African Centered Educators’ Perspectives on Theory in Practice

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“I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me”-unknown

This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors, those whose names are known and not known, without whom this would not have been accomplished.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

African Centered Education – ACE

Population Specific Perspective – PSP

United States – U.S.

Time, Rhythm, Improvisation, Oral expression and Spirituality – TRIOS

Betty Shabazz International Charter School – BSICS

Knowledge of culture – KOC
SUMMARY

African Centered Education (ACE) is conceptualized as a strategy to foster success for African American youth overall and particularly students at risk for low academic achievement and psycho-behavioral issues. A central premise of ACE is that all children, regardless of their background, are cultural beings (Hilliard, 1995). Although there is a considerable literature on the assumptions and conceptualizations of an ACE theory, there is a paucity of empirical studies related to how it is put into practice (Shockley & Frederick, 2010). In addition, most of what is published is dated by at least ten years.

This study utilized a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2012) and a critical case sampling approach (Patton, 2001) to understand and describe what Africentric principles, concepts and ideas ACE teachers apply to their teacher practice. Constructivist grounded theory is a method that involves constructing reality through entering the phenomenon, understanding how it is experienced from multiple viewpoints, and developing an interpretation of that experience (Charmaz, 2012). The goal of this study was to develop a thematic analysis to interpret ACE. Interviews were conducted to eventually arrive at four core themes that capture the pedagogical style of Africentric teachers in this study. Teachers emphasized culture, a sense of community, teacher characteristics and student centered teaching approaches as key to their ACE pedagogy. Findings revealed that teachers use an inherent framework to guide their understanding of how to apply ACE to teaching K-12 curriculum content as well as how to address the psychosocial and behavioral needs of their students. Ultimately, this study represents how education and culture can be used to support the development of ethnically diverse students academically and psychologically.
African Centered Educators’ Perspectives on Theory in Practice

INTRODUCTION

It is common to think of a setting as primarily a physical space; however, the work of Sarason (1972) highlights that settings are not necessarily limited to physical location. Rather, he suggests that settings can also represent social interactions that are maintained over a period of time for the purpose of some intended goal. In his analysis of the creation of settings, he alludes to the need to describe the real world development of settings and the difficulty of taking theory and putting it into action. Those who instigate the creation of a setting are typically characterized as having a set of shared values and an intense and committed motivation for social change.

It is Sarason’s contention that many people who participate in the creation of settings have good intentions; however, they do not have knowledge of the “necessary and sufficient” conditions that make a “viable” social setting (1972, pg. 10). Sarason finds that such lack of knowledge can be true of theorists as well as of practitioners. This is not to say that all settings fail. In fact, many settings that are created succeed and flourish. Nevertheless, the people that make up the setting must go through a process of struggling with transferring abstract intentions into concrete reality. Praxis is the process by which a theory is enacted, embodied or realized. Praxis may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, and/or practicing ideas (Freire, 1970). African centered education (ACE) programs, as school settings, must go through the same process of transferring abstract intentions (Africentric theory) to education practice. This study is an attempt to provide details and reveal added dimensions to our understanding about how ACE theory is put into practice by educators in ACE schools.
Culturally responsive education based in the African worldview

The idea that American public school settings do not teach children of African descent in a comprehensive manner that represents Africa and its people accurately is central to the argument of a number of African American scholars and educators (e.g. Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 1995; Irvine, 1991; King, 1994). The proponents of ACE and those who advocate for culturally responsive teaching are, in essence, stating that culture is important and that for African American children to flourish educationally, the student and their culture must be put in the center of the learning process (Gay, 2000; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 1995; Shade, Kelly & Oberg, 1997). The Africentric literature provides a framework for understanding African and African American culture. In addition, the culturally responsive education literature validates the argument that learning should be culturally centered. When combined, these two philosophies provide a framework for understanding ACE (Murrell, 2002).

Black psychologists have called for an analysis of mainstream school-based interventions targeting African American students, asserting, “in their present state they lean on the side of European hegemonic approach to a people for whom that is not appropriate due to the state of and structures of oppression in U.S.” (Potts, 2003, p.176). Along with a philosophy that emphasizes culture-based learning, ACE critically analyzes a larger system of oppression and hegemony that is perceived to be detrimental to the well being of people of African descent. The goal of ACE is to reframe African American ways of doing and being by taking behavior out of a European context where it might be perceived as negative or abnormal and acknowledging an African or African American frame of reference that allows children to view themselves from a position of “beauty and strength” (Madhubuti, 1992 p. 28). Thus, ACE programs emerged as a part of the solution to the issues of low academic achievement and high drop-out rates facing
African American children in mainstream schools and to Eurocentric hegemony in the U.S (Madhubuti, 1992).

ACE schools arose out of a set of shared values associated with an African worldview and were created due to the work and dedication of people who ascribe to this worldview. These schools exist as settings because of people such as teachers, administrators, parents and community members who want a rich learning environment for children that highlights their own culture. They were created due to the belief that the practice of and dedication to this worldview are integral to the survival and success of people of African descent. The reframing of one’s doing and being is a major thrust of the ACE movement. In addition, it also proceeds from the idea that success lies within the grasp of African Americans who not only share the same values but also put them into practice (Madhubuti, 1992).

Specific aim of this study

Although there is a considerable literature on the assumptions and conceptualizations of an Africentric theory, there is a paucity of empirical studies related to how it is put into practice (Pearl, 2004; Boykin, Tyler & Miller, 2005). More specifically, the Africentric worldview has been articulated by a number of scholars (e.g., Akbar, 2004; Asante, 1998; Jones, 1997; Kambon, 1998; Meyers, 1988; Nobles, 1980), yet how it gets applied in a school setting is not always clear. In addition, what little has been published in empirical literature is dated by at least ten years. Although the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) accredits and provides teacher education for independent Africentric schools, there is still a lot to learn about ACE. According to Giddings (2001), there has not even been any formally agreed upon criteria for what constitutes effective Africentric practice set forth in the literature. This creates a vacuum between research and action that, when left unfilled, can have implications for how we
solve real world problems in terms of effectiveness, timeliness, applicability, and
generalizability. Although there are a plethora of ideas, concepts and assumptions about what it
means to be Africentric, more literature that connects ACE theory to the school setting is needed
to fill the gap. This study will focus on the Africentric educator’s interpretation of education
practice, as viewed through the cultural prism of worldview (See Appendix A).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To understand and describe how teachers in an African Centered Educational school
setting apply Africentrism the following key research questions for this study are:

1. What Africentric principles, concepts and ideas are used by ACE teachers?
2. What practices do teachers use to enact these principles, concepts and ideas?
3. Why do teachers incorporate such practices into aspects of their ACE pedagogy?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is not simply one way to view the world but there are different lenses through which people see the world based on a variety of factors (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.). As part of the value for human diversity, the field of Community Psychology acknowledges different paradigms for diversity and the importance of worldview. The field also promotes awareness about the impact that worldview has on theory development, research methods and intervention (Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1994).

In a review of diversity paradigms, Watts outlines one particular approach to diversity that applies to this work. The Population-Specific Perspective (PSP) refers to the need to focus on a single population for the purpose of discovering, constructing and articulating the experience of that group from within rather than in comparison to another group (Watts, 1994). The specific population of interest in this study is Africentric educators, and the purpose of the study is to understand their perspective from within the Africentric worldview. Before I lay out the guiding frameworks of this study, which include the Africentric worldview as well as theories about the relevance of culture in education, I will define and discuss terms that are important to this study as they relate to the population of interest.

Understanding the context of an Africentric Worldview

Definitions and concepts.

In the psychological literature, such terms as race, ethnicity and culture have been used in varying ways and even interchanged; therefore, it is critical that I define them as they will be used in this study. In addition, given the specific socio-historical experience of African Americans in the U.S., these terms have distinct meanings and thus need to be put in context.
**Race.** The two most common ways in which race has been defined in American social science research are biologically and socio-politically. Biological definitions involve assigning people to racial categories based on certain phenotypic characteristics such as skin color, hair texture or facial features (Kambon, 1996). People have tried to ascribe racial differences to biology; however, such a notion has been consistently disproven. Also, race, as biologically defined, has historically been used to falsely justify claims of pathology about groups of people. Thus it is important to move away from such assertions (Guthrie, 2004; Zuberi, 2003). The second most common way of defining race focuses on the social meanings ascribed to it within the macro culture. It acknowledges a group’s sociopolitical history and experiences of domination and oppression. This is considered to be a sociopolitical-historical definition (Helms, 1994). In this study, race is primarily conceptualized around social and political meaning, which has some quasi-biological relevance to the extent that people of African descent were targeted for slavery due to their phenotypic features. The enslaved Africans possessed so-called “negroid” features such as distinctive skin color, hair texture, and other physical features, all of which led to a shared experience of slavery, racism and/or discrimination in the U.S.

**Ethnicity.** Ethnicity might best be conceptualized as a social identity based on the culture of one’s ancestors’ national or tribal groups as modified by the demands of the macro culture in which one’s group currently resides (Helms, 1994). Certain definitions focus on groups that are socially defined on the basis of culture. Whereas some view ethnicity as interchangeable with race (Phinney, 1990), others make an important distinction between race and ethnicity (Casas, 1984). The same ethnic group can consist of individuals from various races, and any single racial group is made up of many different ethnicities.
For many regions in the world, ethnicity delineates groups within a particular area. This was especially true for pre-colonial Africa where people strongly identified with national and ethnic alliances. Nevertheless, the experience of what is known as the “Maafa” overshadows such allegiances (Ani, 1994, pg. 3; Richards, 1988, pg. 12). Maafa is a kiswahili word that means disaster but in this context is now used to refer to something more specific. Ani used the word to refer to the whole process of slavery and its effects on Africa and its people. Therefore, it refers to the harrowing experience of slavery from the point of being taken from one’s homeland, put in slave ships and slave dungeons, only to eventually live as slaves. It also includes the ripple effects of slavery on generations that followed (Ani, 1994; Richards, 1988).

In the context of such experiences that included being stripped of a connection to one’s own ethnic tribe, a different relationship for African Americans emerged and still exists today that makes racial membership more salient than any specific ethnic identification within Africa.

**Culture.** According to Lonner (1994), anthropologists and other social scientists have not been able to agree upon one definition of culture. Nevertheless, psychologists tend to look for such elements as shared language, social roles and norms, values, and attitudes (Triandis, 1994). Nobles (1985, pg. 103) defines culture as “a process that gives people general design for living and patterns for interpreting their reality.” Sue and Okazaki (1990) postulate that culture is mediated by societal opportunities and restrictions-- one restriction being oppression. Therefore, oppression often complicates our understanding of culture because sometimes it is unclear whether a characteristic of a population reflects an aspect of culture or an effort to combat oppression (Watts, 1994).

The important thing to note about race, ethnicity and culture in this study is the complexity of this population; African Americans are not monolithic (Smitherman, 2000; Zuberi,
They manifest myriad ways of being and doing. Nevertheless, their individuality does not belie their shared socio-historical past. Additionally, although African Americans were not able to openly and fully practice their culture amidst slavery, Africentric scholars propose that aspects of West African culture remain in the African American community (Akbar, 2004; Meyers, 1988; Nobles, 1980; Kambon, 1998; Jones, 2003). Ultimately, this is why worldview is important, because these pre-colonial values and principles speak to a larger worldview and are at the root of what it means to be culturally African.

**Worldview.** Watts (1994) defined a worldview as “the pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions that is shared by a population based on similar socialization and life experiences” (pg. 52). Worldview can be dictated based on culture, nationality or a particular group membership or involvement. Watts’ worldview schematic includes three factors: historical legacy, hereditary predispositions and cultural values, beliefs, behaviors and traditions-- as a way to understand how historical and sociopolitical forces impact worldview (Watts, 1994). Historical legacy provides an understanding of how factors in history have influenced a group’s experiences. Hereditary predispositions refer to the general patterns of behavior and cognition that exist and are passed down through generations, resulting in a psychological sense of membership. For African Americans, it also speaks to how certain patterns of behavior have persisted despite attempts to disconnect Africans from their culture. Lastly, cultural values, beliefs, behaviors and traditions reveal how these cultural patterns have been retained.

**Psycho-social, educational and cultural contexts.**

**Historical legacy.** The history of Africans in America did not begin with enslavement, because there were people of African descent on this land long before slavery (Van Sertima, 1976). Nevertheless, slavery is one of the most significant periods to impact African Americans, and its effects are still evident today (Akbar, 1992; Richardson & Boykin, 2002). As stated
above in the discussion on race, ethnicity, culture and worldview, the American form of chattel slavery involved a process of intentionally and brutally stripping away the identity, culture and beliefs of Africans in order to create a slave system (Richards, 1989; Ani, 1994). As a result of tactics used to control and suppress the enslaved Africans, those enslaved were not allowed to practice their own culture, including spiritual traditions, customs and social structure, as well as native languages, art, music, dance, etc. People who came from the same nations or ethnic groups were often separated, never to see each other again. In addition, the slaves who were born and raised on American soil were taught to fear and hate Africa. Eventually, Africans in America often sought to distance themselves from their homeland given the stigma attached to it (Ani, 1994; Richards, 1989).

**Psycho-social adjustment and education.** Hundreds of years of slavery, racial oppression and negative unwarranted propaganda aimed at Africa are associated with far-reaching psycho-social and behavioral consequences for people of African descent in every facet of life (Cross, 1978; Degruy-Leary, 2005; Jones, 1997). The results of such experiments as “the doll studies” of the 1940s that studied Black children’s self-perceptions related to race are evidence of the negative psychological consequences of slavery and oppression (Clark & Clark, 1940). The experiment showed that Black children preferred the white doll significantly more than any other racial group in the study, leading researchers to conclude that African American children were experiencing self-hatred and internalized racism. These and other theories have been used as evidence that racism and oppression negatively affect the psychological well being of African Americans (Degruy-Leary, 2005).

The history of the education of African Americans in the U.S. is also an important context for understanding ACE. Beginning with prohibitions against teaching slaves to read and
write, education for people of African descent has been problematic (Woodson, 1933). Once slavery ended and “Negroes” were free to obtain an education, discrimination on the basis of race continued, thus creating an antagonistic relationship between people of African descent and mainstream educational institutions. Eventually, African Americans had schools in their own communities that were staffed by African American teachers and principals and they were able to learn and strive for educational equality. Civil rights scholars note that these early schools for African American children were effective, just woefully underfunded (Bell, 1987).

Another major impact on the schooling of African Americans involved the Brown v. Board of Education decision. This 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision, which was greatly impacted by the 1940s doll experiments, was supposed to end low quality education for African American children. It essentially mandated White schools to integrate African American students into their student body (Bell, 1987). Some argue that these efforts to force White teachers to educate African American students during the civil rights era had limitations (e.g., low teacher expectations) that the education system still has not addressed (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Those who call for a new approach to educating African American youth state that there is a need for African Americans to take responsibility for their own education so that they will be equipped to address their own needs and the needs of their communities, especially when societal structures and institutions have historically failed to do so (Asante, 1991; Madhubuti, 1992; Shujaa, 1994). Overall, the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. has lead to numerous theories about negative psychological and academic outcomes.

**Retention and reclamation of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors.** The idea that African Americans are in some ways inclined towards certain aspects of their African culture (regardless of whether it is conscious) relates to the second component of Watts’ formulation of
population worldview, which he refers to as hereditary predisposition. Culture is such a deep structure that is not easily erased from one’s being (Sarason, 1973), such that attempts to disconnect Africans from their culture were not entirely successful (Jones, 2003). It has been suggested that elements of African culture were unknowingly retained (Ani, 1980; Hale-Benson, 1982) and that contemporary African American culture is a continuation of its African origins (Jones, 2003; Hermanns & Kempen, 1998).

Examples of cultural retention include beliefs in the primacy of the non-material world, creativity, harmony, balance, expressiveness and oneness with others (even those outside of blood ties) that exist in communities of people of African descent. One phenomenon that exemplifies the way enslaved Africans held on to their culture in the face of oppressive slave rules is the existence of “fictive kin.” Fictive kin refers to an emotionally significant relationship with another individual that would take on the characteristics of a family relationship even though there are not blood ties (Sudarkasa, 1981). Although slavery made it difficult to maintain blood ties due to the constant selling off of family members, the value of community and oneness with others persisted. This demonstrates the primacy of relationships and familial bonds, which are features of African culture in the midst of the horrors of slavery, and such relationships can still be found in African American communities today (Richardson & Boykin, 2002).

In addition to the cultural retention theory, there has been a resurgent movement of African Americans to reclaim their African culture, values, beliefs and behaviors. There is a Ghanaian Adinkra symbol called Sankofa that represents looking back at the past in order to understand the present and make meaning for the future (Akoto & Akoto, 2000; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). For many seeking to reclaim an African identity, this means looking to the
cultures of the western region of Africa. Due to the Atlantic slave trade routes, most African Americans are predominantly descended from the Western region of Africa, and so it is no surprise that much of the Africentric ideology is largely centered in the cultural practices from this area of Africa (Littlefield, 1981).

Having evolved from multiple roots over so many years, African American culture is multilayered and complex. Africentrism represents some ways that contemporary African Americans are making sense of their collective pasts. Efforts to reclaim an African identity can range from the personal to the political. It is reflected in a number of social and political movements, including Traditional African (Kambon, 2001), Pan Africanist (Shockley & Frederick, 2010), Black Nationalist (Shockley & Frederick, 2010), Black Socialist (Madhubuti, 1992), and Modernist Adaptational (Jones, 2003). The common thread among these perspectives is that they seek to reframe how the world is understood for people of African descent.

