

WHEN AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES CHOOSE AN AFRICAN-CENTERED
CHARTER SCHOOL IN PLACE OF A TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR
THEIR CHILDREN, WHAT MOTIVATING FACTORS INFORM THAT DECISION?

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ABSTRACT

LISA A. NAPP: When African-American Families Choose an African-Centered Charter School in Place of a Traditional Public School for Their Children,
What Motivating Factors Inform That Decision?
(Under the direction of Dr. William Malloy)

A qualitative study was designed to explore and contextualize the motivating factors leading Black families to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into an African-centered charter school. The study also sought evidence of the motivating factors identified by Black parents and families at the school of choice. The study was rooted in liberatory/emancipatory educational research and synthesized congruent conceptual themes generated in the literature. The study was composed of six cultural indicators that focused on culturally affirmative and emancipatory concepts of education and emerged from a blended framework specifically designed for the study by synthesizing congruent conceptual themes discussed in the educational research of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2005). The six Cultural Indicators that informed the data analysis were: 1) culturally affirmative/culturally relevant classrooms; 2) instruction designed to guide students to be self reflective, gain self knowledge, and discover authentic self; 3) academically rigorous programs scaffold onto students' prior understanding, knowledge of the world, and cultural identity; 4) interpersonal relationships are fostered; emphasis on creating learning communities and de-emphasis on the individual and competition; 5) hidden curriculum dismantled;

students gain ability to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions; and 6) teachers and students purposely dialogue about strategies to influence popular and intellectual culture through social and economic justice activities.

The study focused on an African-centered charter school in its first year of operation. The research analyzed the narratives of families who exited the traditional public school and documented the disengagement and isolation Black parents, families, and educators experience in traditional public schools. Family narratives revealed that five of the six Cultural Indicators informed the family decision-making process and the choice to exchange the traditional public school setting for a charter school. The study concludes that the motivating factors are real and complex, provides suggestions for educational practice, and discusses implications for future research.

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your constant love and support
sustained me through a journey
I never would have contemplated
without your encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this dissertation presents the reason for the study and articulates the research problem. The chapter describes the significance of the study, researcher perspective, definitions related to the study, and the research methodology. Delimitations of the study are presented as well. A brief summary concludes the chapter.

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of the study was to observe, describe, understand, and analyze: when African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? Additionally, the study asked: What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants are present at the school of choice? In 1996, as the language of the North Carolina Charter School legislation was being finalized, lawmakers debated whether or not charter schools might give rise to another era of “White flight” (Cecelski , 1994, pg. 24–25) from traditional public school settings into the charter school setting (Simmon, 1999; Silberman, 2000). During these debates, policy makers and legislators did not anticipate that the exact opposite would occur in several school districts throughout the state and the nation. Four years after the charter school legislation was passed, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that, of the 78 charter schools operating in the state, 71 of the schools had minority enrollments of 70%

or more and that at least nine of the 78 schools had enrollments of 100% minority students (Simmons, 2001).

In one North Carolina school district, the phenomenon of Black flight was evidenced by data reporting that, of the 1,238 students enrolled in the eight charter schools operating within the district, over 90% were Black and all but one of the eight had enrollments that were almost wholly Black (Silberman, 2000). An article published in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, quoted John Dornan, executive director of the Public School Forum, as saying: “Just the tremendous growth of charter schools is a real testament to parents wanting options to traditional public schools, and the minority response to charter schools ought to be a wake-up call for public schools” (Silberman, 2000, p. 7B).

Despite the legal directives written into the North Carolina Charter School Legislation requiring charter schools to “reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population within the district or of the special population the school seeks to serve residing in the district” (NCGS 115C-238.29F(g)(5)), North Carolina student enrollment in charter school settings followed a pattern that was observed nationally. Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project reported in 2003 that, nationwide, African American students represented 33% of the charter school population but only 17% of the total U.S. public school population (Frankenburg and Lee, 2003). Contrary to what was expected, minority families were more likely to remove their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in publicly funded charter schools. While several researchers had noted high minority and at-risk student enrollments in charter schools (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Frankenburg & Lee, 2003), few in-depth accounts of the families

of minority children speak to the underlying motivation for the phenomenon (Cooper, 2005).

The desire of this investigation was first, to gain insight into and understand what motivating factors lead Black families to withdraw from traditional public schools and enroll their children in an African-centered charter school and, second, to discern the evidence of the motivating factors that parents and family members identified at the school of choice. The study employed a qualitative research format and focused on a charter school in North Carolina from a district that had seven of its eight charter schools enrolling in excess of 90% Black students. The specific context of the study was an African-centered charter school in its first year of operation. The study asked the following question: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? Additionally the study asked: What evidence of the motivating factors identified by the families of enrolled children was present at the school of choice? The study was designed to guide the researcher toward a deeper understanding of the educational vision and values of the Black families who enrolled their children in a charter school early on in the charter school movement. What factors motivated Black families to take the risk and remove their children from traditional public schools to enroll them in a charter school in its infancy as an educational setting?

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of the study is located in a body of research dedicated to liberatory/emancipatory education. Liberatory/emancipatory research advocates that the study of education and of related fields be generated across disciplines to decentralize

the hegemony of knowledge constructs based in Eurocentric beliefs and to re-envision education through culturally affirmative and emancipatory concepts of knowledge (Shujaa, 1993, p. 11). The study is rooted in the work of educational researchers Mwalimu Shujaa, Beverly Gordon, and Gloria Ladson Billings. A blended framework designed for the study synthesized congruent conceptual themes discussed in Shujaa's (1993) school vs. education research, Gordon's (1993) culturally compatible pedagogy research, and Ladson Billing's (1995) cultural deficit/at risk vs. culturally relevant/culturally affirmative paradigm shift research. This blended framework served as the study's lens and informed the reason for the study, the design of the methodology, the analysis of the data, and the implications of the findings. Chapters 2 and 3 present and discuss the liberatory/emancipatory lens in greater detail.

Background of the Study

Sankofa, the pseudonym chosen for the research site, is an Akan word symbolized by a long necked bird posed with its body in forward motion while its head and neck are arched and looking back. Sankofa signifies the wisdom of purposely learning from the past to inform the future. Sankofa Charter School offered an African-centered education and challenged the reified or taken-for-granted beliefs of traditional public schools in relation to transmission of knowledge, socialization of the students, and the explicit communication of culture (Bowers, 1984). During on-site interviews for a "best practices" study conducted in 2000 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction under the guidance of Dr. George Noblit, Sankofa's charter members stated that their motivation to establish an African-centered school was rooted in their belief that Black children enrolled in public schools

were continually labeled, tracked and promoted as “underachievers.” The charter members believed an African-centered school would address the educational and cultural barriers Black students and their families face in traditional public school settings. In 1998, page nine of Sankofa Charter School’s application to the state of North Carolina avowed that the mission of the school would be “to provide an educational setting in which true academic excellence can be achieved within the context of Africa-centered education.” The mission statement proposed a holistic pedagogical approach integrating theory and application through utilizing an interdisciplinary curriculum supporting the educational priorities of interactive and visual learning experiences, oral communication skills, hands-on technology, decision-making, goal setting, responsibility, discipline, self-appraisal, and follow-through. The charter members stated that the educational setting was designed to promote a positive attitude toward education by building the student’s self-confidence through character education and an understanding of the need to celebrate diversity.

Educational researchers Asante (2000), Nobles (1976), and Oyebade (1990) suggest that the following cultural indicators inform African-centered practice and pedagogy and are observable in African-centered schools:

- African-centered schools take the students’ culture into account in every subject area and at every grade level and seek ways to attach the student to history, concepts, mythology, science, mathematics, nature, motifs, and personalities (Asante, 2000).
- Students in African-centered schools understand the historical role their people have played in world events. An African-centered school’s staff is

comfortable celebrating the culture of the students and encourages students and staff to wear fashions of the students' cultures, while infusing their lessons with illustrations from those cultures (Asante, 2000).

- The African-centered school infuses the guiding principles of the African worldview “one with nature” and “survival of the tribe” into the educational environment. This African tradition informs the evolution of self and emphasizes that only in terms of one's people does the individual become conscious of his or her own being. It therefore grounds the self in the collective and social definition of one's people (Nobles, 1976).
- African-centered education promotes a paradigm shift away from culturally aggressive practices rooted in an imperialistic and exploitive value system. Culturally aggressive systems devalue non-sanctioned cultures by limiting information about them. African-centered education promotes a paradigm shift towards humanistic frameworks that reject the construct of cultural domination and promote culturally responsive values (Oyebade, 1990).

The above indicators were used as a guide to determine if Sakofa qualified as a charter school of choice offering an African-centered curriculum. Defining the first indicator, Asante (2000) states that African-centered schools take the students' culture into account in every subject area and at every grade level and seek ways to attach the student to history, concepts, mythology, science, mathematics, nature, motifs, and personalities. Sankofa's charter school application stated that the mission of the school focused on providing an educational setting promoting academic excellence through the

context of an African-centered pedagogy. The school used the African-centered Interdisciplinary Multi-level hands-on science curriculum (AIM) as well as holistic teaching incorporating ancient and modern math, culturally affirmative social studies, creativity, communication skills, and health and physical education into each unit. Students had access to a variety of materials in every classroom and lab. The materials depicted African and African American myths, legends, stories, art, culture, history, politics, and geography. The above practices confirmed the presence of the first indicator at Sankofa.

The second indicator, proposed by Asante (2000), states that students in African-centered schools understand the historical role their people have played in world events. Additionally, an African-centered school's staff is comfortable celebrating the culture of the students and encourages students and staff to wear fashions of the student's cultures, while infusing their lessons with illustrations from the culture. Upon entering the main building at Sankofa, one could see multiple images featuring prominent Africans and African Americans on display. The title above one display stated, "A people without knowledge of its history is like a tree without roots" and featured large prints of both current and historic advocates for the rights of Africans and African Americans. Students and teachers wore uniforms reflective of the school's philosophy of unity, dressing in green and white attire accented by tie-dyed material displaying unity link patterns either as headdresses, skirts, shirts, or pants. Asante's second indicator to meet the criteria as an African-centered school setting was present at Sankofa.

Nobles (1976), identifies an African-centered school as a school that infuses the guiding principles of the African worldview "one with nature" and "survival of the tribe"

into the educational environment. This African tradition informs the evolution of self and emphasizes that only in terms of one's people does the individual become conscious of his or her own being; it therefore grounds the self in the collective and social definition of one's people. Sankofa's charter school application stated that the school was built around the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." The charter application identified the use of multi-age classes as a benefit to students by creating opportunities that promoted leadership through role-modeling and community-building as well as through cooperative learning activities and strategies. Sankofa promoted the philosophical foundation of the Nguzo Saba (seven principals of nation building) and Ma'at (virtues of truth, justice, harmony, and balance) as techniques to counteract the effects that negative schooling experiences had on students previously enrolled in public schools as well as to supplant the negative images of Black people in popular culture and the news. Nobles's criteria for an African-centered school setting was evident in both philosophy and practice at Sankofa.

Oyebade (1990) maintains that African-centered education advocates for a paradigm shift away from the culturally aggressive practices advanced by hegemonic beliefs that work to devalue non-Anglo cultures and limit accurate and affirmative information about them. African-centered education offers humanistic frameworks that reject the dissemination of cultural domination and instead promote culturally responsive principles and actions. During on-site observations for the best practices study it was noted that Sankofa incorporated the symbol of links into student and teacher uniforms and in signage throughout the building. During the "Harambee" ceremony schoolmates form a circle, hold hands, and are reminded that the purpose of the link is for individuals

to pull each other up, not down. Other affirmations of the school's mission were heard in the school song sung every day during Harambee. The words of the song avowed a shift from negative to positive thinking about self. Students were surrounded with positive images of Africa and African Americans as well as linguistic affirmations about their history, their heritage, their creative abilities, their intellectual ancestry, and their community. Oyebade's (1990) African-centered indicators were evident at Sankofa.

Utilizing the characteristics suggested in the literature by Asante (2000), Nobles (1976), and Oyebade (1990), as a guide to site selection for the research study, Sankofa Charter School was found to qualify as an African-centered charter school offering an culturally affirmative curriculum and was therefore chosen as the study's research site.

Sankofa Charter School is a descendent of a school choice movement that began in the 1970s (Brown, 1999). The school choice movement is rooted in the rejection of the efficient and rational tracking strategies practiced in traditional public schools (Tyack, 1974). Charter schools offering culturally relevant curricula are seen as pockets of political resistance to traditional public schools (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Tyack (1974) accuses traditional public schools of being disingenuous when they settle for a tertiary cultural awareness that does not guide students towards becoming individually aware of and connected to their cultural identities. Traditional Public schools thereby impede the critical role cultural identity plays in social, political, and economic self-reliance. Spring (1989) asserts that social life in traditional public schools reflects the social life within the larger society and that issues of power are enacted in the classroom (p. 195). Marable (1997) posits that "public schools consciously and unconsciously create deep social chasms" (p. 94) and translate "difference" and "diversity" more often than not

into inferiority and subordination (p. 109). Marable (1997) challenges educators to go beyond racial stereotypes and, as an alternative, create opportunities for learning about people in ways that encourage the exploration of difference and provide an authentic understanding of the values that cultures hold in common. Marable (1997) and Bowers (1984) suggest that educators become culturally literate by creating “liminal space or a temporary openness” (Bowers, 1984, p. 2) to permit mutual understanding across barriers of class, color, and faith and that they create frameworks for recognizing the tensions between diversity and democracy. Marable (1997) and Bowers (1984) believe that the existing educational practice of displacing negative social constructs of race and inserting antiseptic versions of the history of Black people into social studies curricula does not take into account the presence of racial bias and the influence prejudice has on unconscious behavior. This practice obstructs genuine progress to bridge the current cultural isolation of White educators from Black students and their families (Spring, 1989).

