed, follow-up interviews with several of the participants were performed.

Data Analysis

Keeping in line with the tenets of the Afrocentric methodology, prior to analyzing the data, introspection was undertaken. This process was to identify any assumptions, values, and beliefs concerning an Afrikan centered educational experience. After introspection, the interviews were transcribed and the "code mines" (Glesne, 1999, p. 135) were entered to search for themes within the data. According to Glesne (1999), "[c]oding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose" (p. 135). The data analysis was undertaken by reading and re-reading the transcripts. From the transcripts and fieldnotes, key themes and patterns that emerged from the data were identified. A coding system was established through sorting and re-sorting the emergent themes and patterns and each new theme was recorded in a code book. When no new themes and patterns emerge, the themes were compared to see if major overarching themes within the coding could be identified and where possible some themes were merged with other themes. This data reduction was a necessary part of the analysis process. Miles and Huberman (1994) affirm that "Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified" (p. 11). Once the themes and patterns were identified and exhausted, the findings were recorded.

After the completion of the data analysis and writing up the findings, the process of retrospection was performed. Thoughts, emotions and reactions in the research process were examined to ensure that a fair representation of the data and the participants

had been achieved. This examination encompassed writing within a journal. Several questions were asked: Were the participants represented fairly? Were these findings anticipated? Had subjectivity within this study been accounted for sufficiently?

Verisimilitude

In an attempt to ensure accuracy within this study, the use of multiple methods and multiple data sources was employed, a process called triangulation. Triangulation was achieved through the use of several methods of inquiry, such as intensive in-depth interviews, observations, and documents examination. Not only were subjects interviewed, but the site was visited to observe student and teacher interactions, as well as gain insight into the school context. On these visits, the accounts of events within the school as reported by the participants were verified through teachers, and even current students. Newspaper articles were also located that substantiated events that the participants reported during their interviews.

Also, data was gathered from multiple sources such as through the interviews of the young people, their parents, and the director of the school. Even though this study is interested in the experience of the young people who attended an Afrikan centered school, the interviews of their parents and the school director were used to cross check and verify the data received from the young people. As another means of ensuring accuracy, the "member check" method was employed, which provided opportunities for the participants to look over the transcripts to verify the accuracy of data collected. Several of the participants were willing to "collaborate" in the research by perusing their transcripts, although no suggestions for change or corrections were recommended.

The Role of the Researcher

As an Afrikan American, middle-class, female researcher, I wanted to view this data from my own race-based epistemology. My own lived experience is encompassed in growing up in a Midwestern city which was flourishing as an automotive center. As an Afrikan American child growing up in this society during the turbulent sixties (1960s), I was painfully conscious of the racial oppression and injustices that permeated the social and economic terrain like a thick smog. Realizing that my worldview has been shaped by my lived experiences, I concur with Cynthia Tyson (2003) as she asserts that the "specificity of oppression" shapes the epistemology of the Afrikan American scholar (p. 20). In other words, the historical experience of oppression in this country has impacted how people of color view phenomena. She further states that "the experience of racism and oppression moves the oppressed "Other" into a paradigm of survival creating a view of the world that is not shared by those gatekeepers who legitimize academic discourse and research" (Tyson, 2003, p. 21). In light of Tyson's assertion, I acknowledge that I bring to this research process an epistemological perspective that has been and yet is continually being shaped by the "specificity of oppression".

Limitations of this Study

This study has several limitations. First, the study looks at participants of a single site. Data may be different if taken from various sites in different regions of the country. This site is located in an urban community and may produce different data if the study is performed in a rural or suburban area. Further, this study lacks a control group to compare the responses of young people to determine if these responses can be generalized to all students.

CHAPTER IV

Context of the School

Introduction

The Setting

The Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy is an Afrikan-centered charter school which provides instructions to students from the kindergarten through twelfth grades. It is located in Westville[3], Michigan, which is a large metropolitan urban city. The Westville Public School District (WPSD) has a student enrollment of approximately 170,000 students; well over ninety percent of its student population is Afrikan American (U.S. Charter Schools, 2002). By 2001-02, more than 19,000 students were attending charter schools in Westville (U.S. Charter Schools, 2002). In an effort to minimize the impact of declining enrollment resulting from students transferring to charter schools, the WPSD capped the Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy's student enrollment at 300 students. During the 2004-05 academic year, the school had a student enrollment of 260 students (Annual Education Report, 2005).

Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy began in 1974 as an Independent Black Institution (IBI) in the format of a Saturday School. It was named the Nat Turner School; its genesis was rooted in the Black Power, Black Nationalist, and Pan Afrikanist movements of the 1960s, as Afrikan Americans were redefining themselves and their existence in American society. These movements were both political and economic within Afrikan American communities, and they promoted the ideology that Black people on the Continent and the Diaspora must become a self-determined and self-

[3] To ensure anonymity of the location and the participants in this study, the names of the school, city and people have been changed

reliant people. In response to this movement, a collective of parents, educators, and professionals began to embrace the self-determination initiative to create the private school. When the Nat Turner School became a full day school in 1976, the name was changed to the Faizah Shule Academy for Gifted Children. The name of the school was significant for two reasons. First, the name was changed to Faizah Shule because "Faizah" is a Kiswahili term which means life and "Shule" is Kiswahili for school.[4] In essence, the name "Faizah Shule" means the "school of life". The second reason the name was changed was to give emphasis to the Afrikan centered educational model and to stress the philosophy of the school, which emanated from Mama Taraji's, the founder and director of the school, belief that Afrikan American children were gifted children and that the school experience should be holistic, impacting every aspect of the child's life. In that same year, the Faizah Shule joined the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) and was instrumental in refining the ideology of IBI's that consequently, resulted in the creation of national standards for IBI's.

As an IBI, student enrollment for Faizah Shule was comprised of approximately sixty students. The requirement for attending the Faizah Shule was through parental choice and student tuition. Whenever possible, financial scholarships were awarded to families who experienced temporary financial hardships. Rather than have the students leave the Afrikan-centered learning environment to attend public school, when the oldest students reached the eighth grade, the Shule extended its grades each year until the school reached the twelfth grade. When the high school was added, it was named the Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy and emphasized student preparation for higher education.

[4] The name of the school is significant to the philosophy of the school. Faizah is actually a Kiswahili term which means "she is victorious".

Even though the schools were located in separate buildings, they were usually presented as one entity, the Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy (FS/MGPA)[5], when Mama Taraji referenced them. In 1996, the FS/MGPA experienced its first graduating class of seven students in 1996.

The Faizah Shule - Background

The Faizah Shule was located in the building that housed K-8 grades and had been a storefront that encompassed the entire length of a short city block. Christian churches of various denominations lined the streets like trees on both sides of the Shule and across the street from it. The building was painted in a color that was a dark red and windows lined the front, the left side and the back of the building. An interesting feature of these windows was that every window was shielded from unwanted entry by cast iron security guards. A sign "Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy" hung over the main entrance in the front of the school.

The school was divided into two learning circles. One learning circle was the Nile Valley Learning Circle, which is where students are instructed from kindergarten through 5th grades. This learning circle was located on one end of the building and consisted of open classrooms that were divided by material cabinets, lockers and coat racks for the younger students. The room was painted white. The classroom walls were utilized for student achievements, decorated bulletin boards, affirmation posters, Afrikan American historical figures, and various maps of the world, particularly the continent of Afrika. Within the Nile Valley Learning Circle, grades are identified by ethnic groups. T

The second learning circle was the Pyramid Learning Circle, which was where

[5] Henceforth, Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy will be referred to as the acronym FS/MGPA or simply as the Shule.

students from sixth through the eighth grades were instructed. This learning group was located at the opposite end of the building. Along the narrow hall which connected both instructional centers were offices for the finance managers, the School Psychologist, counselors and instructors. The office for the Director and the Administrative Assistant for the school was located in the same area of the Pyramid Learning Circle. There were three rooms in this area that were utilized for instruction; one main room and two adjacent rooms on each side of the main room. Off from the main room was an area with about eight computers. During the times that I visited the Shule, I never observed any students using the computers. Mama Taraji is a constant presence passing through the rooms, occasionally stopping to praise or if necessary, chasten students.

Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy - Background

The Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy was housed in a building located on the property of the oldest Afrikan American college in Westville. It has leased this building since 1994 and is located to the left of the main building on the property. The building was a multi-level building with rooms on all floors. The front exterior wall of the building was brick and the side walls and back wall of the building were covered with painted white wood. Windows flanked the front of the building with a few windows located on the sides and in the rear. The front entrance was always locked and could be accessed only from the parking lot that also served the college. The rear of the building had a gated-fenced perimeter.

Displayed on a small table in the foyer is a picture of the school's namesake, Marcus Garvey. Also displayed on the table was the official accreditation of the Marcus Garvey Academy as a member of the National Honors Society. African statues and artifacts were also displayed on the table. In this building, there were three classrooms

on the upper level of the school and three classrooms on the bottom level of the school. At one time this building served as the elementary school. Now this building is the high school.

Meeting the Founder of Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy

To understand the context of the FS/MGPA, it is necessary to first meet and interact with the founder of the school. The vision of the school is enmeshed and embedded intricately within her social, historical, political, and cultural perspective. So, our effort to explore the context of the school must occur simultaneously with understanding the founder, Mama Taraji.

I remembered that I was astonished at the physical beauty and stamina of this woman. Mama Taraji is a beautiful woman in her seventies. She was medium stature and she was attired in a colorful Afrikan top and slacks. Her long grey locks flowed from under her head dress. She was a soft-spoken woman with a calm and warm demeanor. Mama Taraji was a native of Westville. She grew up during a time when the Afrikan American community of Westville was rich and vibrant with the presence of Afrikan American cultural heritage:

> And we went to everything...all cultural groups [because] at that time people came to churches in community things and anybody could go. There were Black business and science expositions...that [were] kind of in with George Washington Carver people. Black inventions and Black businesses, people got to see those...And in the Black community there was a race consciousness that was different than it is now, I think. We knew about Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois...We got to see Eartha Kitt...Lena Horne...I mean we just had these images of Black people who were prominent and successful in all areas...From athletes to inventors to intellectuals (Personal Interview, 2004).

After graduating from high school, she continued on to college where she co-majored in English and French. She taught English and Journalism in the Westville Public schools for ten years. She decided to pursue a Masters degree and began

substitute teaching throughout the Westville school district. During this time, she witnessed the economic and subsequent resource disparity between affluent and low socio-economic schools and decided that she needed to create her own school. She noted that her drive for the advocacy of Afrikan American children stimulated her search for an educational model which would address their specific concerns. She asserts "I was looking for something that would dramatically impact [Afrikan American] students."

In 1974, Mama Taraji along with a collective of twelve families opened the school that would eventually become Faizah Shule as a Saturday school called the Nat Turner School. Mama Taraji described the process of the genesis and evolution for the Saturday school:

> The process that we chose was to run a Saturday school for two years and to develop and test curriculum...at least one member of the family was an educator. And most of them taught higher education, they were college instructors and professors. So we worked diligently and seriously on curriculum and we tested it in six week segments. We had kids come for six weeks and then they were off for a week while [we] did an evaluation and assessment, rewrote or wrote core curriculum until we had felt strong enough and we were ready to open the Shule in 1974 (Personal Interview, 2005).

In 1976, yielding to increased pressure from parents and having refined the curriculum, the Saturday day school became a full day, K-8 school and the name was changed to Faizah[6] Shule.

Struggles: The tool of perfection. Historically, Mama Taraji and the Shule community struggled to keep the school open and this struggle was manifested in constant relocation of the school. In over 30 years of existence, the school had moved nine times. The Shule began in an Episcopal Church center and after several years moved to a Lutheran church. After a brief period, the Shule moved to Lorne College of

[6] Refer to footnote #1

Business. Violations cited by the Fire Marshall caused the Shule to move again. They purchased a small building, but then lost the building because of financial difficulties. Next, the Shule moved to a Catholic church. The church decided to demolish the building and the Shule was forced to move again, this time to another Lutheran church. Officials at the Lutheran church decided to terminate their rent and the Shule moved to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The YWCA eventually closed and the Shule moved to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). After several years, the YMCA closed and was sold to Catholic housing. Finally, the Shule moved back to Lorne College of Business, which is its current location.

In 1995, the Shule became a charter school and opened its enrollment to students within the Westville Public School district.

The Guiding Principles for the educational experience. During this time, the school was under the ideological and organizational umbrella of the Council of Independent Black Institutions. In 1994, through the collaborative efforts of its members, in which Mama Taraji and the staff were instrumental, the CIBI created a position statement. The position statement defined an Afrikan centered education and in 1995, the CIBI also created national standards for evaluating Afrikan centered Educational Institutions (Hotep, 2001). According to the definition created by CIBI and adopted by Faizah Shule and which guided the instructional pedagogy of its member schools:

> CIBI defines Afrikan-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. We define nation building as the conscious and focused application of our people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. Nation building encompasses both the reconstruction of Afrikan culture and the

development of a progressive and sovereign state structure consistent with that culture (Hotep, 2001, p. 212).

The CIBI position statement further elucidates ten beliefs of utilizing an Afrikan-centered education. The practice of Afrikan-centered education:

1. Acknowledges Afrikan spirituality as an essential aspect of our uniqueness as a people and makes it an instrument of our liberation;
2. Facilitates participation in the affairs of nations and defining (or redefining), reality on our own terms, in our own time and in our own interests;
3. Prepares Afrikans 'for self-reliance, nation maintenance, and nation management in every regard';
4. Emphasizes the fundamental relationship between the strength of our families and the strength of our nation;
5. Ensures that the historic role and function of the customs, traditions, rituals and ceremonies --- that have protected and preserved our culture; facilitated our spiritual expression; ensured harmony in our social relations; prepared our people to meet their responsibilities as adult members of our culture; and , sustained the continuity of Afrikan life over successive generations --- are understood and made relevant to the challenges that confront us in our time;
6. Emphasizes that Afrikan identity is embedded in the continuity of Afrikan cultural history and that Afrikan cultural history represents a distinct reality continually evolving from the experiences of all Afrikan people wherever they are and have been on the planet across time and generations;
7. Focuses on the "knowledge and discovery of historical truths; through comparisons; hypothesizing and testing through debate, trial and application; through analysis and synthesis; through creative and critical thinking; through problem resolution processes; and through final evaluation and decision making";
8. Can only be systematically facilitated by people who themselves are consciously engaged in the process of Afrikan-centered personal transformation;
9. Is a process dependent upon human perception and interpretation (Thus, it follows that a curriculum can not be Afrikan-centered independent of our capacity to perceive and interpret it in an Afrikan-centered manner);
10. Embraces the traditional wisdom that "children are the reward of life" and it is, therefore, an expression our unconditional love for them. In order to best serve Afrikan children our methods must reflect the best understanding we have of how they develop and learn biologically, spiritually and culturally (Hotep, 2001, p. 212).

Integrating the beliefs and the position statement from the Council of Independent Black Institutions with her personal educational philosophy, Mama Taraji developed a

framework for instructing students at the Faizah Shule. Mama Taraji's articulated her educational philosophy as follows:

> Our philosophy has evolved over the years. We have a collective philosophy. Basically, we are saying that we believe that all children are gifted. It is up to the teachers to identify and this is before Howard Gardner, to identify the particular strengths and talents in each child. And to develop a curriculum just for him alone that will become an equalizing factor for his social and academic growth, for these children. We believe in the whole child and that everything has to be addressed, the child's nutrition, the spiritual, the physical development, the intellect, etc. And because we live in a racist society, we believe that Black children need more intense mentoring...We believe that the parent should be involved at all levels from pre-school thru high school and probably on into college in their child's education . . . [because] their first teacher should continue to guide them, to study with them, to nurture them, to see that they have these thing." (Personal Interview, 2004).

A more formal articulation of the educational philosophy of Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Academy was located in the Shule's Parents Handbook (1999) and reads as follows:

- We believe, as Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, believed in preparing talented young people to provide leadership and service for Afrikan people at home and abroad. Our commitment is to continue this legacy within an Afrikan centered framework and a violence-free environment challenging students to become some of the finest scholars, artists, and leaders in the global community.
- We believe that with the spiritual and moral strength inherited from our ancestors, and through on-going struggle for justice, peace, and self-determination, the [Garvey] Preparatory experience will foster in the students a spirit of self-reliance and commitment to the rebuilding of our communities and reclaiming our traditional greatness.
- We believe that education is the gateway to liberation and that all students deserve to be fully and correctly educated with the truth of human endeavor. In the spirit of Sankofan Education, we must teach our students to reclaim and reconstruct Afrikan greatness, using that knowledge to establish working relationships with Afrikan people throughout the Diaspora.
- We believe that education is a transformative and life-long process. Growth through learning places responsibility on both Mwalimu (teacher) and Mwanafunzi (student) to share their knowledge and skills. This process involves social interaction, cultural immersion, hands-on, and "beyond the walls" creative school experiences that complement and reinforce reading, computing and research. Learning must be balanced between structure and freedom to create.

- We believe that parents must continue to take an active role throughout their children's entire education; and that parents and teachers must work together to promote harmony, self-determination, cooperation, collective responsibility, purpose, creativity, and faith (The principles of the NGUZO SABA) in the children they collectively serve.
- We believe that all children deserve respect and protection; but must also learn to respect others. These lessons are best taught through role-modeling by adults who are positive and fair and consistent in their behavior.
- We believe that given an educational experience that promotes self-esteem, self-respect, and self-determination, and armed with a consciousness based on truth, justice, and service, Afrikan descended children can become competent and confident leaders in their communities and in a world of many diverse peoples and cultures (Parents Handbook, 1999, p. 3).

The FS/MGPA's also developed a seven-fold purpose statement that reads as follows:

- To develop a learning model that encourages academic excellence, self-determination, entrepreneurship and social responsibility.
- To produce leadership for the re-development of the African American community.
- To reinforce group identity and pride as well as self-esteem by daily use of exemplary deeds and virtuous thoughts from great African people throughout our history.
- To instill a sense of belonging in parents, students, and teachers by emphasizing the concept of extended family.
- To develop strategic thinking based on past and present successes and creative possibilities for the future.
- To prepare students for higher learning.
- To examine the benefits of extended exposure of learners to education based on Afrocentric principles. (Parent Handbook, 1999, p. 4).

These documents were utilized as the guiding principles to ensure that students who attended the FS/MGPA received an Afrikan centered educational experience. The overall intent of this experience was to produce leaders who were grounded in Afrikan culture and identity and who would work towards the liberation and perpetuation of Afrikan people on the Continent and in the Diaspora.

The next section provides detailed insight into the culture of a typical day at the Shule. This section provides a rich description of the rituals and ceremonies in which

students were expected to engage as well as the songs and affirmations that students sang and recited each day in this educational experience are presented.

A Typical Day at the Shule

A Typical Day at the Shule

Because the participants' memories of the Shule experience spanned over a period of time, in some cases as many as nine to twelve years, and also because the Shule has experienced various changes over the years, such as expanding grade levels and even converting to a charter school status, the participants descriptions to paint a portrait of a typical day at the Shule have been synthesized. Drawing upon the memories of the participants in this study, the following description of a typical day at the Shule is presented:

Students arrived at the Shule in uniformed dress, girls attired in a black skirt or slacks with a white blouse, and an optional red sweater, and boys in black slacks, a white shirt, and the optional red sweater. Occasionally, girls would wear a scarf or a head wrap and both boys and girls wore black shoes. The mornings began with the gathering of students and staff for the opening assembly, which was held at 8:30 am every morning in two locations in the building. The pre-kindergarten to fifth grade assembly was held in the Nile Valley Learning Circle room with their school administrator, teachers, and staff and the sixth to the eighth grades assembly was held in the Pyramid Learning Circle room with their school administrator, teachers, and staff members.

During the assembly, the students stood in a circle formation and took a stance referred to as *angulia*, which is Kiswahili for "attention." In this stance, boys would stand with their arms folded across their chests, and girls would stand with their arms in a crossed position over their chests. Students understood that taking this stance

demonstrated respect for their elders and a willingness to hear what was being said. One participant explained *angulia* in this way:

> *Angulia* is to stand at attention and it how you have to stand during morning and afternoon assemblies. How you stand when you are greeting one of our Mwalimu [teacher]. How you stand for approval, for the most part you are at rest in between any tabora or a drill, like a tapping society....I think there was a spiritual element [to it], but also there was a discipline element because it was about learning how to control and still yourself from the inside-out. And I think *angulia* in a lot of ways helped stilling oneself from the inside-out. You have to pull from an internal force so that you can control your body [and] you can control your mouth (Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

While standing in *angulia*, students participated in the daily ritual of honoring the ancestors through prayer and libation, the recitation of pledges, and the singing songs of affirmation. They heard announcements and inspirational words. The students recited the pledge, which is referred to as the CIBI pledge:

> We are Afrikan people struggling for national liberation,
> We are preparing leaders and workers to bring about positive change for our people,
> We stress the development of our bodies, minds, souls and consciousness,
> Our commitment is to self-determination, self-defense and self-respect for our race (The Council of Independent Black Institutions, 1990, p. 51).

The students sang songs of affirmation; one example is the song, ***Watoto Wa Afrika (We are children of Afrika).*** This song is a call and response, that is, one person says the verse first and then the audience responds by repeating it. This activity, call and response, is reclamation of Afrikan traditional culture (Ani, 1997). A student is selected to lead the song and then employs improvisation as the song progresses. One student related that the song was sung as follows:

> Watoto Wa Afrika *(call)*
> Watoto Wa Afrika *(response)*
> My name is Kamau *(call)*
> His name is Kamau *(response)*
> His name is Adofo *(call)*
> His name is Adofo *(response)*

(Personal Interview, 2005).

The song would continue in this manner until every student and teacher had been named. Announcements were given and encouraging words for the day and the *wanafunzi* (Kiswahili for students) all pulled together by saying seven *harambees. Harambee* means "let's all pull together" in Kiswahili; it is performed by the students forming a fist with their left hand, raising their fisted arm in the air and pulling the arm down to the group recitation of seven Harambees. Then, the students are dismissed from the group assembly and go to their classes.

The curriculum consisted of classes that are centered in Afrikan culture. Studies are designed to present a holistic context for learning about self and heritage, and to provide the basis for understanding other peoples (Annual Education Report, 2005). Students receive instruction from the following categories:

- **CULTURE** – Afrikan Studies, Social Studies (History, Civics, Government, Economics) Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy, Fine Arts, Music and Dance
- **LANGUAGE ARTS & COMMUNICATIONS** – Reading, Writing, Speech, Listening, Afrikan and World Literary Studies, Drama, Debate, Oratory, Research/Library Skills, Journalism, Foreign Languages: Afrikan and European
- **MATHEMATICS** – Basic operations, Geometry, Afrikan Counting Systems, Business Math, Algebra, Trigonometry, Calculus
- **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** – Life Science, Afrikan Invention and Discovery, Environmental Studies, Chemistry, Physics, Physiology and Anatomy, Research and Scientific Writing, Computer Science
- **PHYSICAL EDUCATION** – Fitness, Games and Sports, Martial Arts, Health & Nutrition (Annual Education Report, 2005).

In the Nile Valley Learning Circle classrooms, a visitor may find kindergarten students learning about their identity as Afrikan people. One participant of this study explained the importance of students gaining knowledge of their Afrikan identity as the foundation of their educational experience:

> They needed to understand [that] they were African children and everything that they needed to do that was going to be good and had needed to be reaffirmed was an African thing. Everything that needed to be in [the] room which was about colors or shapes or styles or letters or numbers were learning about black people. And it could be about black people anywhere in the world but it was going to be about black people. They were going to be inundated and re-inundated with blackness, blackness, blackness and how beautiful and good it was (Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

In the Pyramid Learning Circle classrooms (older students), you may find students receiving instructions for writing a term paper. This term paper would be expected to be representative of a college level paper with cover sheet, footnotes, and bibliography. This paper would challenge students to see themselves as leaders of nations, and a comprehensive explication of how they would effect and implement policies for the maintenance of their nation would be expected. One participant described the experience of writing this paper as follows:

> And our assignment was to write . . . I mean I was so zealous about that assignment, I wrote something like 9 pages worth of work. I think the requirement was like 4 pages, but I wrote something like 9 pages. The whole idea was how we foresee ourselves as an independent African nation and what that would be. You know, that's what heads of state do, that's what people who are designing policies and implementing policies that affects entire nations, and the entire world, that's what those kinds of people do. But we were never taught explicitly certainly that, neither implicitly that we did not belong to that group . . . but we are responsible for re-designing and then implementing new policies, and a new way of thinking, a new way of being, and a new way of teaching, and a new way of living (Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

At mid-day, students attended lunch at the Shule. The entire school gathered in a common lunch area and one student was selected to lead the group in the giving of thanks for the food. The prayer is recited in Kiswahili but is translated here:

> One hand to give,
> One hand to receive,
> We give praise to our Creator for healthy food to eat
> To make us stronger.
> To continue our struggle for liberation,
> Justice, and peace.