Africentric worldview

A worldview is a deep structure that encompasses the way a people conceive the fundamental questions of reality, including the nature and organization of one’s existence in the universe (Carruthers, 1999). It has been argued that, in the U.S., normative attitudes, values and behaviors are based on Western European Anglo-Saxon Protestant White male values (Potts, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Because a Eurocentric view is considered an inaccurate reflection of the life and the conditions under which African Americans exist, an Africentric worldview interprets the experiences of Africans in America through a suitable cultural frame of reference (Asante, 1998; Carruthers, 1999).

A review of Africentric models reveals that along a continuum of different interpretations of an Africentric worldview are two extremes: on one end is a worldview that is based purely in
traditional pre-colonial African culture (e.g. Kambon, 1998), while the other end involves a modernist adaptational view that attempts to capture the dynamic of retaining traditional African values in the midst of adapting in a Eurocentric society (e.g., Jones, 2003). Also along the continuum are other articulations of the Africentric worldview (Akbar, 2004; Diop, 1974, Meyers, 1988; Nobles, 1980; Kambon, 1998; Jones, 2003). The following is a review of Kambon’s (1998) traditional pre-colonial and Jones’ (2003) modernist adaptational Africentric worldviews (e.g. Jones, 2003). For this study it will be important to understand where teachers are situated under the larger umbrella of Africentric worldview as they apply it to their education practice (See Appendix B).

**Traditional African Cultural Worldview**

Kambon’s (1998) worldview schematic is based upon articulating the cultural retention perspective on Africentric worldview. It is divided into the following three components: 1) Ethos, 2) Values and customs and 3) Psycho-behavioral. Ethos is defined as the characteristic spirit of a culture as seen in its beliefs and aspirations (Ani, 1994). Kambon (1998) describes ethos as the characterization of man’s existence in relation to nature. He asserts that the Africentric perspective involves harmony with nature and is signified as human-nature unity. In addition, he refers to the survival thrust of a particular group such as the “survival of the fittest” European ethos. In contrast to the European ethos, the Africentric survival thrust takes into account the interdependence of all living things and thus the primary focus is on survival of the group. It should be noted that this review of worldview schematics does not signify the individual characteristics of any person or community of European descent. Instead, it is meant to capture what has been historically viewed as the prevailing spirit of the cultural values and beliefs deemed worthy in European American society.
As the second modality in Kambon’s worldview schematic, the foundational values in the Africentric worldview are inclusiveness, cooperation-collective responsibility, interdependence, spiritualism, circularity and complementarity-understanding. These represent the foundation from which cultural and traditional African customs are fashioned. In contrast, the European values and customs are mainly influenced by such concepts as competition-individual rights, independence, materialism, and linearity/ordinality.

The last modality represents a set of concepts that represent how life is understood from a psychological and behavioral sense. They are groupness, sameness-commonality and humanism from the traditional African cultural perspective. In the psycho-behavioral modality, the highest value of life is the interpersonal relationships between people. One example of a psycho-behavioral modality in the Eurocentric worldview is a primary importance placed on individualism and uniqueness.

Kambon subsequently developed the Worldviews Scale (Kambon, 1998), an individual level measure that included 26 items that contrast Africentric and Eurocentric worldview along the above-mentioned dimensions. The items had previously been shown to discriminate between the two worldviews. He assessed endorsement of an Africentric or Eurocentric worldview on a college sample of 94 African American students and 87 European American students. The findings revealed that African American students’ scores were significantly more consistent with an Africentric worldview on five of seven of the above-mentioned dimensions, while the students of European descent scored significantly more consistent with a Eurocentric worldview on six out of seven of the dimensions (Kambon, 1998).

**TRIOS: An integrated African Worldview**

TRIOS, another popular model of the Africentric worldview, incorporates the historical legacy of the African American experience (Jones, 2003). Like Kambon’s model, TRIOS is a
worldview that is derived from traditional African culture; however, it also takes the position that the African worldview evolved over centuries for African Americans in reaction to the influence of being in a society dominated by a European worldview. This model incorporates the dynamic process of cultural transmission as well as the impact of racism and oppression on worldview. Therefore, “TRIOS is the nexus from which we trace the dynamics of African-European cultural contact in America” (Jones, 2003, p.580).

TRIOS is an acronym that includes five dimensions of human experience: Time, Rhythm, Improvisation, Oral expression and Spirituality (Jones, 2003). **Time** refers to cultural differences in perceiving and experiencing time. African notations of time are based on the beginnings and endings of social and environmental experiences and have a more relational connotation. For many Africans, time was slow moving and practical, deriving from tasks, social interaction and behaviors, not prescribing them. Whereas, dominant US cultural norms utilize points of reference such as the clock in order to keep time.

**Rhythm** is a reframing of rhythm simply as time, and instead expands our understanding of it as a way of being –the flow of life in terms of being able to make adjustments on that continuum. Rhythm refers to recurring patterns of behavior set in time and can give shape, energy and meaning to psychological experiences. It is also an internal response to the rhythmic patterns of the external world. Rhythm refers to a relationship that is “flowing” or in harmony with one’s environment. It is manifested in the oral style found in the African American church and gospel songs known as “call and response”. Call and response occurs when something is said by the speaker (or sung by a soloist) and the audience is expected to collectively respond in a certain manner. The process highlights a particular synchronicity between self and the environment. **Improvisation** is an organizational principle that encourages creative and intuitive
application of knowledge and skills in response to the demands, feedback and challenges of a task. Improvisation promotes flexibility over structure. Within an established structure, it allows one to engage life in a spontaneous and personally expressive manner for the sake of adaptation to current situations, and thus serves both a social integrative function as well as an expressive function.

**Oral expression** recognizes that many African cultures have oral traditions that include storytelling, naming, singing, drumming and the important lessons of socialization and cultural transmission. The important meanings and values of culture are spoken or sung, not necessarily written down, and it is not just what you say, but it is how you say it. The final element in TRIOS, **spirituality**, is undoubtedly a common element across all worldview schematics, as the “belief in nonmaterial causation” and “measure of accomplishment not on earth” (p.39) as well as a universal oneness with all that is both structurally deep, if not hidden, and at the core of our existence.

It is important to note that these and other Africentric worldview models overlap in numerous ways. For example, the Kambon (1998) model refers to living in harmony with nature, while the TRIOS model (Jones, 2003) also touches on the same idea with the Rhythm of one’s environment. The same can be said for groupness, commonality and interdependence. The majority of Africentric worldview models are meant to reflect the deep-rooted and core African cultural ethos. Nevertheless, it is not meant to suggest the individual elements within these worldview schematics exclusively exist or are only possessed as part of an African or African American view of reality. Rather, a worldview is represented by the distinctive pattern of perception that the individual elements form collectively.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Above, I reviewed the main theoretical tenets of an Africentric worldview suggested by Jones (2003) and Kambon (1998). They are abstractions, representing the cultural outlook shared amongst a group of people. In this section, I will review guiding principles that act as the blueprint for how to apply Africentric worldview in the community (e.g. an ACE school setting), family or individually. They represent the potential ways culture can be expressed. They include three sets of principles, namely 1) Sankofa; 2) Ma’at and 3) Nguzo Saba.

The following review seeks to examine whether these principles are reflected in ACE practice as described in the literature. This review identified articles and books that explicitly stated that their education program or intervention was a) based on an Africentric worldview and b) took place in a school with its primary focus being on ACE. A total of 19 studies were identified that described Africentric programs in different types of schools (e.g., independent/private, charter and public). The programs ranged in scope from a district wide adoption of Africentric educational practices (e.g., Giddings, 2001; Binder, 2000; Pollard & Arijotutu, 2000) to self-contained ACE classrooms within a mainstream school (e.g., Hudley, 1995; Hudley, 1997; Lewis et al., 2006), and also intervention programs implemented within the school but not as a class (e.g. Scott, 2001).

Africentric principles reflected in ACE literature

The first principle, Sankofa, is a concept that was also mentioned earlier in the contextual framework section. It is a Ghanaian symbol that reflects the motivation to re-connect with the cultural past of Africa as a way to move forward. It is part and parcel of the larger system called the Adinkra. Adinkra are visual symbols associated with the Akan that represent aphorisms of traditional African wisdom. There are more than 60 symbols that represent ways of
doing and being and knowing (Williams, 1971). It is interesting to note that these symbols continue to be modified and added to, which demonstrates the dynamic nature of culture.

In relation to **Sankofa**, many ACE programs have a focus on prevention and target at-risk youth with the perspective that students may struggle when a strong cultural foundation has not been established (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Harvey & Rausch, 1997). In the ACE literature that was reviewed, the only author to mention Sankofa was Potts (2003). He briefly stated that it was among the principles chosen to be profiled in the school newspaper by students at one ACE school-- the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI); no other details were given.

Another Africentric set of principles is **Ma’at**, which involves the attributes of truth, justice, reciprocity, harmony, righteousness, order and balance (Hilliard, 1986; Rivers & Rivers, 2002; Shockley, 2007). It is considered to be the foundation of truth, law, love, and order (Amen, 2008). It comes from the ancient Egyptian Nile Valley cultures of Kemet and Kush. The use of Ma’at as a Kemetic principle is particularly noteworthy as it represents a reframing of Egypt as an “African space” – as opposed to a non-European space. Many scholars (Africentric and otherwise) have researched and produced works that link the cultures of Kemet to the rest of Africa (e.g., Diop, 1974; Gadella, 1999; Williams, 1976). Thus Africentrism is a way to reframe our understanding of Africa and its people in a more accurate way.

In the Africentric education context, this principle is embraced as a code of ethics and spirituality and it is central to ACE theory that informs human conduct and social order (Rivers & Rivers, 2002; Akbar, 1994). It is sometimes used in conjunction with Nguzo Saba for programs aimed at positive youth development (Harvey & Rauch, 1997). Only one article in the ACE practice literature mentioned the principle of Ma’at. The Sankofa Shule is the name of a school in Lansing Michigan that stated their ACE approach begins with the principle of Ma’at.
Although they do not give any specific examples, the founder says they apply the ideals of truth, justice, righteousness, harmony and balance in their educational philosophy. According to them, Ma’at also means reciprocity, which they explained as an “African ideal that embraces the give and take of life” as well as “respecting everything that has a spirit force- anything that has energy” (Rivers & Rivers, 2002, pg. 181).

The last set of principles, **Nguzo Saba**, was first articulated by Karenga (1988). **Nguzo Saba** refers to a system consisting of seven major cultural principles and values, which has also been applied to the cultural holiday of Kwanzaa (Karenga, 1988, see Table 1, Appendix C). For many ACE practitioners, the Nguzo Saba represents the core set of beliefs from which the Africentric curriculum and/or practices were established. Various articles mentioned ACE praxis as it related to the Africentric principles of the Nguzo Saba. Scott describes a therapeutic group for middle school girls that employed this set of principles (2001).

To facilitate the development of a healthy ethnic identity the group sought to integrate African-centered values and a sense of community. Part of this was facilitated by the opening ritual. The opening ritual includes verbalizing one of the Nguzo Saba where the group member states the group’s fundamental virtues and principles utilizing a call and response format. After reviewing the seven principles a group member reads the group rules; e.g. “no Joaning/ranking” on one another, listening respectfully to other members when they speak, speaking positively about other members.” This is followed by a “check-in” during which each member is encouraged to talk about whatever is on her mind. This is followed by structured group activities that include defining the seven principles and considering their implications for the individual members and for the group-as-a-whole...” (Scott, 2001, p.81).

Some of the literature mentioned Nguzo Saba but did not describe in detail how it is used. For example Potts (2003) explained that the students at BEMI are expected to study Nguzo Saba, memorize them, and believe in them. Only one statement about students who put together a newspaper that reviewed some of the values that were relevant to them such as Kujichagulia (i.e. Kiswahili for self determination) provided a small glimpse of how Nguzo Saba, and Africentric principles more broadly, can be applied to education.

In summary, although many of the publications called their programs Africentric, not all explicitly stated which Africentric philosophy or guiding principles informed the design of their
school as Africentric. Overall, the literature review on Africentric principles shows that explicit acknowledgement and application of said principles is not customary for those who write about ACE practice in scholarly publications. The Africentric worldview and principles described above represent abstract theories and concepts that apply to all aspects of life. Next, I will review constructs that provide a framework for how Africentric theories are applied.

**Culture and Education**

A central premise of this research study is that all children, regardless of their background, are cultural beings. To acknowledge the “self” as a cultural entity is to assert that culture is a context through which we experience life. Perhaps one of the earliest theorists who contributed to this understanding was Vygotsky. He defined "context" as a child’s culture and how it is expressed (Vygotsky, 1978). Culture is especially salient as children are developing proficiency in cultural symbols for language, as well as social and behavioral mores. Vygotsky argued that a lack of attention to the cultural context distorts our view of development, and can lead us to look at causes of behavior as residing within the child rather than within their culture. He theorized that culture is communicated through home and societal routines (Premack, 1984).

Theories and practices from culturally relevant education are apropos to the theoretical underpinnings of this exploration into ACE praxis. The movement of *culturally relevant education* refers to a set of instructive practices and resources that insist upon including the culture, values, history, and background of students in the educational process (Gay, 2000; Hale-Benson, 1982; Irvine, 2003). The movement has been referred to by multiple terms, such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), home-school dissonance (Tyler et al, 2010), culturally congruent education (Schonleber, 2007) and prescriptive pedagogy (Boykin & Allen, 1992). It is important to view culturally relevant teaching as distinct from multicultural
education. Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1994) critique multicultural education as colorblind rhetoric devoid of any real meaningful understanding or acknowledgement about culture and group characteristics. Instead, their contention is that multicultural education programming is reduced to programs surrounding festivals and food. Ultimately, the distinction is that culturally responsive teachers seek to understand and ameliorate the impact of cultural discontinuity between the classroom and the home. Ladson-Billings (1994) made the current concept of culturally relevant teaching popular in her efforts to identify pedagogy that would empower African American children not only intellectually but also socially, emotionally and politically.

In addition to what Ladson-Billings is advocating for culturally relevant teaching in curriculum and pedagogy, there are some people suggesting the culturally responsive teaching framework as an effective framework for ACE curriculum and pedagogy (Murrell, 2002). The major distinction between culturally responsive/relevant teaching and ACE being that ACE goes one step further by striving to develop institutions that are independent and run by African Americans who value an Africentric worldview (Shujaa, 1994 Lee, 1992; Madhubuti, 1992). It suggests that an African worldview is relevant to the pedagogy, classroom practice, learning styles and evaluation of African American students. Such theories help frame the ACE praxis that is uncovered in this study.

**African Centered Education (ACE)**

I have reviewed the main theoretical tenets of an Africentric worldview (e.g. Jones, 2003; and Kambon, 1998) as well as Africentric principles that have been used to apply Africentric worldview (Akoto & Akoto, 2000; Karenga, 1988). Now I will review the seven key constructs
of ACE as articulated by Shockley & Fredericks (2010). When combined, these form the theory of Africentric education used to interpret ACE practice in this study (See Appendix D).

**Seven key cultural constructs of ACE.** Seven major theoretical tenets of Africentrism have been applied to the education field (Shockley & Frederick, 2010). Now I will review the same 19 articles mentioned above using these seven constructs in the literature on ACE practice. Therefore, this section serves two functions: 1) a review of the seven key constructs and 2) a review of literature on ACE practice.

Historical attempts to disconnect Africans from their culture and other forms of oppression create the necessity for the first two constructs: **Identity and Pan-Africanism.** Identity involves developing a healthy view of oneself as an African as well as one’s view of their group. For example, as mentioned earlier, one common misconception that is taught in public schools is that African American history starts with slavery. Scholars have devoted their work toward dispelling this false notion that Blacks in the U.S. are synonymous with the enslaved Africans who were kidnapped and shipped to the New World in the fourteenth century. One aim of Africentricism is to broaden the narrative of Black history in the mainstream as it relates to the origins of people of African descent (Van Sertima, 1976), the experience of slavery and liberation activities (Aptheker, 1974), and ultimately to look at history from the perspective of Africans in world. Pan-Africanism is a more expansive approach to identity in which people of African descent all over the world cultivate a unified identity (Shockley & Frederick, 2010).

Consistent with Shockley & Frederick’s (2010) consideration of **Identity and Pan-Africanism,** the literature reveals that, for many of the ACE programs, their main goal is to develop a more positive view of self and group in their students. For example Scott (2001) designed an ACE school intervention structured as a therapeutic group for African American
middle school girls. This group aimed to enhance self-esteem and pro-social peer networks among the girls by centering them in their culture and values. Another program that consisted of a self-contained classroom within a mainstream school was also aimed at enhancing the children’s self-esteem (Hudley, 1995). Binder (2000) conducted an observational study of an ACE classroom that included “self-esteem raising and reform” activities such as intentionally acquainting African American students with authors that made people of African descent the central figures in their literary works.

A study by Rivers & Rivers (2002) outlined a ten-step process employed at their Africentric school. It begins with pedagogy that respects the real history and contributions of African people and eventually leads to reframing the issue of racism by defining and treating it as an external issue. As with many approaches to ACE, the goal is to reframe African American ways of doing and being by creating an African frame of reference that allows children to develop a better view of themselves and their group overall (Madhubuti, 1992). Consequently, the process teaches children to be at peace with themselves. The last lesson in the process teaches about racism as an external issue, meaning that they should never think the problem resides in their ability, culture or physical self. The Africentric goals and principles of these ACE programs all involved self-esteem and empowering children through establishing a healthy sense of both the self and group (Nobles, 1976).