Despite major educational initiatives, public schools in America seem chronically unable to educate Black students as effectively as they educate White students. The exodus nationally and more specifically in North Carolina of Black students from traditional public schools and into publicly-funded charter schools can not be ignored (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007). Educators need authentic tools in order to create educational environments that effectively serve diverse student populations. The narratives of the families of Black students exiting traditional public schools hold the potential to enlighten educators as to what Black parents and families value in an educational setting for their children. Seeking out and listening to family narratives contributes to the body

of research educators may draw on when purposefully challenging themselves to be a little “less naive and a little more honest” (Gordon, 1999 p. 408) about their role as educators of Black children.

Sankofa Charter School was chosen as the research site because it offers what no other charter school or traditional public school offered in the district, an African-centered curriculum. Gordon (1990) challenges educational researchers to seek out instances of, and to create, “culturally compatible pedagogy” (p. 103). It is this researcher’s belief that it is possible to create educational environments authentically inclusive of all students. Educators must acquire the requisite tools to overcome both cultural and social barriers obstructing public schools and move beyond schooling to deliver a culturally inclusive, culturally relevant, and socially just education (Shujaa, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000). Narratives of Black families are scant in educational research in the area of school choice. The stories of families deciding to withdraw from traditional public schools and enroll their children into an African-centered choice school contribute a depth and authenticity previously missing from education research. The omission of Black parent and family narratives from the body of research has served to hinder the critical work of creating culturally relevant public school environments and has operationalized the use of fallacious hegemonic constructs of knowledge to inform public school policies and programs. As Black parents’ and families’ visions, values, and beliefs begin to inform public school educators’ practices the work to fulfill the democratic mission of educating a culturally competent, economically just, and civically active citizenry will authentically transpire (Gordon, 1990; Delpit, 1995; Shujaa, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000).

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to seek out, describe, and understand: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? Additionally, the study asked: What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice? The research question was designed to infuse “first person accounts” (Merriam, 1998, p. 157) about the educational needs of Black students from the narratives of parents and families into the current research base. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the use of narrative is critical in helping to construct meaning when studying a phenomenon. What was the nature of the motivating factors informing Black parent and family choice to exit traditional public school? Was it a move toward cultural competence (Bowers, 1984; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995)? Was it a move to reject the imbalance in power dynamics (Delpit, 1995; Spring, 1989; Marable, 1997)? Was the choice parents and families made motivated by a desire to find an educational setting centered on the transmission of authentic cultural identity, tradition, purpose, and control (DuBois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933; Spring, 1989; Marable, 1997)?

As Black parents and families exercised their right to choose charter schools in unanticipated numbers, Black flight from traditional public schools began to be documented quantitatively as a phenomenon replicated in school systems throughout North Carolina as well as in school systems across the nation (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007, Frankenburg and Lee, 2003). The focus of the research was to document the significance of the movement by seeking out and listening to the narratives of Black parents and

families who were among the first to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and opt for an African-centered charter school. The narratives allow for a greater understanding of Black parents' and families' vision for their children in an educational setting. What motivating factors informed parent and family decision-making when opting for an African-centered educational choice?

The Professional Significance of the Study

The study sought to understand the motivating factors that inform Black parents' and families' decisions to remove their children from traditional public school settings typically based in a Eurocentric belief system and place them in a culturally relevant African-centered charter school. The desired outcome of the research is that the perspectives of Black parents and families will serve to support public school educators' work to deconstruct policies and practices that force Black children and their families into cultural deficit models. Affording educators the opportunity to read and reflect upon Black parent and family narratives that expressing culturally-centered background knowledge currently missing in parent choice literature may promote the design of policies and practices to advance authentically-informed models of education based on cultural capital and culturally relevant programs of study (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000). The research sought to understand and illustrate an unprecedented educational phenomenon, Black flight from traditional public school settings through a publicly-funded school choice initiative, charter schools. Research illuminating the narratives of Black parents' and families' educational decision-making presents a significant and timely contribution to the field of education. The findings of the research study will assist educational practitioners as they facilitate the restructuring of schools to be culturally

relevant and educate students to be culturally competent. Reading first-hand accounts of Black parents' and families' experiences and perceptions of traditional public schools as well as understanding the motivating factors that led them to exit may allow educators to examine their own beliefs and values in relation to the education of Black children and reflect on how their beliefs and values may serve to liberate or bind children (Bowers, 1984).

Parent and family narratives contributed by study respondents bore witness to the body of research affirming the standpoint that educational settings based in Eurocentric beliefs “school” Black children rather than “educate” them (Shujaa, 1993, p. 14).

Franklin (1989) asserts that “what we must demand is this: that the schools shift their focus from the supposed deficiencies of the black child—from the alleged inadequacies of black family life—to the barriers that stand in the way of academic success” (p. 2).

Gordon (1999), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000), Shujaa (1993), and Bowers (1984), echo the need for culturally-relevant curricula and pedagogy to prepare all students to be culturally competent.

Sankofa offered an African-centered education model unique among publicly-funded schools. Sankofa's culturally-based model of education authentically articulated the Africans' historical experiences and encouraged students to see themselves “not merely as seekers of knowledge but as integral participants in it” (Asante, 1991, p. 171).

It is hoped that the narratives informing this study can aid the reader in creating the “liminal space” Bowers (1984) speaks of to examine unconscious cultural beliefs and rethink basic cultural assumptions that serve to bind and not liberate students. Gordon (1999), Ladson-Billings (1995), Franklin (1989) and Asante (1991) call for pre-service

and in-service teacher training in the area of cultural literacy and competence. Educators who realize cultural competency will be able to recognize, understand, and critique the social and political power structures currently imbedded into public schools educational environments.

American public school education systems have moved through a variety of cultural models yet staff development and pre-service training remains unable to effectively challenge and dismantle the stronghold Eurocentric and hegemonic beliefs have on public school educational settings and curricula. By remaining “naive” about prejudice, prejudice is enacted in educational environments daily. As a result of ineffective staff development models in the area of cultural competency, the majority of public school educators do not associate themselves with racism, its cause, or its remedies (McIntosh, 1990; McLauren, 1997; Weis & Fine, 1993). The study documented Black parents’ and families’ perspectives through narrative to help educators personalize the call for people throughout the field of education as well as disciplines related to the field of education to become “less naive and a little more honest” (Gordon, 1999 p. 408) in relation to unexamined beliefs and actions that contribute to the historic cycle of the denial of basic economic opportunities and political rights to some and not to others (Marable, 1997). The narratives generated by respondents contributing to the study provide educators with an opportunity to scrutinize their assumptive beliefs based on taken-for-granted knowledge in relation to equality, social justice, economic justice, and education (Bowers, 1984).

The narratives contained in the study identify common factors to facilitate more effective communication between educators and Black families related to educational

values and beliefs as well as school choice. The narratives are informative as time constraints make it difficult during the course of a school day to have deep discussions with the families of children who are dissatisfied with a school's environment. Add to this dilemma differences in race, class, or language and the barriers to meaningful discussion involve issues of power, authority, and trust (Franklin, 1989; Marable, 1997; McIntosh, 1990). Dissatisfied families reluctant to talk openly about their beliefs or share their perceptions for fear that their child may suffer some form of retribution from the educator choose not to enact voice. Distrust of school personnel runs high when families believe they are not being treated equitably; however, it is imperative that Black families and public school educators begin to genuinely listen to each other and work toward understanding each other. Marable (1997) contends that "where tension and honest dialogue exist, where there is a recognition of difference and commonality, the environment for learning is extraordinary" (p. 99). Marable believes that educators must take the time to create opportunities for mutual understanding across the barriers of class, color, and faith. The parent and educator narratives contained in this study can serve as points of reflection that may be useful to educators when planning to open lines of communication with Black families who may feel disenfranchised from their children's educational setting.

Tye (1987) speaks of restructuring schools to break down the deep standard operating procedures of schooling that shape students in the same mold regardless of issues related to diversity and intellectual ability (p. 10). Including parents' perceptions and perspectives in school improvement plans and policy is essential. This study may help educators begin to create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and break down the

cultural isolation of the American public school system from the Black community (Spring, 1989, p. 128). It is the researcher's desire that the narratives presented in this study serve to inform public school educators' thought processes and discussions when identifying school-based and community-based barriers impeding equal access to education. The study articulates tangible cultural indicators desired by Black families when considering school choice options for their children.

The research study did not aim to construct an educational model or program for public schools that produces cultural relevance and competence and creates culturally literate educators and students. There is no quick fix or one-size-fits-all solution to an educational challenge of such magnitude. The study speaks to the restructuring of public schools to genuinely include the concerns of all its stakeholders. Black Americans have struggled for control of their educational destinies and the quality of their education for centuries. It is time to emphasize the need to listen to Black families' beliefs and visions and concerns for their children. Even if public schools are filled to capacity, they are hollow when void of genuine human relationships and absent deep understanding of who we are, where we have journeyed from, and where we are going.

Overview of the Methodology

What motivating factors inform Black families' decision to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into an African-centered charter school and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice? The focus of this research was to gain insight into and understand the perspective of Black families and the motivating factors informing their choice to enroll their children in an African-centered charter school as well as to discern

what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice. The study focused on Black families exiting traditional public schools and enrolling in a charter school offering an African-centered model of education.

The research employed a qualitative research design. This design utilized the qualitative strategies of observation, interview, field notes, and document analysis. The study was designed to guide the researcher towards a deeper understanding of Black families' visions and values concerning the education of their children.

The study is an extension of a NCDPI grant to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the direction of Dr. George Noblit. This NCDPI grant explored the "best practices" of charter schools operating in the state of North Carolina. The researcher was an assistant investigator and a co-team leader at three of the charter schools included in the NCDPI study. The study presented within these chapters occurred at one of the schools included in the NCDPI "best practices" grant.

In-depth interviews were conducted at the charter school with board members, the principal, teachers, students, and parents using the NCDPI interview guides designed by the university research team under the direction of Dr. Noblit for the North Carolina charter school best practices research grant. The study utilized the parent and site-based respondents interview data set gathered during the NCDPI Best Practices study and reanalyzed the data thematically to focus on the research question: What motivating factors inform Black families' decision to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in an African-centered charter school and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice? The

study incorporated triangulation measures. The organizing framework for the study was grounded in the cultural relevance/culturally appropriate theories discussed in liberatory/emancipatory educational research. The data coding and analysis for the research question focused on Black families' experiences and subsequent decision making to discern culturally specific indicators informing school choice (Cooper, 2005).

Delimitations of the Study

The research study's qualitative design may limit the generalizability of the findings to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Although the study focused on one site the use of narrative presents the opportunity for the general to be found in the particular (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) and Greene (1988) support the use of rich thick description as a strategy to increase the possibility for the reader to discover a "universal from a particular" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). Firestone (1987) refers to the process of the reader recognizing the similarities and differences between their situation and the qualitative research study as a case-to-case transfer. Therefore it is left to the reader to interpret the relationship of the findings from the study to their particular educational setting.

The research was designed to respond to the uniqueness of the site and the phenomenon of Black families exiting traditional public schools and enrolling in an African-centered charter school. Within the selected strategies from qualitative methodology, the researcher was prepared to address unexpected limitations when and if they became evident during the research process. However, the research questions posed minimized this potential problem. The research asks: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their

children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice? Additionally, the researcher was guided by the conceptual framework for the proposed study grounded in the cultural relevance/culturally appropriate theories discussed in liberatory/emancipatory educational research. As a result the focus, design, and data collection strategies chosen by the researcher sought out the experiences and perceptions of an emic, or insider's, perspective (Merriam, 1998).

A second limitation related to the site of the study. Although the educational environment is an African-centered model of education, it was still a publicly funded charter school. Charter schools in North Carolina are mandated to take the state-designed End-of-Grade or End-of-Course tests. The charter school's agency to fully implement an African-centered curriculum may have experienced a level of interference from this imposed regulatory constraint. A liberatory/emancipatory move away from traditional public schools is not a clean break for an African-centered charter school as forces that have historically derailed social, political, and economic equality for Black Americans continue to influence charter school law. The accountability standards designed by policy elites and driven by Eurocentric educational paradigms are imposed on charter schools through state- and federally-mandated testing required of all schools that accept state and federal funding. This research did not seek to address the complexities of the accountability dilemma. The study's focus was to observe, describe, and understand the motivating factors that informed Black families' choice to remove their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in an African-centered charter school as well as

to discern what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice. The study focused on culturally relevant indicators.

The final delimitation of the research was an ethical concern relating to the researcher's positionality. Positionality is one's location in society as represented by race, class, and gender (Cooper, 2005). In both the NCDPI charter school best practices study and the research investigating family choice the researcher was exploring the experiences and environment of a group the researcher is not and cannot be a member of (Gordon, 1990; McIntosh, 1990; Spindler, 1987). This ethical dilemma informed the make up of the team of researchers the investigator was assigned to work with for the NCDPI study. The researcher was one member of a three-person graduate student team made up of one Black male, one Black female, and one White female. During data gathering, the researcher received guidance and advice from a multi-racial group of fellow doctoral students and university academics. The researcher's dissertation committee is experienced in collecting and analyzing data under similar circumstances. Every effort was made to capture the naturalistic setting of the site. As the research was analyzed and written every effort was made by the researcher to "listen to the evidence" (DuBois, 1953, p. 61) and check the work for the possible influence of researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Ultimately the reader will make her or his own assessment of the final presentation in relation to the research findings with regard to positionality and life circumstances. Chapter 3 details the research design and the strategies employed to minimize researcher subjectivity.