We say "Thank you!" (Personal Interview, Kamau, 2005).

Students ate their meals, abundant in raw vegetables and fruits. The Shule's philosophy was to encourage students and parents to eat nutritious and healthy foods. After students completed their meals and cleaned up behind themselves, they were permitted to go outside for recess. During recess, boys and girls were kept apart and engaged in separate activities. After recess, students went to their afternoon classes.

During the afternoon classes, a visitor would find students in the Nile Valley Circle classrooms learning about the protocol for interacting with adults. As one participant related:

> We [Afrikan people] have always been very, very careful [and] deliberate about relationship in role and place. You know children have a place, and it isn't to be beat down and oppressed, but they have a place. As a young adult you have a place; as a full grown adult you have a place; as an elderly you have a place. And so we were constantly learning and being molded and shaped in a way in which we understood our place and not that that wasn't an important or special place, but that there was certain ways in which you engaged with an adult. If you were late for class, you had to ask permission to enter. If you left the class, you had to ask, but first of all, you had to apologize for being late and then ask for permission to enter. Anytime a teacher walked into the classroom and at the beginning of class, you stood and you greeted your teacher with respect. You did not leave a class .... You waited for the teacher to dismiss you and then you stood up and you thanked them for providing you with the information and all that you had gained for that day from that class. You didn't just enter [a class], let's say that that teacher had sent you with a note to another Mwalimu (teacher). You didn't just walk into that class, you didn't ever walk through anyone's classroom, depending on where you were and they had open classrooms. No, you ask permission (Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

In the Pyramid Learning Circle classrooms, a visitor may find students learning the third principle of the Nguzo Saba, which is Ujima. This principle stands for collective work and responsibility and is understood to mean "To build and maintain our community together, and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to

solve them together" (Karenga, 1998, p. 53). A participant of the study described how this principle was affirmed in their education:

> But it is very interesting about this idea that everybody will take responsibility for each other because if anybody is misbehaving then everybody gets in trouble. That was how we learned. We had to chant when we would drill "Are you your brother's keeper?" or "Are you your sister's keeper?" and the answer was "No, I am my brother"; "No, I am my sister." Not that there wasn't individual responsibility, but definitely out of that push for individual responsibility came a larger governing responsibility to something bigger than you. I'm always saying it started with you, but it always ultimately went to something that was bigger than you (Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

At the end of the day, students gathered for the closing assembly. In the assembly the students formed a circle and stood at *angulia*. Once again, the students, teachers, and the administrator participated in the recitation of pledges, songs, and inspirational words. In the closing assembly, the Afternoon pledge:

> I am the first and the Last.
> I am the Umoja and Imani.
> We pledge to think Black, Speak Black,
> Act Black, Buy Black, Pray Black,
> Love Black, and Live Black.
> We pledge to do black things today,
> To ensure us of a Black tomorrow (Konadu, 2005, p. 169).

This pledge is followed with the singing of the song, *We Have Done Black Things Today*:

> We have done Black things today and
> We will do Black things again tomorrow.
> We have done Black things today and
> We will do Black things again tomorrow.
> Will you? Yes, I will. Will you? Yes, I will. Will youuuuuu?
> One more time (repeat) . . .
> Asante Sana (Thank you very much) (Konadu, 2005, p. 170; Personal Interview, Asma, 2004).

The Seven principles of the Nguzo Saba have been incorporated into a song, and a student leader engaged his fellow students in a call and response rendition. At the end of the song, students pull together with seven strong *Harambees*. This act of pulling

together was interpreted by the students as coming together on one accord and combining their energies and strengths in support of the seven principles of the Nguzo Saba. Following the Harambees, the students clapped their hands together seven times. Afterwards, the students were dismissed for the day.

Although the Shule was dismissed for the day, many students remained on campus. These students were participating in after school programs, such as drum and dance practice or tutoring, and some were just waiting for their parents to pick them up. So a day at the Shule often did not come to end until well into the evening hours.

In the next chapter, profiles of the participants of this study and their parents are presented. The intent is to put flesh on the sinew of each participant's life, hoping to shed some light into the context of each young person's educational experience as related through their narratives.

CHAPTER V

Case Studies

In this chapter, the participants in this study, and their parents will be introduced through their narratives. The objective in this chapter is to paint a brief portrait of each person to give the reader a sense of who these people are historically, socially, politically, and culturally. The underlying questions which guided the writing of each narrative of the participants and their parents were:

1. Who is this person?
2. What were his/her parental influences while growing up?
3. What was the social, historical, political, and cultural context in which they grew up?

An additional question which was posed for the parents in shaping their narratives was:

4. Why did he/she select the Afrikan centered school for their child(ren)?

In this study, one parent for each participant and in two cases, two children of the same family were interviewed. Refer to Table 5.1 for a breakdown of the participants, their parent, graduation year, and gender.

Table 5.1: Participant, parent, graduation year and gender of participants

Participants	Parent	Year Graduated	Male or Female
Kamau	Mama Mariama	1996	M
Heimes	Mama Mariama	2001	M
Naimah	Mama Nefertiti	1996	F
Asma	Mama Busara	1996	F
Nina	Mama Ayo	2001	F
Mumbi	Baba Shombay	2001	F
Adofo	Baba Shombay	2002	M

Narratives are often employed when attempting to make meaning of particular life experiences (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). In the following profiles, a brief narrative of the parent is presented and then a brief narrative of the child/ren of each family is given. The parent's narrative frames the historical, cultural, social and political context which

guided the decision to enroll the participants into an Afrikan centered school. The parent's story broadens the scope of the participant's life, allowing the reader to more fully apprehend the lived experiences of each young person participating in this study.

To protect the privacy of the participants in the study, a pseudonym has been given to each participant, their parents and the school in the study. Some participants selected a pseudonym or pseudonyms were provided for those participants who did not select a pseudonym.

The majority of the participants, their parents and the director of the school had names representative of Afrikan culture. In selecting pseudonyms for the participants and their parents, I wanted to be mindful of the representation of the participants in this study. Their Afrikan names were significant because each name declared a quality, virtue or characteristic of the person who carried that name (Mbiti, 1991; Tedla, 1995). As researcher, I wanted to respect the naming tradition of Afrikan culture and as I selected pseudonyms for the participants, their parents and the director of the school, I took care to select a name for each person which reflected a trait or character that I observed during the interview process. In this action, I am aware that I shaped the image of my participants to the reader by the pseudonym that I select.

Mama Mariama, which means "a gift of God" in West Africa

I selected the pseudonym "Mariama" for this parent because I believed it described how her family perceived her life. She and her family had endured a crisis which tested their faith in the Creator and each other. It became apparent as I interviewed her that her children felt that she was, indeed, a precious gift from God.

Mama Mariama has two children who participated in this study, Kamau and Heimis. Mama Mariama and her husband owned a home located in a predominately

white suburb about 20 miles outside of a main urban hub, East City. A small population of people of color resided in the area; in fact, the neighbors located immediately to the left of their home were Afrikan Americans.

At first glance, observing Mama Mariama in the kitchen, I did not notice the peculiarity of her movements. At times her movements were not smooth and fluid, but rather jerky and forced. Mama Mariama later told me that she had been completely paralyzed thirteen years prior, and doctors did not expect for her to ever walk again, however, she was proud of the progress she had made in moving about without assistance.

This family had the ability to make you feel at home. Mama Mariama's sixteen year old daughter assisted her in the kitchen with obvious pleasure. I noticed that each task her mother gave her was met with an attitude of honor and respect. We sat at a table arranged with real chinaware, silverware, napkins and elegantly arrayed dishes of food and we prayed before eating. While eating, Mama Mariama told me about her close fate with death back in 1992.

On reflection it demonstrated a critical point in the lives of the family members and underscored the affection and love that her children displayed towards her with constant affection through spontaneous hugs and kisses, subtle touches and playful joking. It seemed as if laughter and giggles were constant companions in the midst of this family.

When she was growing up, Mama Mariama asserted that she was comfortable with who she was as a person. She was not an activist, nor did she give serious consideration to her Afrikan heritage. She offered that her attitude may have been influenced by her socialization in a mostly white school environment at the Catholic

school that she attended as a child, but she added that her parents always taught her to be proud of herself as a Black person. She met and married her husband, who was an activist and involved in the Black Nationalist movement. He sought knowledge about Afrikan history and identity, and his was the motivation to place their children in an Afrikan centered school.

After her husband located the Afrikan centered school, Mama Mariama went to visit the school. Initially, she did not want her children to attend the school. Her first impression of the school was that it was "messy" and "it didn't look neat in what I considered a lily white school painted with white walls." Also, she was concerned about her children coming away from this experience without being "well-rounded." "I wanted them to be a well-rounded child like I thought I was . . . and to get the aspect of all the things that may be more relative to white society." In the vein of being a good wife, she acquiesced to her husband's desires. The event that won her over to accept this educational experience for her children was the first spring program she attended. "These little kids were dancing and reciting poems and telling me about my history and doing things that I never saw done before, and, boy! I was just shocked and amazed how organized they were and the regimen of everything." As a parent, she was required to be involved in her children's education, which meant that she attended parent training sessions in Afrikan history and culture. Mama Mariama admitted that she experienced a cultural transformation by being involved with the Afrikan centered school.

Mama Mariama stated that she became critically ill, suddenly in 1992. This illness was so critical that the doctors did not expect for her to live. She was hospitalized for a little over a year. During that time she was completely paralyzed for six months, suffered from pneumonia for five months, and was bedridden for two and a half years.

When this occurred, her oldest child, Kamau was 12 years old, Heimis was 8 years old and her daughter [name] was 4 years old. Her husband was so distraught by her illness that he deserted the family, leaving her eldest child, Kamau, in charge of the entire household. She comments that at twelve years old, Kamau "took over two children and a mom and a household . . . and he still made 4.0 in school." However, the Shule community rallied together and came to her assistance. During Mama Mariama's most critical times, the Shule family became caregivers to her children and also to her. The Shule staff and parents provided care to her children, prepared meals for her and her family and even made sure that she was able to keep her medical appointments.

Kamau, which means "quiet warrior" in Swahili

I chose the pseudonym "Kamau" which means quiet warrior for this participant because I observed him as a calm, serious young man during my interview sessions. Yet, as the oldest child of a seriously ill mother, life circumstances enacted a high demand on his young life as he accepted the responsibility of caring for his family through the crisis.

Kamau arranged for the interview to be held at his mother's home. When I arrived, Kamau was in the driveway assisting his sixteen-year old sister who was learning how to parallel park. After exchanging introductions and small talk, Kamau led me into his parents' (mother and stepfather) home where I was greeted by Kamau's parents, his grandmother and his sister. Kamau decided that we should venture outside to conduct the interview while sitting in the gazebo in the backyard.

Upon first meeting Kamau, I was struck by his serious demeanor, yet he possessed an easy smile. He had a round boyish face, smooth yet glistening chocolate brown skin. His dark brown eyes were full of life, yet gazing back from them was a man mature beyond his years.

Kamau was born and grew up in the Midwestern metropolitan city of Westville in a home with his mother and stepfather and two younger siblings. His brother currently attends Veterinary school at a historical Black college in the south, and his sister is a senior in a predominantly white high school in a suburban school district. He mentioned that he has an older half brother by his father and maintains a "good relationship" with him.

When describing his family's socio-economic status, Kamau felt that his family was middle-class and he remarked that "we were never without." Kamau considered his parents to be Afrikan centered, particularly his father, who "was really into Afrikan history." It was this that led his father to locate the Afrikan centered school, Faizah Shule where he and his siblings attended. "He's a visionary-type person . . . And he heard about this school . . . And he wanted his kids to be reared and to know who they are and that is where he sent me."

Initially, Kamau attended a Catholic school from kindergarten through the third grades. "My mom always tells the good kids . . . that school was never a problem [for me] . . . I always had good grades . . . Always A's and B's, I was never a C, D student." Even though, Kamau received excellent grades in the Catholic school, his father's concern that he acquired knowledge in Afrikan culture and history motivated him to enroll his son in an Afrikan centered school, the Faizah Shule.

Kamau spoke candidly as he described the school and recalled his many experiences. Kamau graduated from the Shule in 1996 and immediately enrolled in a predominantly White university within the state to continue his education, majoring in marketing. His desire was to attend a historically Black institution but he didn't have the financial means to go away to college. He was offered a full scholarship at the

predominately White university, and he accepted it. He joined an Afrikan-American Greek fraternity and was active in community activities. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications and began working for a marketing firm in Westville. Kamau recently received a job promotion, became engaged and purchased a house in an affluent suburban community.

Heimis, a name he chose for himself

"I don't know where it [Heimis Rodriguez] really came from. It came from somebody who used to play beats with Popsicle sticks, that was the thing, I was Heimis Rodriguez and my profession was making beats with popsicle sticks." He explained that he has always offered this name as his A.K.A. (also known as). His best friend went by the name of Rudolph. "And he became Rudolph Adelphia, and that was it. And [we were known] as H & R Block: H for Heimis and R for Rudolph . . . . We were the H& R Block and it's just been that way since high school."

Recently, Heimis graduated from a historically Black university (HBCU) and had been accepted at the HBCU's Veterinary School. He knew that his love of animals was a gift from God, and he was determined to fulfill his "calling". Heimis was back in town to visit his family during the middle of the summer. Heimis is different from his brother, gregarious and playful: a jokester.

The interview was held at his mother's house. Heimis emphasized that he was born and raised on the east side of Westville. He recalled as a child coming home for lunch, which his father had prepared for him while his mother worked. He felt that his family was a little below middle class. He was the middle child in a household of five people, along with dogs, cats, and fish. Heimis attributed the finding of the Faizah Shule to his father. "I'm pretty sure it was my dad because he was real Afrikan centered."

Heimis' father was the founder of a local magazine which was Afrikan centered called "Acabalon Inc.," and his mother was the editor. Through the magazine, they would bring in renowned Afrikan American speakers to Westville who would speak to the public.

Heimis recounted how he entered the Faizah Shule in pre-kindergarten. He boasts of being a history maker much like his brother. His brother was one in the first graduating classes, but Heimis holds the honors of being the first, and one of the only, students who attended Faizah from pre-kindergarten through the twelfth grade. His sister [name] attended Faizah also, but left to attend a predominantly white high school in the suburbs where her mother and stepfather had moved. When he comes back to Westville during breaks and vacations, Heimis visits the FS/MGPA to volunteer his services. He believes in giving back to the Shule community.

Mama Nefertiti, which is Egyptian for "the beautiful one has arrived."

Mama Nefertiti did not adopt an Afrikan name nor did she offer a pseudonym to be used for this study. I selected this pseudonym for Mama Nefertiti because as I observed her during the interview, through her mannerisms and physical carriage, I was reminded of the famous queen of Kemet (Egypt).

Mama Nefertiti currently sits on the Board of Directors for the FS/MGPA and is the mother of Naimah, a participant in my study. Mama Nefertiti was a tall, thin stately woman who looked younger than her years. Her hair was straight and pulled back away from her face, exposing her high cheekbones.

Mama Nefertiti was born in a small rural town in Louisiana. She attended school in East City, graduated and attended a major university in South Arbor. She majored in psychology but left after a few years when she married her husband. They moved to Westville where they started their family. She viewed her family as a working class

family, since her and her husband were both employed at that time. Mama Nefertiti and her husband are the parents of three children, Naimah, Donald and Charles and all were enrolled at the Faizah Shule at one time.

Mama Nefertiti does not consider herself to be an activist, per se, nor does she consider herself to be a Black Nationalist or Pan Afrikanist. She was not involved in the Black Power or Black Nationalist movements of the 60s and 70s. In high school, a teacher "piqued' her interest in Afrikan American artists, particularly, the writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance. She did not begin to seek an understanding of herself as an Afrikan person until she became involved with the Shule.

Initially, Mama Nefertiti enrolled Naimah in a neighborhood public school. In Naimah's third grade year, the teachers went on strike for several months. While watching a television special that featured the Faizah Shule, Mama Nefertiti and her husband decided to make an inquiry into the school. They "were looking for a good school, but [they] weren't necessarily looking for an Afrikan centered school . . . . We were just looking for a good school." Her husband was leaning more towards the school because it had an Afrikan centered focus. They enrolled Naimah into the Faizah Shule with the intent to keep her enrolled there just until the strike was over. As a young working family, they felt that they could use the tuition money in some other needed capacity. Mama Nefertiti recalled that they "got hooked" and stayed, eventually enrolling all of their three children in the Shule.

She stated that the philosophy of the school emphasized the giftedness of every child, and this philosophy was an attractive feature of the school. It was an excellent strategy that provided for the development of each individual child. She discovered her personal development to be a crucial part of the educational experience. As her children

were learning Swahili and learning about Afrikan inventors and educators, she was learning also, "I felt that I was learning right along with them." The Shule provided Afrikan centered training to teachers; and this training was made available to parents at no cost. She noted that "the school had an open door policy, so just through your participation and general parental involvement; you received training of some sort." She was involved in transporting students to political protests activities, local and state-wide rallies, and to performance events.

When Donald, the oldest son, was in the ninth grade, he asked his mother if he could attend one of the public high schools in Westville. He was interested in playing football, and the Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy did not offer intramural sports. Mama Nefertiti acknowledged that there were several reasons why she seriously considered his request. Her brother had played sports in college and was in the National Basketball Association (NBA), so, Donald had strong role models promoting sports. Her family was encouraging her to allow him an opportunity to play sports. Still hesitant because he had not had the experience of attending a public school, she was uncertain of his ability to withstand the influences of that environment. She made him commit to demonstrating his seriousness by maintaining a 4.0 grade point for his ninth grade year. She acquiesced and allowed him to go because he had proved that he was serious about utilizing the opportunity to play sports, so she enrolled him in the public school, and his younger brother soon followed.

Naimah, a name she chose for herself

Naimah selected to give herself a name after a favorite person in her life. Naimah described this important figure as someone who was the Director of an Afrikan centered

school. Also she stated that this person reminded her of Mama Taraji in her commitment to the school and was someone that she wanted to emulate.

Naimah carried herself in a stately manner. She walked very erect and exuded confidence. Her complexion was creamy coffee brown and her hair was cut very close in almost a boyish manner, but yet definitely woman. She was a tall, thin woman. I recall thinking how a silhouette of her would capture the elegance of her presence.

After a brief discussion about my research, Naimah sat back and began to tell me about her life. She was born in East City, Michigan and her family moved to Westville when she was five years old. Naimah told me that she is the oldest of three siblings, two brothers and a sister, a brother, 19, who was attending college and a brother, 15, currently in high school. Her father remarried; Naimah has a one year old sister.

Naimah began her school experience in a public school. She stated that her parents "weren't really satisfied for reasons I don't know. I was too young. But they found Faizah Shule, and I went there the following year was the third grade." and attended Faizah Shule from the third grade until she graduated in 1996. In the fifth grade, she was double promoted. When asked about her academic performance, she responded, "I always did really, really well in school. Always a top performer, straight A's. I only got one B in my entire school career."

Naimah now resides in Atlanta, Georgia and is in the process of opening a daycare for pre-kindergarten Afrikan American children. She feels that this is a stepping stone to her higher aspiration of opening a literacy institute for Afrikan American children. Naimah plans to attend graduate school at Harvard University in the near future.

Mama Busara, which means "wisdom" in Swahili

I selected the pseudonym for Mama Busara from Swahili which means "wisdom." During the interview, Mama Busara shared a wealth of wisdom on childrearing, family values and instructional pedagogy.

She is the parent of Asma, another participant in the study. Mama Busara is an administrator at the Faizah Shule. Mama Busara was a native of Westville and had a long history with the Faizah Shule. She came from a long line of educators; in fact her father's grandfather was a founder of Morehouse College. Her grandfather received a master's degree from Harvard University in the 1920s when W. E. B. DuBois was there. Despite the entrenchment of poverty, her maternal grandmother immersed her mother in the world of dance and the equestrian. So she attributes her paternal family with the influence of institutional instruction and attributes her maternal family with the nurturing concepts of the importance of family.

Mama Busara's grew up observing her father, a supervisor over Social Workers and community agents for the Westville School District. As a young child, she observed her father, the only Afrikan American in his position, negotiate with, appeal to, and even pressure his subordinates in their choices of interactions with the Afrikan American clientele and the poor clientele. With unconcealed pride, she remembered, to the amazement of her then young mind, how her father was often disrespected in these encounters, but he consistently responded with fortitude and resolve. If she wanted to spend time with her father, she would often travel with him to his various meetings. "He was gone all the time. Either he was counseling somebody, organizing something, down at the food co-op, organizing to get shoes, taking them to the dentist. He was always on call. She recalled her parents' involvement in community activism, manifested by the

frequent hosting of community gatherings in the backyard. Her mother engaged her and her sister to listen to the radical voices of the sixties:

> I remember as a teenager, I remember my mom letting us listen to the "Last Poets." Even though, she didn't like the cursing, she would let us listen to it anyway. She took us to see Bobby Seales when he was here. We had neighbors down the street who were ranking officers of the Black Panther party. So we use to read the Black Panther's paper and then my father was a community organizer, se we had to deal with issues of poverty, and all that was around me all the time (Personal Interview, 2005).

Mama Busara stated that her parents' attitude toward education was that education did not make those who possessed it better persons, but rather the value of the education was assessed by the accomplishments that resulted from having it. "What you did and if you didn't do it, what you could [have done] for yourself and community with education, you didn't need to get it at all. What's the point in having it?" For Mama Busara's parents, "[t]he value of education is to make a true contribution of yourself and your family and your people, and if you're not about that then what is the point in getting educated?"

When Afrikan American families in her middle class community were sending their children to Catholic schools, Mama Busara's father resisted the appeals of his daughters to enroll them with their friends. He was a staunch supporter of traditional public schools; his reasons were political. One reason that he gave her for keeping her and her sister in public schools was that Afrikan Americans had struggled too hard to obtain access to public education to forsake the opportunity to attend public schools. The other reason that he offered for sending his children to public schools was that he wanted to eliminate or diminish the idea of classism. She recalled that he told her "now that I make a certain amount of money doesn't mean that I'm going to send you off to some

Catholic school . . . . Why not make it better for all the children instead of just pulling yours out because you have the benefit of money?"

Smiling, Mama Busara reflected upon her youthful years of community activism at her high school, when she acquired the nickname "militant midget." She received that name because "I was so small and I use to have an 'Angela Davis' afro; you know the whole nine yards." Her retort to that nickname was "Yeah, small but mighty!" As a junior in high school, she organized and participated in a sit-in to protest that girls could not wear pants or short shorts to school. At that time, school regulation was such that girls could wear only dresses to school.

While in college, her daughter, Asma, was born. She enrolled her child in a daycare center operated by a multi-cultural group of people and also became involved with the Kiswahili Club, an Afrikan centered organization on campus that brought in guest speakers for Black Studies. She attributed her growth in Afrikan consciousness to her involvement with this organization and wanted her daughter to have a similar experience. "I was growing in my Afrikan consciousness and I knew for my daughter to have a similar experience and understanding of who she was, she had to be in an environment that embraced that ideology." She felt that cultural knowledge is a critical defense in the struggle of life, particularly within a society that negates the humanity of Afrikan people.

Mama Busara eventually enrolled her daughter in the Shule:

> And when I saw how the Shule was interacting with the pre-kindergarten children . . . . Pre-kindergarten is a preparation for school, but just hearing that language and finding where they taught the children. I really loved that they didn't have the T.V., that they were actively engaging the children in active learning, in active play. That everything that they did had a purpose for some kind of academic or moral or spiritual or some kind of lesson for them to draw from, to profit. But I liked how they engaged the children; I liked the philosophy. The Shule title was

> "the academy school for gifted children." And I loved the fact that the school embraced the theory that all children are gifted (Personal Interview, 2005).

Asma, which is Swahili for "higher, more exalted"

The pseudonym "Asma" was selected for this participant, because I was impressed with the level of insight that she espoused as she explicated her educational philosophy for Afrikan American children.

When I interviewed Asma, I was greeted by her and her two year old daughter, Njeri. Njeri was not shy and proved to be an inquisitive toddler. Asma was born in Westville and lived with both parents during the first year of her life, after which her parents "broke up and went their separate ways." Both of her parents were initially teachers in the Westville Public School system. She explained that she came from a long line of educators. Her mother who is a biology and chemistry major is the fifth generation of teachers in her family and she is the sixth generation since she had taught kindergarten in an Afrikan centered chartered school for several years. Asma's father was a longtime teacher and administrator in the Westville school district. Asma's parents met at a local university and were both political activists on campus. Her father taught history and often supplemented his lessons with documents and writings from renowned Afrikan American historians, such as Dr. John Hendrix Clarke, J. A. Rogers, and others.