The third ACE construct identified by Shockley and Frederick (2010) involves African culture and values. “Traditionally, the ancestors of people of African descent have used various cultural practices and beliefs as guides to define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves” (p.1222). For the current study, culture and values are the content of ACE, not only highlighting how they shape worldview, but also the deliberate socialization and teaching of
African traditions. Lewis, Sullivan and Bybee (2006) evaluated a school-based emancipatory ACE intervention that involved what the authors called “cultural exchanges” that taught African American history and promoted Africentric values.

The fourth construct that Shockley and Frederick focus on, Reattachment, is related to culture and values because it represents application of cultural practices (2010). In ACE practice, the objective of reattachment is to make African culture and values a way of life for students (in whole or in part) while also helping them to develop a totally new concept of being. Cultural reattachment seeks to rectify the historical attempts to disconnect Africans from their culture, and thus Sankofa or reattachment is a theme that is interwoven throughout all of the major Africentric theories.

Although I was not able to find literature on any ACE schools that used the term “reattachment” as a specific goal, Giddings (2001) wrote about an ACE school whose objective was focused on reacquainting them with appreciation for their African and African American cultural heritage. Potts (2003) describes an ACE school where students are immersed in African principles. Although Giddings (2001) and Potts (2003) never used the terminology, their ACE schools are clearly representative of this construct.

Black Nationalism represents solidarity among African people and is exemplified by the sentiment that all people of African descent constitute a nation (Asante, 1999; Madhubuti, 1992). According to Shockley and Frederick (2010), as the fifth construct of ACE, it more narrowly refers to the idea that ACE should teach children to have a sense of agency as well as loyalty towards Africa. A possible application of Black Nationalism through local efforts within communities involves the sixth construct, which is Community Control (and Institution Building). Community Control refers to intentionally building and maintaining Independent
Black Institutions (IBIs) that serve the interests of one’s community (Shockley & Frederick, 2010). ACE schools are a primary example of IBIs, as they represent Black-owned and controlled education systems (Akoto & Akoto, 1992; Madhubuti, 1992).

One of the programs that clearly outlined goals that reflect Black Nationalism was Project EXCEL, a school-based ACE emancipatory intervention. It sought to increase communal orientation and social change efforts by equipping students with tools they could utilize to affect change in their own community (Lewis et al., 2006). Menken (1994) conducted participant observations of an ACE classroom where the objective was to create norms and a classroom culture that cultivated a sense of empowerment in the students that would carry over into other parts of the students’ lives including their communities. Potts (2003) describes the objective of as influencing students in a way that would develop a sense of ownership over their education and community. Although not all ACE programs outline Community Control and Institution Building as specific goals, the simple act of starting and maintaining an ACE school is, in essence, fulfilling this as an objective (Lee, 1992; Madhubuti, 1992).

**Education, Not schooling** is the clarion call of the final construct. It is the assertion that, for African American children, mainstream public education is not truly education at all and instead is referred to as “schooling” or “training.” From an Africentric perspective, education is meant to do more than just teach subjects, but instead should develop the whole child into a better person as defined by their society. Therefore education should address the academic social, emotional and spiritual needs of the students (Mosha, 1999). Africentric educators say that U.S. schools do not educate but instead train African American children to be workers in a system that perpetuates the American political and economic status quo (Hilliard, 2003; Potts, 2003; Shujaa, 1994).
In the literature on practice, Potts (2003) may be describing this construct when he states that the students at one ACE school are expected to develop critical agency, which means the ability to critically think and analyze the world and their place in it. Hudley (1995) described a program whose instructional goal involved cultivating higher order thinking and critical analysis. Although this construct has been identified in the literature on the theory of ACE, the small number of studies that I found that explicitly stated it as their goal is surprising. Perhaps amongst ACE practitioners, it is assumed that all ACE programs are inherently involved in doing this work.

**Africentric Pedagogy**

**Pedagogy.** Pedagogy refers to the art, science or profession of teaching, especially education (www.merriam-webster.com). Education is the Latin-derived word for pedagogy, referring to the whole context of instruction, learning, and the actual operations involved therein (www.askdefine.com). In the context of ACE, culturally relevant material is delivered in an instructional setting tailored to an African cultural frame of reference (Rivers & Rivers, 2002). It is important to acknowledge that the teachers at ACE schools are the primary facilitators of ACE pedagogy and therefore are a natural unit of analysis for the study of the process of transforming Africentric theory into practice.

**ACE teachers.** ACE teachers can be found in a variety of (different types of) schools, ranging from independent Africentric schools to charter schools to Africentric programs within mainstream schools. Because many Africentric schools are independent (not part of a public school system), they are able to hire people that are not trained to be teachers by universities (Lee, 1992). Characteristics of ACE teachers include having a strong commitment to their students and high expectations for what they can achieve as well as a willingness and openness
to new ways of teaching (Hoover, 1992; Rivers & Rivers, 2002). One ACE school founder and administrator stated that she has greater success with hiring teachers for ACE who are not trained by mainstream institutions (Lee, 1992).

Although, typically, ACE teachers are of African descent, a review of articles about ACE schools shows that teachers in ACE schools can come from a variety of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hoover, 1992). Regardless of whether teachers are of African descent, most ACE teachers have to be trained to teach in a way that is Africentric. In the beginning some teachers do not necessarily adhere to or have great knowledge about Africentric philosophy and therefore they are learning alongside their students (Lee, 1992). Although most ACE teachers (in independent schools) are not products of mainstream teachers’ education programs, those teachers who are say their undergraduate programs did not incorporate any training in Africentric pedagogy or culturally relevant pedagogy (Hoover, 1992). Nevertheless, there are institutional supports for ACE teachers, such as those provided by the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), which offer school certification and teacher training programs for ACE schools. Additionally, many ACE schools take a very hands-on approach with teacher in-service training (Ginwright, 2002).

**Key areas of ACE practice**

This section describes a review of the ACE practice with a specific focus on key areas of the schooling process. In addition to the articles on ACE practice, this literature review also examines research on the learning styles of Black children that can be applied to the classroom because they test certain assumptions of Africentric theory (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Albury, 1992; Boykin, Jagers, Ellison & Albury, 1997). I organize my summary of the literature on ACE practice by adapting a classification scheme provided by Boykin, Tyler & Miller (2005) of the dynamics of classroom life. It should be noted that these categories are not meant to be
exhaustive or mutually exclusive; nevertheless, they provide a useful way to organize and highlight aspects of ACE practice found in the literature. Therefore, the following key areas of ACE school practice are the result of adapting the work of Boykin et al., (2005) to what was most commonly found in the ACE practice literature: 1) physical setting and activities, 2) curriculum, 3) relationships, 4) norms and rules of behavior, 5) instructive strategies and methods. In this section, I explain these areas and review studies that describe them in their practice.

1. Physical setting, ACE school structure and activities

One aspect of ACE practice that was mentioned in the literature was that of physical setting, school structure and activities. This often included such things as structural and cosmetic changes to the school setting as well as physical activities that incorporate the Africentric cultural methods of using song, dance, ritual, and affirmation. Ginwright (2002) explains how changes to both the physical school setting and activities were involved in an ACE school reform. He states that cosmetic changes to the school environment included new murals, posters with African and African American images and proverbs in the hallway. An African style of dress was even encouraged, such that on Fridays, teachers and students were encouraged to wear Africentric clothing (Ginwright, 2000). Also, changes to school activities and structure included assemblies that were held at the school to promote new Africentric classes. The authors described the use of rituals in conjunction with Africentric principles, such as songs and affirmations to open and close the school day (Scott, 2001).

Some of the programs were structured differently, such as having separate ACE classrooms within a mainstream school (Hudley, 1995; Hudley, 1997; Lewis et al., 2006). Although none of the articles stated it explicitly, the parameters of the mainstream school in
which ACE teachers had to operate still impacted practice. For example, one program in a mainstream school consisted of all boys in a classroom in an inner city school. The program intentionally sought to meet the needs of young boys living in an urban community that was plagued by violence. According to Hudley (1995), for this group of boys, the goal of making the physical environment a safe place from the negative influences of the streets was just as important as challenging them intellectually. This is one way their approach to the physical setting sought to meet the unique needs of their students (Hudley, 1995).

2. Curriculum

A major area of education practice involves the curriculum; therefore, I looked in the literature for actual descriptions of how curriculum is created or modified. One of the common approaches to curriculum was for ACE classrooms to modify mainstream curriculum. Such modifications aimed to teach the contributions and perspectives of African Americans by emphasizing the following: 1) the history and culture of both ancient and modern civilizations on the African continent, 2) the contributions of African Americans to the political, social, economic and technological development of the U.S., 3) the analysis of current social and political issues and problems, including the impact of racism, classism and sexism on all members of American society, 4) the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens in a democratic society (Hudley, 1995; Madhubuti 1992; Potts, 2003; Rivers & Rivers 2002).

Menken (1994) described an ACE classroom within a mainstream school that added to an already existing school curriculum “texts, poetry and other course content written from an Africentric perspective (pg.100)”. Another similar program described the following:

“Songhai’s social studies teacher told me that part of what makes his class Africentric is that he uses both the text recommended by the school along with a book on African American history and presents his students with both perspectives along with criticism of the information presented in both texts-which is directed at sharpening critical thinking skills” (Giddings, 2003 pg. 474).
Some modifications to curriculum are due to the perception that representation of people of African descent - their work or events surrounding them - are not adequately and truthfully portrayed in existing course content. For example, the overall philosophy of the ACE curriculum at the *Sankofa Shule* was to not only prepare students intellectually but also teach them the importance of having respect for themselves and others through a truthful representation of history and society (Rivers & Rivers, 2002). This particular approach signifies the need to address the inadequacies that ACE educators feel exist in mainstream history curricula.

The other approach to curricular changes involves adding courses to the curriculum program by offering non-traditional classes that rarely exist in mainstream schools. According to Foster, who was the administrator and Algebra teacher of the Songhai program:

*Songhai is an Africentric educational experience because the students’ education is focused on reacquainting them with appreciation for their African and African American cultural heritage. Students are taught Ki-swahili and are engaged by a number of progressive educational programs, such as the “University of Jenne,” (Giddings, 2003, pg. 474)*

The approaches to ACE that involve sociopolitical awareness and social change efforts typically add courses that not only vary the types of perspectives but also involve taking social action (Potts, 2003; Lewis et al., 2006). Potts (2003) provides one description.

“At BEMI students wrote articles about many social issues and therefore reading, writing and engagement in other school activities are connected with confronting structures of domination. Students not only read about African history and principles but are challenged to participate in that history and live these principles (Potts, 2003, pg. 179).”

3. **Social relationships**

Although **social relationships** were not mentioned in most of the articles, they represent a particularly key aspect of ACE pedagogy due to the Africentric values that focus on communalism and interdependence (Kambon, 2001). Relationships may involve the
interactions of staff, students, parents and the surrounding community. For some, this may also involve one’s relationship to the physical environment and nature (Rivers & Rivers, 2002).

Culturally responsive pedagogy highlights the importance of social relationships between student and teacher as “fluid and humanely equitable,” signifying the primacy of respect (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In the following excerpt, an ACE educator specifically highlights how respect facilitates healthy relationships with African American students.

*Through being able to openly express themselves in a respectful manner that in turn demands respect, African-centered students also can act without a heavy conscience and learn to deal with consequences calmly and rationally (Rivers & Rivers, 2002 pg.185).*

Finally, a key aspect of relationships involved altering the definition of parents and family to include the school community (Hoover, 1992). This is exemplified in one school whereby students acknowledge male staff by the prefix “Baba” and females by “Mama”, which mean father and mother respectively. This reflects the African proverb that says “it takes a village to raise a child,” referring to the responsibility of the whole community to educate and socialize a child responsibly (Lee, 1992).

4. Norms and rules of behavior

In its broader sense, **Norms and rules of behavior** refers to African behavioral norms established to create order in the class and in the students’ lives. This makes up the next key aspect of ACE practice. This differs from the first section on environmental structure and activities, which refers to physical activities and space primarily as it relates to teaching in the classroom. Norms and rules of behavior are primarily focused on, but not limited to, maintaining social order and managing behavior not bound by any physical structure.

Rivers and Rivers (2002) describe a behavior management strategy called RIP (Reward, Invest, Praise). It means Reward children, Invest time to notice children’s progress and Praise
children for their efforts. This works in concert with TAP (Take Away Privileges) if a student’s behavior is disruptive or disrespectful. First they get a warning, but if the behavior persists, then everyone is included in resolving the matter, including parents and the whole class. This approach is based on the above-mentioned idea that it takes a village. Also, another study describes the behavior management of an ACE classroom aimed at students with a history of behavioral problems (Hudley, 1997):

Mr. L. valued a balance between student autonomy and teacher control. Students had a voice in choosing the topics of study and the rules governing classroom activities from a set of alternatives offered by the teacher. I [Mr. L] am always the final authority, though. One of the things these kids with behavior problems really need is to know what the limits are and who is in control. They really appreciate the structure, and they thrive on it.

In a different context for ACE, Scott (2001) described how the group culture of her therapy group for African American adolescent girls created a safe and supportive environment for dealing with group conflict.

“...In one group session the members processed feelings related to a member who had been stealing from other group members in their classroom over a period of time. Prior to beginning the process of exploration and confrontation, the group members accepted my directive to acknowledge and connect with whatever parts of themselves victimizes others. This directive was given to establish a space of acceptance, empathy and equality within each member before asking them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings about the girl who was stealing. Creating a group culture that emphasizes collective work and responsibility, allows the members to approach the undesirable behavior of a peer from an internal space in which they acknowledge ownership of undesirable parts of themselves. The members were able to voice their pain and concern while also appealing for respectful and safe behavior to be generalized outside of the group.” (pg. 83).

This process helped the girls to process their emotions while also directly dealing with the unwanted behavior of a fellow classmate. These norms and rules for behavior combined Africentric and Eurocentric (group therapy) approaches.

A secondary understanding of norms and rules of behavior involves a broader sense of how to interact in and with the world versus just in school from an Africentric perspective and refers to the goal of giving students life skills to help them live more productive lives.

The African-centered teacher understands the interdependence of health, intellectual stability, and spirituality. A complete person will not develop if one of these dimensions is neglected. Teachers use exercise or breathing techniques and drills to invigorate or focus a child, respectively. Also they teach how to live independently, this means growing your own food and making your own clothes. This brings about a sense of security.
and mental goals are met, the African-centered teacher helps the student achieve spirituality. Religious beliefs are not taught but inner peace is emphasized as an aid in coping with external stresses and pressures (Rivers and Rivers, 2002 pg. 185).

5. Instructive strategies and methods

Instructive strategies and methods is the last area identified as a key area of ACE pedagogy. Empirical evidence demonstrates that specific instructive methods are compatible with certain cultural backgrounds (Hale-Benson, 1982). This is not to say that a child is limited to one particular method, but rather, certain strategies make learning less of a challenge when they are congruent with a child’s cultural or home environment.

One article in this literature review that was not labeled an Africentric program (Allen & Boykin, 1992), but was still included because it tests the assumptions of Africentric theory and cultural relevance (i.e., that when you put children in the center of their learning experience, the more they excel and are motivated). Allen and Boykin (1992) examined what they refer to as prescriptive pedagogy. Their theory of prescriptive pedagogy postulates that there are nine “Afro-cultural contextual factors” that when incorporated into the learning environment, may help to enhance learning of African American youth. They conducted experiments examining the effect of Afro-cultural contextual factors on student performance (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

In one study they looked at verve, defined as a preference for high levels of variable and intense stimulation. The authors found a main effect such that African American low-income children performed significantly better with the greater variability context than with the lesser variability context. In addition, this study found an interaction in that African American children who rated their home environments as high in sensory stimulation performed better with the greater variability format, while African American children who rated their homes as relatively low in sensory stimulation performed essentially the same across presentation types. Ultimately,
task performance was enhanced by increased verve when that was characteristic of their home environment (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

In another study by Albury (1992), both white and black low-income children from the same school and neighborhood were given a list of 26 unfamiliar words to match to a definition. Once the baseline scores were taken, race homogeneous groups of 3 children each were assigned to one of three contexts. One context, named the “individual criteria,” consisted of study instructions where students were told to study alone and if they scored better than 15 out of 25 correct at posttest, they would be given a reward. In the second context, called the “interpersonal competitive,” children were told to study alone and the highest scorer of the 3 at posttest would receive a reward. In the third context, the “traditional cooperative,” children were told to study in their group and if their group received the highest score at posttest, they each would receive a reward. The results showed that for white children, the “interpersonal competitive” group performed the best, and the worst performance occurred in the communalistic group. By contrast, black children showed more learning gains when they studied under the “communal” context followed by the “cooperative condition” and their worst performance occurred when studying alone.

Overall, these studies (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Albury, 1992) revealed that performance on a task is greatly enhanced when the mode of learning is compatible with the child’s background. These and studies like them test the assumptions of ACE and culturally relevant teaching. For example, Giddings (2003) states that teachers at the ACE school he observed described their classes as Africentric because the students learn in a dynamic cooperative manner, which is one of the documented learning styles of young African American learners. Rivers and Rivers (2002) described their approach as “multimodal,” whereby they use an eclectic
approach that is based on the needs of the children. Lecturing may be the best way to teach a
lesson one day, but encouraging communal experiential learning may be best another day.
Teachers are encouraged to adapt and improvise with all methods.

Summary of key aspects of practice.