Definition of Important Terms

Charter School

There is no universal definition of a charter school for the purpose of the research question, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” The researcher identified and employed the following definition of a charter school: a charter school is a legally and fiscally autonomous, publicly-funded school of choice that is designed and operating under a charter or contract negotiated between organizers and public sponsors (Vergari, 1999, p. 390). Organizers may be parents, educators, nonprofit organizations, or corporations as per the regulations set forth in state school law. Sponsors may be local school boards, state school boards, and or other public authorities including universities. Typically, charter school applications must contain a clearly-defined mission, as well as articulate provisions for curriculum, performance, and finance (Schneider, 1998; Vergari, 1999). Ideally, a charter schools’ main purpose is to be responsive to the desires and demands of parents, students, and teachers while exercising autonomy in the areas of pedagogy and management through innovative practices (Vergari, 1999).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) supports the development of critical perspectives that assist students in differentiating and challenging the social inequities affecting their ability to exercise self-determination. Ladson-Billings (1995) terms this educational framework Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (p. 469). Ladson-Billings (1995) credits

Irvine's work, *Black Students and School Failure* (1990) with breaking away from the cultural deficit model or the culturally disadvantaged explanations that initially led to compensatory education and advancing the concept of "cultural synchronization" (p. 468). Cultural synchronization extends beyond speech and language interactions and explores the cultural mores of mutuality, reciprocity, spirituality, deference, and responsibility (Irvine, 1990, pp. 468–469). Ladson-Billings (1995) extends Irvine's concept of cultural synchronization by proposing a pedagogy that encompasses student achievement as well as an awareness of and appreciation for cultural identity. Gordon (1990) calls for dialogue that "does not marginalize minority intellectual discourse," and she further posits that, if there is "such a thing as culturally compatible pedagogy, we must attempt to identify and apply it to see whether it can be widely transfused into public schools and teacher preparation" (p. 103).

Liberatory/Emancipatory Education

Liberatory/emancipatory education is a conceptual framework that advocates that the study of education and of related fields be generated across disciplines to invalidate the hegemony of knowledge constructs based in Eurocentric beliefs and to re-envision education through African-centered concepts of knowledge (Shujaa, 1993, p. 11). Gordon (1993) asserts that liberatory/emancipatory theoretical frameworks have the potential to move America toward a genuine democratic society if schools and other learning institutions counter Anglo-hegemony by providing alternate paradigms through which to view, perceive, and understand reality (p. 58).

African-centered Education

Asante (1987) is considered to be the leading theorist and designer of Afrocentricity. Asante problematizes the effects Eurocentric paradigms have on Black students enrolled in American public schools.

Asante (1991) drew upon the writings of Carter G. Woodson (1933) to examine the relationship of Afrocentric education and the American educational philosophy. Asante (1991) offers two fundamental purposes of education. First, education is a phenomenon, the ultimate purpose of which is to socialize the learner, that is, to send a child to school is to prepare that child to become a part of a social group; and second, schools are reflective of the societies that develop them (p. 170).

Asante (1991) advocates that students must see themselves as subjects rather than objects of education and that all students must be participants in gathering knowledge and not solely seekers of knowledge. He believes effective teaching models place students in the center of the curriculum and further advocates for knowledge to be contextualized in cultural and ethnic paradigms in order for students to relate to different cultural perspectives from a position of social and psychological strength.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter 1 is introductory. It presents the rationale for and a description of the problem that the study addresses. Chapter 2 presents a working review of the theoretical and empirical literature that relates to liberatory/emancipatory frameworks of education and to motivating factors for parental/family choice in an African-centered charter school. Chapter 3 presents the

methodology and its rationale. Chapter 4 reports the study's data and results, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose for the study and articulated the problem that the study addressed. It described the significance of the study, the research perspective, the research methodology, as well as the delimitations of the study and definitions related to the study. It concluded with a brief summary of the organization of the remaining chapters for the proposed research study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the research question: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? The chapter opens with an account of the trends and issues of the American public school choice movement leading to the development of charter schools. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature focused on the role of parents and families in relation to school choice, specifically Black parents and families. Finally, chapter 2 includes a review of liberatory/emancipatory frameworks of education with a particular interest in cultural relevance and cultural competence as embodied by an African-centered model of education.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study. First, it presents an account of the trends and issues of the American public school choice movement leading to the development of charter schools. Second, the chapter reviews research literature focused on the role of parents and families in relation to school choice, specifically Black parents and families. Third, it presents a review of the African-centered approach to education. Last, the chapter reviews the conceptual framework of the research and how it informs the study.

School Choice Movement Trends

The study focused on the question: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice? To begin, one must review and understand the history of the American public school choice movement leading to the development of charter schools and creating an opportunity for Black families to act on their decision making.

Public school choice programs have expanded in the United States since the 1970s (Brown, 1999, Raywid, 1985). At present, there is no universally accepted definition of school choice. For the purpose of this research, the researcher has adopted

the definition of school choice offered by Metcalf, Muller, and Legan (2001) as “providing individual parents or families with some range of alternatives in their children’s education from which they may make choices they believe are best suited to their children” (p. 3). Raywid (1985) suggests that school choice schemes are the result of pressure on public schools from two forces, desegregation law and parental dissatisfaction with school district attempts to empower parents through decentralization and advisory councils. As reported in a review of educational research literature for the American Educational Research Association (Raywid, 1985), the major contributing factors to parental dissatisfaction include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the perception that parents have very little to say about the education of their children;
- the fact that, over the years, control of the schools has moved increasingly in the direction of central district offices, states, the federal government, and producers of ancillary constructs such as textbook publishers, testing services, and accreditation agencies;
- the sense of impotence and ensuing alienation experienced by many parents in trying to deal with local schools;
- the growing evidence of systemic failure of the school to deal effectively with some student populations;
- the growing evidence of the disaffection and psychic estrangement from schools of those who work in them (teachers as well as students);
- the explication and dissemination of the notion that there is no one best system of education for all youngsters;

- the growing public resentment of service agencies and the ensuing critique of the service professions; and
- the intensification of particular social problems, including segregation, school violence and vandalism, the decline of the cities, and youth unemployment.

(Raywid, 1985, p. 435)

Since the 1970s, public educational systems have been responding to parental pressure for change with a menu of choice programs that, according to Metcalf et al., (2001), are a mix of both forced choice and legitimate choice. A brief account of the choice movement in American public schools prior to the inception of charter schools follows.

Metcalf et al. (2001, p. 4) designed a diagram (Table 2.1) of public school choice programs in order to provide an organizational framework for a discussion of the range of school choice options. For the purpose of this research, the researcher adapted the diagram to incorporate two choice options not mentioned in the research by Metcalf et al., (2001), but which are otherwise discussed at length in a study of public choice options researched by Raywid (1985) for the American Education Research Association. The diagram begins with the most limited programs in the arena of school choice, identified as the “public–public school choice.” Public–public choice includes choice options that range from the most restrictive choice options, Teacher options, to the least restrictive public–public choice options, Inter-district choice. The middle of the choice diagram, “semi–private choice,” is less restrictive in the area of administrative requirements and ranges from the most restrictive semi-public choice schools, charter

schools, to the least restrictive semi-public choice, home schools. The diagram concludes with “public–private” choice options that include tuition tax credits and/or voucher programs. The literature review for the research question, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?,” will discuss “public–public” choice options as well as a “semi–private” choice option, charter school.

Table 2.1: A Diagram of School Choice Options

Public–Public Choice	Semi–Private Choice	Public–Private Choice
Teacher	Charter schools	Vouchers
Classroom	Home schooling	Tuition tax credits
Tracking		
Alternative school		
School-within-a-school		
Magnet schools		
Intra-district choice		
Inter-district choice		

Public–Public Choice Options

Teacher. At the school site level, parents may request a specific teacher at their child’s grade level. This request may be made to or solicited by the administration, depending upon site-based and/or district policies with respect to placement within the general or exceptional childhood setting.

Classroom. At the school site level, parents may request a specific classroom. This classroom selection request may be made to or solicited by the administration

because of the teacher or the student mix in relation to other students in the classroom (friends, siblings, student dynamics, health concerns). Again, the process for the request is dependent upon site-based and/or district policies with respect to placement within the general or exceptional childhood setting.

Tracking. Students are separated by ability as well as interest, race, and socio-economic status. Empirical studies have found that content differentials in curriculum limit and or freeze future options for students in the tracking model. In 1967 tracking was held to be a discriminatory practice on both racial and economic grounds (Rosenbaum, 1976). Research by Oakes (1983) and Rosenbaum (1976) revealed that, once placed in a track either by force or as a result of legitimate choice, students rarely have the opportunity for upward movement into a more advanced program of study; in fact, if there is any movement, it is more than likely a downward move into a lower track. Research suggests that ability separations have the tendency to increase educational disparities. Students from minority, poor, and low ability backgrounds will often receive the weaker teachers, smaller classrooms, and participate in fewer school programs and activities (Gittell, Berube, Demas, Flavin, Rosentraub, Spier, & Tatge, 1973; Kozol, 1991; Spring, 1989). The economic prospects for low tracked students as adult members of society are bleak, as they “are denied equal opportunity to obtain the white collar education available to white and more affluent children” (Filson, 1967, p. H7698).

Alternative Schools. The late 1960s saw the alternative school movement begin as a choice option in the American public school system (Graubard, 1974; Nathan, 1976, Tice, Chapman, Princiotta, Bielick, 2006). The alternative school movement was an effort to address the inequities inherent in what Tyack (1974) later referred to as the “one

best system.” The alternative school movement grew from the recognition that public schools needed to address the following objectives:

- a more personalized and humanistic setting for young people;
- a broader, more exciting, challenging, and satisfying education for young people;
- a more meaningful link between childhood and adulthood, better acquainting young people with the world they are entering and better equipping them to deal with it;
- a more accurate picture of the world—especially its problems and injustices—and more effective ways of dealing with it;
- open up genuine educational opportunities for youngsters with whom conventional public schooling seemed systematically unsuccessful, e.g., inner city poor and minorities.

(Raywid, 1985, p. 438)

The variety of alternative school programs that grew out of these five objectives corresponded to the needs of the population the alternative school was designed to serve. Raywid’s (1985) analysis states that schools designed to attend to the first three objectives resulted in majority white, upper middle class, suburban alternatives and schools designed to attend to the last two objectives drove urban, inner city alternative schools (p. 438).

However, no matter what the specific theme of the school, an identifiable common thread throughout the alternative school movement was a grass roots effort that sought to create educational settings responsive to student needs and interests that were

otherwise perceived as nonexistent in traditional public schools (Fantini, 1973). The programs that resulted from the alternatives movement were as diverse as the students the movement sought to serve. Alternative schools include, but are not limited to, the following organizational themes: open schools, schools-without-walls, learning centers, and continuation centers. Instructional practices and programs of study were designed to reach students in meaningful ways and encapsulated both old and new educational concepts, such as independent study, experiential learning, service learning, and the ideal of schools as models of democratic communities. The alternative school movement was led by people who worked within the newly initiated programs and purposely sought to define themselves by how dissimilar they were from the existing traditional school settings (Wolf, Walker, and Mackin, 1974). The aspiration was that the alternative school movement would model best practices for public schools throughout the United States. Although there have been pockets of success in the alternative school movement, alternative schools have been and remain typically “localized” single-program efforts within a school district that are designed to respond to a single challenge or problem target group. Alternative schools are not likely to impart best practices to other schools within the district (Goodlad, 1983).

Magnet Schools. According to Fuller and Elmore (1996), magnet schools first emerged in Milwaukee and Cincinnati during the 1970s and currently exist throughout the United States. Magnet schools are thematic schools of choice and operate within traditional district-assignment and/or controlled-choice districts. According to Raywid (1985), magnet schools were largely created as to serve as a voluntary alternative to judicial school desegregation mandates. Magnet schools usually represent a school

district's desire to facilitate diversity while offering a motivating and engaging educational environment for all students enrolled within the program. The ultimate goal is to create distinctive, attractive thematic programs of study that appeal to parents and students across racial lines as determined by residential housing patterns (Blank, Dentler, Baltzer, & Charbotar, 1983). In a study of three large school systems (St. Louis, MO, Cincinnati, OH, and Nashville, TN) conducted in 2001 by the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, magnet schools both encouraged desegregation and met the test of serving poor children more effectively than the schools the students previously attended (Hadderman, 2002, p .4).

Studies that analyze magnet schools through family choice models reveal a number of advantages that contribute to positive parental perceptions. Magnet schools are viewed by families as sites offering meaningful school reform initiatives as well as enhanced educational programs. Faculty at magnet schools are perceived to be more dedicated and enthusiastic than their peers at non-magnet schools and are further perceived to possess the expertise to design and deliver more rigorous and contextualized programs of study. Magnet school parents and families typically view administrators at their school to be interactive and open. Parents and families also perceive that magnet schools are of higher quality because they are "special" (Fleming, Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, 1982; Blank et al., 1983). Studies that focus on family choice and magnet schools reveal that, despite the increase in parental/family satisfaction, parent involvement levels are neither high nor unique in relation to magnet schools. The increase is clearly in the arena of parent/family satisfaction and does not indicate an increase in parent/family involvement (Raywid, 1985; Tice et al., 2006).

Research focused on magnet schools raises concern surrounding parent/family choice in relation to ethnic and class related values associated with child-rearing (Warren, 1978; Raywid, 1985). Differences in opinion and approach to child-rearing cut across socio-economic status, ethnicity, and gender. Though some of the differences can be addressed in school settings with best practice site-based solutions, others are deeply imbedded in cultural belief systems and are difficult to address through policy. Research indicates that perception of school climate and its support of or detracting from family child rearing values is a pervasive factor in families' exercise of available magnet school options (Warren, 1978; Raywid, 1985).