Asma was the only child of both of her parents until she was 10 years old, after which she was a sister to two brothers. Her youngest brother attends an Afrikan centered school, but not the Shule because he experienced some difficulty while there which warranted his move to a different school. According to Asma, when the Shule became a charter school, it experienced a period of adjustment that involved receiving a different clientele of students and hiring teachers who were inexperienced with the Afrikan

centered educational model. This period of instability and adjustment proved to be not conducive to her brother's learning style. He began to have behavioral problems, and his mother decided it would be best to move him to a more stable environment.

Asma sees herself as "different" and that her experience with an Afrikan centered educational model has placed her in a small group of unique individuals. She believes that there exist around twenty to twenty-five Afrikan American young adults who have spent the majority of their educational careers within an Afrikan centered educational environment and ideology throughout the nation.

Today, Asma is married, soon expecting her second child and is a student at Westville Law School.

Mama Ayo, which means "joy" in Yoruba

I chose this pseudonym for Mama Ayo because I observed joy to be a constant presence in her demeanor as she interacted with her students, her granddaughter, and with me.

Mama Ayo is currently a Language Arts instructor at the Shule and has been teaching there for the last fourteen years. She is the mother of Nina, a participant in this study. I met Mama Ayo on one of my first visits to the Faizah Shule. I observed her in a classroom of seventh graders. Fourteen 6^{th} and 7^{th} grade students were engaged in activities within the room which looked to be about a 10' by 12' space. In her classroom, chairs with attached desks were arranged in four back-to-back rows. Jazz music flowed from a small stereo system located by Mama Ayo as she sat at one of the student desks positioned to the far right of the room and softly permeated the room with soothing rhythmic sounds. Upon entering the room and immediately to the right was a wall inset which was decorated with a seven candle Kwanzaa stand surrounded by fruit, nuts and

green foliage plants. Colorful Afrikan cloth was draped across the two windows in the room for the dual purposes of blocking out the morning sunlight and painting a visual Afrikan culture throughout the room. Several brightly decorated bulletin boards graced the walls; each one announced students' achievements.

I interviewed Mama Ayo in her home in South Arbor, which was located about forty miles from Westville. In South Arbor, Mama Ayo lived with her daughter and grandchild on the campus of a major university within the state.

Strikingly beautiful, Mama Ayo had a round face with almond shaped eyes. She had a soft creamy coffee complexion and was medium build. She was adorned in colorful Afrikan attire and she had wrapped her hair which was locks of dreads with a matching cloth.

Mama Ayo began her life in the south in the midst of a large family of tobacco farmers under the matriarchy of her great grandmother. She acknowledged that her mother was young and single, and though she knew her biological father, she never had a close relationship with him as she was growing up. Her mother eventually migrated to Westville, leaving her in the south with her great grandmother. Mama Ayo's mother met and married a man in Westville, and sent for Mama Ayo when she was around seven years old. She grew up in a working class home. Her mother was a nurse's assistant and her stepfather worked in the vocation of refrigeration.

Mama Ayo noted that she grew up in an environment in which self-education was very important and she was encouraged to get a "good" education. Although Mama Ayo did not consider her parents to be Afrikan centered, she always thought of her mother as a Black woman who actively demonstrated both the pride to be Black and the defiance against the constraints of an oppressive society. "I remember her saying that she would

never live anywhere where she wasn't wanted . . . but at the same time, she had this attitude that she could go anywhere she wanted to go . . . . I can remember us going to the stores and going in the malls and stuff and sometimes we'd be the only Black people."

While in college, Mama Ayo became actively involved in the Black Power movement. This was around the late 70's and she noted that the movement had "lost a lot of its luster." Mama Ayo had a strong leaning towards the philosophy of Malcolm X. She did not subscribe to the civil rights movement of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., believing they were pursuing two opposing goals. Concerning Dr. King, she felt "his thing was to change the conditions of our people by integrating and assimilating into America." Whereas, regarding the Black Power movement and Malcolm X:

> The Black Power movement . . . the school of thought was that we have to create for ourselves, and we have to be self-sufficient. And yes, we do want civil rights. You know, the law, the rights that are guaranteed to us as citizens of this country but we also are concerned about human rights . . . not just being able to integrate into the white world but also to be able to defend ourselves if we need to . . . . Dr. King, his philosophy was a turn the cheek philosophy; non-violence. Malcolm's school of thought was [that] we can defend ourselves, and actually as so-called citizens of this country, that's supposed to be one of our rights, to defend ourselves (Personal Interview, 2004).

Also contributing to her growing consciousness and awareness of Afrikan culture was her employment as a journalist at two Afrikan American media venues, the Westville Chronicle and Broadside Press. At the Chronicle, her job was "to report what was going on in the cultural, nationalist community . . . . So everything that went on in terms of community organizations, theatre, concerts, music, anything that was cultural, particularly dealing with Afrikan centeredness, that's what I did while I was there."

Her first encounter with the Faizah Shule was when she was working as a journalist at the Broadside Press. Faizah Shule and the Broadside Press were housed in the Nat Turner Center. The Nat Turner Center was affiliated with an Afrikan centered

church that not only housed the church but also, the Faizah Shule, a food co-op and the Broadside Press. Though she was aware of the school and its purpose to educate children from an Afrikan centered perspective, she felt that she could not financially afford to send her children to this school. She had two children, and her primary concern was to ensure that they received a "good" education, which she felt that they were getting from the neighborhood public school they attended. This particular public school had a good reputation and was staffed predominately with Afrikan American teachers. "I was happy that they were getting a good education, even though it wasn't Afrikan centered education."

After Nina was born, Mama Ayo began to utilize the Faizah Shule's after school program for her older children, and "in exchange for my two oldest children being in the after school program, I went in and volunteered once a week." With assistance from Nina's father, Mama Ayo was able to send Nina to the Shule during her Pre-kindergarten year, but when that assistance ceased, she enrolled her in public school. By the time Nina was going into the second grade, Mama Ayo began to work as a teacher's assistant at the Shule. The inconvenience of the conflict between her employment hours and her daughter's school dismissal time influenced Mama Ayo's decision to re-enroll Nina at the Shule. As a Shule employee, Mama Ayo was not exempt from paying tuition, but was able to receive a small discount.

Mama Ayo also related having had a somewhat disheartening experience with the public school system in regards to her eldest daughter. By the time she was in the fifth grade, she encountered her first white teacher who exercised no managerial skills over his class, and her daughter was becoming discouraged with school. She added "from a

nationalist background, our thing is that you cannot turn your children over to the slave master to educate them and expect for them to get a good education . . . . That's crazy!"

Nina, which means "mother" in Swahili.

Nina was a young mother and I chose this pseudonym for her. She was patient and nurturing to her daughter during the interview session. Even though, the interviewing process required Nina's concentration as she recalled her experiences at the Shule, she never was removed from her maternal focus.

Nina stood about five feet one or two inches and she was a fair almost olive complexion Afrikan American woman. Nina was dressed in a pink athletic outfit with sneakers. Her reddish brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail. Nina was born and raised on the east side of Westville, and attended Faizah Shule most of her life. She went to the Shule for pre-kindergarten, a school in east Westville for the kindergarten and first grades, and was enrolled from the second grade until graduation in 2002. Nina has two brothers and two sisters, but she is not close to her father's children and does not stay in touch with them.

Nina considered her family to be working class, although she had been raised in a single parent home all of her life. Regarding her mother "I know she was working three jobs and she was, you know, out there hustling everything, you know, so she could do everything for me." Nina felt that her mother and she had a very close relationship, and it was because they were so much alike, plus their birthdays were two weeks apart. "I think us being so much alike helps me to understand her, so I think it helps her to understand me." Nina said that her mother had the greatest influence on her. "She was my first example of how a woman should be." Another reason they spent so much time together

was that her mother was her teacher at Faizah Shule from the 4th through the 6th grade, and some portions of the 8th and 9th grades.

Nina recalled that she had a good experience when she attended a Westville public school. "I can always remember being a good student. I always loved school. Kindergarten . . . . I was really fortunate to have really good teachers when I went to public school." She spoke about her public school experience:

> We did, I remember all kind of activities and my teacher, my kindergarten teacher was very hands on; she was very involved. Even though we had a large class, she was able to get around to all of us and really be involved. And my 1st grade teacher, Mrs. Lyle, she was like the best teacher. She taught me how to read. And I can remember, I remember wanting to learn how to read. That probably helped of course. We has some bad kids in there who didn't wanta do anything, but I remember wanting to learn how to read. So that was the big thing. And, but taking the phonics, we did phonics workshops and things like that (Personal Interview, 2004).

Nina felt that her grades were pretty good while she attended the Faizah Shule, but highlighted some times when she got into trouble. "I clearly remember being the kid that got other people in trouble." Nina was double promoted, which meant she skipped the 7th grade and was promoted to the 8th grade after completing 6th grade. She felt that eighth grade was her adjustment period. This was the year that she entered the high school. She felt that she had to adjust to the transition of being in the group of the oldest students to becoming one of the youngest students in the high school. But she was able to pull her grades up from a 3.0 GPA in the 8th grade to a 3.4 overall GPA by the time she graduated.

Nina will be graduating in December 2005 with a Bachelor's degree from a major university in southern Michigan.

Baba Shombay - He who walks like a lion.

I chose the pseudonym for Baba Shombay, which means "he walks like a lion" because he was a wealth of knowledge from a broad range of topics. He spoke with authority over whatever topic he discussed.

Baba Shombay is the father of two of the participants in this study, Mumbi and Adofo. Baba Shombay was a tall, thin Afrikan American man. He had a short afro and his face was clean shaven. Baba Shombay appeared to be comfortably dressed in a multi-colored Afrikan Dashiki and dark slacks. I found that Baba Shombay managed to find humor in his life's experiences and did not hesitate to highlight the learning opportunities his experiences entailed.

Baba Shombay told me that he was born in Westville and was raised primarily by a Christian mother. His mother was a teacher in the Westville schools and his father was in the Navy. Baba Shombay graduated from a top ranked high school in the city, received a master mechanic certification from a local career institute, and was employed by a major automotive firm as a technician. This employment opportunity gave him the chance to continue his education, enabling him to become an "engineering technologist." He is now working as a Teacher's Assistant in the history and science classes at Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy.

While attending college, Baba Shombay was involved in the reorganization of the Black Students Association. He and fellow students "reorganized the so-called Black Students Association, which always reminded me of the Boy Scouts, and renamed it the Association of Students of Afrikan Descent." He became an activist promoting Afrikan organization and Afrikan consciousness in the school.

When Baba Shombay became involved with a young woman with a three year old child, he began to give serious consideration to provide a quality education for his

children. "[The daughter] was four [years old], time to put her in school. That's when I started having issues with where was I going to put her in school . . . and Mama Taraji and Shule was there so that's where we started." After a son and daughter were born and were old enough, he enrolled them into the Shule also. He was now paying tuition for three children to attend the Shule. The fact that he was paying both tuition and taxes caused him to become a parent activist in the Westville public schools. Baba Shombay asserted:

> Now I've got three children in school and the Shule is breaking me. Then that's when I actually started, became actively involved with the Westville Public Schools, saying that we need to African-ize the public schools because I'm paying taxes for public schools, and I'm paying money for private school, and this is ridiculous (Personal Interview, 2005).

As a community activist, Baba Shombay engaged in various activities to engender agency and self-determination in the Afrikan American community. He was involved in bringing Afrikan American scholars to speak in Westville. He also participated in initiating a Westville School Board recall. Eventually, he worked actively in the development and implementation of three all-male academies in Westville. Once the schools were operating, Baba Shombay, in what he considered a proactive move, enrolled his son, Adofo, in one of the all-male academies.

According to Adofo and Mumbi, Baba Shombay allowed his children to experience traditional public education when they asked his permission to do so. He permitted his eldest child, Gheche to attend a traditional elementary public school when she asked. In the same manner, he allowed Mumbi to enroll in the same elementary school when she was in the sixth grade and allowed Adofo to attend the ninth grade in a traditional public school setting. Baba Shombay's rationale for allowing his children to attend public school was that "sometimes experience is the best teacher." He felt that

they could learn more by actually attending the public school and experiencing the environment than by telling them about the environment. In fact, both Mumbi and Adofo asked to be placed back in the Shule because they felt that the work was too easy and that they were not receiving a quality education in the traditional public schools.

Mumbi, which means "creator, mother of the universe" in Kikuyu

Mumbi has two young children and is a nurturing caring mother, a role she valued. As a result, I chose the pseudonym of Mumbi which means "creator, mother of the universe" for her.

She was medium stature about five feet five inches, perhaps a bit shorter. She was a beautiful woman of Afrikan descent with a chocolate brown complexion. Her personality was light and hearty, manifesting in her penchant to quickly discover the humor of various aspects of her educational experience as she relayed it to me.

Mumbi recalled that she was born in Westville. Mumbi felt that her family is Afrikan centered, that is, their actions are driven by the question of "how does this benefit Afrikan people?" She felt this way because her paternal grandmother owns a cultural center on the east side that operates as a cultural hub within the Afrikan American community. Her father is a historian of Afrika and Afrikan American culture and now teaches at Faizah Shule. Mumbi had just completed the certificate program for a Medical Assistant at a local technological institute. She is interested in going back to school for nursing. However her ultimate desire is to become a child psychologist.

Mumbi attended the Faizah Shule from kindergarten until graduation with one year of interruption. While in the fifth grade, she appealed to her father to let her attend a traditional public school, but once she got there, she found the work too easy and begged her father to send her back to the Shule.

> I went to public school, one year, I think about the fifth or sixth grade. I didn't really like it [laughing]. I had made my daddy put me back in the Shule after the year was over, but the work was just too easy and if in the fifth or sixth grade, I could realize that the work was too easy, I went back to school to get some harder work (Personal Interview, 2005).

When talking about her experience at the Shule, Mumbi stressed that the course work was challenging and the teachers were demanding. She proudly boasts about having to dissect animals for science in the 8th and 9th grades. She told me that her English teacher, Mama Ayo, had prepared her to write research papers. "She had me prepared to do a research paper, as far as the bibliography, works cited page, the body, the content, and outline goes." She says that her grade point average (GPA) was 3.3 when she graduated from the Shule.

Mumbi feels obligated to go back to the Shule and volunteer assistance whenever she is needed. She believes that giving back is a manifestation of reciprocity and fulfills the goal of nation building. Also, she is the mother of two boys and enjoys being a mother.

Adofo, which means "courageous warrior" in Akan

When asking Adofo to supply me with a pseudonym for this research, he was adamant about using his own name. He felt that his name was serious and "I want people to know who I am basically, even though my name is serious. . . . And I want people to know that." Adofo's father had named Adofo after a radical Afrikan American leader of the sixties. Baba Shombay made sure that Adofo understood the importance of his name and the history of his namesake. This presented a struggle for me as researcher. I wanted to give Adofo the opportunity to use his name, but I needed to maintain the commitment of anonymity to the other participants and the school. After much consideration, I decided that it would be best to provide a pseudonym for the study. Adofo means

"courageous warrior" and represents my perception of his personality during the interview.

Adofo is back in Westville preparing to continue his educational career at Westville Community College (W2C). Since his graduation in 2002 from the Faizah Shule high school, Adofo had attended a historically Black University in Alabama. Several of his peers from the Shule were also attending this university. Adofo was majoring in Architecture, but when his funding ran out, Adofo found himself back in Westville.

Born in Westville in 1984, Adofo grew up with two older sisters and a younger brother. He and his siblings attended the Faizah Shule at various points in their educational careers. Adofo's two older sisters are currently attending [NIT], a technical institute and both are pursuing medical certifications. Adofo's younger brother is currently enrolled in the Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy. Adofo considered his family to be a middle working class family.

Adofo sees his paternal grandmother's work and Mama Taraji's work as "a joint venture . . . because a lot of her [his grandmother's] curriculum [that] she uses and the guidelines for her summer program and our after-school program is based on the Shule." In fact, since his graduation from high school, Adofo has taught chess at his grandmother's center.

Adofo's educational journey was significantly different than the other participants in this study. Initially when Adofo started school, like his older sisters, he was enrolled in the Faizah Shule. He attended the Shule from kindergarten through the first grade. During that time, his father was actively working with the Westville Public School District in efforts to open several all-male academies. The intent of these academies was

to address the crisis of academic failure and specific needs of Afrikan American boys. After overcoming challenges, which included litigation by a women's group protesting the exclusion of females, three Afrikan centered academies opened in Westville. The particular focus on Afrikan American males was the impetus that caused Baba Shombay to pull Adofo out of the Faizah Shule and placed him in the academy named after his namesake, Adofo Academy. Adofo attended the academy from the second grade until he graduated from the eighth grade.

In the ninth grade, Adofo attended a traditional public high school, Martin Luther King. While in the public school, Adofo noted that his grade point average was terrible. Adofo felt that the size of the school attributed to his poor performance. "Big, too big. King was huge . . . it was huge. There were one thousand students. They didn't have enough room for the students." Adofo didn't believe that he was receiving a quality education in the public school and asked his father to allow him to go back to the Faizah Shule high school and in the tenth grade he enrolled in Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy, continuing there until his graduation in 2002.

Evident in the young people's choices and locations after graduating from the Shule is some manifestation of the impact of the educational experience upon their lives. All of the young people interviewed had some higher educational experience. Out of the seven young people interviewed, five had completed a four year degree. The other two young people, ironically brother and sister, both maintained their intention to continue their education.

In Chapter VI, the findings from the thematic data analysis are presented. In this chapter, utilizing the espoused philosophical outcomes of the Shule and the CIBI position statement as a lens to explore these educational experiences, the themes which emerged

from the data analysis were examined. The findings from that analysis are reported in light of the review of literature and the educational outcomes.

CHAPTER VI

Findings

Introduction

This study explored and investigated the experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended a school which instructed from an Afrikan centered educational model. The findings speak to the question, "What were the educational experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school?" An Afrikan centered educational model has been heralded by its proponents as a viable alternative to the traditional public school's educational model (Akoto, 1992; Lee, 1992). Within the last decade, proponents of an Afrikan-centered education have attempted to standardize the Afrikan centered educational model by defining the guidelines and parameters for this education. The CIBI organization established itself as the accreditation and regulating organization for Independent Black institutions. However, many schools both private and public have implemented what they have termed an Afrikan centered educational model.

In a review of the literature, research has explored the implementation of this model within public schools and public school academies, i.e., charter schools. There are few studies that impute academic success or increased life chances of Afrikan American students to this educational model. Rarer still are studies which utilize the voices of students who have experienced this educational model to determine their perceived outcomes of this educational experience. Questions to be answered are "What are the educational experiences of Afrikan American young people who have attended an Afrikan centered school?

The collective of families which created the Faizah Shule in the mid-70s were influenced by the Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikanist movements of that time. Joining the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), which operated as a unifying organization for independent Black institutions throughout America, the Faizah Shule helped to develop and refine the ideology of Afrikan centered education. This ideology that was formalized into a position statement for CIBI was adopted and integrated into the educational philosophy and the purpose statement which guided the educational process at the Faizah Shule.

The synthesis of the CIBI's position statement, FS/MGPA's philosophy statement and purpose statement suggest that the educational outcomes should develop young people who undertake the goal of nation building for Afrikan people on the Afrikan continent and throughout the Diaspora. Nation building should reflect in the young person's involvement in positions of leadership, their perpetuation of Afrikan traditional culture, spirituality, and in their understanding and acceptance of their roles as adults. These young people would be critical and creative thinkers who are grounded in their Afrikan culture and identity. This educational experience located in the centeredness of Afrikan worldview systems, endeavors to develop young people into "re-Afrikanized, liberated thinking human beings" (Akoto, 1992, p. 112).

These documents defined the philosophical underpinnings of the FS/MGPA and demonstrated that in addition to academic excellence, the Shule proposed to provide students with these educational outcomes:

1. The Shule provided educational experiences for young people that were grounded in the concept of nation building.
2. The Shule provided an educational experience for young people that cultivated their cultural knowledge and identity.

3. The Shule provided an educational experience for young people that cultivated the principles of self-advocacy
4. The Shule provided an educational experience for young people that developed their personhood.

In this chapter, the findings from the thematic analysis of the data are presented. The first outcome that emerged from the data analysis was that the Shule provided an educational experience grounded in nation building.

Educational Experiences Grounded in Nation building

> If it's not about nation building, then it isn't about anything
> — John H. Clarke

Nation building. For the Afrikan centered educational model, nation building must be an active process of garnering and developing the resources of Afrikan talents for the freeing of Afrikan minds and bodies. In this educational model, students are encouraged to reclaim Afrikan culture, which is taught and modeled in behaviors, values, traditions, and language. This reclamation is referred to by Akoto(1992) and other Afrocentrists as re-Afrikanization (Kambon, 1998; Hilliard III, 1998). Since education is a cultural act (Hilliard III, 1998), Afrikan centered education is about the "reconnection and continuity" of Afrikan people (Akoto & Akoto, 2000 p. 72). Akoto and Akoto agree that "nation building is an intergenerational process of progressive but intense denuding [Afrikans] of multi-generational layers of alien values and things, and the progressive adoption and immersion of [Afrikans] in the culture and the work of rebuilding" (2000, p. 73).

The educational philosophy at the Faizah Shule addresses nation building as the belief that the Shule would provide an educational experience which would "foster in students a spirit of self-reliance and commitment to the rebuilding of our communities and reclaiming our traditional greatness" (Parent Handbook, 1999, p. 2). The CIBI

position statement declares that the Afrikan centered educational model prepares Afrikans "for self-reliance, nation maintenance and nation management in every regard" (2005, p. 6-7). Through their experiences these young people gained an understanding of nation building which is reflected in their narratives.

When speaking of nation building, Kamau identified Mama Taraji as intensely focused upon the business of nation building in operating her school. Kamau described Mama Taraji as having an attitude of creating a nation. He shared, "Her attitude was [in] developing a nation, a nation of thinkers, a nation of positive people to represent the Afrikan Diaspora . . . all that really means at the end of the day is [that] she was building leaders."

The concept of nation building for the participants in the study flowed throughout the educational experience when the participants expressed that nation-building was rooted in the individual, family and the Shule community. Naimah understood nation-building to be the fundamental objective of her educational experience. This ideology was stressed at home as well as in the Shule. Naimah elaborated, "I feel like I was taught that education and everything that I do is about nation building. And if it's not about nation building, it is not about nothing." She said that nation building was "kind of drilled into us." She understood that nation building should be the primary motive for "whatever I pursued in my life." She added that nation building was promoted at home, "my father would . . . ask me, well, why do you have to go to school? And my answer . . . would be so that I can help my people."

One element of the philosophy of the Afrikan centered education at the Faizah Shule was the belief in "preparing talented young people to provide leadership and service for Afrikan people at home and aboard" (Parent Handbook, 1999, p. 2). Asma

recounted a project that had a great impact on her sense of agency and self-determination for Afrikan people on the Continent and the Diaspora:

> I mean I remember one of the assignments that we had...yeah, I'm sure this was in the sixth grade...it was at the end of Chancellor Williams book [*The Destruction of Black Civilization*], and I think that we were talking about a Declaration of Independence or a Constitution...for African people. The whole idea was how we foresee ourselves as an independent African nation and what that would be. You know, that's what heads of state do, that's what people who are designing policies and implementing policies that affects entire nations, and the entire world, that's what those kinds of people do. But we were never taught explicitly certainly that, neither implicitly that we did not belong to that group...but we are responsible for re-designing and then implementing new policies, and a new way of thinking, a new way of being, and a new way of teaching and a new way of living (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma's reflection demonstrates that students were not simply required to think about what nation building entailed but were required to apply strategies towards nation maintenance and management.

Heimis also perceived nation building as a process that was located within everything that he did, but he noted that the act of nation building first began with him. He defined nation-building, "in my mind, nation-building is first, building *your* own nation." He also broadened his definition to include the animals of the earth (demonstrating his desire to be a veterinarian and reflecting the Afrikan cultural concept of Afrikan people's responsibility to exist in harmony with nature). He further expounded, "I'll help my kids out before I help somebody else's kids out, because that's human nature, but I'm going to help somebody else's kids."

Heimis also identified simple acts of assisting other Afrikan Americans as part of the nation building concept. For instance, he felt that ensuring that fellow college students were picked up from the airport was an act of nation building. These college students were alumni from the Shule who also attended the same HBCU that he attended:

> Now the thing I do [is] I show love to anybody that's in Alabama and in Atlanta. I pick people up from the airport. That's nation-building in the simplest [form]. Even my boy, [Adofo] when he was at [HBCU], I showed him love (Personal Interview, 2005).