The literature on ACE practice describes different ways in which educators seek to make
the physical setting and activities reflective of African culture (Ginwright, 2002). Not many
studies provide great detail about the structural or cosmetic aspects of their school environment.
Although some studies mention some cultural activities, the descriptions in the literature usually
do not indicate the specific content of the programs nor how they connect to ACE theory. When
it comes to the curriculum, most articles give general statements about what they do in their
school – making it very difficult for the reader to understand the Africentric nature of the
curriculum. Surprisingly, there is a paucity of articles that directly mention social relationships,
even though this is cited as a major part of the Africentric value system (Kambon, 1998; Nobles,
1980). When it is described in the literature, the focus is on respect (Rivers & Rivers, 2002) and
interdependence (Lewis et al., 2006), but very few details are given.

Perhaps one of a select few articles that provided a full description of Africentric praxis
related to norms and rules of behavior is Scott(2001). Scott employed collective work and
responsibility, which is an Africentric principle. Although she did not provide a definition, she
did state that it was a part of the Nguzo Saba, she described exactly what happened in great
detail, making the Africentric theory she used and its application very apparent. Although the
literature on instructive strategies and methods does not come directly from ACE literature, it is
interesting to note that a few educators (Giddings, 2003; Rivers & Rivers, 2002) gave general
descriptions for how they apply this knowledge in their classrooms.
In reviewing the academic literature on ACE, I discovered that most descriptions of ACE do not mention the types of theories and constructs they use and translate into practice. Therefore, there is still much to be known about ACE praxis. To understand praxis it is necessary to provide such details and explanation of 1) the goals of the program (creation of settings); 2) the Africentric principles or ACE constructs that the program is based on (theory); and 3) rich description of the actual practices/pedagogy. It is my contention that without these key pieces of information, there is no clear understanding of praxis. In terms of praxis, some articles connect theory to practice; however, the majority of descriptions of pedagogy do not connect back to the aims of the programs, nor do they connect to any Africentric framework that is found in Africentric paradigm literature.

Ultimately, this project is not intended to be an evaluation of an ACE school. I am not critiquing the effectiveness of these programs but seeking to understand and describe the ACE praxis of teachers at an Africentric school. For this reason, I chose qualitative methodology for this study.

**Overall Goals of this Study**

The overall question of the study is: “What are the ways in which teachers in Africentric schools incorporate Africentric principles into the different aspects of classroom life?” To examine this question I utilized qualitative methods to ask the following specific questions: What Africentric principles, concepts and ideas are used by ACE teachers? What practices do teachers use to enact these principles, concepts and ideas? And why do teachers incorporate such practices into aspects of their ACE pedagogy?
METHODS

Qualitative Methods

Drawing upon the work in other social sciences that apply population specific approaches to research, I chose to use a qualitative research method to study this topic for several reasons. First, as shown in anthropological and ethnic studies disciplines, qualitative research methodology is well suited for population- and ethnic-specific approaches to research that aim to understand the unique experiences of ethno-cultural groups from their own perspectives. Two fundamental principles of the Africentric worldview are 1) that it challenges hegemonic Eurocentrism in all its forms and 2) it represents the reality of African descendants and establishes normative experiences from their perspective. Secondly, quantitative methods are typically used in research projects that explicitly assume universality of human experience but implicitly rely on Eurocentric norms as the standard to which all other cultures and worldviews are compared (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Therefore, utilizing qualitative methods allowed me to capture participants’ experiences and perspectives, in their own words. The conventional positivistic approach to research dictates going into the population or research setting as the expert and objectively obtaining data without any future input from the population or setting members for how the data are understood, analyzed and reported. Scholars have noted that there is in inherent tension between doing research that attempts to respect and adhere to indigenous or alternative perspectives within the confines of a Eurocentric approach to research (Scheurich & Young, 1997). The choice of grounded theory was one that allowed for the greatest flexibility within a Eurocentric research paradigm to which the author was trained. It is evident that there is some degree of tension that exists when attempting to conduct research associated with an Africentric paradigm. It provides structures to represent the reality of African descendants and establishes norative experiences from their perspective while working within a Eurocentric
research framework. Therefore the investigator of this study attempted to step away from a positivistic approach when conducting the study.

Approach. I used a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2012), which focuses on the ways in which people, including the researcher, construct their lived experiences and interactions with the phenomenon of interest. Such an approach was used to describe and understand, from their perspective, how teachers translate ACE principles into ACE practice. Grounded theory is an appropriate qualitative research method to use when the goal is to understand a process or action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The results are thus grounded in data from interviews with ACE teachers who have experience with the phenomenon in question (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Given that ACE practice is not well documented in the mainstream scholarship, this study might help shed light upon what takes place in ACE schools as a function of the teacher, as well as provide a framework upon which further ACE research can build. Through the use of the grounded theory method, I systematically define categories and find relationships between the statements of the educators that I interviewed and the classroom practices observed. Based on my investigation, I am able to provide rich descriptions of Africentric ideas, concepts and theory and the reasons for why they get applied to the classroom setting.

Observations were utilized to corroborate and contribute more details about the context, instructional strategies and social interactions that related to this study. This choice was made for several reasons: 1. The author had no prior experience with ACE and though it would be good to experience it and become familiar with the phenomenon of interest in a real world setting before I sat down to interview teachers. This allowed me to understand things they referred to in their interviews and also probe and/or re-direct in an informed and competent
manner. 2. It was part of my own research approach as a Community Psychologist and as someone who respects and adheres to the Africentric worldview paradigm. In gaining entry into the setting, I could see the importance placed on relationships. Therefore I volunteered to help out in the classroom for a semester before any data was actually collected. I believe it contributed to more valid data as teachers opened up to me as they became more familiar with me and began to see me interact with students in ways that they thought were productive and successful.

**Sampling**

I used a critical case sampling approach (Patton, 2001) to explore the way teachers apply Africentric ideas, concepts and theory to the classroom setting at one school. Critical case sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique that is particularly useful in research with limited resources, as well as research where a single case (or small number of important cases) are likely to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2001, p. 236). For the purpose of this study, each teacher represented a case because s/he is the unit of analysis for how theory is applied to practice. Nevertheless, this study acknowledges the phenomenon of interest as embedded within the specific school context in which teachers work. Therefore, characteristics of the school were factored into how I understand resultant phenomena.

I began by working with one teacher at one school to conduct participatory classroom observations and interviews with the unit of analysis being the teacher. Observational data was not a primary focus of this study but rather used to supplement findings from interviews, allow the author and participants to become more familiar with each other, ultimately to ensure that the interview data was of the best quality (meaning that teachers felt comfortable sharing and I was
able to match what they were doing to what was said in interviews). The grounded theory approach stipulates that the sampling will ultimately be determined through simultaneous gathering and analysis of data until saturation is reached. Saturation is defined as the point when collecting data no longer provides new insight into concepts, categories, or emerging theory (Charmaz, 2012).

**School Sampling.** To select a school, I chose to take a purposive sampling approach (Patton, 2001). Theoretically, the chosen school is an excellent choice to examine and describe ACE praxis because of its experience of having been in existence for many years and because its founders are not only educators but also Africentric scholars. Betty Shabazz International Charter School (BSICS) was founded in 1997 by Dr. Carol D. Lee, Haki Madhubuti, Robert J. Dale, Soyini Walton and Anthony Daniels-Halisi. It began as New Concept School 37 years ago and is known as one of the oldest Africentric schools located on Chicago's Southside. The founders saw the 1997 introduction of charter schools in Chicago as an opportunity to provide children in the City with access to a free Africentric primary and secondary education. BSICS combines rigorous academic course work with a full Arts & Humanities program; an award winning vegetarian school breakfast and lunch program; athletics, culture and technology based afterschool programs; and summer school and camp offerings. In 2006, BSICS expanded to open a high school, the DuSable Leadership Academy campus in Bronzeville and the Barbara A. Sizemore Academy in Englewood.

The school granted me permission to conduct classroom observations and interviews in concert with volunteering at the Betty Shabazz campus. I utilized the knowledge and expertise of the director in suggesting possible teachers who met my inclusion criteria.
Inclusion criteria for teacher sampling. To be included in the study, all teachers were required to have at least 4 years experience with teaching at an Africentric school. For my supplemental observations, I was interested in working with teachers that had direct access to the same set of students throughout the day compared to the specialty teachers (performing arts, visual arts, physical education) who change students throughout the day. I interviewed teachers who taught kindergarten through eighth grade and observed teachers who taught kindergarten through sixth grades.

Teacher background. Teachers are the primary focus of this examination into ACE and therefore it is important to put ACE pedagogy within the context of teachers’ personal and professional experiences with Africentrism. A total of 4 teachers were observed and 10 teachers were interviewed for this study. Of the ten teachers who participated in this study, 6 had also worked in a mainstream school at some point in their teaching career. The number of years of teaching experience ranged from 5-31 years ($M = 13.70$, $SD = 9.34$).

Each interview began with questions about the teachers’ background. Teachers were asked questions regarding their upbringing, personal views about Africentrism, and prior teaching and professional development. To begin with their experiences as teachers, all but one of the teachers in this study had never had any specialized teacher training with regard to ACE before coming to their current school to teach. The one teacher who had experienced training stated that it was because she had taught at another ACE school before coming to the school at the central point of this study.

Therefore, none of teachers had experienced any formal training to become ACE teachers before they had come into contact with an ACE school. Interestingly, the ACE school in this study includes professional development every year that is geared toward ACE pedagogy. At the
school that is a part of this study, I spoke with teachers as well as the principal and CEO of curriculum and instruction to find out what types of professional development they offer. It was explained that, at the beginning of every school year, the teachers received two weeks of teacher orientation and training and starting in this school year (2014-2015), they received three weeks.

**Research Procedures and Data Collection**

**Procedural Details.** To learn about ACE praxis, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers as well as observed their classroom practice to uncover the process for how they link Africentric theory to practice; this includes probes for detailed descriptions of ACE practice.

After being given formal permission to speak with teachers, I contacted the first teacher suggested by the executive director based on my inclusion criteria and this teacher gave me permission to observe her class. I obtained informed consent from the teacher, and conducted participatory observations in each class. I made the choice to observe first and then interview teachers to become more informed about the school context, instructional strategies and social interactions that related to ACE. This ensured that the data obtained in interviews was of the highest quality. Memos were in two forms: 1) type written notes and 2) recorded notes that were spoken into the digital audio recorder directly after I left the class. After the first interview, the first teacher and also the principal made suggestions for subsequent classroom observations based on who would be both willing and have different teaching styles from what was already observed.

Interviews with teachers being observed were conducted towards the end of the observation period. I developed an interview guide and asked follow up questions based on the need to clarify or explain pedagogical practice observed in the classroom. Interviews were
recorded with a digital audio recorder. Transcribed interviews were de-identified. I used pseudonyms for the names of teachers; I also removed any other information that could identify the teacher or classroom when data was transcribed and/or reported.

**Interview Guide.** The semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix E) included open-ended questions designed to elicit rich and detailed descriptions about the process of applying Africentric theory to classroom practice. Because my focus was rich descriptions and details, I probed for such and made sure to have prompts in the protocol. Details included the teacher’s objective, his/her view of Africentric theory and how s/he describes the specific activity (i.e. people involved, physical setting, social interactions, and materials used). I probed for different aspects of ACE praxis identified in the literature review above (physical setting and activities, curriculum, relationships, norms and rules of behavior, and instructive strategies and methods) in order to gain a rich understanding of what teachers do in the classroom. Educators were able to reflect on their process in ways that they rarely can in the course of daily life (Charmaz, 2012). I adapted the probes for the interview guide as needed from interview to interview.

**Observation.** Observations in this study were utilized to corroborate and contribute more details about the context, instructional strategies and social interactions that related to this study. They were very beneficial in allowing the researcher to become acquainted with the students, teachers and school environment. Conducting observations also created a familiarity among students and teachers with the researcher, which greatly contributed to collecting rich and descriptive data. The observational data was not a primary focus of this study, but rather is used to supplement the findings from the interview data. All field notes were completed immediately after leaving the school building. Field notes were usually typed shortly after the observation.
On days where the investigator could not sit down and type immediately following the observation period, field notes were verbally recorded onto a digital recording device and transcribed at a later time. Observations focused solely on teacher behaviors therefore children were not the unit of analysis in this study. My notes included any details about key constructs (e.g., Africentric goals, principles, taxonomy of pedagogy), the setting and verbal or nonverbal interactions. Classroom observations were conducted two days per week for time periods that lasted for up to 4 hours.

Data Management and Analysis

Data management. All data were dated and saved in electronic file formats. Raw data for this study consisted of interview recordings, interview transcriptions and field notes. I transferred transcriptions into a qualitative data analysis software program called Atlas.ti. Interviews and observational field notes were coded as soon after their occurrence as possible.

Coding. First, I performed detailed, line-by-line open coding on transcribed interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is the part of the analysis concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text. Essentially, each line, sentence, paragraph, etc. is read in search of ideas related to the phenomenon of interest. Adjectives and adverbs indicate the properties and dimensions of a phenomenon. I searched for repeating ideas or instances where terms were used for the same concept (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). As a list of categories emerged from the data, the focus of the analysis shifted from discovering categories to verifying categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Second, I developed axial codes. Axial coding involves relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, with an emphasis on the phenomenon, causal relationships, context, action strategies and outcomes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, I linked causal statements
and searched for ways to understand the context in which these connections occurred. I attempted to make connections between phenomena (what), and causal relationships (why).

Finally, I performed **selective coding** that led to one or more core categories relating to all other categories that signify the resulting Core Themes of ACE teacher practice. This represents the researcher’s understanding of ACE teacher concepts and practice as described by the teachers in this study. They signify the application of Africentric concept, principles, and ideas and the explanation for such practices from the teacher’s own perspective.

**Data Quality**

It is important to ensure the quality of the data, analysis and interpretation by using standards appropriate for qualitative methods. Thus, credibility and justifiability of interpretations were criteria used instead of reliability and validity criteria (& Guba, 1985). These constructs reflect how well research is conducted so that, in the end, the realities of the research participants are properly represented. Peer debriefing and member checks are key techniques for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A decision not to code for reliability was made for this particular qualitative study. Instead, the researcher focused on developing codes collaboratively with key stakeholders in the African centered school community (CEO, principal, etc.), research team members and research advisors. Reliability is not necessary given the approach taken in this project given that such criteria for validity comes from “positivist” or “quantitative” methodological paradigm. Researchers assert that qualitative research should not be judged by the same criteria as quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Madill, Jordan, & Shirley 2000).

**Peer debriefing.** The purpose of peer debriefing is to make explicit emerging aspects of the study design, research process and data analysis that would otherwise remain implicit
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I set up regular debriefing meetings with my advisor and research team members, who served as debriefers for me over the course of this study.

**Member checking.** The purpose of member checking is to allow the researcher to check her understanding of the constructed realities of research participants by testing analytic themes, categories and interpretations with participants. To check my interpretation of ACE practice, I met with selected key informants after data analysis to determine the extent to which my interpretation of praxis matched that of the participants or key informants. Key informants included the principal, the CEO of curriculum, and an alum of the school who is currently a Clinical and Community psychologist. There were no discrepancies however meeting with informants allowed me to further understand the dimensions of the core themes and highlight key concepts, principles and ideas that make the emergent themes in the data.

**Audit trail.** The purpose of an audit trail is to keep a thorough record of the research process to the extent that someone can “audit” or review the research steps in order to justify interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My audit trail includes the raw data (interview and field note recordings and transcripts) and all other materials created (e.g., tables, diagrams and/or charts) related to coding, categorizing, hypothesizing, interpreting and theorizing.
RESULTS

This study sought to identify and understand how Africentric concepts are applied to teaching practice. It began with the following research questions: “What are the Africentric principles, concepts and ideas used by ACE teachers?” “What practices do educators use to enact these principles, concepts and ideas?” And “Why do teachers incorporate such practices into aspects of ACE pedagogy?” The following results reflect what teachers communicated as most central to their ACE pedagogy in response to these questions. In order to contextualize the following results, it is important to have a general understanding of the upbringing, personal experience with Africentric thought and prior training of these teachers as they bear upon the findings of this study. When asked how they were introduced to Africentric perspective, most teachers had become involved in some way with Africentric thought prior to becoming teachers. Many were introduced to it in college or brought up this way; that is, even though their parents did not have a name for it, they parented according to the principles of Africentrism. I asked teachers, “On a scale of 1-10, how important is an Africentric way of life to you personally and why?” All teachers gave an answer of 8 or above. In general, most teachers felt Africentrism was important to them personally because it grounded them in who they were culturally, provided a sense of purpose and because it was how they grew up and was a major part of their overall sense of identity. Those who gave an 8 expressed that it is important to be open to other cultures so that you do not lose sight of the fact that we are all human beings first. Teachers in this school had a very inclusive view of Africentrism. It involved anything that was associated not only with the continent but also people of African descent in the Diaspora. I also found it noteworthy that all 10 teachers were parents and at some point had children who had attended the school in this study.
Only one teacher had prior training with regard to ACE before coming to their current school. The professional development at the current school includes both an African centered component and a curriculum and instruction component. The African centered component involved two main parts. First, a speaker gives a lecture. Teachers reported that, through the years, they have had various speakers including notable Africentric scholars such as Dr. Asa Hilliard III. Examples of lecture topics have included the history of African student education, ways that children can influence the world around them (e.g. lecture on action research with students as a form of activism) and the psycho-social impact of media on youth. All of the topics are meant to guide the directions of teachers in the upcoming school year. The second portion of the African centered component of professional development involves reviewing the Virtues of Ma'at, the value system, and the principles of Nguzo Saba with a power point presentation. This is followed up with activities to help teachers develop a clear understanding of these values or to remind them of how those values are played out in teacher-to-student, student-to-student and teacher-to-family interactions and at the school in general. Lastly, when new teachers come in, they work with the performing arts director to learn how to incorporate African cultural traditions and approaches to working with children.