Schools within school. Schools within school are another school choice option and are separate school programs housed within a parent school (Raywid, 1985; Cookson, Jr., & Shroff, 1997). This school choice option is related to school reform initiatives that have philosophical roots in the 1960s. One belief that fueled this initiative was the notion that schools were becoming "impervious bureaucracies" (Raywid, 1985, p. 454), that their size was a barrier to meaningfully addressing the needs of students, and that to be effective it was imperative for schools to be humane and supportive (Cookson, Jr., & Shroff, 1997).

Initially, schools within school were an administrative unit created within a larger school to serve one of two populations. The first population was the student that needed more than the conventional program of study due to the student's advanced intellectual ability as identified through standardized tests and the student's intrinsic motivational drive to learn. The second population of students served by schools within school was typically underachieving and possibly on a trajectory that would lead to dropping out of

school or expulsion from school for disruptive behaviors (Raywid, 1985; Cookson, Jr., & Shroff, 1997). Eventually, schools within school began to serve a third identified population of students as year-round school calendars became appealing to parents (Matthews and Hansen, 1995).

Researchers have found schools within school to be adaptable and flexible and able to work effectively in urban, suburban, and rural elementary and secondary settings (Goodlad, 1983; Boyer, 1983; Sizer, 1984). The challenge to schools within school that serve underperforming students is the ability to maintain the program as a choice option and not a forced choice. In order for choice models to be effective, they must remain voluntary. When families believe their student has been “sentenced” to a particular school setting, the perception of quality in relation to the program of study and the educational setting is negatively altered and parental support is appreciably diminished (Wehlage, Stone, Lenko, Nauman, & Page, 1982).

Intra-district choice and Inter-district choice. Finally, according to Metcalf et al., (2001), the continuum of “public-public” school choice programs ends with intra-district choice plans or inter-district choice plans. Intra-district choice plans allow students to choose schools across residential zones within their district. District plans may vary and districts may offer limited school of choice options or include all schools within the district in the choice option policy (Cookson, Jr., & Shroff, 1997).

Inter-district plans allow families to choose to send their students to school outside the district in which they reside. Traditionally, inter-district school choice plans have been made available in the case of special education students (Raywid, 1985). State funds follow the student and transportation is typically provided. Missouri, Michigan,

Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin adopted inter-district enrollment plans on a voluntary basis to help reduce racial imbalance (Cookson, Jr., & Shroff, 1997).

Semi-Private Choice Options

Charter Schools. Charter schools are categorized by researchers Metcalf et al. (2001) as “semi-private” choice programs that are “neither clearly public nor clearly private” (p. 4). Additionally, charter schools have been characterized as “quasi-public schools” that straddle the boundary between public and private settings (Witte, 1996, p. 161; Vergari, 1999, p. 389).

In the late 1970s, school administration professor Ray Budde brought the concept of the charter school into the educational policy arena (Nathan, 1996). The idea was further championed by Albert Shanker as an opportunity to increase school choice options within the public school system while not wholly abandoning the public school system, a phenomenon that voucher programs would ensure (Vergari, 1999; Nathan, 1996). The first charter school law was enacted in Minnesota in 1991 (Manno, Vanourek, & Finn, Jr., 1999). For the purpose of exploring the research questions: “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” the researcher has identified and will use the following definition of a charter school: a charter school is a legally and fiscally autonomous, publicly funded school of choice that is designed and operating under a charter or contract negotiated between organizers and public sponsors (Vergari, 1999, p. 390). Organizers may be parents, educators, nonprofit organizations or corporations, in accordance with the

regulations set forth in state school law. Sponsors may be local school boards, state school boards, and or other public authorities including universities. Typically, charter school applications must contain a clearly defined mission, as well as articulate provisions for curriculum, performance, and finance (Schneider, 1998; Vergari, 1999). Ideally, charter schools' main purpose is to be responsive to the desires and demands of parents, students, and teachers while exercising autonomy in the areas of pedagogy and management through innovative practices (Vergari, 1999).

In separate studies, researchers Wells (1998) and Vergari (1999) articulate key differences driving the “public–public” choice options offered by school districts and the “semi–private” choice option made available through the charter schools movement. Both Wells (1998) and Vergari (1999) found that, since 1978, the driving force behind school districts' creation of “public–public” choice models has been to serve one of two functions: 1) school districts with segregated housing patterns utilize choice options as a palatable desegregation alternative to circumvent forced busing; and 2) choice options are a mechanism to provide parents with the perception of a private school culture funded by public school money. According the to the U.S. Department of Education, in the year 1999–2000, there were 3,026 magnet schools “with explicit desegregation objectives” enrolling 2.5 million students and 2,550 magnet schools “without explicit desegregation objectives” enrolling 2.0 million students (Tice et al., 2006, p. 5).

Wells (1998) and Vergari (1999) assert that semi–private choice options focus on parent concerns and are not driven by district needs. The U.S. Department of Education (2000) reported that the charter school movement used the following self descriptors as enticements to parents and families:

- small class size, leading to an enhanced learning environment for students;
- instructional programs that focus on student needs, interests and academic achievement;
- positive relationships with constituents providing a sense of community and collaboration;
- access to novel learning environments designed to improve educational opportunities for students; and
- accountability to parents and families and students who have chosen the school on the basis of the mission, vision, purpose stated in the charter.

Based on the descriptors cited above, it is clear that charter schools provide an opportunity for the focal point of an educational setting to shift from district goals and converge on student needs as identified and articulated by charter school organizers, inclusive of parents (Casey, Anderson, Yelverton, & Wedeen, 2002; Manno et al., 1999). This shift in agency allows for a departure from the existing structures of school programs in the areas of curriculum and instruction, organizational leadership, governance, staffing, and parent involvement. Research on charter schools has identified dozens of school programs. The majority are not dissimilar to previous school reform initiatives offered through the “public–public” choice arena (Metcalf et al., 2001, p. 4). Merely a few embody unconventional, innovative approaches (Manno et al., 1999).

Black Parent Choice. In 2003, a report written by Frankenburg and Lee for Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project stated that, nationwide, African American students represented 33% of the charter school population but only 17% of the total U.S. public school population. The exodus of Black families from public schools has been a

quiet and unanticipated movement. As noted in Chapter 1, during the final moments before North Carolina charter school legislation was approved, lawmakers debated whether or not charter schools might give rise to another era of “white flight” (Cecelski , 1994, pp. 24–25) from traditional public school settings into the charter school settings (Simmon, 1999; Silberman, 2000). Lawmakers and educators clearly did not identify the unintended consequence of Black families’ “flight” from public schools as the charter school law was crafted.

Charter schools are categorized as semi–private choice schools by Metcalf et al. (2001) and create an opportunity for parents and families to access unconventional and innovative programs of study largely unavailable to their children in traditional public school settings. The charter school movement offers Black families the prospect to create or participate in African-centered models of education. The researcher explored such an occurrence and asked, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?”

The landmark ruling *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) has fallen short of its promise of educational equity for Black students and the school choice movement is a response to its failure. Wilkinson (1996) states that although the mandated change in the school setting was necessary for Blacks to gain access to public accommodations and other institutions, it is flawed. Wilkinson points to the numbers of African American children who are failing, dropping out of school, and graduating without basic literacy skills. She continues to voice her concern stating, “For example, schools that served not

only as educational institutions but as community centers in predominately black neighborhoods have been closed; the burden of busing has fallen disproportionately upon Black children and their developmental and cultural needs are not being met” (p. 29). A teacher who attended segregated schools growing up states:

The Black child has gotten cheated through integration [because] the Black child has to prove himself [or herself]. With integration, [we] got more money, better facilities, better textbooks. [But] what is missing is the nurturing and the caring. This has negative effects. Kids who could have been leaders are pretty much ignored. [You] can't ignore somebody and expect them to behave, to fit in. (Wilkinson, 1996, pp. 27–28)

A parent states:

As an African American parent who has sent one daughter to predominantly white schools I know we have paid a price. The single most important thing that the movement towards school choice demonstrates is that constitutional declarations have little meaning in the lives of children when their parents are precluded from active participation in the design and implementation of school programs. (Barnes, 1997, p. 2387)

Barnes (1997) states that Black parents report a feeling of tension when they seek meaningful involvement in evaluating or designing school policies with White parents and that Black parents have reported a pattern of exclusionary practices when decision-making sessions are held at school. Goldring and Hausman (1999) found that parents want ‘good schools’ that match their values. Parents who choose to leave their previous school are leaving because they are dissatisfied and are more focused on ‘going away’ from a school then they are ‘looking towards’ the school of choice (p. 474). Goldring and Hausman (1999) state that parents are exercising choice for different reasons in different contexts and found that more minority parents are exercising choice for non-magnet programs and charter schools. Goldring and Hausman (1999) assert that racial quotas for

magnet schools may be influencing minority parents' choice for non-magnet school programs because parents feel their request may not be honored.

Bradley (1998) reports that a poll conducted by Public Agenda, a nonpartisan public opinion research firm, found that 80% of the Black parents polled identified raising academic standards and achievement as a priority. Only 9% of the Black parents polled chose diversity and integration as a priority. Black families shared a deep anxiety about Black student achievement in public schools and believe that public schools are at a crisis point. Sixty-eight percent of the Black parents polled expressed a concern that because of the cultural differences, White teachers are not likely to understand how to teach minority students. Seventy percent of the parents believed that both teachers and principals have lower expectations for Black students due to stereotypes (Bradley, 1998). In the same poll, 63% of the African American parents agreed that too much focus is placed on the differences between Blacks and Whites and not enough of what Blacks and Whites have in common. Additionally, 75% of the Black parents polled believed that it was absolutely imperative for schools to teach students about the contributions Blacks and minorities have made to history.

A mother of four stated, "What I see is, the people running [the public schools] don't have a sense of urgency . . . It's too late for you to say "Trust me. Give me time." If my children are already in school, I don't have the time to give you" (Caire, 2002, p. 1).

A Black parent who conducts research for educational testing and accountability states:

Many of us have paid our dues on the battlefield, fighting for greater educational opportunities for African American students for many years. I have avoided arguing over tiny increases in students' standardized test scores. Most of the standardized tests our students take should not be used as the only measure of their knowledge or their capacity to think and learn. These tests measure

a limited amount of knowledge and a limited number of skills.
(Caire, 2002, p. 7).

A singular reliance on quantitative data to capture the complete story of this exodus without the accompanying narratives of Black families to contextualize what factors motivate their exit from the public school system minimizes the potential this movement can provide with respect to informing future educational practices and policies that heed parents' concerns and create rigorous, culturally affirming, programs of study that meet the needs of their children. The narratives of Black families surrounding exit serve to give voice to the concerns and perceptions informing their decision-making process. Researchers Cooper (2005), and Ogawa and Dutton (1997) assert that the motivating factors behind Black families' choice to leave traditional public schools demands deeper attention through a research framework of exit and voice first utilized by Hirschman in the 1970s. Ogawa and Dutton (1997) support Hirschman's belief that efforts to reconstruct failing organizations to meet the needs of clients must include the use of exit and voice:

Exit occurs when clients become dissatisfied with the quality of an organization's product or service and seek it elsewhere. When the organization recognizes that the clients are exiting, it will improve the quality of its product and thereby regain clients. Voice occurs when dissatisfied clients register their complaints with the organization. When the organization recognizes the substance of the complaints, it improves the quality of its product and, thus, retains and even regains its clients. Clients tend to employ voice when exit is not an available strategy, for instance, in a monopolistic situation. When alternatives do become available, dissatisfied clients are more likely to exit than to voice.
(Ogawa, and Dutton, 1997, pp. 334–335)

Ogawa and Dutton (1997) contend that parents who most value the quality of their child's education will be the "first to exit," and to opt for involvement in choice programs (p. 334).

The researcher's desire to listen to the resolve of parents who are the "first to exit" traditional public schools and become the first to "opt for involvement" in an African-centered charter school shaped the question "When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?" The desire to understand the significance of Black families' unprecedented move to exit the public-public school setting and "opt" to attend an African-centered charter school necessitated the study of exit and voice as perceived through parent narrative.

Children and their parent(s) are impacted minute by minute through the behavior, attitude or disposition of teachers, administrators, staff members, and students within span of the school community. The declining enrollment in "public-public" schools of Black students as reported by Frankenburg and Lee (2003) in Harvard University's Civil Rights Project indicates that Black families are not satisfied with the "public-public" school programs. While it is clear from the quantitative data that Black families are exiting "public-public" school programs and opting to enroll in charter schools, the motivating factors informing the decision to exit are not at all clear. Essential to understanding this exodus is seeking out and listening to Black families' voices.

Cooper (2005) encourages educational researchers to study instances where Black families embrace school choice to understand how school options are enacted. Cooper (2005) contends that "input from parents/families of color" (p. 175) is rare in school

choice research literature and rejects a notion asserted by fellow researchers Apple (2001), Carl (1994), and Henig (1996) that presents Black parents/families as “pawns” (p. 175) in the school choice movement initially championed by a conservative political agenda. Cooper (2005) believes that Black parents/families “subjective positionality,” as opposed to “objective rationality,” powerfully influences their school choices. Parents, therefore, are more apt to make positioned school choices (p. 175). Cooper’s (2005) assertion that positionality, or one’s location in society, as represented by race, class, and gender informs parental/family school choice decision-making opens up an area of research possibilities focused on parent/family narratives to capture the “emotional, value-laden, and culturally relevant” (p. 175) motivation informing Black parents’/families’ move towards African-centered charter schools.