Mumbi, a young mother spoke to the concept of the perpetuation of Afrikan people; she perceived the birth of her two children as an act of nation building. She explained nation building as the act of creating leaders from Afrikan American children who will have the ability to think critically about their place in the world and how they can be instrumental in assisting Afrikan people.

> I'm building a nation! You see, I'm building a nation. How I see it manifested in my life? Well of course, nation-building is way beyond just bringing more children into the world. I guess when you say nation-building, that's the first thing that will pop into your head, having kids or trying to build a nation, bringing more people into the world. It's more than that . . . that's what the Shule does. Because, they're not having children, they're bringing children. They're collecting children to turn them into nation-builders, to make them think, not about themselves, but about the nation, about African people . . . . That's the scientific question that we always ask when we do our science fair. Is it good for African people?

In their description of their educational experience, some participants viewed nation building as reflected in class projects centered upon the perpetuation of the Afrikan nation. Other participants spoke of nation building as beginning with them first; as manifested in producing children for the nation, and even in assisting other Afrikan people in seemingly small ways such as providing transportation so that they could continue their education.

An Afrikan centered educational experience was built upon family involvement and cooperation in the within the Shule community.

> What was really cool was the environment is definitely a family environment . . . There is an African proverb that says 'it takes a village to raise a child.'
>
> --Kamau

Family and Community. The concept of nation building cannot be obtained without the active engagement of the members of the nation-state. The smallest units of the nation-state are individual families and the collection of families make up the nation-state. It is common in Afrikan traditional cultures to consider the family as the basic unit of the community (Tedla, 1995). However, the concept of family is not confined to the nuclear family as in the Western culture, but includes extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. This broad concept of family is attributed to Afrikans' sense of collective importance, that is, that every person in the family is connected to and interested in the welfare of each other. According to Mungazi (1996), traditional Afrikans understand the concept of family "within the framework of the *oneness of being*" (p. 28). Mungazi (1996) explained the oneness of being operated in the Afrikan family from two perspectives. The first perspective was that family ensured the physical welfare of its members, that is, making sure that food, clothing and shelter were provided. The second perspective was in providing members with a "sense of belonging and an improved self-concept" (p.29). Within these perspectives, an individual progressively locates his/her space within the family unit as a contributing member.

The aforementioned ideology undergirded the education at Faizah Shule and framed the practice of an Afrikan-centered education, which "emphasizes the fundamental relationship between the strength of our families and the strength of our nation" (CIBI, 2005, p. 6-7). Proponents of Afrikan centered education understood that the family unit is the first and primary unit for the perpetuation of Afrikan heritage and culture. When participants were asked the question "What made their school an Afrikan centered school?" they unanimously agreed that it was the familial environment.

Kamau recalled that it was Afrikan tradition and the Shule protocol to refer to the teachers as mama (Kiswahili for mother) and baba (Kiswahili for father). Kamau explained:

> This was my mama, this was my baba, so they are responsible for me like I am their own, and they took that seriously to the hilt. So it was my son, [Kamau], needs to learn. So we were taught like we were their kids...it is like if I was a teacher and I had my own child in school, I [would] want my child to succeed (Personal Interview, 2004).

The Faizah Shule also believed that it was important for instructors, parents and students to develop a strong sense of community through the extended family concept. Kamau noted how he felt that he was fortunate to have been in an environment in which the education of the children was considered a community endeavor:

> What was really cool was the environment is definitely a family environment . . . There is an African proverb that says 'it takes a village to raise a child.' And they made that proverb the truth. It was everybody was involved all of the time. I was fortunate during my time because parents were really involved (Personal Interview, 2004).

This view was substantiated by Akoto (1992) when he asserted that "[effective] parenting within a viable family, which family is also supported within a supportive network of families is a central requirement for the perpetuation of those new Afrikan centered values among youth" (p. 35). This supportive network of families constitutes the realization of community for the Shule. Within Afrikan cultures, community is the space in which an individual is defined. The community does not exist external to the individual and the individual does not exist external to the community (Tedla, 1995; Mungazi, 1996; Mbiti, 1998). Menkiti (1984) states, "[I]n the African view, it's the community which defines the person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory" (p. 171). Several participants spoke about experiencing the extension of

family within the Shule community. Naimah explained her understanding of family as a function of community:

> Based on African centered living and African style of life in which an African – traditional African community pretty much regardless of what nationality you are talking about, what region of the continent you are talking about minus some variation here and there. No individual exists on their own. Family units don't really even exist on their own, it is all a part of the community. So the idea was that we don't have students, we have children and they belong to us, to the community as a whole (Personal Interview, 2004).

Another participant, Nina explained how family at the Shule has become her extended family:

> [T]he African centered perspective is that the school is your family because like you guys said, we spend so much time there. And your teachers are one of the many influences in a student's life and like for us . . . because our teachers were there and they taught so many grade levels, we spend three and four years with them, so they really get to know us. We really get to know them. And we really get family. I mean, most of my extended family, because it's really just me and my mom; and I don't really keep in touch with my dad's side of the family that often. So my extended family is my Shule family (Personal Interview, 2004).

Naimah emphasized her experience of the family environment not only was it an extended family environment, but it was a safe place, particularly when her parents were in the midst of a turbulent divorce:

> We had to refer to our teachers as momma and babba, and so it really felt like a family. I guess the best way I could describe it was that it was an extended family there quite literally. The level of involvement that the teachers had in my personal life, the level of awareness that they had of what was going on when my parents were getting a divorce, I felt comfortable talking with my teachers as mentors. And I felt safe and very comfortable in that because my parents' break up was violent and very hostile. So there were times where we weren't allowed to leave and they protected us (Personal Interview, 2004).

Heimis recounted his experience of the family concept as demonstrated by the staff at the Shule when his mother became critically ill. The staff members adopted his family as their own and ensured that he and his siblings had transportation to school:

> [T]he Shule was real family oriented, I give the Shule a one hundred percent credit on being at that time . . . it takes a whole village to raise a child, family oriented unity, Nguzo Saba. I give them one hundred percent on that. I mean they were willing . . . especially in my situation where my momma got sick [and] couldn't drive. We had people like Mama [Ayo] use [to] pick us up. We use to get dropped off at the Inner City Cultural center on the East side and she would take us to the Shule because she used to work there early in the mornings. And she would take us all the way over to the Shule. We'd use to ride with Mama [name], Mama [Busara] would pick us up some time. Heck Mama [Taraji] came and got me a couple of times and that's the principal. She's the top dog. It was really family oriented (Personal Interview, 2005).

For the participants in this study, the family and community environment at the Shule was the most salient feature of the educational experience. They recounted how they considered their teachers to be surrogate parents who became their extended families and who offered a safe place, along with needed assistance to families experiencing difficulties and crises.

Another outcome which arose from the data analysis was that the Shule provided students with educational experiences for developing their cultural knowledge and identity. Cultural knowledge and an Afrikan identity were cultivated through the students acquiring cultural proficiency, developing a positive self-concept, cultivating a belief in student greatness, and fostering higher order thinking skills.

Educational Experiences for developing their Cultural Knowledge and Identity

> --we learned African culture in the school and we were based on African culture.
> --Heimis

Cultural Proficiency. Proponents of an Afrikan-centered education have argued that the struggle for nation-building and liberation demands an education that provides Afrikan children with knowledge of their Afrikan cultural identity. Culture is the meaning making mechanism of reality for a people, manifested in language, rituals, and symbols. One of the beliefs as posited by the CIBI position statement is that an Afrikan-

centered educational practice "emphasizes that Afrikan identity is embedded in the continuity of Afrikan cultural history" (p. 6-7) and that history is dynamic and distinct. The FS/MGPA's philosophical statement acknowledges that education for Afrikans, particularly Afrikan Americans is in the spirit of *Sankofa,* which is Kiswahili for "going back and fetch." FS/MGPA believes that Afrikan Americans must look back within the Afrikan historical continuum to reclaim as well as reconstruct Afrikan greatness. Central to accomplishing that mission is the reclamation of the Afrikan cultural ethos. FS/MGPA believed that the students must engage in "cultural immersion," that is, students must not only have knowledge of the Afrikan culture but essentially live the Afrikan culture.

Participants in the study articulated their experience in receiving an education from an Afrikan centered cultural perspective. To them, the experience was essential to their identity development because it was built upon their view of history and events from their own epistemology (i.e., method of knowing) and ontology (i.e., essential nature of reality) as an Afrikan people. Kambon (1998) contends that these components of world-view are dependent upon a particular racial/cultural experience. Naimah explained her understanding of how the Afrikan-centered educational experience enabled her to gain cultural proficiency:

> The fact that this is African and African American history, that the experience of African people across the Diaspora was the basis for everything that we did, everything that we learned, everything was centered around that. And so the curriculum, the core curriculum, didn't suffer because of that but that was just the foundation. So as we studied math we learned our basic math, algebra, geometry, but I feel like it was enriched by having knowledge and understanding of what these subjects, what these ideas mean to us as African people. Where were African people in 1865, what were they doing? So we had to learn about the Emancipation Proclamation and the formation of America as a country. But we always had to understand what black people were doing at the time; where were

> people at this time? How did these events affect black people (Personal Interview, 2004)?

Niamah understood that the foundation for gaining knowledge was in locating Afrikan people at the center of that knowledge acquisition. She also noted that Afrikan cultural knowledge was imparted to the students. She highlighted learning about Adinkra symbols and learning how to wrap Afrikan head wraps. She reminisced that in the Afrikan centered environment, there was always "something culturally reflective." She further explained:

> We learned about the symbols. We learned how the cloth was used, how to wrap the cloth around us, and how to create geles, the headpieces, yes. Pretty much in depth in everything that surrounded us was reflective of a piece of Africa. So our teachers, their attire, they didn't have a uniform, but once I became a teacher I understood that they were required to wear African clothes. Not all of the time not even always full African garb, but there should be something culturally reflective, whether it was earrings or a bracelet that children need to see, to see the culture and experience it on a daily basis (Personal Interview, 2004).

Heimis felt that the Shule helped him to acquire values through the cultural traditions, rituals, and activities that grounded him and prepared him for his future endeavors. He expounds on this experience even further:

> [A] lot of people say when you have a foundation of yourself, you can go on. Just know who you are. You can learn that kind of any place, but I guess the Shule, it being African-centered . . . they help to instill that in you . . . . I know where I came from and I know where I am going given the values that I've got . . . . I learned . . . . But experience at the Shule, I believe help to prepare me for the future more so than the education . . . . It's not the education of books that grounded me, but it's my experience at the Shule. The things that the Shule did, how they did them, the performances we use to do, the drumming and dancing [that] I was always involved in, my rites-of-passage, the family experience, the mama and the baba, the being responsible for little kids while the teachers are in the meetings, the fact that the school was real little . . . that whole cycle . . . helped me be grounded. More so than learning 5 times 5 is 25 . . . . Kind of the fact that I was there was better than the 5 times 5 is 25 (Personal Interview, 2005).

At the Shule, American holidays were not celebrated; rather, celebratory traditions were established that had cultural relevance. The Afrikan centered concept of

self-determination, Kujichagulia promoted the ideal that Afrikan people create and celebrate their own cultural traditions. During the time of Halloween, the young people in the study reported that they participated in "Ancestors Day," which represented a time to research and give honor to Afrikan family, community, and historical ancestors.

Kamau described the significance of that event, "[A]nother thing that we did that was different was Ancestor's Day versus Halloween . . . . Halloween is more [about] celebrating goblins and ghouls." Kamau was quick to interject that the Shule administrators never said that they were against Halloween, but "instead of drawing all this attention to jack-o-lanterns and all of these dead, scary things," the students were encouraged "let's talk about some dead things that made a difference." Kamau explained that on Ancestor's Day, the students would dress up as an ancestor, "you would become that person for that day. And you had to write a paper on them too . . . . I am talking about a five page paper . . . so it was a history lesson."

Adofo offered another perspective of the cultural celebrations:

> Even, they didn't have Christmas but they had Kwanzaa. They didn't have Valentine's Day. It was Black love day. In those days, they did not want to worship a man named Valentine. Who was Valentine? That's the question. If you wanted to celebrate something then you have to know what you're doing. It's Valentine's Day. Who was Valentine? Do you know him? No. St. Patrick's Day, you ever met St. Patrick? No. Ever heard of St. Patrick? No, you just heard of the day. Basically, it's just . . . . Capitalistic holidays. Stuff that'll make you spend your money (Personal Interview, 2005).

For cultural nationalists, reclamation of the language is vital to the process of nation-building for Afrikan people (Karenga, 1998; Asante, 2003). According to Asante (2003), "Language is essentially the control of thought" (p.41). He argued that Afrikan people must control their language, if they are to control their future. Participants in the study talked about learning Afrikan languages as well as other languages. Heimis'

account summarizes the experience, "the fact that we spoke Swahili, like almost fluently. So [you] spoke English and Swahili when you went to the Shule."

For many of the participants, the cultural imperative was emphasized in the home environment as well as the Shule. In fact, in situations where the parents initially were not familiar with Afrikan culture, the parents learned right along with their children. Niamah recalls that her mother and father were also gaining from her experience at the Shule:

> I think there were so many things that they had never encountered until I had attended the school . . . . Whether it was just in helping me with homework assignments or participating in school events. And that is still a very important part of the school right now is educating parents . . . . So there is a lot of education that goes on [so] that the parents actually can reinforce what is going on (Personal Interview, 2004).

Upon graduation, most of the participants went off to pursue higher education. Out of the seven participants in this study, four went to a four-year predominantly white institution, two attended a historical Black university and one participant attended a two year community college. One can speculate that once these students were not in an environment which reinforced the Afrikan-centered world-view, that these students would experience difficulty maintaining cultural proficiency. When asked how he maintained his Afrikan centered perspective once he graduated from high school, Adofo indicated that this Afrikan cultural orientation had been internalized:

> I have no choice. It's there now. It's there now. Subconsciously, it's there. I may not think I'm doing it but it's there. You can do something and not know you're doing it. How I would end up at a HBCU, the best HBCU? I think, it's just subconsciously in there (Personal Interview, 2005).

The participants in the study felt that the Afrikan-centered educational experience had provided them with knowledge of their historical cultural identity. They attributed this acquisition to their instruction in Afrikan history from their own epistemological and

ontological perspectives as Afrikan people. Participants also noted that their parents were equally transformed through their child's educational experience. Finally, one participant affirmed that once cultural competency was acquired, it was internalized for life.

The FS/MGPA's intent was to create in these young people an awareness of their cultural roots. Yet, they understood that integral to the development of cultural proficiency was the need to cultivate a positive self-concept. Supporting the Shule's rationale for developing positive self-esteem in Afrikan American children, Mama Taraji asserted "because we live in a racist society, that Black children need more intense nurturing" (Personal Interview, 2004).

> We suffer from issues of our esteem, issues around our values, issues around abilities and capacity, issues around black children and academically accelerating, issues around being able to accept that . . . the three R's for black children are not the fundamentals. They are not fundamentals for any child. They come after the fundamentals which are: who you are, who you are in relationship to the people to whom you belong, and who you are in relationship to the world around you.
>
> ---Asma

Positive Self-Concept. The above quote from Asma, gives a clear description of the difficulties facing Afrikan American children in American society. Daily encounters with a hostile and brutal society organized around the ideology of White Supremacy (Ani, 1994; Kambon, 1998; Wilson, 1998), translates into suffering from an atrophied self-definition for the majoring of Afrikan Americans in America. Recognizing and identifying with this experience has positioned the Faizah Shule to strategize ways to ameliorate the often atomized destructions from these encounters. Addressing this reality for Afrikan people, the Faizah Shule's educational philosophy states the following:

> Given an educational experience that promotes self-esteem, self-respect, and self-determination, and armed with consciousness based on truth, justice, and service, Afrikan descended children can become competent and confident leaders in their communities and in a world of many diverse peoples and cultures (Parent Handbook, 1999).

The staff at the FS/MGPA was energized by their belief in the legitimacy of Afrikan culture and the greatness of Afrikan people. They were intensely committed to the development of leaders for Afrikan people and the world. The participants in the study noted the Shule's commitment to this goal; it was not only obvious in their pedagogy but also in their faith and pronounced belief of the "genius" of Afrikan children.

Several participants in this study presented descriptions demonstrating their experiences of developing a strong self-concept as a result of attending the Shule. Naimah emphatically states, "I would not be the person I am if I had not attended [Faizah] Shule. I don't know what would have become of me, but the things that I experienced are so intrinsic to who I am, to what I believe, and what I want to do" (Personal Interview, 2004).

When speaking of his perception of how the Afrikan centered educational experience cultivated his self-esteem, Kamau elaborated that "it developed a person." He further explained:

> I think because there was . . . attention [focused on you] and you were taught to drive yourself [that] when I went to [name of university], which was a predominantly white school, I didn't feel less of anything; I felt good happy and proud of being me. So when I went in there my attitude was, hey, you all, how are you doing? I'm here. It taught me how . . . to be open-minded [and] to not be afraid to learn stuff. A lot of cats [that] I grew up with in my neighborhood or whatever are still there. They have not left the block because they are afraid . . . . We went to Africa and we did all kind of stuff. We were out and about. We talked to people who were involved in things and that made us think differently. You weren't afraid to learn new stuff and listen to different music and just a lot of things that a lot of people I find are just afraid to do . . . I am like, hey, what else

> can you show me? Teach me something [that] I don't know (Personal interview, 2004).

Asma shared her development of a positive self-esteem. She pointed out that "growing up in a school that's Afrikan-centered . . . you just learn to have a very strong sense of self."

> You always or at least almost always [are] able to maintain your identity regardless of the space, environment, or the venue in which you find yourself. You are who you are in everything and even if you don't own the space entirely, you never lose yourself. You always own yourself. Because you have learned the value of what it means to be who you are where you are (Personal Interview, 2004).

Substantiating their perspectives on the development of their self-esteem and preparation for life, some of the participants cited the Afrikan centered education as providing the basis for their ability to go into predominantly White institutions (PWI) and not feel intimidated in that experience but rather found themselves empowered. They also were not spending their time grappling with their identity while there; a process which they found engaged other Afrikan American students. Asma gave her account of feeling grounded in her Afrikanity:

> I've attended the [name of a major PWI university] as an undergrad, which is very much a white institution, a predominantly white institution and a socially white institution and has been intensely unfriendly to black students until very, very recently . . . What was always very interesting to me was how so many of my peers, my contemporaries, who were black [which means] they were young adults of African descent; rather they be from [Westville] which is a 80-85 percent Black city or from somewhere else, who did not have similar experiences [and] who hadn't at the very least grown up in a home which was very much centered culturally, ethically, and spiritually around a politicized black perspective and they've come to the [name of university] to discover themselves . . . where for me it was an opportunity to be challenged certainly, but to refine my own understanding of who I already knew that I was and to get a chance to kind of play around and learn and discover things about other people . . . and that's one, the tremendous values of having grown up in a very politicized and very "Pro Black" house, but two, having that constant 360 support in whatever environment that I was in just about my entire life, having gone to the Shule and therefore been involved in . . . a lot of my extra-curricular activities, particularly performing

> theater, rites-of-passage were related to the Shule. So just that constant reaffirmation and confirmation over and over and over again of who I am and what I do and what my purpose is valued and valuable, or really invaluable. I think it made it much easier for me to transition into that institution without losing myself or at least losing much less of myself than I saw a lot of other kids lose . . . . So I just was constantly reminded of how important that experience was to me being able to maintain things as fundamental as my dignity while I was there (Personal Interview, 2004).

Nina felt that the experience at the Shule has helped her to be secure in her Afrikanity, that is, who she is as an Afrikan person. With apparent pride, she described her features and accepting the reality of her beauty as an Afrikan woman. Nina explained that the Afrikan centered educational experience has caused her to see the world from a different perspective. "And the way I view the world is from such a different perspective . . . the type of person [that] I am, I'm proud to be Black." She further emphasized, "And I'm proud to be African and I'm secure in . . . the fact, that my hair is nappy and the fact that I'm never [going to] be a size two, no matter how, what I do, how much I diet or anything . . . I'm never [going to] be a size two. My nose is big and my lips are bigger . . . . And it's because of my African-ness." Nina felt that she demonstrated more security in her Afrikan identity than she observed in other young women who also attended the university:

> So I'm a lot more secure in myself as opposed to so many sisters I see come up here to [name of university] who are just, they just get totally turned around. You know, because they come up here and get so bombarded by so much European-ness, white-ness, and you know, so it's grounded me. It's given me a good foundation, and I can come up here, and I can do what I need to do, and I can take these classes, and I can get my degree, but I don't lose myself in the process. And when I feel myself losing myself, I have the tools and the foundation to pull myself back . . . . I felt I was really prepared for the rest of the world. I was really prepared to come here . . . . And, from the educational perspective, definitely, I think I was prepared to come here (Personal Interview, 2004).

The participants in the study unanimously agreed that the experience at the FS/MGPA were committed to the cultivation of their positive self identity as Afrikan

people. The educational experience offered by the Shule was predicated upon their intense belief in the historical greatness of Afrikan people and in the young people that they instructed.

> --All day long it was I want you all to be the best, whatever the best meant. She [Mama Taraji] didn't have a definition for it. It was just be the best at it period.
>
> --Kamau

Expectations for Greatness. Current research on Afrikan American student academic achievement has shown that teacher expectations can have both positive and negative impacts upon student achievement (Thompson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 1990). Daily in urban school settings across the nation, Afrikan American students interact with teachers who have low expectations for their academic achievement (Hilliard III, 1997).

Through research Afrikan American scholars and educators have deduced that the cultural orientation of Afrikan Americans has a greater focus on people and activities, unlike the western cultural orientation, which is geared towards things (Hale, 1986; Boykin 1986; Shade, 1994). This orientation towards people stimulate Afrikan American children to seek greater positive interaction with their teachers than European American students; in fact, Afrikan American students have higher academic success when their relationship with their teachers are warm and supportive (Shade, 1994).

Central to the educational philosophy of the Faizah Shule is the belief that all Afrikan American children are gifted. Mama Taraji states:

> Our philosophy has evolved over the years. We have a collective philosophy. Basically, we are saying that we believe that all children are gifted. It is up to the teachers...to identify the particular strengths and talents in each child. And to develop a curriculum just for him alone that will become an equalizing factor for his social and academic growth, for these children (Personal Interview, 2004).

This belief in the giftedness of the students was imprinted in the hearts of the school director, her staff, the parents, and the students of Faizah Shule. The participants in this study, specifically those young people who were in the first graduating class saw themselves as a special group of gifted children who were destined for greatness.

The term "greatness" did not encompass one specific definition, but it was encapsulated in the Afrikan historical cultural experience. It was presented in the historical accounts of the great civilization of Kemet. Greatness was presented in the ancestral memory of the accounts of the survivors of the Maafa, the Afrikan Holocaust. This greatness was presented in the great works and accomplishments of all the ancestors who have gone before and paved the path for this generation's existence. Young people were constantly told and reminded by the demonstration of invested time, effort and love of the Shule staff, parents, and community that they were expected to be great. Several young people share this experience:

> But the model of the school was the new Afrikan child will have a broader vision, and I think the full name of the school at the time was [Faizah] Shule Academy for Gifted Children. So the whole philosophy was that all children are gifted. And many of us are gifted in different ways. And that's the mission of the school and the instructors were to tap into those gifts no matter how they surfaced or how they manifested themselves for each child. Yes, I was considered gifted among everyone else who I went to school with (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma affirmed that she had never experience this expectancy for greatness in the public school that she attended briefly:

> So our orientation was that . . . all the expectations were that you are going to do and be great. What you do is expected to be great. Who you are is great already, but we expect you just to fulfill your own capacity. And that was something that I definitely never experienced in a public school setting (Personal Interview, 2004).

Kamau who was in the first graduating class recalled that "there were seven of us who graduated . . . it was like we all kind of jelled so well, we were kind of what I call

the experiment kids." He felt that because students in his class were the first cohort of students who had experienced the Afrikan centered education for most of their school career; they were the test case for many innovations. But, he and his cohort were also the recipients of high levels of investments of hope and faith through the Shule community. He remembered Mama Taraji's desire for his "success" and also, he recounted the weight of the responsibility that her love and interest placed upon him:

> And she just wanted you to succeed . . . looking at it now it was like this lady loved the hell of out of us and to this day still does. When she sees me it is like her face lights up and she is like, how is my [Kamau] doing? And for somebody to care about you like that makes a difference. It changes the way that you do things, the way that you feel about things and the way that you interact with people. When people care about you, you treat people like they care about you and like you care about them (Personal Interview, 2004).