Core Themes

I examined the concepts, ideas and beliefs held by participants to eventually arrive at four themes that capture the pedagogical style of Africentric teachers in this study. These results are organized around four core themes, which are: 1) Knowledge of Culture, 2) Village Concept, 3) Teacher Characteristics and 4) Holistic Learning. These four major themes show that specific Africentric principles, concepts and ideas are primarily focused on knowing one’s culture, developing a psychological sense of community and reliance upon tangible support from the
school community and extended networks. In addition, the data revealed that there are certain qualities associated with this pedagogical style that help to facilitate teaching in an Africentric way. Lastly, the data revealed a pedagogical style that includes a variety of student centered teaching approaches that are dynamic, holistic and multi-faceted. These approaches not only target educational goals but also the psycho-social-behavioral development of the student as well.

The author acknowledges that there are inherent contradictions involved in breaking down a cultural phenomenon based in holism into coding categories and therefore found the task to be quite difficult. The descriptions and excerpts represent my attempt to convey, to the best of my ability, what emerged from these data. Within each of the four major themes, there are descriptions and excerpts that reflect what teachers communicated as most central to their ACE pedagogy. Although there were many to choose from, the excerpts reported below were picked because they were most representative of the themes. Therefore, within each of the four major themes, there are descriptions and excerpts that link Africentric principles, concepts and ideas to teacher practice in order to show what these practices are and why they are employed. Given that there is so little published about the application of Africentric concepts in the classroom, the results here provide examples of the kinds of practices teachers employ. Lastly, the descriptions and excerpts that link theory to practice also reveal the reasons for why teachers use particular practices as part of their Africentric pedagogy.

Although every teacher interview touched upon the major themes captured in the data, the overall intent of this qualitative analysis was not to quantify the number of times participants endorsed each code. Therefore quantitative analysis of counts and/or percentages will not be reported. In making choices as a qualitative researcher, the author asserts that such quantification
does not validate one’s findings since grounded theory is not about generalizability, but for identifying issues of concern across participants (Charmaz, 2012).

1. Knowledge of Culture (KOC)

In interviews, teachers were first asked to tell me which Africentric principles, concepts and ideas they use in their classroom. An idea that came up with every teacher as an overarching principle of ACE is captured by the theme I am calling Knowledge of Culture (KOC). It was stated repeatedly, in a variety of ways by every participant in this study, that learning about their own culture is an important component to the education of African American students.

KOC as a concept centers on the belief that culture is an important contribution of ACE to African American students. Teachers expressed that African Americans in general and young students in particular suffer from a disconnect from their culture, which is further exacerbated by a lack of or misrepresentation of cultural content in the mainstream school system (e.g., curriculum, textbooks, school environment). Teachers feel there is a need for their students to not only know who there are but also be proud of it. They emphasized providing a foundation for students on which they can grow into healthy individuals and be productive members of their community.

Specifically, KOC represents concepts, ideas and beliefs related to 1) Being grounded in African culture and feeling connected to the Continent, 2) Individual and group identity as it relates to developing a positive view of people of African descent, 3) Knowing who you are as essential to having a sense of purpose and direction in life, and similarly 4) The principle of Sankofa, which, as stated before, represents the idea that in order to go forward you must know about the past and understand the present (Akoto & Akoto, 2000; Shockley & Frederick, 2010).
EXCERPT #1

Culture is intrinsically in each person and so I kind of equate that to if lions are among lions they are going to act like lions without being told but if a lion is amongst a pack of wolves then he might question how he looks and acts. I’m saying that to say there was something lost amongst us, during the slave trade when we were displaced throughout the world. So I think that there is an origin that we are away from, even if the traditions in Africa may not be suitable for today, and just to know where you come from and to have direction and purpose is to me Africentricity.

Teachers stated that culture is a missing yet necessary component of traditional education. They associate the need for “knowledge of culture” with the idea that African Americans have experienced an unnatural and extreme disconnection from their African roots. Teachers expressed that African American students are at a disadvantage for healthy development of their sense of self and that ACE addresses this issue. I initially labeled this as Knowledge of Self (KOS); however, upon further reflection, I concluded that the African centered perspective defines the “self” in relation to the group. Therefore, by definition, one’s self identity is connected to group identity. Therefore Knowledge of Self was changed to Knowledge of Culture (KOC).

The following excerpts demonstrate that teachers feel there is a need to not only know who you are but also be proud of it due to the above-mentioned disconnect between many African Americans and their culture and ancestral homeland. Excerpt #3 represents the connection many teachers feel exists between positive development and their connection to and acknowledgement of their African heritage.

EXCERPT #2

I would say being proud of who you are and knowing your roots and your purpose. I remember one year the students were surprised because I told them they were African. I think they just had never heard anyone tell them that and it's important to me that I let them know that. I give them an example of a boy that you see who has Asian features. You are probably going to call him Chinese. And if that is where he is from and his people are from there- he
doesn't have to be born in China, I tell them he is still going identify as Chinese because that is where his people are from. So I try to do my best to let them know that just because you are not born in Africa doesn't mean you are not from there. Your ancestors were African when they arrived they were not slaves – they were African.

**EXCERPT #3**

Because it's like that saying if you don't know who you are and where you come from how can you know where you're going. And I just think that if you only identify with being Black in America and you don't have a connection to your roots then you are basically lost. And I think there are so many people who are disconnected from who they are, or who I believe they are. They might think that is who they are. I just, from being around the elders in the village [referring to the elders who have founded and continue to provide guidance at the school, which is also being referred to as a village] especially, I just see they have that connection to the land and I just feel like you can't really grow if you don't know. At the end of the day everyone is from Africa as descendants from the Original Man and Woman.

Finally, the following excerpt demonstrates the teacher’s belief that having knowledge of one’s culture can serve as both an initial foundation upon which one is rooted, as well as a continuing source of inspiration and strength as students go on to fulfill life goals.

**EXCERPT #4**

I would say one basic concept is be proud of who you are, be proud of your being because its not an accident that you've come into existence as a dark person. You do have a purpose and you have within you whatever your biggest dream is- you can achieve it.

**KOC and Practice**

*KOC* is put into practice in a myriad of ways by the respondents, both explicitly and implicitly. Teachers expressed that culture can easily be applied to practice. Some of the most often cited practices were teaching students African history beyond the limited scope found in mainstream textbooks (e.g., African history that pre-dates enslavement by Europeans, biographies of accomplished people of African descent and teaching about events from different points of view), affirming positive messages about self worth, providing positive representations of people of African descent and promoting a sense of connection between students and the continent of Africa. Observations and interviews also revealed that these practices were supplemented with decorating classrooms with colorful African fabric, African cultural symbols
and pictures of people and places representing indigenous Africans and their descendants in the Diaspora.

**KOC** in practice was seen as employing methods that connect students to the history of Africa and its people. Teachers emphasized African culture and history through curriculum content, classroom design and experiential learning. Explicitly KOC is put into practice, primarily, by teaching historical content in the curriculum (class lessons, history fairs, research assignments and various other projects).

The purpose of **KOC** practice is to introduce and create cultural connections for students in ways that are not usually available in other areas of their lives. Teachers intentionally search out the stories, periods and people that are not commonly presented in mainstream society yet are a source of inspiration. Observations and interviews revealed that the way teachers decorated classrooms was a part of practice. Teachers wanted to immerse students in the symbols, colors, fabrics, images and sometimes even the sounds associated with African culture and people of African descent. Experiential learning provides tangible experiences that students can associate with the places and people they learn about culturally. This usually took place in the form of field trips to historical sites and museums, inviting notable speakers and artists to the school and visiting remarkable places that are associated with African culture. For example, in the past, students graduating from the 8th grade were taken to the continent of Africa as a class field trip. Cultural practices and values are also promoted in the larger school context. Another example of this is the concept of unity, which is represented in multiple ways such as having all students and teachers wear school uniforms or African clothing. The colors red, black, and green represent the unity of Africa and all its people—so therefore, the school has chosen those colors as its school colors, which is also reflected in the colors of the uniforms. Therefore, the practices that have
been mentioned at the teacher level are being reinforced in the school context. Ultimately, the idea is, if the school community provides students with a foundation that supports a positive and inspirational view of self and self in relation to one’s group, then it will help them develop their own positive identity and a more positive regard for the larger group of African people.

The following set of excerpts reveals practices employed for the purpose of showing students positive representations of people of color and connecting them to the continent and people of Africa. As part of a critique of the African American experience in the U.S., many of the teachers in this study identified the inability to “see oneself” in various representations (e.g., print, television, news media, etc.) or to only see negative representations of people of African descent as detrimental to African American students. They believe that self-validation and validation of one’s culture in the world impacts identity development. This issue becomes particularly salient in the school context when self-representation is missing or distorted within the curriculum and culture of mainstream schools (e.g. textbooks, historical narratives, school protocols).

**EXCERPT #1**

*So when you think about the kids knowing who they are, one way it comes up is in the projects we have them do. For example we had one where we asked them what African or African-American hero inspires you? So then you go from that—this person inspires me because—now, what can you do to carry on that legacy? That sort of thing. And another thing we do is present them with images of different Africans or African-Americans. We have the ancestor wall where we put up pictures of those people in history who have passed on but we want the students to remember and learn from. And for our African history project most of the time I create a list because we don’t want Martin Luther King; we want — I’ve had to come up with a list of people they haven’t heard of. Yeah. And I’ve also done inventors, so that they know the contributions of Africans and African-Americans in society, the things that we’ve already come up with. And so with that invention project, at first we explore African-American inventors, and then you come up with an invention. You create your own invention.*

**EXCERPT #2**
One concept is to look back at those who had the same types of struggles. I speak in terms of children since we are dealing with education. Children are being bombarded and have to fight against violence in their neighborhood, images that are not healthy and are not holistic, and all kinds of other negative things. Well you can look back at the fact that there are some people in our history who triumphed. Let’s just take the founder of the school, he found his refuge and way out through education - reading and writing poetry and then he has the idea of building institutions. This shows that once you know what makes you strong then you can give back by using it in the community.

Excerpt #2 is a more detailed example of KOC practice. It was part of an explanation about an assignment where students had to research information about the founder of their school. They were tasked with developing interview question about a business the founder had started. Later, they went to the place of business and met with the Administrators and were able to tour and see business operations. The teacher felt that this assignment provided lessons that were two-fold. First, it allowed students to see what someone who came from a challenging background could achieve. Second, it showed them that just because a person becomes successful, that person does not have to leave the neighborhood. One student’s investigation led to the discovery that, at one time, this business had been a million dollar corporation. The teacher wanted the students to see that the founder of the school was running a successful business in the “hood.”

EXCERPT #3

It’s very important for children to see themselves. When we were younger all of the pictures and books that I had in school were of Caucasians. Most of the books I have here have images of Africans and other people of color because there is still a stigma that we are not beautiful or smart or whatever. They need images of success and I’m not talking about Oprah I’m talking about the little girl in the book who just successfully resolved conflict. They need to see that and have that connection to themselves.

The final excerpt extends this idea with an emphasis on experiencing the sights, sounds, tastes, etc. of the continent of Africa as a way to facilitate that reconnection.
EXEMPLARY #4

I know that one movie, Roots, it deals with life before slavery. It briefly provides a visual of what Africa was like before the slave trade. With them being in the villages and then as the movie evolves it deals with the triumphs and tragedies of slavery, it gives a visual of what Africa was like. So now the children don’t have to guess, their young minds are trying to grasp…if I came from Africa what did that look like? How would the people have looked, what was their hair like? I’ve had the experience and even talked to people who have gone to Africa and seen people that look like their relatives. I think that’s a visual confirmation like “Ahhh! I’ve heard that I come from this place, now I’m starting to really believe this because this person looks like my uncle Joe or my auntie. And some of the sights and sounds of Africa, some of the dances, the music, all of that, you see where you come from, your origin, and THAT appeals to all 5 of your senses.

Conclusion: KOC

KOC, which includes having knowledge of one’s culture and a sense of connection to the continent of Africa, was considered essential to the teachers in this study. Knowing who you are as understood from an Africentric worldview, involves developing a positive view of self as well as “in relation to the group” (i.e., people of African descent). Furthermore, there is a deeply held belief that KOC assists African American students in becoming well-rounded and grounded in their ancestral history, culture, values, and traditions, which are all seen as contributing to the development of a positive sense of self.

2. Village Concept

We have all heard the saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” Well this is not simply an old aphorism – it is an African proverb that the teachers and school in this study take literally. This proverb is an indication of the next major theme called the Village Concept. This theme centers around what it means to be a community in an Africentric context. It suggests that the idea of relationships, duty and being in accord are of primary significance; therefore, there is a strong emphasis on valuing people, responsibility and commitment to the group, and a consensus about values and goals for students.
**Village Concept** encapsulates multiple concepts that ACE teachers felt were important at this particular school, including establishing a community environment (e.g., school and classroom climate) that emphasizes the primacy of relationships so much so that many of the teachers likened their relationships with their students to a parent-child relationship. Specific Africentric principles of unity, cooperative economics and collective work were also important as well as the reliance on assistance from an extended network (e.g., volunteers, alumni, parents, etc.).

**Village Concept** involves practices among students, teachers and staff that encourage a communal climate within the school. Examples of such practice include calling adults “Mama” and “Baba” and allowing and accepting hugs. **Village Concept** is also facilitated by supportive relationships as evidenced in teacher-to-student and teacher-to-teacher relationships. Nevertheless, the data suggest that some teachers reported that existing teacher-to-parent relationships need improvement. Teachers practice the **Village Concept** in order to help students become open and receptive to the teachers and to learning. The idea of “giving back to the community” is also a salient motivator. Teachers hope that students will take what they learn and share it or some other gift with people who have not been exposed to this way of life or to reinforce it with those who have.

This concept is undoubtedly one of the most important, second only to **KOC**, for teachers at this ACE school and encapsulates the following: 1) Establishing a community environment in both the school and classroom, 2) The primacy of relationships (including being respectful, committed and displaying good character in relationships), 3) Nguzo Saba principles of unity, collective work and responsibility and cooperative economics, 4) The importance of getting
assistance from an extended network of people in the community (e.g., volunteers, alumni, parents, etc.). 5) The idea that teaching is likened to parenting and 6) The importance of establishing rituals that support the culture of the “village”.

The first excerpt expresses the importance of establishing a communal climate. This is consistent with the Africentric worldview that places the emphasis on the whole versus the part. The next excerpt expounds on the impact of the above-mentioned practice of calling adults “Mama” and “Baba”.

**EXCERPT #1**

*For me its about developing a community environment – not individualism but this classroom is a community – we are communal…we work in harmony, that’s very big for me that we actually live by the virtues of Ma’at –harmony, order, balance, truth, justice, that’s what we strive for day –to-day and that is pretty much what we do here.*

The next excerpt represents the belief that relationships are primary. According to teachers, the *Village Concept* means there is a sense of connection to the community as evidenced by the strong bond between teachers and students that lasts even after students graduate.

**EXCERPT#2**

*They say “It takes a village to raise a child” and a lot of people believe it, well we actually apply it. The relationships that we have established with our students so that they can understand that they are protected, that we are here for more than just their education, that we care for them as people, it creates a certain bond with them.*

*The relationships that we have developed have lasted forever, you know within our alumni, when they leave and go off to high school and college…when they take a day off or they have a holiday at school they come back to the village. We may have 10 to 15 high school students here, helping out in the school village, communicating with everybody. They’re being pulled for whatever—maybe it’s to talk to the current students, or to do something else.*

*I never went back to my elementary or high school but the relationships that are created*
here—and also the experiences that were created here that they’re part of—has drawn them back to the school village, because they feel like this is their home. This is not just a school, it’s a home.

Interestingly, the idea that teaching is likened to parenting was very prevalent in this sample of teachers. The next excerpt speaks to the familiar and familial tone of the school environment. It also suggests this is one of the things that appeals to people who decide to become teachers at this ACE school.

**EXCERPT #3**

*I think this school is such a good fit for me because I’m a mother and I feel like I’m being a mom when I’m there because when I’m at home I’m teaching and I’ve always taught and I feel like its just a natural extension of who I am. Because I approach them as my children so it is just an extension of that.*

At this point, it is important to address the school setting as a context. Through observations at the school and reviewing documents published by and about the school, it is clear that certain traditions have existed for many years that impact a sense of community at this school beyond teacher practice. One noteworthy tradition I observed involves the use of ritual to reinforce values and goals through repetition. For example, one such ritual is the *Unity Circle* that requires that all faculty, administrators and students participate. It is mostly student led and involves pledges, affirmations, and the option for anyone to come to the center and make announcements. As indicated by its name, this is meant to establish the Nguzo Saba principle of Unity by allowing people to connect through seeing each other, holding hands, and speaking in unison at the beginning and end of every school day. This is done every day that the school is in session.

Another tradition I would be remiss in not explaining is the practice of calling all the adults in the building “Mama” and “Baba”, which are terms used in West African language to
denote mother and father. Students are to attach the adult’s first name to the “title” and so, if your name is Delores, then you would be called Mama Delores and if your name is Frank, then you would be called Baba Frank. This rule goes for everyone in the building, from the janitor to the CEO of the school. This rule serves two functions: 1) because all students and adults must use this nomenclature, it removes titles and hierarchy among adults and instead promotes that all adults are to be respected equally as authority figures; additionally 2) it expands each adult’s role and responsibility toward the students beyond whatever traditional duties are expected as a function of their job description. Therefore, the janitor is not just there to clean up but may also be expected to address behavior management, assist in areas where needed and is welcome to offer his own expertise outside of the janitorial role (see excerpt below for more details).