African-centered Charter Schools. The African-centered charter school setting is able to provide an environment that is difficult to find in traditional public schools. Asante (1987), the lead theorist of Afrocentricity, asserts that Eurocentric values present in the dominant culture and represented in public school philosophy seek to maintain the status quo. Nobles (1976) states that the Eurocentric credos of “survival of the fittest” and “control over nature” drive instructional practice and school climate in traditional public school settings and that these beliefs are in direct conflict with the African worldview of “survival of the community” and being “one with nature.” Nobles (1976) goes on to say that in African tradition the individual can only become conscious of one’s own being through one’s people. From an Afrocentric view, schools are more human-centered as opposed to object-centered.

Asante's (1991) work problematizes the effects that Eurocentric paradigms have on Black students enrolled in American public schools and offers two fundamental purposes of education. First, education is a phenomenon, the ultimate purpose of which is to socialize the learner, i.e. to send a child to school is to prepare that child to become a part of a social group. Second, schools are reflective of the societies that develop them (p. 170).

Asante (1991) advocates that students must see themselves as subjects, rather than objects, of education and that all students must be participants in gathering knowledge, and not solely seekers of knowledge. He believes effective teaching models place students in the center of the curriculum and advocates for the notion that, when knowledge is contextualized in cultural and ethnic paradigms, students can relate to different cultural perspectives from a position of social and psychological strength.

At present, successful models integrating culturally-affirming instruction and promoting culturally-competent school climates are the exception and not the rule in traditional public school settings (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Wells et al., (1999) state that efforts in the multicultural arena have failed because the end result was that educators sought to mold an "autonomous, prejudiced-free, individual" (p. 178) rather than educate individuals who were collectively aware of and connected to their cultural identities, capable of discerning and dismantling harmful power relationships and of creating more equitable distributions of power.

African-centered charter schools open up educational settings for Black families and their children who otherwise may not have access to culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The researcher's desire to discern culturally relevant, culturally

specific indicators driving Black family decision-making to exit public schools and to enter an African-centered charter school through the analysis of narratives resulted in the formulation of the research questions: “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?”

Liberatory/Emancipatory Education. The concept of cultural relevance is researched, described and debated within liberatory/emancipatory educational theory. The researcher was influenced by this body of work and sought to utilize the theoretical framework of cultural relevance described in liberatory/emancipatory research as a lens to inform the research questions: “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?”

Liberatory/emancipatory education is a conceptual framework dedicated to de-centering hegemonic constructs of knowledge based in Eurocentric beliefs and re-envisioning education through culturally sensitive and authentic concepts of knowledge (Shujaa, 1993). The roots of liberatory/emancipatory education can be traced to early 19th century abolitionist debates when accommodationist/assimilationist advocates argued for integrated schools and emancipatory/liberatory advocates argued for segregated schools. Fredrick Douglass sounded the call for segregated schools and warned that the assumptions of white educators would alienate a Black student from his culture (Banks, 1996). Northern Black parents heeded Douglas’s warning and in 1832 African American

leaders demanded community control of the African Free Schools in New York City. In the early nineteenth century, Black parents were keenly aware of the role of politics in education (Banks, 1996).

Banks (1996) depicts an educator's experience during the Reconstruction of the South in the 1860s. Edmonia Highgate, a Black principal from the North, requested a teaching position in the South. After four years she returned home and made the following observation: "The teachers sent out by the evangelical organizations do little to remove caste prejudice, the twin sister of slavery. We need Anti-Slavery teachers who will show that it is safe to do it right" (Banks, 1996, p. 32). Public schools in the South were in the hands of the oppressor and the movement of Black communities to control the education of Black students was hindered by increasingly hostile attitudes towards the freed people.

W.E.B. DuBois emerged as one of the first advocates to consistently write and lecture about the need for liberatory/emancipatory education. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1953), DuBois explained that Whites feared educated Blacks "for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong: for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent" (p. 20).

The American Negro Academy (ANA), founded in 1897 by Alexander Crummel, was envisioned to bring together Black professionals affiliated by intellectual ties with the purpose of promoting intellectual activity and leadership. The ANA was formed to counter the growing movement in America that proclaimed Blacks to be socially, morally, and intellectually inferior to Whites. The ANA was designed to have an

inclusive membership of both educators and social scientists focused on the matter of Black education in America.

Prominent members who joined the ANA contested racist explanations of societal and human development and were committed to education as central to the uplift of African Americans. These members set a variety of political and ideological strategies that shaped a century of Black American liberatory/emancipatory protest dialogue (Watkins, 2001).

Carter G. Woodson, a member of the ANA, wrote *The Mis-Education Of The Negro* in 1933. His critique of education is another foundational piece that informs current liberatory/emancipatory educational research.

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does Negroes because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs to those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker people. For example, the philosophy and ethics resulting from our education system has justified slavery, peonage, segregation and lynching. (pp. xi-xiii)

The current study draws from the contemporary work of liberatory/emancipatory researchers Mwalimu Shujaa (1993), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000), and Beverly Gordon (1990, 1993, 1999). All three researchers acknowledge the work of DuBois (1903/1953) and Woodson (1933) as sources of intellectual inspiration on the topic of cultural relevance and the role of culturally affirmative education.

Shujaa (1993) defines education as the “process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness” (p. 15) and schooling as the “process intended to perpetuate and maintain society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (p. 15). Shujaa (1993) goes on to

say that schools can and should provide accurate historical overviews of the ethnic groups of the nation, the continent, and the world that contribute to the “storehouse of human knowledge” and that the attainment of these goals in concert with students’ understanding of cultural histories and identities would prepare children for “full and equal participation in society” (pp. 15–16).

Ladson-Billings (1995) credits Jacqueline Jordan Irvine’s (1990) work, *Black Students and School Failure*, with breaking away from the cultural deficit model or the culturally disadvantaged explanations that initially led to compensatory education and advancing the concept of “cultural synchronization” (p. 468). Cultural synchronization extends beyond speech and language interactions and explores the cultural mores of mutuality, reciprocity, spirituality, deference, and responsibility (Irvine, 1990, p. 468–469). Ladson-Billings (1995) extends Irvine’s concept of cultural synchronization by proposing a pedagogy that encompasses student achievement as well as an awareness of and appreciation for cultural identity. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (1995) supports the development of critical perspectives that assist students in differentiating and challenging the social inequities affecting their ability to exercise self-determination. Ladson-Billings (1995) terms this pedagogy “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” (p. 469).

Gordon (1993) asserts that liberatory/emancipatory theoretical frameworks have the potential to move America toward a genuine democratic society if schools and other learning institutions counter Anglo-hegemony by providing alternate paradigms through which to view, perceive, and understand reality (p. 458). Gordon (1990) calls for dialogue that “does not marginalize minority intellectual discourse” and further posits that, if there is “such a thing as culturally compatible pedagogy, we must attempt to

identify and apply it to see whether it can be widely transfused into public schools and teacher preparation” (p. 103).

Liberatory/emancipatory education calls for culturally affirmative and responsive classrooms based in the culture and history of the African world (Shujaa, 1993). In culturally affirmative classrooms African American paradigms are presented as normative and not as otherness (Gordon, 1990). A critical goal of culturally relevant classrooms is guiding students towards a deep understanding of the emancipatory relationship between knowledge and human activity and to help students become independent of the social barriers that may hinder the development of an authentic self (Ladson-Billings, 1995). All three researchers assert that culturally relevant classrooms have the potential to help build the foundation for a true democratic society inclusive of all citizens and residents of the United States.

The research questions, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” are designed to focus on the narratives of Black families’ decisions to exit the public–public school setting and to “opt” to attend an African-centered charter school. The exploration of the parent and family narratives, while ensuring an emphasis on motivating factors, will be informed and contextualized through the lens of cultural relevance as described in liberatory/emancipatory educational research. It was the researcher’s desire to listen to and understand the narratives of families who chose to leave the public school setting and enter an unproven African-centered charter school setting in its first year of operation.

As previously noted, Hirschman's theory of exit and voice (Ogawa and Dutton, 1997) suggests how to reconstruct organizations that are failing to meet the needs of clients, in this case public schools. Research on school choice is often generalized to all parents and does not capture "the decision-making values or beliefs of parents of color" (Cooper, 2005, p. 176). According to Cooper (2005), research has failed to recognize that parents may forgo traditional school indicators like test scores, location, funding (Neiman, Stambough, 1998; Wells, 1998) and instead rely on culturally specific indicators (Cooper, 2005).

The researcher believed that exploring the moment of school choice through the narratives of parents and families who are "first to exit" (Ogawa & Dutton, 1997, p. 334) from known to unknown, would elicit rich descriptions, contextualize "the decision-making values or beliefs of parents of color" (Cooper, 2005, p. 176), and allow discernment of some of the culturally specific indicators (Cooper, 2005) motivating Black families' decision to exit public schools and enter African-centered charter schools.

Summary

Chapter 2 outlined the school choice movement in the United States and the forces that have driven and continue to influence the creation of school choice options. It has further reviewed the relevant educational research that outlines the role that parents play in school choice. The chapter demonstrated the need for further research into Black families' decision making processes in regard to school choice, in order to add meaning and context to the literature and thereby contribute to future adjustments in educational practice and policy to better meet the needs of Black parents and families. Chapter 2 concludes with a description of the encompassing framework of the research question,

liberatory/emancipatory research, and the researcher's intent to seek out and listen to parents' and families' voices after their exit from the public school setting. As such, the research question and findings may serve to inform future efforts to reconstruct public school settings that are currently failing to meet the needs of Black students and their families.

Chapter 3 presents a blended liberatory/emancipatory conceptual framework designed to act as a lens to guide the study and outlines a qualitative research methodology to explore the research questions: "When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?" and "What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?"

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. First it details the research perspective and its rationale, the conceptual framework of the study, and the research design. Second it describes the context of the study and site selection, research participants and sampling protocol, data collection procedures, data analysis; data reporting procedures, and methods for verification. A brief summary of the research methodology concludes the chapter.

Research Question

The focus of the study is on the research questions: “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” These questions were the catalyst for the research design and the focal point for data analysis. The goal of this research question is to infuse the “first person accounts” (Merriam, 1998, p. 157) of parents’ beliefs concerning the educational needs of Black students into the current research base. Theoretical and empirical research confirms that parental support is key to student success in school (see Chapter 2, Literature Review). The research question reflects the need for educational researchers to seek out and listen

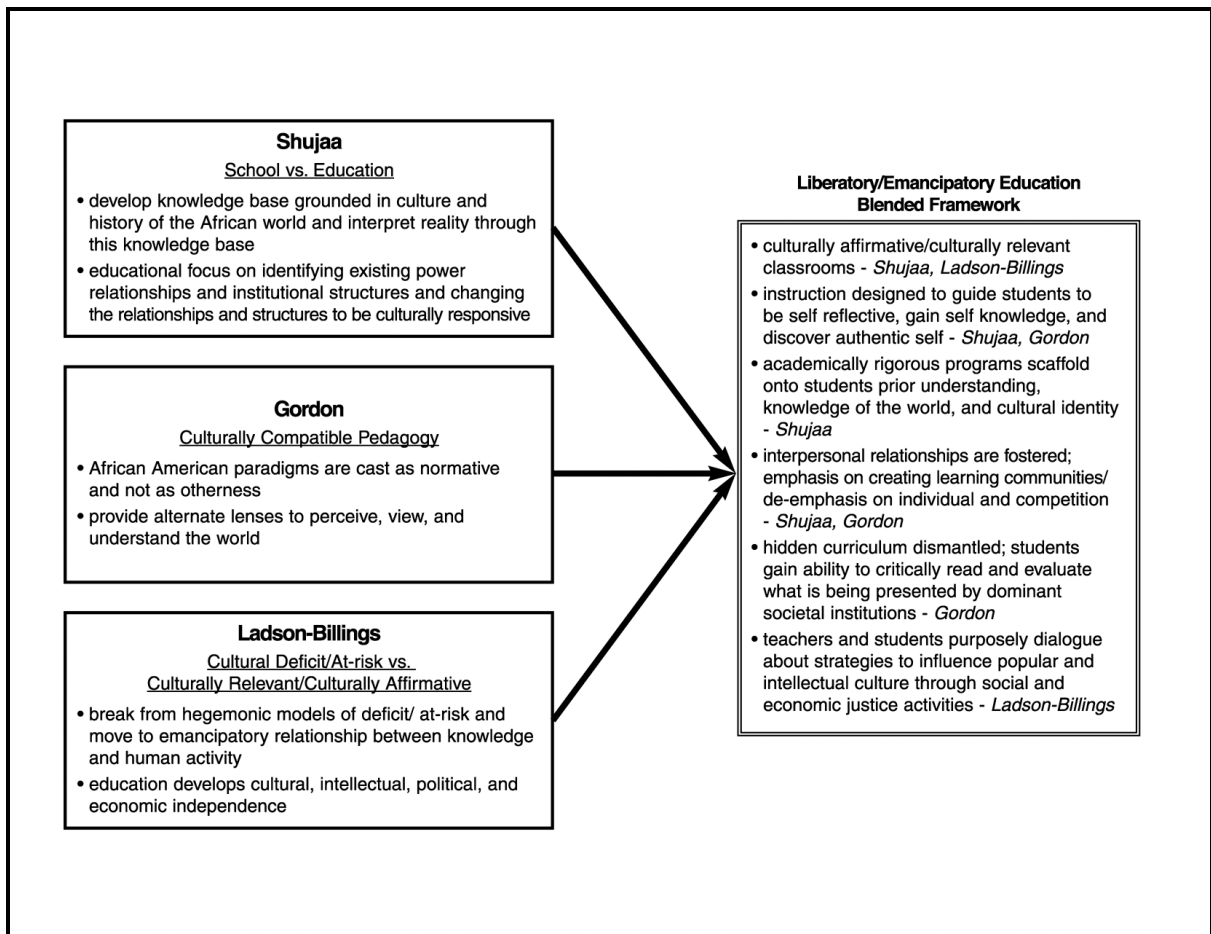
to the beliefs and attitudes of Black parents and families in relation to their children's educational setting.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework for the study was located in a body of research dedicated to liberatory/emancipatory education. Liberatory/emancipatory research advocates that the study of education and of related fields be generated across disciplines to decentralize the hegemony of knowledge constructs based in Eurocentric beliefs and to re-envision education through culturally affirmative and emancipatory concepts of knowledge (Shujaa, 1993, p.11). A blended framework was designed for the study by synthesizing congruent conceptual themes discussed in the work of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000). This blended framework served as the proposed study's lens and informed the reason for the study, the design of the methodology, as well as the analysis of the data, and the implications of the findings. Chapter 2 presented the origins of liberatory/emancipatory education research and discussed the work of researchers Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000). In order to explore the questions, "When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?" and "What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?" a conceptual framework sensitive to the culturally specific indicators Black families may be seeking in exercising their school choice option (Cooper, 2005) was employed. Ultimately, the work of liberatory/emancipatory educational researchers Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) offered the

culturally sensitive lens critical to the study. In order to focus the research, a blended framework was designed specifically for this study and as mentioned earlier identified cultural indicators congruent in the research of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) that may have been contributing factors motivating parental choice. The findings of the analysis are represented in Figure 3.1 and were used as the lens to guide the study.