Each of the participants was grateful for the attention and care of the staff; even to the point of experiencing what was essentially "parent-like fussing" from them. The participants understood that they had become part of an extended family, and the teachers considered them to be as one of their own children (Hilliard III, 1997). This concept of accepting the students as their own children was a direct reflection of the Afrikan traditional culture. The Faizah Shule incorporated the wisdom that "it takes a village to raise a child" and the participants felt that they were recipients of that conviction. In fact, Nina spoke appreciatively about her teacher's concern for her:

> So my teachers always . . . made sure when I got into my slacker mode, they're like, that's not you. Snap out of it. You know, in science class, if I wasn't doing well, Mama [Busara] would be like no, that's unacceptable and I'm not gonna accept it until you do it right. And they always had such expectation of greatness so they always made sure that we produced greatness (Personal Interview, 2004).

She further explicated:

> So no, the fact that Mama [Busara] cared, and the fact that I went over to her house and spent the night and, you know, I hung out with her kids, and she considered me to be her daughter. You know, really made her invested in my

> education, and my teachers were invested, and Baba Mwandu, my history teacher was, you know, really invested and really cared about us succeeding. So that definitely, that definitely had a great impact on my education. So I don't know. I just get into these modes, and it's like I don't really feel like doing that and now that I'm older, I push myself because I expect greatness for myself (Personal Interview, 2004).

Nina demonstrated that she had internalized her teachers' expectation for her. Buying into and trusting her teachers' perception of her, she began to demand the same level of performance for herself. In Afrikan traditional culture the community is central to the formation of the individual's identity and perception of self (Tedla, 1995).

Fundamental to nation-building is creating a generation of leaders capable of instituting self-determination and agency. The participants related how their experiences at the FS/MGPA reflected this goal. They shared how teachers had high expectations for them and were constantly reinforcing those expectations through their investment of time, love, and attention. The participants viewed the teachers like their own parents, often spending time with them and their families outside of the school setting. According to the participants, the teachers believed in them and their abilities for achieving "greatness."

The Shule sought to provide an education that would cultivate the "giftedness" of every Afrikan child within the Shule community for the purpose of creating leaders for the Afrikan nation. Proponents of an Afrikan centered education believe that critical and creative thinking is a necessary component of the educational experience (Hilliard III, 1997; Akoto, 1992; Lee, 1992).

> And because I was at this school I was able to look critically at things that were around me
>
> -- Naimah

Higher Order Thinking. The latest trend in education has been promoting a notion of creating a generation of higher order thinkers (Ennis, 1987). However, the teachers at Faizah Shule have understood that higher order thinking was an essential tool for the re-construction of the Afrikan world.

> Our children's commitment to this struggle and to the culture and ideology can only come through the exercise of their individual thought processes: that is, through the knowledge and discovery of historical truths; through comparison; hypothesizing and testing through debate, trial and application; through analysis and synthesis; through creative and critical thinking; through problem resolution processes; and through final evaluation and decision making (Akoto, 1992, p.116).

The Shule's purpose was "to develop strategic thinking based on past and present successes and creative possibilities for the future" (Parent Handbook, 1999, p. 4). This strategic thinking must proceed from a reciprocal relationship between teacher and students, in which the teacher is student and the students are teachers. This thinking entails examining phenomena utilizing both critical and creative skills. Akoto asserts that the "objective of creative/critical thinking skills is to equip the student with the ability to be discerning and analytical, but insightful, intuitive and imaginative as well" (1992, p. 161).

One aspect of the Afrikan centered education provided by the Shule was in exposing Eurocentric mythology and the fabrication of "truth" as taught from a Eurocentric world-view and viewing history from an Afrikan centered location (Ani, 1994; Asante, 1992). When Kamau related his experience at the Shule, he shared that History was one of the courses that demanded a critical analysis:

> [T]here were things in European culture from a historical standpoint that are mistruths I am sure in some cases. Like the biggest thing that stands out to me is everybody and their mommas now know that Christopher Columbus did not discover America; why haven't the history books changed? How can you discover a place where there are people? So I think from a historical standpoint

> we were just...taking different angles at looking at things (Personal Interview, 2004).

Kamau further expounded that the teachers, through critical analysis required a more in-depth examination of Afrikan historical events. For instance in studying the *Maafa* (the Afrikan Holocaust of slavery), Kamau understood that his analysis proceeded from an Afrikan worldview, which is different from a Eurocentric worldview. He offered that the Afrikan worldview teaches circular or relational thinking, that is, "from a cause and effect" perspective; "everything that is old is new." The "European culture teaches linear thinking . . . . Do this and do this later and just keep going". Kamau explains:

> Some things are more critical . . . . And when I talk to all of my other friends who didn't attend African-centered schools, they didn't talk about nothing about black folks. And what I mean by that . . . of course, you had your slave trade. Before the slave trade, [those] people were doing something. So what were they doing? Let's go and find out . . . we looked more in-depth into that part of it. The European settlers went over and grabbed some black folks and brought them here, and they worked for 400 years, and then they set them free. Okay . . . . I mean, to hear it like that, it was nothing. Let's look at that some more. People got killed. They sank in ships. Four hundred million Africans died, that is not lightweight stuff. So it was a more critical look into some things and just more expanded horizon of African people (Personal Interview, 2004).

Instructions were often given and reinforced through applications. In the Afrikan centered education, higher order thinking was cultivated by engaging the students in applications of the knowledge imparted. The teachers understood that students needed to problem-solve through identification of the problem, gathering of important facts, contextualizing, reflection, and decision making (Geertsen, 2003; Akoto, 1992). Nina relates an experience in an algebra class. She noted that the teachers designed a project that addressed the various learning styles of the student, while, demanding a critical analysis of the consequences of particular choices. These lessons were built upon the

Afrikan cultural emphasis on the interdependency of all things (Tedla, 1995). Nina explains it this way:

> So just reading it in a book doesn't really help me [to understand] so you know, that's a part of the African centered curriculum in the class incorporating things in the class...that'll help each child in their particular learning style . . . . Like she [the mwalimu] had us build this house so that we could apply the things that we were learning instead of just arbitrarily looking at them on paper . . . . So we had to incorporate certain angles in the house and do certain things from the algebra class we were learning. And we also had to talk about the materials that we'd be using and where we would get them from and where we'd build it and what would happen to our environment if we put our house there . . . so not just, oh, I'm [going to] go . . . clear [these] acres and acres of land of all these trees and where all these animals live. What's [going to] happen to that environment once I put my house there and what am I going to be changing about it and what other life forms am I [going to] be displacing once I put my house there. And how am I going to be able to live harmoniously because we are the dominant life form but all the other animals have just as much of a right to live here as . . . . Everybody else. [T]hat's part of the African centered idea that, you know, they gave us. It's, yes, we're the dominant life form and you know, we're thinking beings and we seem to run off more than just instinct. But that doesn't give us any more right to be here than anything else (Personal Interview, 2004).

The acquisition of higher order thinking skills was perceived as a valuable outcome of the Afrikan centered educational experience. The participants in the study expressed their experiences in obtaining these skills through projects and frames of reference. The young people stressed the importance of examining phenomena from an Afrikan centered perspective, which is aligned with their cultural and historical continuum. In this regard, they were also taught to perceive themselves as the leaders of nations and responsible for maintaining harmony with all of creation.

The Shule provided an educational experience that cultivated the principles of self-advocacy, the third outcome that arose from the data analysis. Creating leaders, for the Shule meant that students needed to understand how to practice social and political activism as well as student agency.

Educational experience that cultivated the principles of self-advocacy

> --they were training us to be activists from the very beginning, and we always felt empowered to act and to actually change circumstances.
>
> ---Naimah

> There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Shaull, 1970, p.34).

Activism. Ensuring the goal of nation building requires that the next generation is actively seeking to establish and maintain the nation-state. The CIBI position statement clearly states that an Afrikan centered education "prepares Afrikans for self-reliance, nation maintenance, and nation management in every regard" (CIBI, 2005). Also, in the value system of the Nguzo Saba, Nia is the sixth principle and this principle promotes the concept of collective purpose and responsibility.

While attending the Faizah Shule, the participants spoke of regularly being engaged in activities that developed their confidence in their abilities to affect society and history through activism. Activism as defined by Wordnet, "is a policy of taking direct and militant action to achieve a political or social goal" (Wordnet, 2006). For the participants, activism was a very key component of their experience. They expressed their memories of going to events and learning that they had the ability to impact society. Naimah's articulation most poignantly denotes the collective experience of the participants:

> But we always had to understand what black people were doing at the time; where were people at this time? How did these events affect black people? I think that probably more than anything else that is what made us an African centered school. We were always looking at current events, what was going on. I always remember writing letters and campaigning to free Nelson Mandela. Whatever was going on in politics we knew about [it]. And we didn't just know about [it] but we were doing something about it however we could at that age . . . they were

> training us to be activists from the very beginning and we always felt empowered to act and to actually change circumstances. So when he was freed, we felt like we had done something like we had ownership and we had participated in a way. So in that sense activism was just instilled in us. So I think that's why I feel so committed to serving a cause greater than myself because I feel like I can (Personal Interview, 2004).

When asked how many students in her graduating class did she considered to be activists, Naimah responded, "I would say about three out of seven" (Naimah). This may be an indication that even though all the students were exposed to aspects of activism, not all were perceived as having internalized the ideology of the experiences. On the other hand, participants may practice activism in less obvious ways, such as through volunteerism.

Parents also became activist. One reason for this transformation was because they transported the students to the rallies, protest events, marches, and sit-ins that exposed them to the political clout of grassroots efforts. Another reason was that they also were learning how to be activists right along with the children. These events were often not planned in advance, but as the need arose in the community, the Shule was bound by its philosophy of community to meet the call.

Adofo described one event in which students at the Faizah Shule participated in a protest at a major university in Michigan. Adofo stated that "at [name of the university], they had a problem when some students locked themselves in the office as [a form of] protest . . . . I forgot the actual [reason why], because I was young." When asked if the protest was attributed to Affirmative Action, he responded:

> No, it wasn't affirmative action. It was some students, they were having a problem. One year, they had some students protesting the way the [name of the university] was handling some business. I can't remember actually the situation . . . . I was going through my rites of passage, too, at the time. I was in 9th grade. And they loaded us on the bus and we went out there and we demonstrated. We drilled and we said pledges and we were basically supporting the people who

> were boycotting the school. But the people there were looking like these are kids from [Westville] and they're well disciplined. Well disciplined. We were there to support the people . . . . It was all over the news (Personal Interview, 2005).

Adofo continued explaining that they were transported to the university by the parents through carpools:

> It really wasn't anything planned. It was last minute. The students [at the university had] just graduated from the Shule . . . and they came back [telling of the organized protest] . . . and then Mama Taraji and other teachers decided that we should go out there. We should be seen, we should show our support . . . because it was only about five students actually protesting . . . . And for us to come out there, last minute and show our support, they're like well, it's bigger than the school now. So they got the attention they needed. And when the community sees something that needs to be done, they do it . . . . You need to see our face, to see we're not playing (Personal Interview, 2005).

Adofo also stressed that the Shule supported major candidates with elections within the community. However, for Adofo, activism was not only demonstrated through their political activism but also through social activism which encompassed the community involvement of their performance group, which was the Pyramid Performance Troupe. He described their activities:

> We were drumming and dancing all the time. We would go out in Black History month and we play for that all the time. We'd go to every school in [Westville] just about, drum and dance and explain the stories behind African drum and dance. We put on performances all the time at [name of university] State (Personal Interview, 2005).

The Shule's philosophy maintained the importance of exposing Afrikan American young people to community role models "who were positive and fair and consistent in their behavior," and so students were provided the opportunities to be active with other activists of the community. So not only were the young people engaged in activism, but they were exposed to role models of activism. Most importantly, when alumni of the Shule were actively engaged in protest for change, the Shule community was compelled to become a part of that protest through active support and voice.

Student activism was critical to nation building. A key component of "nation maintenance" is producing leadership for the nation and the world. For the Shule, student agency in the form of leadership began within the environment of the Shule community.

> [The tribunal] just kind of evolved, it just kind of happened. It was like that was the cool thing to take care of your school and be responsible.
>
> --Kamau

Student Agency. Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikan ideologies undergird the educational philosophy at Faizah Shule and permeate the curriculum, the pedagogy and the activities of the school. Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikan ideologies promote self-determination, self-respect and self-efficacy for Afrikan people. Agency or instrumentality is the energy that accomplishes the goals of this ideology. When sharing their experiences of attending an Afrikan centered school, the participants recollected how they were encouraged to practice student agency. One way in which agency was manifested was in taking responsibility for their learning. Kamau explained how and why he perceived this agency in learning was present:

> Another thing that was interesting was [that] we taught ourselves. And what I mean . . . there was definitely instruction. Like the principal of the school she taught at Wayne State, and we had straight formal instruction . . . . But what I mean by we taught ourselves, when I came in [enrolled into the Shule] it was kind of a group [of us] that we all just jelled together and went through this whole thing [the Shule experience]. And the school grew with us . . . . But we took our education in our own hands. We were always learning, everything was learning. It wasn't like I had to sit [and say] I am in math now. Everything was intertwined and interrelated (Personal Interview, 2004).

Another participant pointed out how the Director of the Shule would allow the students to select topics of interest for instructions. It was obvious that the curriculum format was not carved in stone, but the students could make requests for various educational experiences and when possible, their requests were fulfilled.

For instance, Mumbi shared:

> We told her [Mama Taraji] what we wanted and when we brought that to her, she made it possible. We had a hip-hop class. We had a chess class, you know, people who just wanted to do extra math. We had extra math. The hardest thing was that we always learned Kiswahili and we brought it to her that we wanted to learn another language like French and Spanish, she made that possible too (Personal Interview, 2005).

Several participants in the first graduating class recalled how the impact of converting into a charter school and accepting a different clientele of students was the impetus for executing leadership strategies as they attempted to maintain a modicum of order within the school environment. The senior class formed a tribunal, which was the governing body for the students. Kamau recounts the events, "we put together what was called a tribunal. And it was basically students taking care of students."

> [The tribunal] just kind of evolved, it just kind of happened. It was like that was the cool thing to take care of your school and be responsible. It eventually became the higher grades. Before it wasn't an official thing, it just happened. Because everybody was so close we just kind of took responsibility for everything and everybody, naturally. So over time as the school got a little size to it, it was like, hey, this is a good thing. Let's make it something official and it was more. Because it wasn't like you were elected so to speak, it was just a natural progression, you just kind of . . . stepped into place somehow. And it worked . . . . It just kind of evolved, it just kind of happened. It was like that was the cool thing to take care of your school and be responsible. Then later on . . . the school, everybody developed the rites of passage program. And the people who were the leaders of that [rites-of-passage] became those heads of the tribunal (Personal Interview, 2004).

When asked if the tribunal made decisions for punishment of students, his response was:

> If somebody would do something stupid, we thought of their punishment because it was our school and . . . just like you wouldn't let anybody into your home act up at your house, you don't let anybody act up at your school . . . . Fortunately, we didn't have to do it a lot because the attitude was "we ain't having it, don't do that!" In the school the most important thing to you is your peers. What your friends think. We [weren't] having the crap (Personal Interview, 2004).

One particular instance he recalled was when the tribunal decided that a student should not continue in the school:

> In cases where people did do stuff, I mean it came down to a situation and I don't remember exactly what it was about. But we had to decide whether someone was going to continue to go to the school. And they didn't. Because they didn't want to respect what was going on. They just wanted to rant and rave and be out here all wild. And it's like okay for the greater good of the community of the school and for our environment you can't continue on, you have got to go (Personal Interview, 2004).

When asked if the tribunal had the authority to make decisions independent of the Faizah Shule staff, he explained:

> When it came to stuff that big, it wasn't like we could just make that decision and that was it, we had input. It was like we really feel that this person – and people got chances. It wasn't like we said, we don't want him to go to school here no more. Because it was never like someone is un-cool they can't be here. It was some serious allegations of something that was done or whatever (Personal Interview, 2004).

The influence of the tribunal became most evident in day-to-day regulations of their peers, particularly with school dress. Kamau related, "In uniforms that is when the whole tribunal piece came into effect. You walked around checking people, tuck your shirt in . . . Tie your shoes up. Don't walk around here all sloppy."

The participants in this study considered the experience at Faizah Shule as fostering student agency to promote self-determination, self-respect and self-advocacy. These outcomes align with the goals of Afrikan-centered educational experience as articulated in the educational philosophy of Faizah Shule.

The fourth outcome which came forth from the data analysis is the Shule provided an educational experience for young people that developed their personhood. According to traditional Afrikan culture, the family and community are responsible for assisting members through life's transitions, which is the process of becoming a person. Fundamental to the evolutionary process of becoming a person is spirituality, the rites-of-passage, and the acquisition of life values.

Educational experience that developed their personhood

> There is nothing about any traditional Afrikan society that comes to mind to me, that isn't or doesn't have a very strong God or Spirit-center, very strong.
>
> --Asma

Spirituality. The staff of FS/MGPA strongly emphasizes the importance of spirituality in the holistic educational experience of Afrikan American young people. The CIBI position statement posits that the Afrikan centered educational experience "acknowledges Afrikan spirituality as an essential aspect of our uniqueness as a people and makes it an instrument of our liberation" (2005, p. 6-7). The ideology of spirituality at the FS/MGPA aligned with CIBI and the concept as put forth by Akoto (1992) in his work *Nationbuilding:*

> Spirituality in the reconstructed and revitalized cosmology of the Afrikan nationality must take its impetus and substance from the traditional spiritual formations of Afrika . . . . The essential substance and fundamental assumptions, however, must be at the heart of the spiritual system. Principal among those fundamentals are: everyone has a direct linkage to the creator, each must find his/her own path; our ancestors dwell among us and are available to us; that spiritual awareness; connectedness is a way of life to be celebrated daily in a variety of forms; and the strength of the national collective grows out of its spiritual foundations (pp. 30-31).

Participants shared how they experienced spirituality in this Afrikan centered environment. Kamau stressed that spirituality was not defined for you by the school, but that you were exposed to the concept of respecting the Creator. Kamau explained that when you talk about "Spirituality, you are talking about the whole person." He explained that the concept of spirituality at the Shule was not based on a particular organized religion because you had families of many different faiths attending the Shule.

> [I]t wasn't based in the organized religion; it was about respecting the creator. Part of that is political you don't want to offend people, but at the end of the day that's what it is all about anyway, at least in my thinking, respecting the creator by whatever name you want to call him . . . . So spirituality was addressed like

> that because that is part of nurturing the person. But it was never defined for you (Personal Interview, 2004).

Ancestor veneration, which is a ceremony in which the ancestors are remembered for their efforts, struggles, and achievements in setting the stage for those who follow them, is often misunderstood by Western scholars. Afrikans have been wrongly accused of worshipping their ancestors through these ceremonies. Tedla (1995) explicates, "Africans do not worship their ancestors . . . since departed relatives are believed to continue to live, they are remembered at numerous events through the act of libation and in prayers for blessings, guidance, and strength" (p.22). She clarifies that this is veneration not worship.

Kamau gives his understanding of ancestor veneration, which he experienced at the FS/MGPA:

> Ancestors were a big part of things. And it wasn't – I have heard a lot of people say, well, you're worshiping dead people. No, it wasn't that. It's showing respect to those who were before you, and that's it. I have seen in my lifetime a lot of people get – and this is where I am different – get really confused with that whole piece. It is like, well, that's false worship and all of that other stuff. It is not about that. Because when my mother passes one day, I am going to sit and think about my momma and all of the things that she did for me, and I am going to talk about it to somebody. And that is all it was. [It is] paying respect to the people who did it before you, the same way when you think about your grandmother (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma explained that the Afrikan centered educational experience had a strong spiritual component. Through this experience, she learned to acknowledge that there was something bigger than she, and this something or someone deserved to be respected as the Creator. She also recognized that her gifts and talents were divinely given and that she should be thankful to God for them. She shared her perspective on spirituality within the Afrikan centered school:

> We said praise (prayers) everyday before we ate our food. There was a strong spiritual element; you know libations before any activity or ceremony . . . . [Giving recognition] that there was something even bigger and greater than you. You had a responsibility to pray in your own faith and to be thankful. Which is also something that "faith" is essentially African. There is nothing about any traditional African society that comes to mind to me, that isn't or doesn't have a very strong God or Spirit-center, very strong. Everything comes out of that, if you have a gift, you're intellectual or something in particular, you know that's your purpose. But this purpose is a natural purpose. We don't give birth to ourselves, and think that, you know, we just sort of make up the idea. But it's a process. For me, its sort of osmosis for us as human beings, I mean, how does our God work? He's organized and planned and purposeful and intelligent and purposed in the way it is meant to work. That's God (Personal Interview, 2004).

Heimis shared his thoughts on the concept of spirituality; defining spiritual as being both human and natural. He also noted in accordance with Afrikan thoughts on spirituality that humans are not separate entities of spirit. Afrikan traditional religion believes that humans are body, soul, and spirit united. Heimis explained further:

> Spirituality is fun. Spirituality is human, nature. I don't care what you believe in . . . . I don't think it is a separate entity. We're not separate entities, we're not . . . . I'm not [Heimis] and then spiritual [Heimis]. I'm [Heimis] right here talking to you from body, mind and soul. That's who I am. I'm all; I'm all at that moment. Just like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one team, with three aspects but one team. I'm one thing and that's how life is, you don't go to school as a person and then go home as a spirit. You don't, I mean, I'm adult so I can talk about it, you don't have sex as a human body and then have a spirit. You're a spirit in a human body having sex and that's what you are and then that's taught to not be separate (Personal Interview, 2005).

He also demonstrated his understanding of the potency of Afrikan spirituality:

> We had to be spiritual to take crap from a whip; you had to be spiritual if your daddy is hanging from a tree, that forbidden fruit. You have to be, you know. . . . So that's just the way I feel (Personal Interview, 2005).

Adofo shared his experience with spirituality through both the FS/MGPA and the influence of his parents:

> Well, if you go to ancient Africa, the way their religion is spiritual. The things they did were spiritual. The gods, the kings, the rulers who ruled were viewed as gods. People, like they were very spiritual, like incense. Everything has meaning. My mom is a very spiritual person . . . . My father [believes that]

> certain incense, certain oils brings certain vibes. And certain vibes you let off are how people, how people deal with you. And being spiritual . . . my parents believe that there's always someone looking over you. [If] my father had a bad day, he'd say I must've disappointed the ancestors. [If] my father had a good day, the ancestors are looking out for me. The ancestors [have] been good. He calls them ancestors . . . . That goes back to ancient Africa (Personal Interview, 2005).

The participants in the study recognized the importance of spirituality within the framework of the Afrikan centered education. They articulated the necessity of acknowledging the Creator as a power greater than themselves. It seemed apparent that the emphasis on spirituality within FS/MGPA was an extension of the significance of spirituality within the home environments. As they expressed their experiences on spirituality, the young people infused their narratives with indicators of heir parent's religious influence.

For Afrikans, spirituality was the essence of human existence within the material world. Afrikan cosmology maintains that spirits enter the material world as babies and through family and community are developed into personhood. This human development is acknowledged and advanced through rituals, ceremonies and celebrations of transitions of life called rites-of-passage. The Shule understood the importance of life's transitions and incorporated the rites-of-passage within their students' educational experience.

> Well, rites-of-passage is...a basic meaning from my understanding...it's not really a rites-of-passage of the body, it's really of the mind.
>
> - Heimis

Rites-of-Passage. According to the CIBI's position statement, one objective of an Afrikan centered education is to:

> ensure that the historic role and function of the customs, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies – that have protected and preserved our culture; facilitated our spiritual expression; ensured harmony in our social relations; prepared our people to meet their responsibilities as adult members of our culture; and sustained the

> continuity of Afrikan life over successive generation – are understood and made relevant to the challenges that confront us in our time (CIBI, 2005, p. 6-7).

In accordance with this statement, the Shule believes that young people must be taught their roles in society for the reclamation and restructuring of Afrikan greatness, and the Shule community has a responsibility to impart that knowledge to the students. One vehicle that the Shule has utilized to integrate this ideology into the educational experience of its students has been through the rites-of-passage program.

Participants in this study described their rites-of-passage experience. They spoke of experiencing two rites-of-passage ceremonies during their educational career at the FS/MGPA. The first rites-of-passage was experienced around the eighth grade and was considered by the young people to be the adult rites. The second rites-of-passage program was around the ages of 14 to 16 years old and was called the Baba or Mama rites. Drawing upon and adapting the traditions of Afrikan cultural rituals, the teachers, parents, and community members created a rites-of-passage program specific to the needs of these young men and women.