Village Concept and Practice

*Village Concept*, when put into practice, involves establishing a community environment where the whole is greater than the individual in the school as well as the classroom. For this sample of teachers, it clearly involved creating a climate that feels like a family. *Village Concept* represents creating a psychological sense of community and establishing conditions in the school that help students to thrive.

As mentioned above, conceptually, *Village Concept* represents creating a sense of community while, when put into practice, involves providing a range of types of support to students in order to help them thrive (not just academically but also socially and emotionally). It also extends to the way teachers and other staff interact with each other and the level of connectedness that is needed to perform the act of teaching. *Village Concept*, when put into practice at this school, can be seen in school ritual, customs and assistance from an extended network of people such as volunteers, alumni, parents, etc.
The first excerpt represents how certain customs and traditions that are practiced at this particular school contribute to the *Village Concept* within the school setting.

**EXCERPT #1**

*One thing that contributes to the village environment is the way we address each other. The fact that we don’t call each other Mr. or Mrs. and instead we call each other “Mama” and “Baba,” it creates a different attitude that you have toward this person - it’s just the use of words. It doesn’t alienate- you’re not a stranger. When you call somebody “Mama” enough times, it clicks that this person is like a mother figure, is like a mama to me. When she says things, even if redirecting me, it’s out of a nurturing, it’s out of love, versus somebody’s just trying to get me in trouble.*

The next excerpt represents different dimensions of the *Village Concept* including sense of community and connection, collective work and responsibility - as evidenced by assistance from the constellation of people connected to the school.

**EXCERPT #2**

*Our building keepers interact with the children everyday and it’s not like ‘Oh that’s the janitor he just picks up the trash so I’m not going to respect them.’ Our children don’t see the building keepers like that. They call him Baba just like they call the teachers or the principal because that’s the circle. So when the Baba comes to you and says “why did you throw that piece of paper on the floor? Pick it up.” Or the Baba comes to me and says ‘I want to work with the children on Robotics.’ Everyone from Baba who cleans the rooms to the CEO is child centered and has an impact on the students.*

The next two excerpts represent the primacy of relationships and the existence of support as ways to enact the Nguzo Saba principles of unity, collective work and responsibility and cooperative economics. According teachers, the *Village Concept* is demonstrated by a sense of connection and support for various members of the community, as evidenced by teacher-to-student and teacher-to-teacher relationships. The last excerpt suggests that teachers feel that existing teacher-to-parent relationships need more of this sense of connection and support.
EXCERPT #3 Relationships: Teacher-to-Teacher

The collaboration. One thing about African centered, at least at this school, the teachers have genuine care and concern for one another. There is no such thing as get your own. If I have, then you have and that is the mentality. And that goes for all of the teachers if I have knowledge then you have knowledge if I have resources than you have resource. If I have materials then you will have. So it's the support that we have from not only the principal but from one another, and everyone is encouraged.

EXCERPT #4 Relationships: Teacher-to-Parent

It’s about relationship. I inform every parent that they are welcome to stop by my classroom whenever they want, they don’t have to set up an appointment and tell me that they are on their way because when you come in you will see what we do and you are going to see your child learning. One of the things that we have to do as a community is reach out to the parents more, its only so much that we can do here we have them 6-7 hours a day, but when they go home (and I’m not saying that they are bad parents, because I’m a parent and a teacher), we want it to carry over. Let the good from home carry over to school and the good from school carry over to home. We need to have a better connection with the parents.

Conclusion: Village Concept

Simply put, the Village Concept demonstrates how this particular Africentric school goes about cultivating a sense of community. This core concept is generally understood at the group level (i.e., school setting); nevertheless, it applies to the individual in the form of working together, identifying as a group and supporting one another. The school and its teachers hope to instill in students a personal responsibility to give back to “the community.”

3. Teacher Characteristics

Village Concept highlights the environment and context of the schooling process with an emphasis on supportive relationships and a sense of duty and responsibility to the students. Teacher Characteristics is different in that it represents attributes and characteristics that emphasize people in the setting. This theme differs from the previous themes in that it does not represent specific Africentric principles, concepts or ideas; nevertheless, it does represent human
qualities and characteristics that are noted by teachers as something essential to the facilitation of ACE pedagogy. Although these qualities and characteristics can be assumed by anyone, the emphasis is on how they are expressed with an Africentric mindset and within an Africentric context.

This major theme, labeled *Teacher Characteristics*, includes the following attributes: 1) caring/sensitive/nurturing, 2) accepting (of a particular role), 3) flexible, 4) passionate and committed. As stated before, this theme describes human qualities and characteristics that teachers believe help to cultivate relationships with students as well as facilitate ACE pedagogy. ACE teachers believe that, when these qualities exist, they serve to foster a sense of belonging to school and creatively put ACE concepts into practice to enhance the educational as well as psycho-social experiences of students. Therefore, the section below attempts to represent *Teacher Characteristics* as an array of ways in which the above-mentioned qualities and characteristics might manifest in the school setting to facilitate educational goals.

Excerpts #1-3 reflect the *caring, nurturing and support* that teachers feel is an important component to meeting the academic need of their students. Excerpts #1 and #2 demonstrate general ways in which teachers are *caring, nurturing and supportive* similar to those in the section above. Excerpt #3 provides more detail regarding specific acts that show students that they care.

**EXCERPT #1**

*I would say that once you have established yourself as a person who cares, and it’s the little things you do for them without anyone looking, doing something special just for them you win their heart and their minds and so I say that to say that students will blossom once they open up their hearts to you. Once they feel that you have their best interest at heart.*

**EXCERPT #2**
Sometimes a hug will go a long way or letting the child get an extra apple, just asking them did you eat? And letting them go down to the cafeteria before they start their day. So it’s the day-to-day things that are beyond their control, once they get passed the basic needs and they know that someone cares, then learning becomes that much more easier.

EXCERPT #3

…it is the little things I do with the children to make them see how valuable, special and important they are to me and to this world. I try to tell them "you are very talkative, one day you will be a great orator" or "you are very creative with your hands, may be you will be a fantastic artist.” In some way you will make a difference in this world. And I want the difference you make to be a positive difference. Outside of my room I have a board that says, “the children in this class will graduate from college in 2026,” and I tell them you are going to college and God willing, if I’m still here I’m going to be at your college graduation to say to you, I remember when you were in kindergarten. Some children are graduating now that I’ve worked with and I always hear from them. “Mama, remember you said you would come to my graduation.” This past year I went to a graduation in Mississippi and before when the young lady invited me she said, “I know you are not really coming” but I went to her graduation because I promised.

Another quality that I termed role acceptance, refers to a teacher’s identification with and willingness to fulfill roles and duties that are outside of what is conventionally expected of mainstream teachers. Excerpt #4 demonstrates role acceptance put into practice by describing the types of supportive roles and duties some teachers are willing to fulfill in this ACE school. Except #5 represents a combination of being caring, nurturing and supportive and also accepting roles that are outside of the scope of schoolteacher.

EXCERPT #4

…You just have teachers that are passionate that end up here, the kind with the type of personality where you bring kids to your house and they’re like your extended family. You genuinely care about the kids and so you adopt kids, basically.

EXCERPT #5

It’s the type of support that we give our students as well. We do home visits. We are accessible to our students, like, they’re able to call us at home. I have students that call me to ask me to come pick them up in the morning, you know, people that I live close to, especially during the
winter times.

The following excerpt shows that some teachers understand the quality of being flexible as an intuitive and fluid process that is based on their connection with individual students.

EXCERPT #6

Some people may call it a teachable moment. When I come in if the something is telling me “address homelessness today” [teacher says it as if someone is talking to them] then no matter what I have planned I need to incorporate a conversation about homelessness in some way. And maybe it is because one of my children has just become homeless but I'm not sitting around asking anyone if they are homeless, I'm just following what I know I need to do, um, I can come in and have an entire math lesson ready, and spirit will tell me to teach it this way. The lesson plan is a guide, but you teach based on what you get from the students or what you know they need, their energy, what you have observed from them, but most importantly what you're inner person is telling you.

The above excerpt suggests a way of being flexible through fluidity and a holistic connection to spirit as information source. The next two excerpts, when combined, demonstrate the importance of being patient and understanding when it comes to the process of learning in general. This Africentric teacher relates it to how she treats people and feels that one way to treat students well is to be diligent in her duties as a teacher. Therefore, this teacher prefers to ensure that students really understand a concept before the class moves on. The next two quotes demonstrate how the practice of being flexible and patient with students could have long lasting effects on student learning.

EXCERPT #7A

...there is a saying that it won’t matter in a hundred years what kind of car you had or house you lived in but how you treated a person, they will always remember that, and that’s what I want to be remembered for, for how I treated you. I’ve seen how children have really said okay now I see why you wanted us to understand that because everything spirals and if you don’t really get why, um, sound travels or how it travels, for example, then later on you won’t understand about molecules and how they move, when you are in high school or college or understand the Doppler effect. You may think well Mama X is rough when it comes to us really getting a concept, she really wants us to understand but over the years, I've had students
come back and say I remember when you taught us the Doppler Effect and they can tell me what I did or said.

It is worth noting that, through observations of this classroom, I did witness the point this teacher makes about how often alumnae of all ages would come back just to visit her class and say hello. In addition, the same teacher followed up the previous statement by stating that time constraints and pressures that originate at the district level are a barrier to manifesting the quality of being patient as students learn. This teacher explains what it was like to teach at the school before the school joined the school district as a charter. She describes how, when it was independent, teachers were able to be patient and flexible with students.

EXCERPT #7B

When it was a private school if a student didn’t understand a concept e.g. pairs, that this is a pair of shoes, we took the time to explain it until they really grasped a concept. It was more flexible and it was truly a No Child Left Behind situation. Now we don’t have that freedom, well to some extent we do but we have to cover so much in a trimester. As a charter school under CPS everything is in a time slot so now we have to say if a child doesn’t get the concept on blending in the 4th week, it maybe covered again in the 6th/7th week but we have to keep moving, they may not remember what they didn’t get in that 4th week so when we revisit in 6th week it becomes a wider gap of understanding. The children excelled with the old method.

The excerpts below represent an idea echoed by many teachers in this study, that being a teacher and especially an ACE teacher is similar to a “calling.” Teachers stated it was fulfilling and described it as something they are “meant to do,” in spite of the challenges that come along. Therefore, there was a resounding message of having “passion” and being “committed” to the students and to their work. Finally, the last excerpt represents multiple characteristics suggesting that teachers have a complex idea of what it means to be Africentric educators and to do the work that they do.

EXCERPT #8
So I just think it's something that is just in the, something we are drawn to this African centered education, you have to have a passion for it and a love, if not you will not appreciate what is being done here, and you won’t do it to the fullest.

EXCERPT #9

Africentric education is love. You don’t hear that in schools. You have to first and foremost have a genuine love for the children and then love what you do. You have to love your culture – respect it. And love and respect those who are with you teaching - that’s the collaboration. You can’t be prideful in an African centered environment – you have to be humble. You have to be innovative and creative because the children are.

**Conclusion: Teacher Characteristics**

Teacher Characteristics reveal the ways in which teachers express certain qualities they think are important to teaching ACE. Being caring, nurturing and supportive, creative, flexible and able to accept duties and roles not conventionally required of teachers were identified as a necessary set of characteristics. In this section, I highlighted ways that teachers were able to provide detailed and specific qualities that they believe impact the academic, social and emotional experiences of students and teachers at this ACE school. Therefore, these qualities and characteristics are not simply about meeting the needs of the students but also have an impact on the transactional nature of the education process that occurs between teacher and student, which is important in ACE.

4. **Student Centered Teaching**

**Student Centered Teaching** as a major theme represents how ACE teachers in this study conceptualize their teaching style as it relates to their theories about how African American children learn. It focuses on understanding and addressing the needs of African American students. This theme relates to the notion that most mainstream schools teach children based in a Eurocentric framework with practices that are most conducive to the learning styles associated
with White middle class students. This theme represents teachers’ perspectives about what makes the learning process a good fit for their students culturally, socially and intellectually.

**Student Centered Teaching** has multiple underlying dimensions that are aimed at teacher practice that focus on the learning needs of African American students. These include: 1) Holistic Teaching, 2) African American Child Centered Approaches 3) Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices, and 4) Multi-faceted Approaches. Also, there is a distinction to be made between *Teacher Characteristics* and this current theme. In **Student Centered Teaching**, the focus is on the learning process that happens at school, while **Teacher Characteristics** focus on the impact that certain teacher qualities and characteristics might have on the student-to-teacher connection as a means of facilitating student learning. Ultimately, it is about exposing the students to learning experiences that meet their academic, social and emotional needs.

**Student Centered Teaching** highlights the active part that teachers play in the learning process of their students. When it is put into practice, it means making learning conducive to African American students through attention to curriculum content and instructional methods. Teachers reported such practices as teaching holistically rather than breaking lessons up by subjects, incorporating song and dance into lessons and behavioral management and creating opportunities for group work where conducive to learning but also competition that still benefits a group rather than just the individual. There were many examples that demonstrated the efforts on the part of teachers to provide students with something different that represents their culture and way of being while also meeting the mainstream academic requirements of their school district.

**Holistic teaching** refers to efforts on the part of the teacher to present curriculum content
that goes beyond the standard academic subjects of reading, math, science, etc. Teachers spoke of wanting to have a deeper impact on the personal development of their students, and thus, they cover subjects and topics that can assist students personally or present new experiences to them. **Holistic teaching** involves attending to the development of social and emotional skills that help students cope with the challenges that exist both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, this approach to learning refers to teaching that can be applied to various dimensions of “real” life.

**EXCERPT #1**

…I think holistically, so it’s not just my job to teach Little Johnny his ABC's or how to read. It’s my job to ensure that if little Johnny has an issue I plant a seed so when he is faced with someone trying to sell him drugs, or he is faced with a young lady who is trying to trap him into doing whatever he can make a qualitative decision based on some things he experienced before, even if it is just a conversation. That is the whole child.

**EXCERPT #2**

And so that’s what I do with that. Of course, balance, is another virtue of Ma’at, is you have to learn how to balance the homework in both classes, learn how to balance your emotions. So, everything we do has to do with the inner child and the outer child and I’m preparing them for out there, as I say.

**EXCERPT #3**

Because I’m teaching them that there are things in life that are known and some children know more things than others because they are privy to that information. And so, again, the things that I do, they all have a purpose whether it’s arranging the desks, I just taught them about Feng Shui….and so I expose my students to things like that. And, of course, a child's prior knowledge plays a part in it because they were saying "Feng Shui, what?" And so I explained the purpose to them by asking do you know how you can come into a room and you can feel a vibe or when you rearrange things in your home or wear different clothes, do they feel right? And so as our future leaders I want them to understand, because will be running the world one day.

There is a literature on the learning styles of African American children that suggests mainstream education is not conducive to the way low-income African American students who grow up in urban environments learn (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Albury, 1992; Boykin, et. al,
1997). This literature found that the learning environments and instructive methods most likely to engage African American students should include emotionality, variability, novelty, active participation, and sensory stimulation that integrates movement, rhythm, music and dance.

*African American Child Centered Approaches* suggests that these teachers have some understanding of the needs of African American students. Such needs are not typically known or addressed in mainstream schools, which are not designed to be student centered and certainly not designed with African American students in mind. Teachers attempted to develop assignments that not only met curriculum requirements but also engaged students.

**EXCERPT #4**

*I think that teachers probably teach the way they learn so I like to be up and moving around – engaged. I know that there is a place for sitting through a lecture but there is also a place for movement. Not all of my lessons are like this but the majority….I try to lean in the direction of the Magic school bus with Ms. Frizzle the way she says “get your hands dirty.” So that’s what I try to do, get the students involved beyond the book.*

**EXCERPT #5**

*I try to make my class memorable. I want my students to be able to say years from now what they learned in my class. What stands out, of course, is different for each personality and what stimulates one may not stimulate another but I think when you bring something to life, and make things interesting then you will be able to recall something you did. How many people actually recall a worksheet experience? I learned this by doing page 278. But they are more likely to say I learned a little bit more about math by doing the Business Bizarre [an experiential learning project meant to simulate a traditional African marketplace where students developed a business plan and sold products at the school].*

**EXCERPT #6**

*A couple of years ago my children and I took a family vacation to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American history in Detroit. Before we went, my family and I had already viewed Roots in its entirety a few years before, so when we went there we were able to make connections between the movie and the exhibits they saw at the museum. The museum has all kinds of exhibits that just brought home certain parts of Roots. They have an actual remake of a slave ship where you can walk through the cabin, where you can see the bodies, they have rats, you hear the screaming, its life size, they have the top of the ship as well that shows the contrast between being trapped in the bottom of a ship and being free to roam about on deck. All the exhibits have something you can read. It shows you everything that happened from people being free, to them being taken from their homes and enslaved for the rest of their*
lives. I thought my students would really benefit from experiencing this – being able to feel and see what it was like. I had the idea that if my children learned from that connection between the book and the movie and museum, then students might also.

In the above excerpt the teacher is aware of the impact a learning experience has on his children as well as his students. By wanting students to see real life replicas of exhibits and pairing it with a movie, this teacher is attempting to engage students in the learning experience. This excerpt demonstrates how seeing, touching, hearing and feeling are all part of the learning process for students.