Figure 3.1: Liberatory/Emancipatory Blended Framework



The Qualitative Research Perspective and its Rationale

The research focused on the phenomena of parental choice with the purpose of exploring and describing “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” The major purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into and understand the perspective of Black families and the motivating factors informing their choice of educational setting for their children.

A holistic approach (Janesik, 2000) generated a richly descriptive study that led the researcher toward an understanding of parental choice as related to the semi-private charter school setting. To this end, the data captured what the collaborators had to say and portrayed their experiences in relation to exiting a traditional public school setting and entering an African-centered charter school setting (Patton, 1990). The research asserts that the culturally specific indicators (Cooper, 2005) gleaned from the study may influence the future design of educational policy, curriculum, and practice to be culturally appropriate and relevant for Black students and their families. A qualitative research perspective was critical to this study.

Research Design

The research perspective and rationale for the study guided the design of a qualitative study. Janesik (2000) notes that the power of a qualitative design is that, by looking at the larger picture, at the whole picture, a search for understanding the whole begins. Additionally, Janesik (2000) states that qualitative research is not constructed to prove something or to control people (p. 385). Patton (1990) asserts that qualitative

methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis and contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of the inquiry (p. 13). It was crucial that the research design aid in freeing the researcher from preconceived notions and assumptions concerning the education of Black students. A qualitative design allowed the researcher to focus on the beliefs and attitudes of the collaborators as opposed to the beliefs and attitudes the researcher may have unintentionally transferred to the study. Minnich (1990) states that, “whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (p. 49).

The nature of the research questions “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” was to perceive what Banks (1996) identifies as the collaborators’ “alternative ways of looking at identical events and situations” (p. 38). Stake (1995) notes that the researcher’s ability to discover the multiple realities of the collaborators “requires continuous attention, an attention seldom sustained when the dominant instruments of data gathering are objectively interpretable checklists or survey items” (p. 43). Exploration into Black families’ choice of an African-centered charter school necessitated that the researcher be able to understand and describe how people constructed meaning at the site; this was a further indication of the need for a qualitative design. The qualitative design allowed for a set of procedures that were open-ended and at the same time rigorous. The goal of the

researcher was to honor the nuances and complexities of the social setting being studied. The capacity to honor the nuances and complexities of a phenomenon develops as information is shared by the collaborators that may reveal a critical event or moment, and demands flexibility, for example, openness to include the unscheduled interview of an individual who feels compelled to share information (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998).

The research study sought to explore the unintended consequence of Black families' "flight" from public schools as a result of the choice option afforded by charter schools. As stated previously in Chapter 2, a singular reliance on quantitative data to capture the complete story of this exodus without the accompanying narratives of parents and families to contextualize what factors motivated them to exit the public school system would have minimized the opportunity for this movement to inform future practices and policies. The narratives of families surrounding the move to charter schools give voice to family concerns and perceptions that inform the decision-making process. Researchers Cooper (2005) and Ogawa and Dutton (1997) assert that the motivating factors of Black families' choice to exit traditional public schools demand deeper attention.

This research study occurred at a charter school offering an African-centered model of education. The qualitative paradigm's strength lies in its exploratory and descriptive nature. The qualitative research design allowed for deeper understanding of the collaborators' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The Research Context/Site Selection

The study explored the questions: “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants are present at the school of choice?” The site of the study was an African-centered charter school located in a mid-sized southern city with a population of 210,726. For the purpose of the study, the charter school is referred to under the pseudonym Sankofa. Sankofa is an Akan word and is symbolized by a long-necked bird with its body in a forward motion while its head and neck are arched looking back. Sankofa signifies the wisdom of purposely learning from the past to inform the future and is a philosophy and practice advocated by liberatory/emancipatory education researchers as well as African-centered pedagogy. The public school district in which Sankofa was located had an enrollment of approximately 31,981 K-12 students. The school district’s demographic makeup was reported as 54.2% African American students, 24.3% white students, 15.7% Hispanic students, 3.4% multi-racial students, and 2.4% Asian students.

Site. Sankofa was located in an established African American community on a residential street. The school’s main facility was a renovated ranch house built on three acres of land. The director’s office, a kitchen, an administrative assistant’s office, three bathrooms, a kindergarten/first grade classroom, and a computer lab were located in the main building. There were three large trailers situated at the back of the facility that housed multi-grade classrooms for students in second through ninth grades. Future plans for the school and surrounding acreage included a nature trail and a playground.

The majority of the students enrolled in Sankofa had either attended their neighborhood school or a public–public choice school within the district. Sankofa was attended by students from across the school district and was open to any interested student within the district and the surrounding area. The school attracted parents and families interested in an educational atmosphere grounded in the philosophy of Nguzo Saba (seven principles of nation building) and Ma’at (virtues of truth, justice, harmony, and balance). Students were required to wear uniforms reflective of the school’s philosophy of unity. The playground and classrooms abounded with students in green and white attire accented by tie-dyed material displaying unity link patterns as headdresses, skirts, shirts, or pants.

Students, Staff, and Administration. Sankofa charter school had an enrollment of 63 students taught by 4 full-time classroom teachers. This represented a 16:1 student/teacher ratio. Sankofa had an enrollment of 50 Kindergarten through Sixth grade students and 13 Seventh through Ninth grade students. All students were identified by their families as African American. The charter school planned to eventually enroll 80 students and was chartered to enroll grades K-12. A new grade level was to be added each year as students were promoted to the next grade level.

Additional staff members included one director/administrator, two teacher assistants, a part-time physical education teacher, and a part-time volunteer technology teacher. The instructional leader of the school was referred to as the director. The director had 23 years of experience as a public school teacher in the areas of gifted and talented education as well as in arts education. Three of the four full-time classroom teachers were female teachers certified in elementary education. The fourth full-time classroom teacher

was a non-certified male teacher. The male teacher was working towards a master's degree in education and certification at a local university. All faculty and staff identified themselves as African Americans.

Sankofa's Charter and Programs of Study. Sankofa's charter school application stated that the mission of the school was to provide an educational setting focused on academic excellence through the context of an African-centered pedagogy. The school followed a holistic approach built around the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." This belief focused the school to invite teachers, parents, and community volunteers to join together to improve student learning. A science- and technology-based interdisciplinary curriculum supported the goal of awakening the natural genius in every child. Sankofa utilized multi-age classes, the AIM (African-centered Interdisciplinary Multi-level) hands-on science curriculum, holistic teaching incorporating math, social studies, creativity, communication skills, and health/physical education into each unit as well as RELAY, a research based literacy program delivered through video and technology. Stated in Sankofa's charter application were the following educational priorities:

- Interactive and visual learning experiences;
- Oral communication skills;
- Hands on technology;
- Decision-making, goal setting, and time management;
- Responsibility, discipline, self-appraisal, and follow through;
- Tolerance for diversity;
- Self confidence and character building; and

- A positive attitude toward education and school.

With the focus of engaging in a meaningful study, the following criteria were used to select the site for the study. The researcher adapted site selection criteria from recommendations Stake (1995) initially designed to help discern an effective case study:

1) The site should maximize what can be learned. Given the purpose of the research question, which site is likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations? 2) Time and access are always an issue. Which sites are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry? Perhaps site members may even be willing to comment on certain draft materials. 3) Carefully consider the uniqueness and context of the site.

Figure 3.2: Site Selection Criteria

1. The site should maximize what can be learned. Given the purpose of the research question, which site is likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations?
2. Time and access are always an issue. Which sites are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry? Perhaps site members may even be willing to comment on certain draft materials.
3. Carefully consider the uniqueness and context of the site.

Adapted from Stake (1995)

Sankofa charter school met the above criteria. The majority of students enrolled at the school had exited traditional public schools. The Board of Directors at the school was made up of community members and parents of students currently enrolled in the charter school. The student population of the school was 100% Black. The makeup of the student

body and parental participation in governance maximized what was learned at the site and led the researcher to a greater understanding of the research question.

The site was included in a research study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was located in North Carolina. The Board of Directors, school administrators, and parents at the school agreed to participate in the study and were available to speak with the research team. The scope of participant characteristics at the site embodied their roles within the school, their previous experiences with traditional public schools and their willingness to contribute to the study. These characteristics fulfilled the first selection criterion.

A team of three researchers had collected data on site for the purpose of an initial University study exploring the “best practices” of charter schools operating in the state of North Carolina for the NCDPI conducted under the guidance of Dr. George Noblit. The IRB application to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill requested approval for data collected during the “best practices” charter school study to be reanalyzed in additional studies. The IRB application was approved. Therefore, time and access considerations of the second criterion were met, affording the opportunity for the parent and on-site participant narratives from Sankofa Charter School to be reanalyzed for the purpose of exploring the research questions, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?”

Finally, the third criterion required that the researcher to reflect upon whether the uniqueness and context of the site were suited to the investigation. The charter school in

this study was identified as an ideal setting for the research question to be explored. Sankofa's application to the State Department of Public Instruction identified itself as a school designed to meet students' needs through a culturally appropriate curriculum. Culturally appropriate models of education seek to teach children the roots of their heritage in order to give students the heuristic tools they need to ask critical questions as they grow up in a diverse society (see Chapter 2, Literature Review). A culturally appropriate model of education that seeks to empower Black children embodies what is referred to in educational research literature as a model or example of emancipatory/liberatory education.

The site met all of the criteria for an effective case study. The research question specifically addressed what motivating factors inform Black families' decision to exit traditional public schools and enroll their children into an African-centered charter school. Sankofa charter school's charter specifically identified itself as an African-centered school. This study sought to understand human experience as it was lived, and the inquiry method was applied to advance understanding (Stake, 1995). The strength of a qualitative study is the use of in-depth interviewing and observation as a guide for gathering meaningful narratives as well as employing specific procedures for the coding and analysis of data to enhance discovery (Merriam, 1998). The research study that seeks patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships has the potential to provide perspective rather than truth for the reader (Stake, 1995; Patton, 1990).

Research Participants/Sampling

The study sought to explore the questions: "When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their

children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?” This study sought out the perceptions of parents and educators who were willing to voice their beliefs and attitudes in response to the questions contained in the individual interview protocol designed to inform a “best practices” charter school study contracted by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the guidance of Dr. George Noblit. (Appendix B provides the NCDPI grant interview guides.) Contained within the interview protocol were questions that informed the research study and asked family members to describe the mission and vision of the charter school setting, what attracted them to the charter school, and how the charter school differed from their previous public school setting.

The interview protocol and resulting interviews were conducted in association with a grant from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the researcher consulted with members of the dissertation committee about the use of the protocols for analysis in relation to the research questions. The dissertation committee was composed of former teachers, administrators, and associate superintendents. Some individuals had served in multiple roles. All members of the dissertation committee maintained active research agendas in school reform and curriculum and instruction.

The in-depth individual interviews with parents and educators took place on site at Sankofa charter school with respondents who volunteered to participate. The researcher was one member of the three-person team of researchers and was present for all parent and educator interviews. The parent and educator interviews were transcribed

for the “best practices” charter school study and were reanalyzed for this study, focusing on the questions “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?” Participants were stratified by their level of involvement and role at the site. Given that the research question encompassed the motivating factors contributing to Black family choice for a charter school setting, the rationale for the strata were the following. First, it was illustrative to gather data from individuals who had a relationship with the site beginning with the design of the charter school application to the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) and who continued to be involved with the school at the time of the research study. Second, it was informative to gather data from families that developed a relationship with the site after the charter school application was approved by the NCSBE and the school opened. Third, the study focused on parents and families that had experienced the educational settings of both the traditional public schools and Sankofa. The narratives of parents and families who met the above criteria were included in the study’s data analysis to identify motivating factors for choosing an African-centered charter school.

All participants were Black parents or family members of students who attend Sankofa, and every attempt was made to interview and include the narratives of parents from a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Sankofa Charter School enrolled children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and some of the students qualified for Title I services. Students came from households headed by two parents,

single parents, and divorced parents. The director of the school provided the necessary data informing the sample.