According to the participants, the first rites-of-passage was a week long experience for both the males and females students. Naimah provided an overview of the first rites-of-passage program for the girls:

> the rites of passage program [was performed] when we were 12 and [when] we were about to graduate [from high school], there were certain rituals and procedures that were integrated into our curriculum as well as after school programs, as well as assignments and tasks that we had to perform at home with our mothers at the time, for the girls it was our mothers. So whether it was an assignment in terms of keeping our rooms clean or interviewing an elder in our family, the assignment that was going on at school, it related directly to what was going on at home (Personal Interview, 2005).

According to the participants, entering into puberty was not a precursor to this experience, it was simply an experience that you had when the elders felt that you were

ready. Nina explained this process, "So when you get to the prep school, you go through your first rites . . . and it's supposed to bring you into young womanhood . . . and the mamas start to . . . cultivate the woman in you, instead of the little girl . . . if they feel that you're ready."

Heimis recounted his thoughts on the rites-of-passage experience, "People tend to think it's dealing with the body when you're going through puberty and things like that, but one thing the Shule always reflect was when you were mentally ready." Heimis mentioned that some students had been dropped from the rites-of-passage lines if they were perceived as not mentally ready to go through the experience. Heimis stressed, "It's the transformation from boyhood to manhood. You don't do rites-of-passage over . . . though it might be a six month passage or a two month passage . . . it is preparation for manhood." He also pointed out that "in the rites-of-passage, you've got to be taught that there are consequences for everything. And that there are things that you do now that leads up to what will happen to you later."

Heimis further stated that this experience was really about re-socialization, "It's a re-socialization indeed. In fact, [that's] one of the biggest parts of it; big because we learn through socialization . . . . Oh yea, it's a re-socialization . . . It's a re-thinking." Heimis stated that during the rites-of-passage program, the young men were involved in both physical and mental activities.

When the rites-of-passage program was first developed, it was not a very elaborate program for the students. The initiation usually only lasted a week, but as the program continued through the years, it was refined and elaborated into several months. Naimah acknowledged that "as the years went on, it became much more sophisticated and . . . the preparation for the rites-of-passage starts months, months ahead of time."

Although, both males and females reported experiencing two rites-of-passages, the second rites-of-passage, which was experienced in high school, was articulated upon with greater frequency by both groups of participants.

During the latter rites-of-passage program, the males and females experienced this ritual in some very different ways. The males experienced separation from the community by being taken on a field trip for wilderness training. The male elders, consisting of teachers, parents, and community persons, prepared and accompanied the young men who were between the ages of 14 and 17 on a "camping" trip. At this gathering, which lasted for a week, the young men were taken through a rigorous program of values impartation, strength training, relationship building, bonding, and explication of the expectations and objectives of manhood (i.e., sexuality, fatherhood, provider, and community leader).

Female students experienced a symbolic seclusion. In most cases, the young women were not taken on retreats away from the community, but were required to participate in a "communication fast." The young women were restricted from speaking with their fathers and brothers during this time. Their time was spent in the presence of their mothers and female elders where they received instructions, were counseled, and were assigned tasks. As the program evolved and became "more sophisticated," according to Naimah, female participants engaged in hiking trips and formed drill teams to establish discipline.

Both male and female participants were explicit about the lessons learned through their rites-of-passage experiences. Asma expressed that through this experience, she was able to link her role and place in the genesis of civilization, which is often negated in the European ethos. She also pointed out that the rites-of-passage experience was

instrumental to her ascertaining an understanding of her womanhood and sexuality. While attending a major university, she noticed that young Afrikan American women were allowing themselves to be exploited as they attempted to enter into and maintain relationships with a scarce supply of Afrikan American men. Asma adamantly refused to get caught up in that game and explained that her attitude was shaped by her rites-of-passage experience. "To a large extent . . . . How you think about desire, yourself as a woman, as an Afrikan American woman." She further expounded, "You know, we heard a lot about being the mother of civilization, coveting the Black woman's womb, everything that exists in the universe exists inside of you. Your womb is a microcosm for the entire universe." She affirmed that the rites-of-passage experience just helped her to perceive herself as valuable, and she resolved not to allow herself to be exploited.

Kamau and his brother, Heimis revealed that while going through their rites-of-passage program, they were the leaders of their groups. The young men were initiated into the Akoben Sankofa Warrior Society and were considered to be young warriors. In this group, they learned "the responsibilities of being a warrior" and Heimis continues, "You learn the responsibilities that a man is generally supposed to have to at least be able to survive." Kamau added that the experience of accepting and operating as a leader in the rites-of-passage group led to initiating leadership in the formulation of a student tribunal to regulate and govern student behavior.

When asked if understanding sexuality was a part of the rites-of-passage training, Heimis acknowledged that they were instructed about their sexuality. He stated that the position taken on explaining sexuality was "You make sure you understand the consequences, the responsibilities of what happens, statistically why it happens, when and where . . . . You keep going with it, and you have rap sessions about it."

Part of the rites-of-passage is to teach young people the importance of community. The participants spoke about the ways the rites-of-passage program enables the students to bond together as community. Nina shared how part of the program was to teach young woman to appreciate other young women. In Western culture, women tend to objectify each other and view other women as threats (hooks, 1993). Nina explained that "so often when we get to a certain point, its like women become our enemies, and it's about trying to dispel that and make us accept one another as our friends." "Because we share some experiences, so women shouldn't be your enemies," she continued, "so they want us to be strong women; they want us to be sisters."

Heimis highlighted this effort of bonding and appreciating the collective also:

> For those [that] I went through [the rites-of-passage with] ranged like from, I believe the youngest one I'm sure, from 14 to about 17 [years old]. Then again, that number gives you a broad spectrum of people, different minds, different angles . . . and it is sorta like [family]. It builds a sense of unity because this is one . . . group . . . . All different walks of life, different shades, different growth, different financial everything and you become on one accord. Then you have a line, a line of brothers who are supposed to be in sync (Personal Interview, 2005).

Once the participants have successfully completed the program, a celebration is held in their honor, separately for males and females. Same sex family members, teachers, staff, and elders in the community gather in ceremony to celebrate the incorporation of the person into the community. It announces the symbolic resurrection of the participant as a new person, an adult who now has all the privileges and responsibilities bestowed on adulthood. In the Baba and Mama rites-of-passage, this person is now referred to as Mama or Baba and is respected as such.

Overall the participants described their rites-of-passage experience as a positive event in their lives. All of them clearly articulated the objective of the program as a transformative event in which they would enter as a child and emerge from it as an adult

person. However, in this study some of the male participants seemed skeptical to the mystical powers of the transformation into manhood. Kamau opined that "rites-of-passage was just a formalized situation . . . of showing young men and young women what being responsible and being adults is . . . . True rites-of-passage is growing up, period!"

Keeping in line with the concept of nation-building and the cultural focus of FS/MGPA, the rites-of-passage provided the venue to pass on the customs, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies to Afrikan American young people. The goal of this cultural impartation is to transform non-persons into persons and to incorporate them into the Pan Afrikan community in an effort to maintain and perpetuate the liberation of Afrikan people on the Continent and the Diaspora.

In the development of personhood through the rites-of-passage and the Afrikan centered educational experience, life values are imparted to the students. The values of the Nguzo Saba and Maat are integrated into the educational experiences of the students and often were not specifically articulated but were modeled through daily interactions and rituals.

> And sometimes when people hear Nguzo Saba they hear certain things; they think of these very constructed definitions . . . . But it's so much more than that, especially when you accept them into your life and into the basis for the way that you live.
>
> ---Nina

Life Values. In Afrikan traditional culture, the goal of education was social with a mission of developing personhood. The family and community, collectively imparted values to its members that would facilitate the development of virtue and character in persons who would perpetuate righteousness, harmony, truth, justice, order, reciprocity,

and balance. This process of education is life-long because a person is considered to always be in the process of becoming a person. In the community of the Faizah Shule, the Nguzo Saba and the principles of Maat are incorporated into the day-to-day human interactions within the school environment. The seven principles of the Nguzo Saba are recited in song at the end of each day and oftentimes, monthly "themes" based upon these principles are taught.

The participants were intensely aware of the principles of life which guided their human interactions with members of the community. These principles were so internalized that the participants, although mentioning the system of values, often did not compartmentalize the values into separate parts but spoke of them holistically. They understood them to be so interrelated and interwoven that they were fundamental to their life choices. Participants cited how values learned from their educational experience at the Afrikan centered school were manifested in their lives, particularly once they left the environment.

Several of the participants graduated from the Shule and began their pursuit of higher education at predominately white institutions. The following are accounts of their experience at the higher education institution and the impact of their Afrikan centered education upon that experience. Naimah asserted that because of her experience at the Shule, she entered the university expecting to take on a leadership role:

> So when I went to the [name of University], it was my duty to assume a position of leadership whether that be through the Black Student Union or to create another organization that was geared toward African American women, Caucus of the Sister. It was just somebody has got do it, and I have got to be the one to step up to the plate or it won't get done. And if it does get done, it's not going to get done right. So I just have to do it myself (Personal Interview, 2004).

While attending a predominately white institution, Kamau decided that he would pledge a Black Greek Fraternity. To some, including myself, this may seem initially to be a contradiction of Afrikan centered values. Kamau presented the following rationale for joining the fraternity. First, he attributed his educational experience at the Shule with influencing that decision. He stated, "Yes, [the Shule influenced this decision] when you think about it from a nation-building standpoint." He further explained, "For one it was about brotherhood, about positivity. It was about connecting, not so much networking, but literally connecting with a band of people that are together for a reason. So from an Afrocentric standpoint, I think that's where that came into play." Kamau recognized that joining a Greek fraternity raised issues in the minds of some proponents of Afrikan centered thought:

> On the flipside of that a lot of African-centered people, quote unquote, had a problem with it. Like why do you want to join a Greek – da da da? And that's where again, that whole thing of wearing it on your sleeve versus it being internal, [that's] what you are . . . that's where those things differ . . . . if you thought about it, African American people got together and formed these organizations the same way that the school came together. It was unifying us and it was keeping something that we can hold on to that's ours, gives us identity and bonding together as one. That's what that was about. It just happened to be named with Greek letters because we didn't have [anything] else. It wasn't – I am not a Greek, Greek organizations don't talk nothing about being Greek. We just got Greek letters as the name. If you said it in Swahili would that help you? Would that make it Afrocentric for you? Mama [Taraji] always said and this always stuck with me is that we are a new African people; she said that all of the time. We are a new African people (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma perceived an Afrikan centered education as a lifestyle, not just a teaching strategy. She spoke of the strategies that were implemented to impart values within the students at Faizah Shule. Also, she noted that she considered the Nguzo Saba to be an appropriate values system for imparting virtue and character within the students. Asma

gives an account of the values impartation, "Afrikan centered education is not a way of teaching; it is a way of life." She explained:

> The way you think . . . the way you breathe. It is a way in which you engage the world, the way in which you think about yourself and how you apply that conception to your children . . . . As a child carrying that idea into adulthood is the sort of thing that I was talking about, just being able to maintain my basic dignity. Because being respected and being respectable was more important to me than being popular (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma offered more insight into the internalization of the values at Faizah Shule:

> One of the really wonderful dynamics about the Shule was that it was very firmly rooted in principle, and the principles utilize the Nguzo Saba. A lot of people like to associate that with Kwanzaa, at a particular time of the year, particular days . . . really we were taught to perceive that these were the seven principles that Blackness [and were] actually founded on the Nguzo Saba . . . so we learn Nguzo Saba, it wasn't just umoja-unity, kujichagulia focus on me and myself . . . kujichagulia: define ourselves, speak for ourselves, create for ourselves rather than being named, defined and spoken for by others as Maulana Karenga has both outlined and designed in a much more comprehensive way. So Kuumba to leave our environment more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it, that's what we are responsible for doing. So when we were walking around in our black sole shoes and scuffing up the floor . . . in morning assembly, we had to stand in "angulia", [which was about] discipline . . . . We might be standing there for a half hour in angulia and you better not [talk] while Mama [Taraji] is talking. And there is still something about that woman's voice that just sort of calls you to attention. But very much like a mother "What are you children doing leaving these scuff marks all over the floor?" So we had to go around in a very simple motion where we had to use the bottom of our shoes, so it wouldn't scuff up some more. What we couldn't get up, she wouldn't fret about the few that were left. But it was like, they took complete ownership of everything relating to us (Personal Interview, 2004).

Asma continued to expound on one of the values of Nguzo Saba, which enforce the concept of collectivity and taking on your brother's problems as your problem. Ujima, collective work and responsibility is the principle of Nguzo Saba emanating from the concept of community:

> But it is very interesting about this idea that everybody will take responsibility for each other because if anybody is misbehaving than everybody gets in trouble. That was how we learned. We had to chant when we would drill "Are you your brother's keeper?" or "Are you your sister's keeper?" and the answer was "No, I

> am my brother", "No, I am my sister". Not that there wasn't individual responsibility, but definitely out of that push for individual responsibility came a larger governing responsibility to something bigger than you. I'm always saying it started with you, but it always ultimately went to something that was bigger than you (Personal Interview, 2004).

Heimis did not view this principle favorably. Heimis indicated that he understood the underlying value of unity the principle promotes, but at the same time he felt that the principle was taken to the extreme when everyone suffered the consequences of one or two people's actions. He offered his perspective:

> Promoting unity is the [African] centered thing. Something they used to do. If one person did [it], everybody did it and that brings the group together and makes sure you're whole. And the premise was to teach you to keep your brothers in line . . . your boy . . . pull his coat tail. That's excellent! That's exceptional . . . but at the same token, if somebody don't do something and everybody gets sent home for it, you can keep that (Personal Interview, 2005).

Yet another participant, Nina provided her understanding of how she felt that her actions directly impacted others:

> I know that my actions . . . have such a great impact on . . . people. People that I know who are [going] to be directly affected by it but also people who are going to be affected by it just from the residual effects . . . . If I make a mistake and I do something and my mom has to . . . say for example, she has to take [Habibah] to the Shule and it makes her late for work. That throws off what's going on at the Shule . . . that throws off their day and it throws off some of the students. The students can't get done. So . . . I'm just saying that every action has a reaction and that's something that we're really forced to look at and really understand because you can't just go around in the world and decide that you're [going to] do something and expect it not . . . to be a consequence for it. So . . . it's stuff like that that I picked up from the Shule that has really impacted the way that I live my life and the way that I view the world. Even . . . some of the world things that's going on right now . . . this whole war thing, I don't feel like anybody's really looking at the impact that it's having on the people . . . who live in these countries that these armies are just going in and bombing. What about these children and what about these people (Personal Interview, 2004)?

Mumbi explained how the Nguzo Saba principle of ujima has been carried over in the rearing of her children. She hypothesized an incident in which her son, who is three years old, would have a friend come over to play. Before the friend could leave to go

home, Mumbi insisted that she would have him assist her son in cleaning up the play area. Speaking of her son, Mumbi explicated, "Sometimes he might have company, I would tell his friends to clean up. They're not going to leave my son with all this mess . . . they're little, but they help [to] make the mess. [His friend] is going to help clean it up also."

Several of the participants in the school were young mothers. Contrary to Western culture in which fetuses are considered not to be humans and once pregnant, selecting to give birth or not is a legislative right, Afrikan traditional culture promotes a different orientation towards life and what is considered the origins of life. Afrikan culture attributes the source of life to the Creator and understands babies as ancestors coming back to the earth. Children are considered to be precious and valuable; also they are seen as spirits that have just departed the Creator and entered into the earth realm (Mbiti, 1970).

In the rites-of-passage program, the young women in this study were taught about their sexuality and motherhood responsibilities, as well as their roles within the community. When these young women discovered themselves to be with child, they made the choice to give birth and raise their children. Pregnancy for them did not mean that they had made a mistake and now were experiencing an unwanted pregnancy, but rather that the Creator had given them a gift. Mumbi shared her account of how her understanding of Afrikan culture regarding children gave her a foundation to make her decision concerning the pregnancy:

> Once you find out you're pregnant, that's a live child. That's a live human being. That's a person! That's African culture . . . that's a person. Now you might did it out of wedlock [or] you might not, but it's still a person, so you keeping that person because this person can do something that you won't do, and it could be a better person than you or anybody else. It is a person. That is the first thing that

> comes to my mind with him, that he could be [and] do anything, and I wouldn't try to discourage him or make him try [to] be something that I want him to be. I want him to be exactly who he is and what he wants to be . . . . Well, the African culture always encourages you to have children and make more babies, so our culture won't die. Like now, they like to call us the minority, but we are the majority and I tell you, we like to have kids. Can't help it! It's almost like it's part of us to be nurturers, to be mothers (Personal Interview, 2005).

Regarding her pregnancy, she acknowledged that he wasn't a planned pregnancy, but she explained, "but once I found out I was pregnant, it was nothing nobody was going to tell me." Mumbi was optimistic about her future; she didn't see why her life had to stop because of her pregnancy. In fact, she planned to go on to college. She gave a glimpse into her thoughts at the time:

> I did good at high school. I didn't slack; I wasn't bad, I didn't run away from home, I wasn't that type of person . . . . I'm not a statistic, because most girls get pregnant in high school when they are 16. I didn't even start having sex until I was 18. So when I found out I was pregnant, I said "Oh, I'm starting school." People tried to talk me out of it . . . . They kept trying to discourage me . . . . I'm not trying to hear that, just because I'm having a baby doesn't mean that my whole life [has got to] stop . . . . When I got pregnant with him, it wasn't on purpose. I didn't, like, oh yeah, I'm about to get pregnant, but I knew that was a possibility. So when it happened, it was just like, okay. Got me a baby (Personal Interview, 2005)!

Nina, also a young mother, recounted her experience once she found out she was pregnant and the impact of her Afrikan centered education upon her decision to have the baby. Although she indicated that she had issues with becoming pregnant so young, she relied on her values learned from attending the Shule, "children are always welcomed." The following is her account:

> So you know, it [Afrikan centered education] has given us a foundation to be secure African people . . . in my case, secure African woman . . . I mean . . . having a baby . . . out of wedlock and . . . I was so young. I got pregnant at 17. But even though I have my issues with it and stuff like that, in my heart I knew it was [going to] be okay. Children are always welcomed. You know, children are always a blessing. So you know . . . that's the way I was raised . . . in African-centered space, children are always a blessing (Personal Interview, 2004).

Becoming pregnant so young was not without some negative experiences and some unsolicited advise from her doctor. Asma shared:

> I faced ridicule because I have a baby so young and I wasn't married and . . . I had to finish school. The doctor that I went to, a white lady actually advised me to get an abortion and . . . it wasn't like discussing my options. It was like if I were you, if you were my daughter, if I was in this situation, this is what I would do, and that's the best thing (Personal Interview, 2004).

She acknowledged that the experience was difficult, but she had the support of her mother to help her through it. Her mother even moved in with her on campus so that she could provide child care while Nina completed her higher education program. Nina spoke of the difficulty of the experience and her mother's support:

> It has been hard, you know what I'm saying, having a child and trying to finish school and stuff like that, but my mom's supported me and my family has backed me up and, you know, she [her daughter] goes to the Shule some days. You know, my mama has the freedom, like she takes her to daycare, but if she can't take her to daycare, then she just takes her to Shule . . . [where] she runs around with the kids and goes to Mama [name] classroom . . . it has given me a strong foundation and the world is so much different. Just that one thing, I know that she's a blessing. And as long as I look at it from that perspective, every struggle that I have is worth it. You know, because God saw fit . . . because he knew that I could raise a child, I can handle the struggles (Personal Interview, 2004).

The life values imparted through the Afrikan centered education at the Faizah Shule appeared to have an impact upon the participants in the study that continued into their post-secondary lives. The young people spoke of moving into leadership roles when they attended institutions of higher learning. They also related how the principles of the Nguzo Saba were internalized and manifested themselves in their daily choices and even in child rearing strategies. These life values also impacted the decision to have children, especially when these young women were not married. Yet, their beliefs in the sanctity of life and the blessings that children bring, which are Afrikan cultural traditions, coupled

with their spirituality anchored their resolve to adapt and reconcile an unexpected turn of events into their life's journey.

But to imply that all the experiences of the participants were in harmony with the Shule's philosophy and purpose would be misleading. In fact, many of the participants shared experiences that at some point were counter to the "positive" experiences of their peers.

Not all had a great experience.

Acquiring a positive self-concept and Afrikan identity is central to the Shule and the Afrikan centered educational experience. Veritably, the young people in the study asserted that the educational experience grounded them in their psychic space. Asma affirms, "You always or at least almost always [are] able to maintain your identity regardless of the space." However, for one participant, Naimah, maintaining her Afrikan identity was challenging. The source of this interpersonal struggle did not come from those external to the Afrikan American community (i.e., non Afrikans) but rather from those whom we would unabashedly refer to as "sisters."

Naimah considered herself to be firmly grounded in who she was as an Afrikan person and was confident nothing could shake her concept of herself. However, she found that when she decided to join a Greek sorority at the university she was attending, she was shaken to her very core. Naimah mentioned, "I made a lot of assumptions about people who are in sororities . . . That they're elitist," even though, her mother had been part of a sorority in college. She continued,

> I got involved in the Black Student Union and I had a very positive experience, not with just one individual from a sorority but the sorority as a whole kind of chipped in to help me in an event that was stressing me out . . . . And I mean, it was the morning of and they were there...early and they chipped right in and they were . . . just, I mean, really, really helpful and they seemed very genuine and in

> that moment, I decided to try to be a little more fair in my assessment (Personal Interview, 2005).

Naimah felt that she was in a tug-of-war. On the one hand, she didn't want to be associated with a negative organization, but also, as she did research on the Black sororities, she discovered that they had a history of being a very influential and positive organization within the Afrikan American community. She acknowledged this discovery:

> I started doing the research and understanding the history of the sororities and the significant contributions and just [the] strides that they had made for African American students in the university setting, which was never really explored at [the Faizah Shule] school. So it was this new history [and] it was beautiful and they struggled and they fought and that was right up my alley. So that sold me on the sorority because it was culturally and historically significant (Personal Interview, 2005).

Naimah thought that the pledging process for the sorority would be much like the rites-of-passage program at the Shule. She thought that there would be sisterly bonding with challenging tasks to perform, but she never dreamed that it would become such a demeaning experience. Naimah felt that the sorority set up divisiveness between the young Afrikan American women and encouraged competition between each other on issues that had no substance, such as a name or personality. She commented, "It's not healthy for a young person who is coming into themselves, is learning who they are, and deciding who or what they want to be." Since Naimah felt that she was well grounded in her identity and self-concept, she chose to have the experience:

> I also had the attitude that I was only going to accept certain things . . . . I wasn't going to allow myself to be hazed. I wasn't going to allow anybody to disrespect me. And . . . not only was I not going to allow it to happen to me but I wasn't going to allow it to happen to anybody else in my presence . . . . And I also felt like there are probably a lot of things that go on within the organization that are not legitimate but I can change it . . . and especially because I was going through it with my best friend and . . . we were just going to take it over . . . that was how I was thinking when I was 20 . . . . And so the idea was to kind of infiltrate the

> organization . . . and turn it into this wonderful, powerful organization on campus. But what I found was that . . . it's difficult for anybody to sustain that type of consistent . . . demeaning and defiling of your person without saying anything back or without . . . . You're thinking that you're dealing with it . . . [but] it makes you question who you are . . . and yeah, all I can say is that it made me question the woman that I thought that I was. Like you know, if you're this dynamic Black woman, how did you end up here (Personal Interview, 2005)?

Naimah said that she felt so guilty for allowing herself to be in that situation. She confessed that:

> The biggest part that I had to go through, what I had to really heal from was being upset with me. It wasn't necessarily the women who I was angry at. It was me that I couldn't forgive . . . . Because I felt like . . . these other people, they don't have anything to lean back on. They don't have a point of reference. They don't know who you are. You do. And you allowed this to happen . . . . It broke me down . . . and that's the idea. You hear anybody talk about the process, they say [they] break you down, so that they can build you back up. They want to break everybody down so everybody is at zero together, and then we all come up and grow together. But I was broke down, I was broke down financially, emotionally, mentally, academically, spiritually, physically. I lost all my weight. I mean any way you can imagine; I was totally broken (Personal Interview, 2005).

Naimah expressed, "I was totally broke and that was the moment when I tried a lot things." She continued:

> You know, I was ashamed so I couldn't really go to my family about it. And I couldn't really explain it to my friends because it's still hard for me to explain how I ended up in that situation. And so it got to the point where I was feeling so worthless that . . . I went to a psychologist at the school . . . they diagnosed me as clinically depressed . . . . But you know, nothing helped and I decided to go to church one day. They were having a youth chorale concert, a gospel concert. And I went and from then on . . . the Lord really changed my life. It really showed me what I went through and really gave me permission to forgive myself (Personal Interview, 2005).