**EXCERPT #6**

*I put the child in the center of what I’m doing– If I put the child in the center then its going to be African centered because that’s how I view the child. Then we expand from that. You know uh, one of the things people may say, “This is not African centered” it may not be. I can think of a time we went to the museum and I had my 5th graders and we went to the museum to learn about the birthing process. And we saw some babies who didn’t make it, and that had such an impact, the children hearts were so heavy, and they needed to talk about what they saw and through talking about what they saw they started sharing experiences. One child said that I was premature and I was in coma for 30 days and they talked about family members who’d had these experiences and that’s why I say the child is at the center of the process because they bring the stories and they bring everything that is needed to teach the lesson I’m just a facilitator. I ask questions – guiding questions and actually listening to what they are saying so in this example we started talking about gestations and we were able to move on with the lesson.*

*Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices* includes the belief that students benefit from an educational environment that allows them to experience and express their culture through African and African American dance, song and music and in other ways in the classroom. It is noteworthy that *Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices* was highly represented in my observational field notes as I observed multiple teachers in classrooms. In terms of practice, art and culture are not only taught in specific class periods but also woven
throughout the educational experience at this school in a variety of ways every day, including
general education class projects, extracurricular performances, graduation ceremonies, choir and
music lessons during school recess and afterschool. I observed general education teachers play
an active role in implementing culture with the help of the performing arts teacher.

**EXCERPT#7**

_The next thing I do is teach them symbolism - how do symbols work because music is
composed of symbols but I don't start with music symbols I start with cultural symbols and the
symbols they have on their chest of their uniforms the symbols they see around this room and
this building that are African-centered. What do they mean? Why do we have to look at those
symbols? What if someone asked you what does it mean - what would you tell them? Do you
tell them its a Chihuahua and it represents a certain people of Guinea and Mali and its a
harvesting symbol and we use it because we talk about harvesting new generations - you. Yes
that's what my children learn._

Excerpt #8 is an example of a teacher that used the **Implementation of Cultural Symbols
and Practices** of dance, song and music in the classroom to address a particularly challenging
situation. The teacher employed this method as a way to manage the class’ disruptive behavior.

**EXCERPT#8**

_And I’ve had situations in classes where students were really disruptive, I mean they fought a
lot, they argued a lot and they were very argumentative. There was always a lot going on. And
that lasted for the first few months of class. I mean, it was really difficult to teach this class._

_So, to really emphasize unity, I decided to do what's called putting everybody on a ONE. It's
kind of similar to the theme of the movie Drum Line where it's like everybody is on the same
beat—you can’t hear the beat of your own drum. Everybody was doing the same thing at the
same time, in unison- not trying to outdo each other._

_So I created a ritual that we did every morning, like a performance activity, where they did
songs, dances, or whatever to help them with what they were learning. If it was math they did
geometry with their arms as long as we did it together._

_As a result of that they became more of a team. When they realized, especially the young ladies
who used to really fight a lot, that when they sang together they found out that they really
sounded good together- that made them look at each other differently. It was very difficult for
them to argue and fight with each other when they created such harmony musically. It’s like
we’re producing something that is so beautiful together._
And also, we would share with the whole school—some of the songs we were singing, and everybody would be amazed—like, wow, you all sound great. So really kind of got them away from the arguing and the fighting, and it really brought a lot of unity.

By emphasizing the implementation of cultural arts in putting the child at the center of the educational process Excerpt #9 combines both African American Child Centered Approaches and Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices.

**EXCERPT #9**

When I went to the national board to get the tenure and certification, they wanted me to teach music for music’s sake and yes if you have a whole lot of orchestra instruments, which I don't and we can't afford, then fine. They said you're teaching social studies and history. I said fine but then I showed them the song that it relates to and/or I teach them the music with the instrument that it surrounds, then my students are engaged, they want to learn, we are connecting to them where music can be an entity in itself and develop discipline. So I do it another way. I do it from the perspective of who they are.

**Multi-faceted Approaches** refers to contrasting paradigms that influence how teachers think about academic concepts. Teachers with an Africentric worldview may look at certain academic concepts and teacher practices differently than when contrasted against a Eurocentric worldview, which is traditionally found in mainstream education. It came up in different ways for different teachers, but the idea was that there are contrasting ways to look at the world and teachers want to make sure that students are exposed to other non Eurocentric perspectives. A few examples of the contrasting paradigms included understanding academic concepts and teaching practices as holistic versus segmented, linear versus circular and teaching in a manner in which the same concept can be applied in many different ways. Teachers stated that there are certain limits to this approach when functioning under a CPS umbrella; for example, requirements for curriculum, instruction and grading.

**EXCERPT #10**
The thing that is really irritating to me as a teacher is the idea that things are segmented e.g. this is art so now this is art time, and over here this is math. When I teach I don’t teach like
that but I have to grade like that but I don’t make separations like that. Take the virtues of Ma’at, one of the principles is balance, I think about it - well for example if a student is acting out I may ask a student who is acting out “how are you going to bring balance to this situation?” and I’m talking about balance because I’m right now because the kindergarteners are working on the science of balance and are doing activities around that well I correlate that with one of our virtues – balance, which also applies to our behavior. Well we know this way is not balance its unstable so we want to make the object balanced. When it’s balanced its stable. So when YOU do something and it’s out of balance it should be your goal to try to bring balance to the situation the way we just brought balance to that object and they understand that these things are related. So no I don’t like to segment things.

Excerpt #11 combines both and Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices and Multi-faceted Approaches.

EXCERPT #11

When we were independent, our grading system did not use ABCD but only African symbols. We used the Ankh for excellence we used the pyramid for you did pretty good (a “B”) and we did those kinds of things. We don’t use it anymore but each class has an African centered name and they collectively develop chants around that to represent who they are as that class and have to share it with the school.

Conclusion: Student Centered Teaching

Overall, this theme represents the way ACE teachers understand and approach how African American students learn in general. Many of the Student Centered Teaching approaches are common threads throughout ACE pedagogy rather than segmented and distinct educational experiences. One major lesson from this theme is that ACE teachers feel the obligation to provide students with life lessons and experiences in addition to fulfilling mainstream educational goals. Additionally, Student Centered Teaching alludes to the idea that this goal involves certain challenges. One limitation perceived by teachers involves the school district requirements in which they must operate. Overall, this theme attempts to demonstrate the way ACE teachers attempt to provide a holistic and diverse learning experience that puts students in the center.
DISCUSSION

Identified Core Themes

This qualitative study sought to identify and understand how Africentric concepts are applied to teaching practice. Interviews and observations were conducted to describe the Africentric practices of teachers at one ACE school. I examined the following research question: “What are the Africentric principles, concepts and ideas used by ACE teachers?” This study also sought to address the following two questions: “What practices do educators use to enact these principles, concepts and ideas?” and “Why do teachers incorporate such practices into their ACE pedagogy?” In this study I used coding and analysis techniques as recommended by grounded theory to identify themes. Although this study represents a step in the direction of developing a theory about ACE in practice, the findings of this study do not fulfill the requirement of drawing conclusions about a set of relationships among themes. This attempt to understand and interpret the phenomenon is a stepping-stone upon which a more comprehensive theory about ACE can be built.

I examined the concepts, ideas and beliefs held by teachers to eventually arrive at four themes that capture the pedagogical style of Africentric teachers in this study. The four themes are: 1) Knowledge of Culture (KOC), 2) Village Concept, 3) Teacher Characteristics and 4) Student Centered Teaching. The first two major themes represent values within Africentrism that impact pedagogy. The results provide in depth examples of how teachers apply Africentric concepts regarding culture, knowing who they are, community and sense of belonging to the classroom. With regard to the third theme, Teacher Characteristics, it differs from the previous themes in that it does not represent specific Africentric principles, concepts or ideas; nevertheless, it does represent the qualities and characteristics that teachers believe are important
to the teaching process. Lastly, the fourth theme, *Student Centered Teaching*, seeks to describe the types of curriculum content and instructional strategies that teachers believe are compatible with the learning needs of African American students, and thus are part of their Africentric pedagogy.

**Findings in Relation to Themes**

**Africentric Concepts, Principles and Ideas**

As could be expected, many of the Africentric concepts, principles and ideas that can be found in the literature were represented in this study. Such principles as Sankofa, Ma’at and Nguzo Saba are commonly referred to as Africentric values. Also, according to Shockley & Frederick (2010), there are at least seven major theoretical tenets of Africentrism that have been applied to the education field. The essence of such constructs as Reattachment, Identity, African culture and values, Education not schooling, Pan-Africanism, Black nationalism and Community control came up even if the exact term was not mentioned. Although teachers seldom used the labels found in the literature, it was apparent that teachers understood and applied these ideas in whole or part. For example, when teachers discussed some of the concepts that made up the theme *Village Concept*, it was explained that unity, working together and having a sense of shared responsibility for what took place in the school system were important concepts. Yet not many people volunteered the terms that describe these as principles of the Nguzo Saba (e.g., umoja, kujichagulia, and ujima, Karenga, 1988). Another major part of *Village Concept* was a feeling of family in the school community, yet no one used terms in the literature such as “fictive kin” that describes the feeling of kinship between people of African descent who have no blood relations (Sudarkhasa, 1981).
Similarly, **KOC** is a major theme of this study that involves wanting children to both learn about and identify with the culture and continent of Africa. Cultural knowledge is believed to serve the function of giving children a solid foundation upon which they can build their individual identity. This is in line with the ACE literature (Asante, 2003; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 2003; Shockley & Frederick, 2010), which states that a major goal of most programs involves expanding the students’ knowledge and connection to Africa and its people (both on the continent and in the Diaspora). Almost every teacher adopted the perspective that, due to the historical attempts to disconnect Africans from their culture, it is important for African Americans, particularly youth, to re-connect or be rooted in their African culture, yet not many teachers used the term Sankofa (Akoto & Akoto, 2000). In addition, re-connection was thought to be a necessary part of developing a healthy self-concept based in individual as well as group identity, nevertheless hardly anyone used terms like identity and no one called the underlying theory reattachment (Shockley & Frederick, 2010).

One critique of Africentrism is that most educational and psycho-social interventions that are touted as being Africentric in nature do not explicitly define the Africentric concepts, principles and ideas that are linked to their practices (Giddings, 2001; Pearl, 2004; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). In this study, when teachers were asked to state a concept, principle or idea, the terms that are commonly found in scholarly work did not readily come to mind but teachers were able to describe the substance of these concepts in their own words. In the beginning of data collection, after teachers provided answers in their own words, I probed to see if teachers recognized and identified with specific terms (such as Sankofa, Nguzo Saba, Black Nationalism, etc.) that were representative of their explanations. Most teachers knew these terms well and could define them. I soon stopped doing this because it became apparent that teachers were able
to thoroughly and confidently explain their approach to ACE yet specific terms were not necessary for them to do so. Some teachers explicitly stated that, because they were not initially introduced to Africentric concepts, principles and ideas through scholarly literature experience in their daily lives, they do not necessarily think about them in these theoretical terms. I eventually came to realize that teachers confidently used personal histories, narratives and examples to explain what Africentrism meant to them personally and for their teacher practice.

In this study, when it came to putting Africentric concepts and principles into practice, the teachers did not conceptualize and articulate them as finite, segmented ideas. Teachers in this study integrated the specific concepts in ways that were relevant to their teaching approach. The major themes of KOC and Village Concept reveal an inherent understanding of how teachers integrate specific concepts, principles and ideas in a way that is relevant to their teaching practice. Therefore, the observation that these teachers embraced these concepts was not surprising; however, the description of the ways in which teachers understood, articulated and put the concepts into practice is a contribution of this study. In the literature, a clearly defined set of criteria has never been formally set for Africentric practice (Giddings, 2001). Perhaps defined sets of criteria are not useful to teachers, as demonstrated by this study’s participants, who rely on internalization and integration of Africentric ideas in ways that are meaningful based on their in-the-moment experience.

**Intervening through culture and education: Risk and protective factors**

The dominant narrative associated with urban African American students is that they are at risk for underachievement, that they experience higher than average dropout rates, that they are exposed to higher than average levels of community violence and that they struggle against a lack of access and success in higher education (Gray, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Hilliard, 1991; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Indeed, most of the students of teachers in this study are
from urban environments that have many societal ills that have been identified as risk factors for youth (Perry et. al, 2003).

Teachers in this study emphasized that it is necessary to focus on not only the academic needs of their students but also the psycho-social needs. Similarly, the general literature on Africentric programs also emphasizes promotion of student success beyond education (Scott, 2001; Hilliard, 2003; Hudley, 1995). Similar to ACE interventions for specific risk factors such as delinquency (Harvey & Hill 2004; King, Holmes, Henderson, & Latessa, 2001), negative peer influences (Scott, 2001) or sexual risk taking (Coleman-Dixon et al., 2000), the education being provided at the school by these teachers is also intended to mitigate risks through promotion of culture and community and thus is considered protective for the students. In this study, some of the types of risks teachers mentioned were substance abuse, crime, low self-esteem, low academic achievement and school engagement. In essence, they are using culture in education as the intervention. This study provides an in depth understanding of how teachers, in particular, contribute to this process of using culture to protect students.

In this study, KOC represents the belief that ACE is a way to help students by relaying cultural ways of knowing and being to African American children. Teachers felt that African Americans in general, and young students in particular, are disconnected from their culture, which is further exacerbated by a lack of or misrepresentation of cultural content in the mainstream school system (e.g. curriculum, textbooks, school environment). Teachers feel there is a need to not only know who you are but also be proud of it. They emphasized providing a foundation for students on which they can grow into healthy individuals and be productive members of their community. These are all key components that are seen as being essential to having a sense of purpose and direction in life. By providing students with KOC, teachers are
addressing the fact that African Americans are less likely to know about their history and origins and thus KOC is meant to buffer against negative media representations and societal conditions that have a negative impact on group and individual identity development.

The theme Village Concept represents promoting a sense of community through creating a caring and nurturing environment that involves working together, identifying as a group and supporting one another. The historical and institutional traditions of the school setting, such as calling all adults in the school setting Mama and Baba, contribute to this. Teachers are consciously aware of the need to protect students from psychological and/or physical risks that may exist as a result of living in a large urban community, such as not feeling safe due to violence, crime or substance abuse. The Village Concept theme highlights how the school setting -- the people, the physical space and what takes place in it -- can be protective when there is a strong sense of belonging, social support and tangible support (Hudley, 1995; Whaley & Noel, 2012). Teacher characteristics also connect to this theory of promotion and protection. This study shows how teachers can encourage students through demonstrating nurturing and caring qualities in ways generally practiced by family or community members, which is more than is required in the role of teachers.

In this study, all of the major themes involve teacher attempts to protect students from certain risk factors that may exist on multiple levels for students. Through analysis of teacher conceptualizations of the practices they used and the reasons for why they used them, an implicit understanding among teachers was revealed about their view of education. ACE pedagogy is based on an underlying theory of what the child needs based on the risks he or she is most likely to face. Teachers have an indigenous, African centered theory of education that involves the necessity of re-connecting students with their culture. In my study, I found that this was inherent
in how teachers think about and understand their role as teachers and educators. Teachers enact their theory for not only protection but also promotion of student well-being through culture. Allen and Mohatt (2014) make the distinction between cultural interventions that use local and indigenous efforts of community members to enact culture and interventions that merely adapt culture to what the pre-determined focus of the intervention is about (e.g., prevention of negative behaviors, promotion of pro-social behavior, direct intervention of youth who are already participating in risk behaviors). Similarly, in this study, teacher theories of education reveal that promotion of culture is promotion of wellness. It is not about prescribing practices to address mental illness or behavioral issues, but rather, supporting healthy development through cultural affiliation, engagement and reinforcement.

**Teachers’ Commitment to Africentrism**

The process of teaching involves various forms of interaction between student and teacher. Those who highlight the vital importance of the teacher to student connection suggest that, for students from underrepresented groups who are at risk for low academic achievement, teachers have to take into account the social interaction of teaching to be effective (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Irvine and York (1995) explain that “teaching is an act of social interaction, and the resultant classroom climate is related directly to the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student” (p. 494). Therefore, this section highlights the contribution that teachers make when they embody the Africentric concepts for the benefit of students.

The teachers at this particular ACE school put a tremendous amount of effort into all aspects of ACE pedagogy-- from teaching academics, to presenting and mediating culture, to cultivating relationships with students that extend far beyond the traditional role of teachers. All of this is evident from the *Teacher Characteristics* and *Village Concept* themes, which convey the idea
that this approach to education involves a large personal investment. The personal investment is represented by the *Teacher Characteristics* of passion, commitment and dedication. Also, I observed teachers invest a lot of time, energy and creativity involved in promoting the goals to educate and help students connect with their culture.

According to Gay (2000), the process of teaching involves social interactions. Thus, to understand and evaluate teaching practice, one cannot remove the person from the equation. In addition, teaching is a dialectical process that involves social interaction, and so the teacher’s qualities and characteristics influence the student and the student influences the teacher. Therefore, the major theme of *Teacher Characteristics* suggests that who the teacher is as a person (e.g., their qualities and characteristics) matters when it comes to education (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers in this study seemed to be saying that a certain type of teacher is suited for this approach to education. It is not clear, and this study did not attempt to address, whether this type of education attracts a certain type of person, or whether teachers develop these characteristics through personal investment associated with Africentric teaching. Nevertheless, it is something to consider as we think about efforts to include culture in the educational process of underrepresented groups as well as programming for teacher training.