Narratives from parent focus groups informed data analysis as well as three in-depth individual interviews with parents that were chosen from the data set using the selection criteria outlined above. Parent and family selection criteria made every attempt to include participants with children in a range of grades. All participants withdrew their children from traditional public school settings and enrolled them into the publicly funded charter school site, Sankofa. Additionally, three in-depth individual interviews with administrators and educators from the Sankofa data set informed the exploration of the second question posed by the research.

Initial access for the interviews, observations and data gathering was gained through the “best practices” charter school study contracted by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Each of the participants received a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the possible use of the data collected for subsequent research (see Appendix A). In order to protect the identity of the participants and the charter school, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants as well as to the charter school site. Table 3.1 illustrates the demographics of the parent respondents and Table 3.2 illustrates the demographics of the Sankofa administrator/educator respondents.

Table 3.1: Parent Respondents

ID#	Parent characteristics			Children enrolled at Sankofa			
	Gender	Education	Occupation	Number and gender	Grade level	Exited traditional public school?	Free/Reduced Lunch Recipient?
1	M	HS	Mechanic	1 M 1 F	K K	no	no
2	F	2-year college	College student	1 M	5	no ^c	yes
3 ^a	M	4-year college	Salesperson	1 M	1	yes ^d	no
4 ^{a,b}	F	2-year technical degree	Small business owner	1 M	1	yes ^d	no
5 ^{a,b}	F	4-year college	Administrative assistant	1 M 1 M	2 4	yes ^d	yes
6 ^{a,b}	F	HS	Stay-at-home mom	1 F	2	yes ^d	no

^a Quoted in Focus Group Data. ^b Participated in in-depth interviews. ^c Exited parochial school. ^d Exited for charter.

Table 3.2: Sankofa Site-based Respondents

ID#	Gender	Education	Position at Sankofa	School Experience	Training in African-centered curriculum?	Number of years involved with Sankofa
1	F	Law degree	Founder/Chair of Board of Directors	No K-12; 15 years in higher education	No	5
2	F	Masters in Education	Director of Charter School	23 years traditional public school teacher	No	1
3	F	Masters in Education	Teacher, grades 6/7	14 years traditional public school teacher	Studied in graduate school	1

In summary, the study focused on the questions “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?” Seven narratives selected from the existing data set gathered during the “best practice” charter school study conducted under the guidance of Dr. George Noblit at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were reanalyzed for the study. The reanalysis of the narratives employed a liberatory/emancipatory blended framework designed specifically for the study. The blended framework drew from the research of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) with the purpose of identifying cultural indicators congruent in each researcher’s work that may have been factors motivating parental/family choice. As noted earlier, Figure 3.1 illustrates the blended framework designed for the study and was used as the lens to guide the study.

Researcher’s Role

In planning a qualitative study, three aspects of the researcher’s role must be determined (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). First is the degree to which the researcher participates in the data collection; second is the extent to which the researcher reveals the purpose and nature of the research to the insiders; the final determination is the amount of time the researcher will be present on site. Marshall and Rossman (1995) refer to these three design elements as researcher “participantness,” “revealedness,” and “intensiveness and extensiveness” (p. 60).

The researcher’s role was that of participant observer. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) assert that interviews are interactional and that “the narratives that are produced

may be as truncated as forced-choice survey answers or as elaborate as oral life histories, but are constructed in situ as a product of the talk between interview participants”

(p. 113).

The research expanded upon an existing study that was conducted by a team of researchers under the direction of Dr. George Noblit at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill School of Education. During on-site data collection the identity of the researcher was established with the participants. The University ensured that participants were aware of the general focus of the study on which the researcher served as a graduate research assistant. For the University study, respondents agreed to meet with the research team and demonstrated a willingness to participate. As a result of the respondents’ prior knowledge in regard to the nature of the study, critical questions in relation to revealedness and confidentiality were not encountered during the research process.

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the research from two entities: the site respondents and the university authorities (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The researcher evaluated the required resources that were essential to the success of the research from the study’s inception through the study’s conclusion both in relation to time and financial commitment (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

As noted in the timeline the fieldwork, data gathering, data analysis, and final report of the results were complex undertakings. The researcher was committed to performing each of the undertakings with sensitivity to the respondents as well as the final product.

A constant sensitivity to researcher subjectivity (McCall and Simmons, 1969; Merriam, 1998) was critical to gathering significant data in the field. Merriam (1998)

observes that, “because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through the human being’s worldview, values, and perspective” (p. 22). Merriam (1998) addresses requisite skills the researcher must hone in order to successfully gather data and further suggests “lack of bias” as an attribute that a qualitative researcher must strive to practice (p. 23). A system of checks and balances was put in place throughout the data-gathering process and aided the researcher in negotiating “lack of bias” while in the process of data gathering. Preliminary findings were reported out to team members during the data collection phase. Alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection were offered by both the researcher and the team members. Yin (1994) suggests “if the quest for contrary findings can produce documentable rebuttals, the likelihood of bias will have been reduced” (p. 59).

Data Collection Strategies

The research asked the following questions: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? and What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice? The study employed a qualitative format and focused on a charter school in North Carolina located in a mid-sized Southern city in a district that had seven of its eight charter schools enrolling in excess of 90% Black students. The specific context of the study is an African-centered charter school in its first year of operation as a charter school. Undertaking this research topic was possible through a qualitative research design “employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” in the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The research design utilized on-site

data collection strategies including observation, individual interview, document gathering, and field notes. In order to explore the questions, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?” and “What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice?” it was necessary to employ a conceptual framework that was sensitive to the culturally specific indicators Black parents may have been seeking in exercising their school choice option (Cooper, 2005). In order to focus the research a blended framework was designed specifically for this study. The blended framework drew from the research of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) with the purpose of identifying cultural indicators congruent in each researcher’s work that may have informed parental choice. The lens designed to guide the study is articulated in Figure 3.1 and guided the data collection strategies, the data recording strategies, data analysis, and verification.

Observation. Qualitative strategies supported the intent of the research study to focus on discovering meaning in context through observing process in the natural setting (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). Observation techniques included classroom observations, common area observations, playground observations, as well as a neighborhood tour and a site visit to a restaurant that hosted fund raisers for the charter school. Classroom observations provided data on the implementation of the school’s mission, vision, academic programs, and classroom management techniques, and afforded the potential to reveal other categories not anticipated by the researcher that could potentially infuse value to the study.

Stake (1995) advises that it is essential for researchers and readers to have a sense of presence at the site. School and neighborhood tours familiarized the researcher with the environment and physical characteristics of the school site and surrounding community and assisted in generating the rich description sought by qualitative researchers. Merriam (1998) suggests that, when the focus is on process and discovery in context, the insights gleaned from experience can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. The observation protocol designed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill research team for the NCDPI Best Practice study is included in the study's results (see Appendix B).

Individual Interviews. While several researchers have noted high minority and at-risk student enrollments in charter schools (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Frankenburg & Lee, 2003), there have been few in-depth accounts by the families of minority children speaking to the underlying motivation for the phenomenon (Cooper, 2005). The interview process highlighted the reflections and insights of Black families and informed the proposed research questions: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision?, and What evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants were present at the school of choice? The responses of the participants infused an understanding of their educational priorities with depth and meaning. Narratives or stories rich in description begin to help the researcher understand how actors-insiders define and explain meaning in relation to the subject under study (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998). The intent of the research is in understanding the phenomenon from the participants' unique perspective as opposed to biasing the research

study through the assumptive beliefs of the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995). The incorporation of in-depth individual interviews into the research process elicits an emic or insider's view of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995). Emic descriptions offered an opportunity to communicate compelling first person accounts that further informed the concepts discussed in the literature review and the conceptual framework encompassed by the research question. At this point in the study, the researcher focused on the phenomenon under study by beginning to access the subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires) of the participants (Bromley, 1986). The individual interview guide and interview probe designed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill research team for the NCDPI Best Practices study is reported in Appendix C.

Documents. The research supported the use of additional data to be incorporated into the analysis. The Charter School application to the NCSBE, other relevant statistical data from the school and the state, school improvement plans, newspaper accounts, and school publications such as student handbooks and rules, staff handbooks, and newsletters are included in the data set.

The Charter School application to the NCSBE allowed for analysis of site priorities, particularly as they related to the school's mission, philosophy of education, pedagogy, governance, and the role of the stakeholders in decision-making.

To include perspectives apart from those gathered through participants involved in the study, the researcher sought out independent archives. These archives included, but were not limited to, testimonials, newspaper articles, and other related publications. According to Stake (1995), the collection of material data has the potential to serve a qualitative study in several ways. Areas of exploration that were not considered in the

research design may surface through the material data, and it is possible that the material data may serve as alternate data in areas and categories that the researcher is not capable of accessing or did not envisage in the data gathering process.

The purpose of gathering and studying material data is to search for additional interpretations that serve to provide a multifaceted picture of the research rather than rely on a single meaning (Hodder, 2000). Combined with interviews and observations, these data serve to strengthen the analytical process. The selection of the above data sources was strongly justified by the research question, perspective, design, and methodology. The goal of this research was to portray a full understanding of the question being explored (Stake, 1995), and the multiple data sources selected were significant to this goal. All data were analyzed within the theoretical framework of the research study.

Field notes. Throughout the research methodology literature, field notes are referred to as an essential practice to sustain the researcher's ability to record events as they unfold in the field, follow emergent patterns during the research study as documented in field notes, and understand personal bias the researcher may be experiencing while in the field (Stake, 1995; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998). A method suggested by Stake (1995) is to separate field notes into two sections. One section scribes participants' comments and observable behaviors, while the second section of field notes records running questions suggested by the data.

The researcher sought out a variety of sources to contribute information to the data set in order to be thorough and make known different perspectives. The perceptions of the participants were further informed through classroom observations and other relevant documents. The inclusion of a variety of data sources in a study is referred to in

research methodology as triangulation. Patton (1990) suggests that this approach to research strengthens the study's design as well as advances the opportunity for meaningful data analysis. The primary reason for the researcher to choose triangulation in a research design is an attempt to increase the researcher's understanding of the phenomena being studied (Patton, 1990).

Data Recording Strategies

All data were gathered efficiently and coordinated to allow for accessibility and retrieval. Data were recorded in systematic processes as appropriate to a qualitative inquiry and designed to facilitate in-depth analysis. It was critical that data recording strategies were as discreet as possible and did not hinder or direct the flow of the natural setting.

Each of the interviews was scribed and/or tape recorded as participant permission allowed. Additional information pertinent to the study was recorded in notebooks as observed. The option of the participant to ask that the tape recorder stop recording was open throughout the interview process. The assurance of confidentiality was reinforced throughout the data gathering process on an as-needed basis. Immediately following each interview session, the researcher made notes. When the writing of notes intruded upon the natural flow of the research setting, the researcher made every effort to take notes when site activities concluded. The interviews that were recorded were transcribed, and the interview tapes were destroyed. In an effort to maintain focus and consistency during the interview sessions, the interview protocol with the open-ended question format was utilized to guide the data collection process. This strategy minimized interviewer effects in each session and maximized interview benefits (Patton, 1990). Each day the researcher

spent on site ended with the researcher recording field notes, observations, methodological notes, and researcher reflections to check personal feelings that could have potentially caused unintentional research bias.

Documents that were gathered in relation to the research were organized thematically and used solely for the Sankofa study. Tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet until transcribed and erased.

Data Analysis and Verification Procedures

The primary focus of the data analysis was to provide the reader with an understanding of what motivating factors inform Black families' decisions to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into an African-centered charter school. The conceptual framework for the study is based in liberatory/emancipatory educational research (see Chapter 2) and informed the data analysis. A blended framework was designed from the work of liberatory/emancipatory researchers Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) which focused the study on six cultural indicators uniformly discussed by all three researchers (see Figure 3.1). During the analysis phase of the research process, the researcher searched for patterns and consistencies that provided an understanding of the motivational factors, issues and contexts embedded in the narratives, episodes, documents, etc., gathered in the field. Stake (1995) refers to this analysis strategy as correspondence. Moreover, the researcher analyzed the data for possible contradictions and complexities in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the case.

Jefferies (1997) outlines a methodology well suited to the narrative analysis approach that includes coding transcripts, assembling factors for understanding and

description, and writing the interpretation. She cautions the researcher that coding and recoding, and assembling and reassembling data is a given in the analysis process. Patterns that were not discerned earlier in the process may appear. Jefferies (1997) advises the researcher to be aware of the necessity to constantly refocus on the essence of the research question as unanticipated issues in the data analysis arise and may lead the researcher away from, rather than closer to, deeper understanding.

The goal of the research was to understand, rather than to explain, the motivational factors at play in parents' choosing to educate their children at Sankofa. This approach to the phenomena under study was an epistemological choice, and the analytical methodology was consistent with the body of qualitative research literature chosen to inform the design of the study. There was no valid reason to assume that, from the conceptual framework of the study, the researcher could postulate or predict the motivating factors informing Black families' choices to enroll their children in an African-centered educational setting. The researcher sought only to explore and understand the human experience within that choice. The researcher looked for patterns by comparing results predicted from theory and the literature to form causal links.

In an effort to best serve the research goal of "making meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178) from participants' perceptions, the body of data was consolidated, reduced, and interpreted. The researcher condensed the data into analyzable units by reducing the data through coding. As interview transcripts, field notes, observations, and documents were read and re-read, categories emerging from the data were coded. The research questions and blended framework were used as a lens to inform the process of coding. Themes and patterns were generated from the data (Jefferies, 1997). Data reduction was critical in the

effort to illuminate meaning imbedded in the narratives of the participants. The desire of the researcher was to go deeper than preconceived notions about how the research would unfold and to move towards the “lived” experiences of the participants in relation to the research question. The analysis converged on the narratives of the participants gathered through interviews and was triangulated with information the researcher gathered through observations, documents, and other related materials.