Drawing upon her spiritual foundation which she received both in her home environment and at the Shule, Naimah was able to make sense of her experience with the sorority. She offered this rationale as to how and why an Afrikan centered person would join a fraternity or sorority:

> But I think that I convinced myself that it was okay because of the historical significance that sorority had played. So that's how an African centered person could possibly conceive of joining a fraternity or sorority...another part of it is that...because my best friend who went to the Shule class with me and another brother who graduated with us at the school, he went [to a PWI], too. So I think another part of it is the fact that we were so isolated from our...mainstream [Afrikan centered] culture...when we got to college...we didn't want to be wild because, we still had good judgment skills. But we wanted to have fun. You know, we wanted to have a college experience. And we did not want to remain isolated. So I think that that part of the reason why we gravitated towards those organizations is because we wanted to belong and we wanted to have fun (Personal Interview, 2005).

The rites-of-passage program was initiated into the Afrikan centered educational experience as a means of assisting the transition of young people into adulthood. Most participants spoke of the experience affirmatively. However, not all participants viewed the rites-of-passage program as a positive experience. In fact, one participant, Adofo provided an account of his discontent with the program.

Adofo explained that he participated in the first rites, which was the adult rites-of-passage, but didn't participate in the Baba rites because he was away at college. Adofo explicated that "I didn't do the Baba rites [because] I was in Alabama. But you can't be labeled a Baba until you go through your adult rites [meaning adulthood]." When asked if he would go back and take his Baba rites, Adofo had prerequisites for taking that action. "I would [do it] depending on if certain people came back and did it . . . so if certain people came back, like the people who took me through my regular rites . . . . I'll do it."

Adofo felt that many of the instrumental adult males (i.e., teachers and men of the community) had became distracted with other issues in their lives and were not available to oversee the rites-of-passage for young men. He commented that he feels the rites-of-passage "is not as potent" today as when those before him went through it. So he

considered himself to be in rebellion, "I don't want to say I'm rebelling, but I don't want to go through it as it is right now because . . . you don't get anything from it . . . I do rebel against [it] because I've done it once and I don't feel that you have to do that to be labeled a man. In fact, contrary to the Afrikan cultural perspective of life transitions, Adofo offered, "You shouldn't have to go through this process every time you want to progress in life . . . I've done it once and it's not easy . . . . It's demanding." Adofo felt that his transition into manhood had been apparent by his life choices and the positive progression of his life.

Many of the participants acknowledged that they were perceived as different by having attended an Afrikan centered school. The educational experience provided them with a different lens to view events and the world. Asma shared that she felt that there were very few people in the nation who could say that they had attended an Afrikan centered school for most of their K-12 educational journey. Asma stated, "I tell people that children who are now adults like me...there maybe about 20 of us and I don't mean here in the city, I mean period...Maybe 25. I think that there are five that I have never seen." Kamau considered the students in his cohort to have been the "experimental kids" because the school kept expanding its grades to accommodate their cohort. Another participant, Nina spoke of being different, but explained how she felt like she was not "normal" as a result of the educational experience. She offered this explanation:

> But when you're in high school and middle school, you really just want to be like everybody else. You always want to be great. You know, [but] you just want to be normal. You want to be like the rest of the kids. You want to fit with the pack and roll with the punches. So while we're going through that teenage thing of not wanting to be great and wanting to be really normal, really regular, they [teachers] are pushing us to be great (Personal Interview, 2004).

She noted that the knowledge acquired and the critical thinking skills engendered within her often made it difficult to communicate with peers in her neighborhood. Nina felt that her experience attending an Afrikan centered school made her different and created a world that was "in a box", insulated from the "real world" and normalcy. Speaking of the community in which the Shule existed, Nina commented, "You know, the people outside in the community who were around us weren't really into that [an Afrikan centered education]. So we had to deal with the dynamic of being in our little box." She continued:

> So we had to deal with going to the Shule and then going home and we had all these things we had learned, all these ideas we had developed, but those weren't the ideas of our peers that we were hanging out with after we got out of school. I mean as we grew older, we hung out with the people from the school . . . . But . . . when you go home, you sit on the porch and you talk to your friends from the neighborhood. These aren't the same things that they were learning in school. I mean, yes, we're learning Afrikan culture, but it went so much beyond that because . . . it wasn't what they were learning in school every day . . . . Every day you were confronted with the differences of the schools . . . . and of the experience that we were having . . . . Even, sometimes it was on a small level, like we wore uniforms. But sometimes it was on ground levels like we had to do this science fair project every year and we had to apply the science fair project, how were they going to help African people (Personal Interview, 2004).

While congregating with friends in her neighborhood, Nina noticed that she would sit back and listen to the conversations, often not commenting, but many times she challenged the thinking of her peers:

> They'd be talking about things or we'd be discussing things and I would . . . sit back and listen to them and I would say okay, well, that's not what I'm learning. What's the difference between what they're doing and what we're doing? Or what . . . it's kind of hard to explain because so . . . often you end up examining them as a person and the ideas that they're developing and the type of person they're developing into. And then you start looking at the experience that they had that's making them become this person . . . and I know hanging out with my friends sometimes, I would just have to stop, like I can't hang out with them right now . . . the people from the block because I always feel like I have such a broader view of things. I always am looking at things from so many angles and really

> examining and analyzing things as opposed to just taking it in. And just letting somebody tell me that's the way it is (Personal Interview, 2004).

Several participants mentioned the disadvantage of not having an athletics program at the Shule. Naimah's younger brother left the Shule in the tenth grade to pursue football at a traditional public school. In her brother's case, Naimah's family had several uncles and cousins who had made it to the NBA in basketball and family members were pressuring her mother and father to allow him to pursue his interests in sports. Adofo who was a good friend of Naimah's brother, shared his understanding of Donald's choice to transfer from the FS/MGPA. Adofo explained the impact of not having an athletics program. Adofo noted, "A lot of people, like [Donald] for example, he left to go to Renaissance to play football because there was no football team [here]. We had a lot of good athletes come through there, too. There were some people who are making their name; going to college, right now" (Personal Interview, 2005).

The participants related incidents in which they felt that the educational experience had not proved to be a great experience. One participate expressed her difficulty in holding on to her Afrikan identity when she encountered a situation in an institution of higher learning. She does not bring indictment against the educational experience directly, but found that she was not able to maintain the grounded-ness in her Afrikan woman-ness when she joined a sorority. Another participant spoke of his rebellion against the rites-of-passage program. He did not understand the value in participating in the second rites or the Baba rites and decided that he will not perform the second passage program. Another participant shared that the educational experience made her feel different than her peers, often to the point of not being able to communicate with her neighborhood peers. Several participants shared how the lack of

having an athletics program was an impetus for some young people leaving the Shule seeking athletic opportunities.

In summary

Through the collective efforts of Afrikan American families, the Faizah Shule was created and began instructing children from an Afrikan centered educational model in 1974. The Shule expanded to the FS/MGPA which was a K-12 institution in 1992. As a member of the Council of Independent Black Institutions, the Shule collaborated with other Afrikan centered institutions to develop guidelines, such as the CIBI Position Statement in 1994 for operating an Afrikan centered institution. Integrating the position statement with their Shule educational philosophy and purpose statement, the Shule provided an Afrikan centered educational experience for Afrikan American students, specifically, the young people in this study.

From the analysis, I discovered four outcomes for this educational experience. The first outcome was that the Shule provided young people with an educational experience grounded in the concept of nation building. For the Shule, nation building is focused upon the reclamation and restructuring of the Afrikan American communities and Afrikan reality. The participants in the study recounted their experiences in the Shule that fostered their understandings of nation building. Nation building is supported and made successful through the family and community. The Shule positioned itself as family within the young people's lives. As articulated by the participants, the Shule was the extended family and there was no doubt in their minds that the staff's interest in them was genuine.

The Shule provided an educational experience for young people that cultivated their cultural knowledge and identity was the second outcome of the educational

experience. The FS/MGPA believed that their students must know their cultural history and that "an Afrikan identity is embedded in the continuity of Afrikan cultural history" (CIBI, 2005, p. 7). The process of cultivating students' cultural knowledge and Afrikan identity was undertaken through acquiring cultural proficiency, cultivating positive self concept, fostering greatness by the Shule community, and developing higher order thinking skills. The participants shared that they felt that they were grounded in their Afrikan identity and appreciated the experience of examining phenomena from an Afrikan centered perspective. The participants also, were appreciative of the Shule community's declared belief in their "giftedness" and their unwavering resolve to foster their greatness.

Another outcome from the analysis was the Shule provided an educational experience for young people which cultivated the principles of self-advocacy. At the Shule, self-advocacy in students was cultivated through social and political activism and student agency. Participants in this study recounted active involvement in political protest events. The young people also mentioned performing Afrikan drum and dance throughout the Afrikan American community as social activism. Student agency was encouraged when the Shule began to accept a new clientele after becoming a charter school. The young people agreed that they stepped into the roles of leadership to secure and maintain the integrity of the Shule environment.

The fourth outcome was that the Shule provided an educational experience for young people that developed their personhood. The staff at the Shule accepted responsibility as a community in the holistic education of their students and to assist students in evolving as responsible leaders within the Afrikan community. The means that were employed to advance the development of young people as adults was through

spirituality, rites-of-passage, and life values. The participants understood that spirituality was fundamental to the Afrikan ethos. They recalled the rites-of-passage program as a ritual and ceremony which was necessary for passage into adulthood and shared how they acquired values from Afrikan traditional culture which they have integrated into their repertoire for decision making in their lives from the educational experience at the Shule.

Then finally, from the data analysis it was revealed that not all participants had a great experience. Even though many of the young people in the study espoused a positive educational experience at the FS/MGPA, there were accounts of discordance. Some participants expressed difficulties that arose as a result of the educational experience. For one participant, although the educational experience grounded her in Afrikan cultural knowledge and developed within her a strong Afrikan identity, she encountered a challenge in higher education that made her re-evaluate her identity. Another participant felt that the rites-of-passage program as required by the Shule was not a necessary ritual for adulthood transition and refused to participate in the second rites. Feeling different was noted by one participant as an uncomfortable consequence of receiving an Afrikan centered education. She felt that the educational experience made it difficult for her to relate to her peers who had not attended an Afrikan centered school. Yet several participants spoke of the lack of intramural sports or an athletics program as a disadvantage of attending the Afrikan centered school.

In Chapter VII, a discussion on the findings of the study is provided. The tensions and challenges that the young people reported from the experience of attending an Afrikan centered school are examined. Also, examined is the question of whether an Afrikan centered educational model or aspects of it can be implemented within a

traditional public school setting. Finally, questions and suggestions for further research are presented.

CHAPTER VII

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I provided a discussion on the findings of the study and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to seek an understanding of the experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school. Further, this study sought to discover and uncover nuances that made the young people's experiences unique to an Afrikan centered education. The questions that guided the research were "What are the educational experiences of Afrikan American young people who attended an Afrikan centered school?"

The findings indicate that the young people experienced an education at the FS/MGPA which focused on four themes. These themes encompassed the following outcomes:

- The Shule would provide experiences that advance the concept of nation building
- The Shule would provide experiences that would cultivate the cultural selves and Afrikan identity of their students.
- The Shule would provide experiences that cultivate the principles of self-advocacy within the young people.
- The Shule would provide experiences that would develop the personhood of the young people.

The Afrikan Centered Educational Experience

A review of the literature revealed that an Afrikan centered educational model can be succinctly expressed as the "the codification or systematic expression of Afrikan people's will to recover, recreate, and perpetuate [Afrikan] cultural heritage" (Akoto,

1994, p. 320-21). In other words, an Afrikan centered education provides an education to Afrikan American students which, first centers the students within their own worldview systems (i.e., epistemology, ontology, axiology and cosmology). This is accomplished by providing an experience which acknowledges and incorporates Afrikan culture and the Afrikan historical continuum into the educational experience. Participants shared experiences of learning from an Afrikan centered frame of reference in which Afrikan people were subjects of history rather than objects and the most poignant question for studying phenomena was "how will this help Afrikan people?"

Fundamentally, the aim and goal of this education "is to build commitment and competency within the present and future generations to support the struggle for liberation and nationhood of Afrikan people on the Continent and in the Diaspora" (CIBI, 1994, p. 6). The main goal of an Afrikan centered education is to "reconnect, confirm and affirm students' cultural and communal identities and empower them to [transform] society through true education" (Shockley, 2003, p. 131). He further explicates that one way this is achieved is through the concept of nation building and fostering communal environments. As aforementioned, the broad scope of this educational experience was to prepare young people for global participation and simultaneously, to provide experiences in coursework commensurate with traditional public schools, such as mathematics, history, English, science, and others.

From the findings, the participants' articulated experiences which overwhelmingly aligned with the espoused outcomes of the Shule. As to the extent of the depth of these outcomes that are intended for competency in students, this topic would have to be undertaken in another study. Within their narratives, the participants in this study reflected on learning about nation building and understanding the importance of the

concept towards the liberation of Afrikan people from hegemonic oppression resulting from White supremacy. Drawing from the Afrikan traditional culture, family environment is essential to the community of the Shule and Afrikan centered education. The young people discussed the importance of community and family in their educational experience and told how the Shule community became their extended family with all the benefits of a safe and stable environment.

In an Afrikan centered education, teachers must have knowledge of Afrikan culture and also must be engaged in the perpetuation and liberation of Afrikan people. They must believe in the greatness of Afrikan people and employ Afrikan centered pedagogy in the instruction of Afrikan American students. Findings revealed that participants in this study spoke of developing a positive self-concept from nurturing teachers who were willing to invest time, energy, and love in them, and expected "greatness" from them. Higher ordered thinking skills (see Chapter VI) were developed within students to ensure that this greatness was achieved.

In Afrikan traditional culture, spirituality encompasses all that is in life and this concept does not preclude education, whether formal or informal. Spirituality is essential to individual progression through life, and the community is responsible for ensuring those life transitions through rituals and ceremonies. The participants perceived personhood to be vital to their experience at the Shule. They understood that spirituality was central to Afrikan cosmology, and they expressed comfort in acknowledging a power greater than themselves. The participants also cited the rites-of-passage as a vehicle in which the Shule community assisted them to transition from childhood to adulthood. They also acknowledged that their feelings of commitment to the Shule community were fostered through the communal space which they had acquired while attending the Shule.

Within this communal space, the participants discovered their roles to be pursued in the mission of nation building.

Much like the concept of *Sankofa,* the Shule reached back and fetched the Afrikan values system of Kemet, which was represented in the Maatian principles, and also utilized the Nguzo Saba principles to impart traditional Afrikan values to their students (see Chapter II). The young people in the study told how these values were integrated and utilized in the decision making aspects of their lives. These participants shared that they relied on these values as they interacted with their fellow peers while away in the pursuit of higher education; also that they passed these values on to their children and utilized these values and principles in contemplating decisions of daily living.

Challenges and Tensions of the Afrikan Centered Educational Experience

Yet, there were challenges and tensions that resulted from the educational experience reported by the participants of the study and were not found in the review of the literature. Overall the participants spoke of the educational experience positively, but some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the experience. It appeared that this dissonance resulted from a lack of understanding of the values, principles or even rituals surrounding activities in which the participants were expected to engage.

For instance, when Adofo spoke about the rites-of-passage program, he demonstrated a level of understanding of the purpose for participating in the rites program; however, having undergone the first rites-of-passage program, he refused to go through the second program. "I do rebel against [it] because I've done it once and I don't feel that you have to do that to be labeled a man. Underlying this rebellion is Adofo's frustration with what he perceived as the depreciation of the rites-of-passage program.

He asserted that the program "is not as potent" and cited that the fathers and elders, who had been involved in providing the young men with the rites-of-passage experience, were now distracted with the issues of life and he perceived the present rites-of-passage and the people involved as not providing a quality experience.

Did Adofo understand the importance of the rites-of-passage experience? Did he understand that in the Afrikan traditional culture that this experience was an essential ritual for making transitions through life? Did he understand that in some cultures missing this experience would mean that a person was stuck in that stage until he/she made the passage? One could speculate that Adofo understood aspects of the rites-of-passage, but he did not fully comprehend the importance of the rites for his development into personhood. The Shule community apparently "missed the mark" in maintaining their commitment and responsibility to assist this young person through his life's transitions at this point.

Another example which demonstrated tension with the educational experience was Nina's account of being different from her peers who attended traditional public schools. Some of the participants in the study enjoyed thinking of themselves as different from children who attended public schools. They considered their educational experiences as granting the opportunity to acquire superior intellectual skills and a broader perspective on the issues, locally, nationally, and globally. For Nina, being different was a two-edged sword because it permitted her to acquire knowledge and experience that many of her peers where not receiving in traditional public schools, but yet it meant that she could not communicate readily with her neighborhood peers. She noted that she was constantly challenging the thinking of her friends on issues because she was encouraged and expected to analyze and deeply question events and observable

facts. She found that her propensity for deep thinking often would have her sitting silently in the presence of her friends, and eventually, she just stopped hanging around them.

One study that speaks to Nina's dilemma was done by Amanda Datnow and Robert Cooper (1997). These authors examined how Afrikan American students attending predominantly White elite independent schools create formal and informal peer networks to support their academic success in these schools. Although their study examines the Afrikan American students' experience in a White elite school, there are several findings in the experiences of the Afrikan American young people that have credence here. One finding in their study indicated that the Afrikan American young people felt they were of a special group selected to attend these premier institutions and were expected to perform well academically. Another finding was that this educational experience often created a barrier of acceptance between them and their neighborhood peers. These students found that adopting the Eurocentric norms and values of the school made it easier for them to adapt to the school environment, but this cultural adoption occasioned stigma from their neighborhood peers.

In light of Datnow and Cooper's study, how does this "play out" for Nina? For Nina, attending the Shule meant that she had a different educational experience from her neighborhood peers. In an implicit way, it meant that she was "special" because she was engaged in an educational experience that the majority of her peers did not have the "privilege" of having, since it was a tuition-based private school. Also, particular to Nina's educational experience was the adoption of the Afrikan centered cultural traditions, manifested in disposition, values, dress, language, and other aspects. This cultural adoption was respected by the Afrikan American community and viewed in a

positive context as cultural consciousness. However, the skills that Nina developed for interrogating and critically analyzing the world and her place in it became the "barbed wire fence" that separated her from her neighborhood peers. She often questioned the things that her peers took for granted and she constantly sought to probe deeper for greater meaning in concepts that appeared to be obvious to her peers. Nina's educational experience provided and cultivated a broad base of knowledge on which Nina could draw that her neighborhood peers could not.

Another situation that was emblematic of the tensions and challenges that arose from this educational experience manifested when Naimah decided to join a sorority at the predominately white institution she attended. Naimah's education at the Shule emphasized the values, principles, and traditions of Afrikan culture. Afrikan traditional culture encourages the collectivity of Afrikan people and the importance of family and community. Values imparted through the Nguzo Saba, provided Naimah with the foundation to take responsibility for her brothers and sisters (fellow students). She was encouraged to accept leadership positions in whatever environment that she found herself and she felt she was "grounded" in her Afrikan womanhood and identity to maintain her space in any environment. Yet, her educational experience at the Shule did not prepare her for encountering people of Afrikan descent whose lives were not guided by the values of traditional Afrikan culture.

Naimah was proficient in the historical heritage of the Afrikan and European encounters and had been given political insight for navigating a predominantly white institution, but she was naïve and unsuspecting when she found herself emotionally broken at the hands of her "sisters" in a Black sorority.

In his work, *Afrikan/Black Psychology in the American Context,* Kobi Kambon (1998) elucidates a disorder affecting the mental health of Afrikan American people which he identifies as "Cultural Misorientation." He posits that this disorder exists among Afrikan Americans as a consequence of Eurocentric oppression and Afrikan cultural suppression. The result of this disorder is the adoption of a Eurocentric worldview and Eurocentric self-consciousness by Afrikan Americans that manifests in anti-Afrikan behaviors and anti-Afrikan self-consciousness (Kambon, 1998).

Kambon's theory can be used to explain the behaviors of the sorority experience that strived to denigrate and "break" Naimah's self-confidence and identity on the premise that the community of sisters would re-build her and others in the attempt to establish common ground and sisterhood bonding. On the surface, this act was reminiscent of the Afrikan rites-of-passage experience where the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the young girls were entrusted into the hands of capable caring adults of the community. Much alike on the surface, but under the illusion of a safe, caring, familial environment, for Naimah, the results of this experience raped her of her Afrikan grounding and left her "for dead" to find her own restoration.

In this educational experience, does the Shule have a responsibility to educate its young people on encountering Afrikan Americans who have adopted anti-Afrikan behaviors and provide strategies for negotiating these encounters? Should the values gained through the educational experience provide the fortitude and intuitive base to navigate these encounters? After a period of struggle, it seems that Naimah was able to draw strength through spirit to regain her grounded-ness and re-focus, pressing into her purpose of establishing a literacy institute.

How is this Educational Experience Manifested?

In an examination of the lives of the young people and their location in life several years after graduating from the Shule, one could conclude that the young people left the educational experience with a repertoire of skills, insights, and values. Seemingly, at various decision points in their lives they extracted skills sets acquired from the educational experience and employed them in ways that they perceived as most valuable for their lives. However, as aforementioned some of the young people had misunderstandings and challenges appropriating the skills and insights acquired through the educational experiences.

Were their lives a manifestation of the espoused goals of the educational experience? These young people were in pursuit of higher education, created families, and established careers. At first glance these activities appear to be no different from the activities of young people who graduated from traditional public schools. These endeavors are the pursuits of life. Yet, what makes these undertakings different is that the fundamental ideological impetus for these activities is grounded in Black Nationalism and Pan Afrikanism. The majority of the participants acknowledged the understanding that everything that they pursued was about nation building for Afrikan people on the Continent and in the Diaspora.

Essential to nation building is the establishment of institutions. Some ways in which these young people were obviously engaged in institution building were through volunteering at the Shule and other Afrikan American organizations as a means to ensure the Shule's continuance. They were also establishing institutions through families because family is considered one of the central institutions in nation building. Two, Naimah and Heimis expressed plans for opening their own businesses.

These young people obtained higher education because they believed as the ancestors believed that education would equip them with the tools to manage and maintain an independent nation of Afrikan people. As Naimah shared, "I feel like I was taught that education and everything that I do is about nation building. And if it's not about nation building, it is not about nothing."

The concept of Pan Afrikanism was not apparent in the lives of the young people. No one announced or demonstrated an overt economic or political link with Afrikan nations, such as an exchange of commerce or Afrikan political affiliations. However, several of the young people interviewed expressed an interest to create links in their lives with Afrikans dispersed throughout the world. On a personal level, Naimah shared that she had dated a man who was Puerto Rican. She expressed, "a lot of people feel like well, he's not black. Well, yes, he is . . . they [are] mixed with the Spanish and Afrikan people, so his complexion may be not as dark as mine, but he has a history of slavery just like I do." Another participant Asma, not only dated but married a Bahamian. She acknowledged that the Bahamians have experienced the same historical struggles as Afrikans worldwide.

Concerns that Arose from the Afrikan Centered Educational Experience

The Faizah Shule was created by a collective of Afrikan American middle-class families who were influenced by the Black Power movement during the late 1960s. As these parents were developing in Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikanist thought and ideology, they realized the importance of agency and self-determinism. For these parents, an education immersed in Afrikan culture became a necessary component for the educational experience of their children.

Different home culture. Throughout much of the Shule's existence, it was an independent Black institution with an Afrikan centered educational focus. It was a small private school, and parents were required to pay tuition for their children to attend the school. Parents who sought to enroll their children in the schools were of two types: 1) parents who maintained Afrikan cultural practices within the home and wanted their children to have that experience in school, and 2) parents who were dissatisfied with the public schools and were looking for a "good" school for their children. The majority of the parents were of the former type of parent. Parents who were of the latter type found parental involvement to be part of the mandate for the child's enrollment and this involvement facilitated personal transformation as they gained knowledge of Afrikan cultural traditions and identity.

When the Shule converted to an Afrikan centered charter school, enrollment opened to all the students within the Westville Public School district. This open enrollment meant that the Shule began to experience a different clientele of students. The new clientele consisted of students whose parents were interested in immersing their children in Afrikan culture, but now a majority of the parents were just interested in their child attending a "good" school. Included in these two groups were parents who were not interested nor had the time to be involved with the school in their child(ren)'s education. The Shule requested parental involvement through volunteerism at the school and the attendance of training sessions on Afrikan culture, but could not make it a condition of their child's continual enrollment at the school. The student enrollment increased from approximately sixty students to nearly two hundred fifty students.