Personal investment in the development of students is evident not only in individual teachers but also in the *Village Concept* theme, involving the school setting as a whole from the administration to the janitorial and other support staff. According to Sarason (1972), when it comes to the creation of settings, it is impossible to describe the real world development of settings and what takes place in them without understanding the motivation and goals of the people involved. ACE schools like the one in this study exist as settings because of the hard work of teachers, administrators, parents and community members who share similar values and
are dedicated to providing a rich learning environment that highlights culture through an Africentric lens.

The relationship between Teacher Characteristics and Village Concept suggests that the school’s overall success is driven by a tremendous effort by the people in the school community. This is particularly true in the African centered worldview perspective, where the focus is on the whole rather than the individual. Therefore, one noteworthy observation is that it seems there is compatibility between people and the school environment where the whole school functions to support ACE. Nevertheless, in noting this, the goal is not to focus on whether this particular school can be reproduced but rather what type of other natural organic approaches can develop that are a synergy between shared values, qualities and characteristics of the teachers as well as the needs of the students.

**Applying Culture to the Learning Process**

The notion that mainstream American schools are color-blind (Lewis, 2003) or culturally blind (Ladson-Billings, 1994) is damaging to ethnically underrepresented students in the U.S. Since the time of Brown v. Board of Education, the U.S. has promoted an ideology that treats all children equally, which is good because they are equal— but they are not the same. This attempt at fairness falls short when you consider the body of literature that suggests that ethnically diverse students may have different learning styles (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Tuck & Boykin, 1989 cited in Boykin et al., 2005; Shade, 1989). Culturally responsive teaching is a form of teaching that shares many common features with ACE. These forms of teaching are seen as effective alternatives for African American students given that the traditional American school system is primarily geared toward White middle class students with regard to learning style and curriculum content (Gay, 2000).
Culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994) asserts that teachers are more effective when they take into account student learning styles, which are influenced by culture and socialization, among other things. A learning style represents the student’s preferences for a range of factors that impact the learning process, such as preferred ways of working through learning tasks and communicating (organizing, sequencing and conveying information in spoken and written forms), as well as preferences for aspects of the physical, sensory and social environments in which learning takes place (Allen & Boykin 1989; More, 1989; Shade, 1989).

Culture of the individual in relation to their group obviously intersects with gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexual identity and other factors to manifest in a variety of ways. African Americans are not homogenous and therefore it is important to acknowledge that students are still likely exhibit variation within learning styles. Culturally relevant theories do not ignore within group differences in learning styles; nevertheless, teachers are most likely to attend to the “core cultural characteristics” that exist as a pattern of learning among their students when they teach in a culturally relevant way (Shade, Kelly, &Oberg, 1997).

A theme that emerged in this study, **Student Centered Teaching**, suggests that teachers at this ACE school understand the value of teaching in a culturally relevant way and intentionally incorporate culture into the learning process. The **Student Centered Teaching** theme captures various ways in which teachers in this study endeavor to put the needs of the child at the center of the learning process with regard to curriculum content as well as methods of instruction.

Boykin and his colleagues found that emotionality, variability, novelty and active participation are important aspects of learning styles associated with African American students (B. Allen, 1987; Boykin & Allen, 1988; B. Allen & Boykin, 1991, 1992). Teachers spoke about many of these styles of learning and attended to them in their classrooms. For example, research
on communication of African American students emphasizes emotions and feelings, as well as communal and social connectedness in oral expression. With regard to conveying spoken information, teachers who had worked in mainstream schools before coming to the ACE school (or who had done their student teaching at mainstream schools) were very aware of how African Americans relay information. Researchers have found that mainstream schools focus on being linear, concise and event focused while African American students from low-income urban backgrounds are characterized as having a very circular and person centered focus. The term “verve” refers to a preference for learning environments and tasks that involve high levels of energy and sensory stimulation (Tuck & Boykin, 1989 cited in Boykin et al., 2005). This is compatible with the descriptions that teachers gave regarding having students active and involved rather than sitting in a lecture style classroom. *African American Child Centered Approaches* and *Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices* are dimensions of *Student Centered Teaching* that provide detailed descriptions for how teachers provide students with opportunities to engage in learning that allows for spontaneity in behavior.

The results of this study also support research that asserts African American students favor an approach to learning that involves behavioral expressiveness, which integrates movement, rhythm, music and dance (B. Allen. 1987; Boykin & Allen, 1988; B. Allen & Boykin, 1991, 1992). One of the dimensions of *Student Centered Teaching* that highlights this approach is *Implementation of Cultural Symbols and Practices*. I observed that teachers who were not music, dance or art teachers nevertheless incorporated music and movement into learning tasks. Teachers mentioned in their interviews how this helped with development of self-concept, learning and behavioral management. This study revealed that teachers believe that
when these forms of expressiveness (e.g., music and movement) are incorporated, students are more engaged in the learning process.

Teachers in this study support students academically by taking into account how African American children learn and who they are culturally. **Student Centered Teaching** reflects multiple ways that ACE teachers applied this knowledge of the interaction of culture and learning styles into their teaching practice. Research shows that, when teachers apply culturally congruent teaching methods, African American students attain higher levels of achievement and engagement, and have fewer behavioral issues (Boykin & Allen, 1988; Gay, 2000; More, 1989; Shade, 1989). The results of this study demonstrated how ACE teachers attempt to place students at the center of the educational process, by utilizing knowledge of African American learning styles in teacher practice. Furthermore, by doing this, they put the students in the center as evidenced by the **Student Centered Teaching** theme.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Given that there is so little published about the application of Africentric concepts to education in the last 25 years, one strength of this study is that it offers a more recent glimpse into this phenomenon. In addition, the rich and detailed descriptions and their associated connection to ACE concepts, principles and ideas that were provided in this study provide a more contemporary understanding of ACE curriculum content and instruction, which is often lacking in the literature that does exist. Lastly, one of the main strengths of this study is that it adds to this larger literature by focusing on the subjective understanding of teachers about the meaning of Africentric concepts and ideas and how it impacts the lives of students at a particular school and how it is carried out in particular school community. The contribution of such population specific (Watts, 1994) and local and indigenous (Allen & Mohatt, 2014) theories are
greatly needed in social sciences as they help us to better understand social phenomena and support positive human development.

As with all research, this study is certainly not without its limitations. One limitation of this study was the focus on only the teachers’ perspective to understand how Africentric concepts are applied to education. Now that the study has revealed the communal nature of the school setting and the emphasis on shared community responsibility, it is important that future studies on this topic also take into account those members in the school community who are also involved in putting ACE into practice, such as students and parents.

Another limitation of this study was that it did not include systematic observation of classroom and teacher-to-student interactions, which could have provided a richer portrait of the phenomena of interest, and triangulation. Although the observations were very beneficial in allowing the researcher to become acquainted with the students, teachers and school environment, the data were not collected or analyzed systematically, which did not allow me to make observational data a more primary focus of this study. Instead, observational data from field notes were used to supplement the findings from the interview data. Therefore, although the observations did corroborate and contribute more details about the context, instructional strategies and social interactions that related to this study, there were limitations to the way the data could be used. I think future studies that do not emanate from a priori hypotheses and established theories of behavior might benefit from conducting and analyzing interviews first and then setting up observational protocols that are informed by findings from interviews.

There are many ways to approach an examination of how Africentric concepts apply to education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to take an in-depth look at the phenomenon
and focus on one school, as the school context has a heavy influence on the teachers (e.g., which teachers end up there, what teachers do and how they view their teaching experiences). Nevertheless, this approach may be potentially limiting with regard to the sample of teachers. For example, one limitation is that I was not able to find teachers who placed a lower importance on Africentrism or teachers who had an alternative view of Africentrism. This may be due to the school characteristics. It is possible that only people with a high commitment to this way of life would choose to teach at this school, because the school is so committed to applying ACE to the whole education process. Nevertheless, future studies might address both the issue of greater variability in Africentric experiences while still examining what ACE looks like in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

Using a methodology that allowed for population specific, local and indigenous perspectives to be made prominent, this study revealed how teachers apply Africentric concepts to their teacher practice and the reasons for why they enact ACE pedagogy. This study revealed that ACE teachers do not consciously and concretely label and identify specific Africentric concepts, but instead have a more complex understanding of them in relation to how they impact student success and healthy development. The fact that teachers use an inherent framework that guides their understanding for how to apply ACE to not only the academic but also psycho-social needs of their students has implications for understanding ACE praxis. Ultimately, this study represents how education and culture can be used to support the development of African American students academically and psychosocially.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Worldview as a Lens: ACE

5 Key Areas of Practice
1. Physical Setting, Structures, and Activities
2. Curriculum
3. Social Relationship
4. Norms and Rules of Behavior
5. Instructive Technology/Strategies

How does an educator transform education practice as a result of worldview?
Appendix B

Worldview as a Lens: Teacher

- Reality/The world around us
  1. Relationship to Nature
  2. Relationships with others
  3. Spirituality
  4. Purpose
  5. How we understand the world

Worldview

- Teacher’s experience of reality is influenced by their worldview.
- Educators process the educational needs of students through the Africentric worldview.
### Appendix C

#### Table 1. Nguzo Saba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nguzo Saba</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Umoja</td>
<td>Unity with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Kujichagulia</td>
<td>Self -determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Ujima</td>
<td>Collective work and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Ujama</td>
<td>Cooperative economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Nia</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Kuumba</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Imani</td>
<td>Faith/trust in oneself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Africentric Education Theory

Africentric Worldview:
- Traditional Worldview Schematic (Kambon, 1998)
- TRIOS (Jones, Yr)

Africentric Principles:
- Sankofa
- Ma’at
- Nguzo Saba

7 Key Constructs of ACE:
- Identity
- Pan-Africanism
- African culture and values
- Reattachment
- Black Nationalism
- Community Control
- Education, Not schooling
Appendix E

Interview Guide

Thank you for your interest in this project. As I said before, I am interested in how you take Africentric concepts and apply them to the classroom and what that looks like. You do not have to answer any of the questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you need a break during our interview, please let me know. Again, I really appreciate your participation and interest in this study.

Part I: Teacher background information

First I would like to begin by asking about your Background as a teacher.

Gender: Female____ Male____

What school do you currently teach at?

How many years have you been a teacher?

How many of those years have you been a teacher at an ACE school?

What grade level(s) do you teach?

How many years have you been teaching at this Africentric school?

Prior to teaching at an ACE school, what Africentric training did you have (if any)?

In this school setting, what Africentric training (if any) have you received?

How important is the Africentric philosophy to you personally?

Do you apply the Africentric way of life to your personal life? If so, how?

How did you come to learn about Africentrism?

What does Africentrism mean to you?

Part II: Africentric concepts, ideas, theory

1. Are there any Africentric concepts, ideas or theories that are important to you as a teacher? If so what are they?

_Probe: ask for as much details as possible_

- What does a particular idea mean to you?
- Who, if anyone is associated with that concept, idea or theory?
- How did you learn about the concept, idea or theory?

2. Are there any other salient teaching philosophies that you subscribe to in addition to Africentrism?
Part III: Description of ACE practice

Can you tell me how you apply one (or more) of those concepts to something you do in the classroom?

 Probe: ask for as much details as possible
  • What did you do?
  • What role did you play?
  • Who else participated in the activity (ies)?
  • How did the students respond?

Part IV. Process

Think about a time when you had a particular lesson or set of standards you needed to achieve (maybe you were given a set of standards that all students had to achieve for your grade) and you needed to “make it” more Africentric. Can you describe the process you went through to achieve this?

 Probe: ask for as much details as possible
  • What did you need to know to do it?
  • What strategies did you use?
  • Did you work with anyone else to do this?
  • What facilitated this process?
  • What were barriers (if any) to this process?

Part V. Explanation of link between theory and practice

Thank you so much for your descriptions of some of the things you do in the classroom. I think it is really important that we help others understand what makes Africentric education unique.

Now that we have talked about [name a particular practice they described], can you explain to me in your own words, as if I had never heard of Africentrism, what makes that particular act Africentric?

 Probe: Remind them of [insert a particular Africentric concept] (if they stated it earlier).

Part VI. Conclusion

Finally, is there anything else you would like to add that we did not have an opportunity to discuss but would be important for me to know?
VITA

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Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA)
Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi)
American Evaluation Association (AEA)
Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship 07-11
California State University, Los Angeles Alumni Association Scholarship 98-99
Eagle’s Print ‘n Post Scholarship 97-98
General Motors/EEOC Scholarship 96-97
Tabernacle of Faith Church Scholarship 95-96

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

Consultant, Ra-messut Academy 9/14 – Present
Chicago, IL
Advise on the development of an African centered educational curriculum.
Assist with development of educational principles, goals and techniques.
Apply African centered education practices.

Teaching Assistant, Psychology Dept. 8/03 – Present
University of Illinois at Chicago
Assist with Applied Psychology, Introductory Psychology,
Developmental Psychology, and Community Psychology.
Provide and facilitate discussions regarding psychology course material.
Design and administer exams and quizzes. Grade term papers.
Provide students with knowledgeable feedback regarding writing skills and testing strategies.
Mentor students on senior applied psychology projects.

**Research Consultant, Academic Librarians of Color**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**
1/14 – 2/15
Advises on the development of a qualitative data analysis plan.
Analyzes qualitative data; assists with theory, coding and analysis.
Employ data quality methods.

**Research Assistant, Institute for Juvenile Research**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**
3/10 – 9/10
Collects data; interviews students and/or their parents.
Administers measures electronically.

**Research Assistant, Heartland Evaluation**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**
1/04 – 10/06
Collects data; by interviewing clinicians, and use of archival data.
Administers measures to clinicians and case managers.
Aids undergraduate research assistants.
Organizes and facilitates streamlined file and retrieval methods.
Maintains client database.

**Research Assistant, Cardiovascular Health Study**
**Rosalind Franklin University**
5/05 – 8/05
Collects data from patients, rehabilitation staff and archival data.
Maintains client records; organizes and facilitates streamlined file and retrieval methods.
Maintains client database.

**Program Evaluator**
**American Evaluation Association (AEA)**
2/04-2/05
Planned and implemented a stakeholder-based evaluation of the Annual Conference for the AEA. Designed and piloted instruments.
Collected and analyzed data using quantitative and qualitative measurement.
Provided written reports of the evaluation results and recommendation.

**Evaluation Consultant, Chicago Safe Start,**
**Chicago, IL**
6/04 – 12/04
Analyzes and evaluates training, process and educational data for a violence prevention program.
Provides written reports of the evaluation results and recommendation.

**Research Assistant, College Experience Study**
**California State University, Los Angeles**
8/02 – 8/03
Assisted with a longitudinal psychological study of minority college students,
Collected, cleaned and analyzed data. Conducted parent interviews.
Research and constructs measures.
Code interviews, journals, and other qualitative data.
Presents data.
Counselor and Aid, Universal Staffing Agency 8/02 – 8/03
Counsel teenage foster children in group homes
Provide guidance. Plan and implement recreational activities for youth.
Conflict resolution. Reinforce rules and regulations of the group homes.
Aid developmentally disabled youth and adults. Monitor behavior.
Provide structure and reinforce activities that promote independence.
Counsel and monitor adolescent youth in home for eating disorders.
Prepare meals and take vitals.

Program Specialist (Case Manager), Children’s Home Society of Calif. 5/01 – 7/02
Manage files regarding families receiving state subsidized childcare.
Interview families at least once a year.
Provide referrals regarding parenting education, social service agencies and childcare.
Create and maintain contracts for the child care provider for payment.

Counselor, Peace & Joy Domestic Violence Shelter 8/00 – 12/00
Provide individual and group counseling to women and their children.
Maintain case reports of shelter residents.

Research Assistant, Project on Adolescent Development 9/98 – 8/00
California State University, Los Angeles
Assisted in research study of adolescents from five ethnic groups and their families.
Interviewed African American adolescents. Facilitated focus groups with parents.

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE/INVOLVEMENT

Practicum Student, Illinois African American Coalition for Prevention (ILAACP)
Conducted an ecological assessment of a statewide coalition for prevention
Assisted with preparation of essential documents such as by-laws, membership criteria
Constructed a needs assessment to ascertain what needs the coalition could provide for
prevention programs, agencies and/or organizations serving African Americans.

Group Leader, D’zert Club, Chicago, IL
Responsible for helping middle school and high school students through a three-year
program aimed to academically, socially and culturally enhance African American students.
Fundraise for program to send successful students to Egypt.

PUBLICATIONS

among Vietnamese refugee adolescents across life domains.

Birman, D., Beehler, S., Harris, E.M., Everson, M.L., Batia, K., Liautaud, J., Frazier, S., Atkins, M.,
enhancement services (FACES): A community-based comprehensive services model for refugee
children in resettlement.
American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 78, pgs 121-132.


PAPER AND POSTER PRESENTATIONS


Blanton, S. (November, 2013). Outlining a grounded theory approach to understanding African Centered classrooms. Presentation at the 37th Annual Regional Meeting of the Midwest ECO Conference hosted by University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Ellis, A. & Blanton, S. (November, 2013). Expanding our understanding of the impact of the school environment on children. Roundtable at the 37th Annual Regional Meeting of the Midwest ECO Conference hosted by University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.


Chan, W.S. & Blanton, S. (June, 2006). School adjustment of Vietnamese refugee adolescents:
Diversity and discrimination. Research symposium presented at the *First International Conference on Community Psychology, Puerto Rico.*


**CLASS LECTURE INVITATIONS**

Blanton, S.L. (June 7, 2013). Building from the ground up: Developing dissertation research questions. Invited class lecture for Psch 303: Writing in Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.