The Shule began to experience a mismatch of the school culture with the home culture. That is, when the home culture was aligned with the Shule's focus of an Afrikan

cultural tradition and values or when the home culture reflected Afrikan American middle class values, the school community and the home environment experienced cultural congruence. However, when the home culture aligned with the mainstream cultural values, that is, a white middle-class values focus, then the Shule experienced a disconnect in forming community between the home environment and the school environment. Also, when the home culture did not reflect mainstream values or Afrikan American middle class values or even Afrikan traditional cultural values, it was evident to the Shule community that the home culture did not align with the school culture and hindered the formulation of community with those families. As previously espoused, community is fundamental to the Afrikan centered educational experience.

There is much research in the literature that speaks to the incongruence between the home culture and the school culture regarding the traditional public schools and children of color, immigrants and poor children (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This is an issue that is generally experienced in the traditional public school because the culture of the school is reflective of mainstream culture that is established on white middle-class values and worldview, while the home culture of Afrikan Americans is established upon Afrikan American values and worldview. Some Afrikan American students' parents, particularly middle-class Afrikan Americans have adopted the mainstream cultural values; consequently these children are more likely to experience greater academic success in the public schools (Fordham, 1988; Irvine, 1990). However, for most Afrikan American students, their home culture does not align with the mainstream culture of the public school and misunderstandings and low academic performance is the outcome.

Surprisingly, after the conversion of the Shule from a private school to a charter school, cultural incongruence began to emerge as a pressing issue for the school. This issue is dealt with lightly in this study, but is a topic that deserves further research. The participants of the study alluded to the cultural incongruence when they recounted situations in which they accepted leadership and responsibility for maintaining the cultural integrity of their school. They spoke of students who had previously attended public schools and were now attending the Shule. These incoming students had no knowledge of Afrikan culture nor were they interested in learning about their Afrikan cultural heritage. They were there simply because their parents were looking for a good school.

The philosophy of the Shule acknowledges that family involvement in student learning is essential to the formation of the community that is necessary for the academic and life success of the students. Mama Taraji mentioned the difficulty that she and the Shule staff experienced in attempting to convince some parents that their involvement was critical to the success of their child(ren). It appeared that the lack of Afrikan cultural knowledge or the desire to acquire it for themselves and their children has created a major challenge for the Shule community to overcome in order to accomplish its goal of Afrikan cultural reclamation and nation building for the liberation of Afrikan people.

All That Afrikan Stuff. The participants appreciated the experience of the study of phenomenon from a position centered in their Afrikan cultural heritage. Participants spoke of learning about world civilization originating in Kemet rather than Greece. They learn about the institution of slavery from the perspective of the kidnapped Afrikans. They studied the Afrikan classics, investigated solutions to problems affecting Afrikan people, celebrated the lives of Afrikan and Afrikan American ancestors, were able to

openly acknowledge their spirituality, studied Afrikan nations, operated in and honored the worldview systems of Afrikan people.

Some students and parents perceived the immersion into the Afrikan cultural heritage and epistemology at the Shule as overbearing. The question arose, "Why do we have to learn all this Afrikan stuff?" A parent of one of the participants stated that she was concerned that her children (she had three to attend the Shule) would be ill-equipped in higher education because they were not exposed to the classics of mainstream education.

> Some of those questions they have on tests that you take anywhere in society, they are all based on their white culture. So my kids weren't able to address that. At one time I felt kind of bad about it because I felt they [her children] weren't well rounded (Personal Interview, Mama Mariama, 2004).

In fact, one of the participants acknowledged she felt somewhat handicapped when she took a history course in college and was not familiar with some of the information on European history. Should the Afrikan centered educational experience guarantee that students are exposed to mainstream canons to ensure their academic success in higher education? Can an Afrikan centered education maintain its cultural integrity and focus while teaching mainstream canons?

As a pluralistic society, America's borders are crossed every day by people from other nations for various reasons. The pursuit of higher education is one attraction which precipitates the influx of people from other nations. For most, instructions in the mainstream canons are not a prerequisite for the successful completion of their degrees. These students attend American educational institutions grounded in the educational canons of their home country.

Likewise for Afrikan American students who attend Afrikan centered schools. The cultural imperative of an Afrikan centered education does not impede the academic success of the young people whose education was delivered from an Afrikan worldview. In fact, the majority of the young people interviewed attended major universities, of which a large percent of the participants attended PWI's and successfully completed their degrees. The young people attributed their ability to navigate the mainstream educational system to their cultural foundation cultivated and established in an Afrikan centered education

Can these Educational Benefits be attained in Public Schools?

Can the participants of this study receive these educational benefits from America's public schools?

Maybe. The answer to that question is that certainly there are aspects of this educational experience operating in some classrooms (e.g., effective teachers, Afrikan American curriculum, small family environments, and others). However one hindrance to this educational experience is a refusal to recognize the impact of culture upon the education of children, particularly Afrikan American children. Ladson-Billings along with other researchers recognize that the American educational public school system refuses to acknowledge Afrikan Americans as a distinct cultural group (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 1992). She goes on to say "it is assumed that African American children are exactly like white children but just need a little extra help" (p. 9).

Certainly we know that Afrikan culture is not monolithic, since there are well over a thousand distinct groups of people on the Continent and in the Diaspora. However, research has revealed that there are many similarities among these cultures such as cosmology, family and community relationships, and the importance of rituals,

ceremonies, and traditions among the people (Mbiti, 1976; Tedla, 1995). Review of the literature has indicated culture to be an essential piece to existence and gives meaning to reality for people. To ignore the culture of a people is to create barriers to understanding their needs and concerns and in effect to sabotage and hinder any effective communications. Lack of attention to the culture of Afrikan American children has perpetuated their academic difficulties in American schools.

Teacher and student interaction in public schools is where this disconnect of culture is most notable, since these students receive instructions from a predominately white middle-class female teaching staff. It is plausible that this teaching staff has had a minimum (if any) training on how to teach students of diverse cultures. Teachers' belief systems are shaped by the racially hegemonic influences on knowledge that emanate from within the dominant culture. So oftentimes, teachers hold beliefs about racial groups and cultures that are influenced by America's racist notions of designated "others."

Yet, in some classrooms within public schools across the nation, students are experiencing a culturally relevant education. This experience is the result of teachers not limited to the Afrikan American race, who are described by Ladson-Billings (1994) as effective in creating academic success with Afrikan American children. These teachers are advocates for social justice, parental and community involvement in the educational process of students, hold high expectations of all students, and their abilities to learn. But these pockets of effective instruction to Afrikan American children are the exception rather than the norm.

The majority of Afrikan American students in public schools are not having these experiences. Education for them is a process of marginalization, de-Afrikanization and

de-humanization. Afrikan American students graduate from public schools without the knowledge of their cultural origins, historical contributions to civilization, the Afrikan holocaust (Maafa), and contributions to American society as well as the global society. Neither have they been given the political capital for navigating mainstream society.

Maybe Not. Education in society serves a functional purpose by providing the conduit through which the national culture is maintained and perpetuated. According to Akoto (1992), education "...lies at the very core of the nation, as it involves the codification, perpetuation, interpretation and transmission of the national history and culture..." (p. 41). Based on the aforementioned purpose of education, one should expect that the objectives of the American public school are to promote the perpetuation of American culture and society.

Within the literature, researchers have asserted that Afrikan American children are culturally different from European American children. In fact, research supports the premise that Afrikan people and European people operate from different worldview systems which are fundamental to how these groups make sense of the world or their construction of reality (Kambon, 1998; Hilliard, 1997; Akoto, 1992; Ani, 1994). Kobi K. K. Kambon (1998) in his work, ***African/Black Psychology in the American Context: An Afrikan centered Approach,*** clearly delineated these worldview systems into four categories: 1) cosmological; 2) ontological; 3) axiological; and 4) epistemological.

Kambon posits that an Afrikan cosmological perspective is based on the interdependence, collectivism, and human-nature oneness, whereas the European cosmology is established upon separateness, independence, and human-nature conflict. The Afrikan ontological perspective is that all things are spiritual and interrelated, whereas the European believes that the essential nature of reality is material. Kambon

further theorizes that the Afrikan axiology places emphasis on interpersonal interactions and relationships, while the European basic value system focuses on person to object relationships. Finally, Kambon states that Afrikans utilize an affective-cognitive synthesis as a way of knowing reality and the European's epistemology was based on cognitive over affective processes in knowing reality (1998).

Based on Kambon's research, implementing an Afrikan centered educational model similar to the one presented in this study would be at odds with the existing worldview systems of the American public schools. The American public schools were initially created and have been maintained through the European worldviews system. This system mirrors the national worldview and fulfills the purpose of the perpetuation of the American society.

In light of the fact that schools are machines employed in the continuance of the American society, it is safe to conclude that some aspects of an Afrikan centered educational experience cannot be found in the traditional public schools. These components of the Afrikan centered educational model which reside in the concept of Afrikan nation building, spirituality, and the impartation of life values may be in conflict with the dominant cultures' societal goals. It does not serve the self-interest of the elite of American society to promote the nation building interest of Afrikan American people. Seemingly, it would be a case of insanity for Americans to teach the concepts of nation building for the development and liberation of another nation within itself. Particularly, it would be insanity to provide this instruction to a people that they have historically held in low regard and as an inferior people. Would not this action be equivalent to the nation of Israel educating the Palestinian people in the concepts of nation building? How could the outcome possibly benefit its national objectives?

I conclude that the concept of Afrikan nation building could not be taught in the American public schools. It would not serve the interests of American society to educate Afrikan American children for their liberation and advancement (Freire, 1976; Carnoy, 1974; Shujaa, 1994). Instructions in spirituality and imparting life values which are fundamental to an Afrikan centered education are taboo within the American public school system. Consequently, introducing an Afrikan centered educational model into the public school would be like introducing a foreign agent into the bloodstream. This action would disturb the equilibrium of the environment and the white blood cells would attempt to adapt the foreign agent to the environment or destroy it. They could not co-exist.

Recommendations

Fundamental to the Afrikan centered educational model presented in this study is the concept of Afrikan nation building, spirituality, Afrikan cultural traditions, and Afrikan values. These concepts proceed from the Afrikan worldview systems which center Afrikans within their own epistemology, ontology, cosmology and axiology. This centeredness, according to Asante (2003) places Afrikan people as agents of their history rather than objects of it. This educational model must:

1. Proceed from the ideology of nation building
2. Be undergirded by Afrikan cultural history and identity
3. Be permeated by the spirituality of Afrikan people through traditions, rituals, and ceremonies.
4. Be taught by people who themselves are engaged in re-Afrikanization and who are actively promoting the advancement of Afrikan people.
5. Be Afrikan centered in both curriculum and pedagogy.

In contrast, the traditional public school model is a nationalist model which promotes the concept of White or European nation building for American and other European nations and its allies, particularly those that align with the ideology of the primacy of Western culture. In public schools, federal legislation has prescribed the separation of church and state, interpreted to mean that schools do not endorse religious practices within the school environment (Cline, 2006). Specifically, the law states that the government cannot endorse a particular religious dogma and mandate students to practice it, but religion is not synonymous with spirituality in the Afrikan perspective. Additionally, there have been ongoing debates within the educational community over who should be responsible for imparting values to students in schools (Gibbs, 2006) asking "Should character education or values be imparted solely through the home environment or should the school be an integral player in passing values on to children?

The aforementioned educational ideology for traditional public schools reflects the Eurocentric worldview systems of American society. The Eurocentric worldview system guides the curriculum and the pedagogy in the educational institutions and would present challenges and impediments to the implementation of the Afrikan centered education model. In the classroom, the primary source of instruction is the teacher. Research has revealed that teacher's beliefs about the students they teach has impact on student success or failure (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 1990). As members of society, teachers' beliefs are shaped and influenced through the socialization of American society. The historical legacy of racism and European hegemony of American society in its relationship to Afrikan Americans is manifested in teachers' beliefs and expectations.

The challenge for American schools interested in implementing an Afrikan centered educational model would be to attempt instruction of this model with teachers

who do not believe in the academic and intellectual capabilities or the cultural relevancy of Afrikan American children. According to proponents of an Afrikan centered educational model, it must be instructed by teachers who believe in their students abilities, who respect and who are knowledgeable of Afrikan culture and are actively working towards the liberation of Afrikan people.

An aspect of this educational model may be implemented successfully in the traditional public school setting. This study revealed that teachers in the Afrikan centered educational model were effective instructors of Afrikan American students. These teachers demonstrated the following personal traits and attitudes that aimed towards their students acquiring academic success which were similar to the research performed by Ladson-Billings (1994). These effective teachers believe that all children can succeed, create a personal connection to students and their communities, assist students in developing and understanding their cultural identity, used students' culture to facilitate learning, and promote and encourage critical and creative ways of knowing. Demonstrating these attitudes and traits, teachers were able to energize and motivate Afrikan American students to achieve academic success. This study affirms Ladson-Billings research and provides empirical evidence to substantiate the importance of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations in impacting Afrikan American student achievement.

There are challenges and tensions for Afrikan centered public academies in implementing this educational model which need consideration by policymakers. The Shule became a public academy during the attendance of the participants in my study. During the interviews, the young people, parents, and the director mentioned the struggles of this Afrikan centered charter school as it attempted to fulfill its mission to

provide an Afrikan centered education while meeting the mandate for achievement on the state standardized tests. If policymakers are truly interested in creating a culturally relevant environment for Afrikan American students by implementing an Afrikan centered educational model, they must create and incorporate avenues for the administrators and teachers of these schools to maintain the cultural focus while helping students to successfully achieve on standardized tests. This may mean that policy is created which allows these schools to be exempted from the mandated testing for a prescribed period of time to allow for the complete implementation of the educational model.

The intent of this study was not to conclude if this educational experience for Afrikan American young people was better than the experiences of Afrikan American young people having educational experiences at other school models (i.e., traditional public schools or private schools). Rather, the purpose of this research was to gain insight on how these young people perceive this educational experience and if that experience aligned with the educational outcomes of the Shule.

Future Research

The participants highlighted the experiences of the Shule as: 1) the family and community environment; 2) the pursuit of Afrikan nation building; 3) the experience of spirituality; 4) the understanding of the Afrikan cultural heritage and history; 5) the acquisition of positive self-concept; 6) the interaction with invested and concerned teachers; 7) the development of critical and creative thinking skills; and 8) the attainment of agency as well as activism. They also exposed some challenges and tensions with the educational experience. The young people affirm that without this experience, they would not be the people that they are today.

The findings of this study create a multitude of unanswered questions that need to be further explored. What are the experiences of current students who attend the Shule in which the majority of their school experience has been as a charter school? The participants, parents, and school director in this study alluded to a cultural change in the environment with the influx of new students. Future research should investigate how current students perceive their educational experience at the Shule.

Another question needs to be explored: "When students educational experiences of attending an Afrikan centered school are compared across different contexts are the experiences similar?" Further research should compare the experiences of the young people in this study with those reported by students in another Afrikan centered school. The comparison could examine young people experiences in an Afrikan centered charter academy, an Afrikan centered Independent Black Institution, or an Afrikan centered immersion public school.

How do Afrikan American young people who have graduated from a traditional public school perceive their educational experience and its impact upon their lives? This question can be explored by a study that examines the educational outcomes of this Afrikan centered educational model for Afrikan American students with the outcomes of Afrikan American students who attended a traditional public school.

For the purposes of assisting leadership in schools that primarily educate Afrikan American students, research should be undertaken that examines the leadership attitudes, values and strategies of people who commit their lives to the education of this underserved population of students.

The insights garnered from further research in Afrikan centered education can assist policymakers, educators, and parents in developing effective education of Afrikan

American children. In efforts to fulfill the American vision of a pluralistic democratic nation in which all groups of people are benefactors of the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing the right to "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," further research on this educational model could provide the foundation on which to build equitable and liberatory education. The virtues of democracy and movement into globalization demand that America can not continue to ignore and marginalize the gifts and talents of its entire people.

Retrospection

When I began this research, I was not aware of what little I knew about Afrikan culture. I grew up in America and had been socialized to a large extent within the dominant culture's worldview. I "knew" that my ancestors were from Afrika, but I was inwardly ashamed of that connection. As a young girl attending integrated schools, I was taught that the origin of Afrikan existence was in slavery and that enslavement by the European was the best thing that had happened to the Afrikan "primitive". Yet something inside my young being knew that was a lie. I joined the Black Muslim movement as a young girl and in my youthful-ness, I didn't realize that it was a Black Nationalist and Pan Afrikanist organization. Within this organization, I learned Black Pride and self-determination. I knew that I was a Black person in America and I knew that I was Afrikan in my origins, but I still didn't know what that meant. I never made the connection between my being and Afrikan culture.

I discovered that this research engaged me in a transformative process. As I sought to uncover and understand the experiences of the young people were who attended an Afrikan centered school, I came face-to-face with my Afrikan cultural heritage. I realized that my lack of knowledge of Afrikan culture and my own learning phase in which I was now engaged, placed me in a position in which I could not trust my interpretations of what I observed. I needed to verify my interpretations with members of the culture. My worldview of Afrikan phenomenon was distorted by my socialization within this Eurocentric cultural perspective. My informant, who had been an instructor within the school became a valuable asset to my study and helped me to interpret the data from the cultural perspective of the participants. Also, I received assistance from a scholar who had recently completed his dissertation. He had performed a critical analysis

on the implications of Eurocentric discourse upon Afrikan American males' educational experiences, particularly in Special Education. He shared his expertise and critical eye to my research, as well as his experience with Afrikan centered education.

To give further enlightenment on the transformative process of this research, I will share a reflective passage from my journal which I kept as I engaged in this work. It clearly denotes my spiritual, emotional and intellectual journey towards re-Afrikanization.

> My own transformation: I am excited today, for I realize that I am evolving as an Afrikan person. Before I began this research, I knew myself to be a Black person in America whose history was linked to a once enslaved people, which in my mind was a position of degradation. It was as though I rose from shit rather than deep rich black soil. I cognitively understood that I was an Afrikan...but what did that really mean? It was an abstract concept to me because I really did not know about Afrika. I only knew what I had been told by those whose ancestors had ripped my ancestors from their native lands. What was it to be Afrikan? I realize that as I began this work, I was so totally ignorant. So in the dark...the Dark Continent is not Afrika, but the Dark Continent is in my mind...nothing of light exists in my mind about my homeland. It's as though I am lost and I can't see to find my way home. As I began this study, a pinhole size measure of light began to penetrate my mind and illumination began to come. I am excited...I have a culture that precedes slavery. I am excited...my ancestral lineage goes back to the beginnings of civilization. I am excited...I have a worldview that has always been with and in me, but I didn't recognize it, I didn't know. My worldview had been pushed to the background of my being, although subtle signs of it were present, but I had been convinced by the children of my ancestors' kidnappers that I should adopt their worldview systems, which were fundamentally opposed to my nature. Oh, what insanity! Allow me to use a metaphor to clarify my thinking. It was as though, I had been a cat living among dogs. I had claws and fur. I had whiskers and I saw enough similarities to convince me that I was a dog. But, I was different...I meowed instead of barked and I enjoyed chasing and catching mice. I could climb trees, which was a behavior that the dogs did not value and constantly berated me for, but secretly they kept trying to climb trees themselves. I always felt somewhat inferior and intimidated by the dogs because no matter how hard I tried I just couldn't seem to be an effective dog. Then I discovered that I was actually a cat!

From this research, I hope to provide illumination to the stakeholders of this educational experience through the voices of the young people who experienced it.

Perhaps there will be elements of this educational model that can be refined, changed, or simply left alone and employed in the effective education of Afrikan American children. Through this research experience, it has become apparent to me that knowledge of Afrikan cultural heritage and Afrikan identity is fundamental to locating, claiming, and maintaining one's space (as an Afrikan in America) in the world.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

[UCRIHS APPROVAL LETTER]

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

This study, entitled: Out of the mouths of babes: African American students' perceptions and experiences of attending an African-centered school, developed by Joyce Piert, Doctoral Student in K-12 Educational Administration at Michigan State University, considers the perceptions and experiences of African American students who have attended an African-centered school. It is perform as a study which will contribute to the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the researcher's Ph.D. in Educational Administration at the Michigan State University.

Your participation in this study will consist of an in-depth interview not to exceed sixty (60) minutes of your time. The interview will be conducted by Joyce Piert, PhD student and investigator under the primary researcher and advisor, Dr. Christopher Dunbar, Jr. With your permission, your interview will be audio-taped and at any point during the interview, you can request not to be recorded. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may terminate your involvement at any time without penalty. All of your data is confidential and will be stored in a locked cabinet for at least five (5) years after the study, at the end of this period; all research materials will be destroyed. To protect your privacy, a pseudonym will be given to you and your school, as well as, the location. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

There are no foreseeable risks with this research. The main potential benefit is in contributing to scientific knowledge on this topic. No costs or payment are associated with participating in this study. If any discomfort should arise regarding material addressed in the study, participants can call the number listed below to ask questions or discuss their feelings. A more complete statement of the nature and purpose of the research will be available when the data collection is completed.

Should you have any concerns or questions regarding the rights of subjects and the duties of investigators, you may contact the primary investigator, Dr. Christopher Dunbar, Jr., Associate Professor at the K-12 Educational Administration Department, 419A Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, email: dunbarc@msu.edu, phone: (517) 353-9017, fax: (517) 353-6393. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish – Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study:

Participant name (please print):

Contact Information: (address)

(Phone number and email)

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

Your signature here indicates that you agree to the audio-taping of your interview:

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Protocol Questions for African American students who attended an African-centered school.

1. Tell me a little bit about your family history...where you were born; family, mother and father's occupation and education; siblings; extended family.

2. Tell me a little bit about your school history...

    a. What is the name of your school?
    b. How did your parent/s locate this school?
    c. What qualities attracted your parent/s to the school?
    d. How would you compare your performance at the African-centered school?
    e. If you attended a public school, how would you describe your performance at the public school?

3. Tell me more specifically about your educational experience at an African-centered school.
    a. How old were you when you began attending an African-centered school?
    b. How many years did you attend?

4. What makes your school an African-centered school? (How do they define an African-centered school, from their perspective) Explain the context of the school.
    a. Location
    b. Decorum
    c. Culture/climate
    d. Attitudes of administrators/teachers
    e. Curriculum

5. Describe your perception of difference between an African-centered school and a traditional public school, if you have attended a traditional public school?

6. Describe the persons and/or events that impacted you the most while attending an African-centered school.

7. Describe the influence of attending an African-centered school upon the way you view the world? (Looking for intrinsic values here).

8. Described any shortcomings that you experienced as a result of your exposure to an African-centered school?

9. When reflecting back, do you feel that there is an area in your life in which your African-centered education either handicapped/empowered you?

Protocol Questions for the parents of African American young people who attended an African-centered school.

10. Tell me a little bit about your family history...where you were born; family, your and your child's father occupation and education; marital status, extended family, political perspective.

11. Tell me a little bit about your sense of identity and what did that look like in your daily living. [community activism? Volunteerism?]

12. Tell me why you sent your children to an African-centered school

    a. How did you locate the school?
    b. Philosophy of the school that attracted you?

13. What makes this school African-centered to you? (How do you define an African-centered school, from their perspective) Explain the context of the school.
    a. Location
    b. Decorum
    c. Culture/climate
    d. Attitudes of administrators/teachers
    e. Curriculum

14. Do you feel that your children experienced education differently than they would have had they attended a traditional public school? Please explain. [nationbuilding, community, values]

15. Describe how this educational experience influenced you as a parent and personally?

16. Do you think that your child(ren)'s attendance of an African-centered school has affected the way you view the world? Please explain. (Looking for intrinsic values here).

17. Describe one disadvantage that you perceive your child experienced as a result of attending an African-centered school.

Subquestions:

- Do you believe that your child has acquired a self-sustaining African-centered perspective through attending an African-centered education? Please explain.

Protocol Questions for African American Administrator at the African-centered school

1. Tell me a little about you...where were you born, family, educational history, and what brought you to this school (where did the vision come from?)

2. Tell me about your school history...

    a. How did you come up with the school's name?
    b. How was the vision for the school formed and what was the process that you underwent to bring the school about?
    c. Describe your educational philosophy.

3. Your school is considered to be an African-centered school, what makes it African-centered?
    a. Philosophy
    b. Decorum
    c. Culture/climate
    d. Attitudes of administrators/teachers
    e. Curriculum/pedagogy
    f. Spiritual

4. Describe the context of your school ten years ago.

5. Describe the differences in your school today.

6. Describe a student that you remember the most. What made that student so memorable?

7. Tell me how attending an African-centered school has affected the way your students view the world.

8. Tell me what you are most proud of about the educational experiences of students who attend this school.

9. If there was anything that you could change concerning your students' experience at the school, what would it be and why?

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