Verification. The research study’s design was strengthened through the triangulation of data. Triangulating multiple sources of data is a process involving more than one data source to illuminate and affirm a single point (Jick, 1979; Patton, 1990). This strategy was utilized throughout the research design. The data gathered was varied and from multiple sources: observations, interviews, documents, field notes, and unanticipated data sources. Triangulation has been effectively practiced in social science research for many years as a methodological approach to strengthen generalizability (Denzin, 1978). The research design drew on both data triangulation and investigator triangulation in its design (Janesick, 2000). Integrating multiple researchers’ data, multiple participants’ perceptions, observations, and documents into the analysis of the site helped to assure that the findings were genuine to the phenomena being studied.

In conclusion, throughout the data gathering process, a chain of evidence was established employing a series of checks and balances. Interviews, observations, and material data were organized and coded using data triangulation. Data were stored in an organized and retrievable manner available in both electronic and hard copy. The chains of evidence were directly related to the research question and were supported by the conceptual framework of the research design.

Timeline and Feasibility Analysis

The resources most critical to the successful completion of this study were time, personnel, and financial support. The study presented was feasible considering the time and financial limitations of the researcher.

The researcher did not anticipate additional personnel participating in the research; however, the researcher needed to employ support in editing the research chapters to ensure that APA style was maintained throughout the writing process. The cost of editing the dissertation and printing was absorbed by the researcher.

Time was also a factor in writing the dissertation. The following timeline was successfully met, and the researcher realized the goal of completion. If time became a factor, the dissertation committee would have been asked to advise the researcher of plausible options.

May, 2007

Presentation and defense of proposal

June—October, 2007

Analyze data, formulate results, and write chapters 4 and 5

October—November, 2007

1. Submit chapter 4 and 5 to committee chair for review
2. Edit chapter 4 and 5 per committee chair's direction
3. Present completed dissertation to committee for review and set defense date

December, 2007

Defend dissertation

Summary

This chapter detailed the qualitative research perspective and its rationale, and explained the use of a qualitative research design as justified by the research question. The chapter also described site selection, sampling, the researcher's role, data collection strategies, data analysis, methods for verification, and a research timeline. The design of the research study was shown to be consistent with educational research practices.

CHAPTER 4.

RESULTS

The fourth chapter of this study presents the results of data collection gathered in the spring of Sankofa Charter School's first year of operation as an African-centered charter school. As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was to observe, describe, understand, and analyze data relevant to the question: When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants was present at the school of choice? Chapter 4 is organized in terms of the six Cultural Indicators identified in chapter three (Figure 3.1). The six Cultural Indicators are the result of a blended framework designed specifically for this study drawing from the work of liberatory/emancipatory educational researchers Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000). Chapter 4 reports the results of data collection and data analysis employing the methodological approach and consequent techniques outlined in Chapter 3.

In order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the findings, it is essential to briefly reintroduce the six Cultural Indicators utilized to guide the research. The Cultural Indicators emerged from a blended framework specifically designed for the study by synthesizing congruent conceptual themes discussed in the educational research of Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000). The six Cultural Indicators that informed the data analysis were: 1) culturally affirmative/culturally

relevant classrooms; 2) instruction designed to guide students to be self reflective, gain self knowledge, and discover authentic self; 3) academically rigorous programs scaffold onto students' prior understanding, knowledge of the world, and cultural identity; 4) interpersonal relationships are fostered; emphasis on creating learning communities and de-emphasis on the individual and competition; 5) hidden curriculum dismantled; students gain ability to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions; and 6) teachers and students purposely dialogue about strategies to influence popular and intellectual culture through social and economic justice activities.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to lead the researcher toward a deeper understanding of the educational vision and values of Black families who enrolled their children in an African-centered charter school early on in the charter school movement. What emerges from data triangulation (Chapter 3) is informative. The parent and family participants share a connectedness and awareness that is revealed through the analysis of narratives from parent focus groups and in-depth interviews. Additionally, the study analyzed where parent perspectives and perceptions are supported and reflected in the thoughts and feelings of members of the charter school board and educators at the site. The narratives that emerged from the study of motivating factors informing family choice to exit traditional public schools for an African-centered charter school in its first year of operation offer a multiplicity of perspectives (Jefferies, 1997) and convey an urgency (Ogawa and Dutton, 1997) felt by participants to make a change by participating in the choice movement offered at Sankofa Charter School.

When illustrations of parent perspectives and perceptions of motivating factors informing decision-making can enrich the analysis, parents' narratives are presented to

preserve the powerful yet subtle connections between the respondents' positionality (Cooper, 2005) and the cultural indicators informing their choices. The decision to report data, deferring to the subtleties of the Cultural Indicators, as opposed to collapsing data into major sub-themes, is supported by Fabien (2002), who asserts that the narratives of people of color must be analyzed through honoring the integrity of the respondents' stories, indicative of the reality that their experiences are often relayed in subtle and layered meaning-making. Duncan (2005) echoes that the narratives of people of color lose their clarity when analyzed through dominant analysis techniques and or technologies and claims that dominant technologies serve to confirm sociotemporal notions of race while naturalizing oppression and normalizing racial inequality in public schools and society. Duncan (2005) further states that the stories of people of color perform multiple functions, allowing researchers to uncover a more layered reality than is immediately apparent while potentially derailing the denial of social and educational justice enacted primarily through language or, more specifically, through discourses and policies that position white supremacy as common sense and the racial inequality embedded public schools as normative (pp. 93–94).

In order to set the milieu for the presentation of the data, it is essential for the reader to review the characteristics, history, and operating context of Sankofa Charter School (Chapter 3). The narratives are presented with an emphasis on the “aesthetic and emotional dimensions” of the respondents' stories to inspire the reader to empathize with the respondents' perspectives (Duncan, 2005, p. 102). Through the lens of the six Cultural Indicators designed to inform the study as well as data coding processes and the

use of categorical analysis and direct interpretation, a story of parental and family choice emerged from the data.

Cultural Indicator One: Culturally affirmative/culturally relevant classrooms

(Shujaa, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000)

It is noticeable from the parent/family narratives that parents withdrew their children from traditional public schools they identified as culturally biased and “opted” for a school they perceived to be culturally affirmative. In traditional public school settings family respondents witnessed disconnect between teachers and students resulting in what parents identified as low teacher expectations for African American student achievement. Parents articulated their displeasure with the lack of accurate and affirmative African and African American history and heritage taught in the classroom and reified to students through instructional materials and activities. Parents were specific as to what they were looking for in a school. One mother was adamant that she no longer had to submit her child to an educational environment that promoted images and information she felt to be “destructive or disrespectful of her heritage.” The stay-at-home mother stated:

African American parents know what’s important, and we don’t have to wait for someone in the public school to (parent gestured quotation marks in the air) ‘get it’ or to tell you what a good education is all about. We know all about accountability but you know my question is, why do you only teach one kind of child about their heritage when you teach the three Rs? Where is the Black child in the teaching? One month out of the year is not good enough and we don’t have to wait anymore for the public schools to ‘get it.’ Now me and my child can just leave for a place that teaches about us and makes learning more important to us.

Parents acknowledged that prejudice played a part in creating the culturally aggressive environment their children had previously been exposed to in their traditional public school settings. One mother described an “uncaring” school climate eventually becoming so oppressive that her formerly healthy and educationally inquisitive oldest son began to experience physical illness and loss of interest in school. She likened the decision to remove her sons from the traditional public school and enroll them into the African-centered charter school as a matter of life and death. The mother explained:

My oldest son, he is really bright but his teacher just really belittle him. . . . till he didn't want to go to school, he'd cry, he'd get sick, would throw up. He was only eight and he would of been a eight-year-old drop out if he could have dropped out of school. So I had to hurry up and do something quick, to save my children.

Additionally, the parent articulated her concern that her son's traditional public school included “no Black leaders to look up to.” Throughout the narratives it is noticeable that parent respondents were no longer willing to wait for traditional public schools to address their concerns and “get it.”

The implementation of a culturally affirmative/culturally relevant educational environment at the parents' school of choice, Sankofa Charter School, is apparent throughout the data. A seriousness and intent was evident in the administrative and teacher narratives. The Founder of Sankofa echoed the parent concern at the absence of African and African American role models in school. The Founder indicated that the “overwhelmingly White female” traditional public school staff was unequipped to help build Black students' self-esteem, especially Black male students'. The Founder stated: “Africans and African Americans must be before our children because we feel that these kinds of intangibles are extremely important to their growth and self esteem.” The

Founder's belief that the content of the curriculum must integrate the rich cultural heritage of Africans and African Americans in order to fulfill the needs of African American students and families was articulate: "Content-wise, we integrate our culture and heritage into the curriculum. The school is the place to remind us of who we are as a people and where we come from as a people through creating culturally affirmative classrooms and exposing children to positive role models in the community, and in the country, and in the world, and throughout history."

The Director's narrative communicated her belief that African American children and people are experiencing societal aggression more intensely than ever before in the history of the United States. The Director stated her resolve that an educator's duty is to guide students through actions that lead to self-determination by modeling for students the purposeful behaviors and lifestyle choices prerequisite to personal and/or community liberation from societal aggression. The Director revealed: "I feel that Black children are actually afraid of themselves because pop culture images are constantly negative. . . . you need to do so much purposeful planning and purposeful work to undo that kind of concerted effort." The Director described Sankofa's approach to countering societal aggression in the educational environment as follows: "creating an environment that is nurturing for our children, we inform them of the truth in history of who we are and what we have done as a people throughout history."

The Teacher's narrative communicates her belief that many educators in traditional public schools have an "unspoken fear" of the Black male child and that Black children educated in culturally aggressive climates learn to fear self. She stated: "Right now our children don't have a positive place in the world because they don't have

an accurate history of their people and they don't know the roots of their own culture .” The Teacher contended that Sankofa’s curriculum and pedagogy would eventually allay the negative impact attending traditional public school had on African American children’s ability to identify and draw upon their knowledge of authentic self. She explained, “Our classrooms are places where we can explore our history and find relevance in our presence and celebrate our accomplishments and plan to participate in a positive way as we discover our path and make our way to the future without fearing ourselves and people who are not like us but are members of the larger community.”

The above respondent statements conveyed parental and educator concerns relating to traditional public schools. Parents cited teachers’ disengagement from Black students, lack of accurate representation in the curriculum, and lack of Black role models as motivating factors compelling them to withdraw their sons and daughters from their previous traditional public school settings and enroll them in an African-centered charter school. School respondents’ personal experiences, beliefs, and practical application of culturally affirmative/culturally relevant curriculum are evidence of Cultural Indicator One’s influence at Sankofa Charter School. Additionally, material evidence gathered on site in the form of Mission statement, CIBI pledge, and affirmative poems and sayings spoke to the affirmative philosophy routinely enacted at Sankofa.

Cultural Indicator Two: Instruction designed to guide students to be self reflective, gain self knowledge, and discover authentic self

(Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993)

Parents of students enrolled at Sankofa expressed their desire for an educational environment that cultivated children’s recognition of their true ability while increasing

their self-confidence as learners and generators of knowledge. Two mothers offered independent accounts of their sons' image of self as a learner failing to thrive through exposure to public school settings operating under cultural deficit models. Though singular circumstances each mother's narrative chronicled a young Black male student's struggle to feel assured in the traditional classroom setting and meaningfully engage in the teaching/learning process. One parent's scenario depicted a child's loss of his image of self as a learner while the other parent's recalled a child in danger of never being able to identify self as learner. The mother of the fourth grade son who experienced the loss of his image of self as a learner reflected:

When he started public school at first he was real confident 'cause he is real, real bright. . . . but by the time he finished third grade he had no confidence. He was unsure of everything. . . . he all the time was working with his head down and biting his nails. . . . And I realized why my son was no longer confident, he no longer knew he was bright and he didn't have a clue what he was good at or what he liked. I think that comes from not seeing your people or yourself as a part of the progress we have made. I think that comes from folks teaching kids in ways that makes them not like who they are or what they see. If you teach a kid that their ancestors were only good enough or smart enough to pick cotton then they are going to shut down. What will inspire them?

The following narrative offered by the mother of a first grade son is illustrative of a parent's concern as her child was unable to demonstrate progress in the traditional public school classroom:

Most African American children are put in a bracket in public school. Our son was not getting it and I worried that they would want to, you know, put him in a place he didn't belong. I wanted him to have lots of opportunities like the others to do projects and work at the table and not be pulled out for everything.

The mothers quoted above chose to withdraw their sons from their respective traditional public school settings and enroll them into Sankofa with the hope that an

African-centered curriculum would repair or ignite an interest in school. The mother's statements reveal a change in their sons' educational trajectories as they are introduced to Sankofa's culturally centered curriculum. The mother of the fourth grader shared a motivating factor leading her to choose Sankofa as well as her son's response to Sankofa:

I liked the message they [Sankofa] had. . . . They were going to instill in the children self-pride, dignity. . . . and I think that is what he needed. Who they are and where they come from matters. You know, the things that public schools just did not teach. . . . And now my children come home and they tell me more about people. They know more and they want to do more in their future. I think once self pride is instilled and deeply in them they can know that they just don't have to go out on that corner and sell drugs. Their ancestors didn't.

The first grader's mother reported a change in her son's engagement with the curriculum and the learning process at Sankofa:

Here they start the day with a story from Africa or an African American story. . . . They write about the stories . . . and what it means to them. He used to couldn't or didn't want to write. Now he writes and draws and tells folks about his writing and his drawing. He is still shy but when he has something to say he says it out loud and in class. . . . I think he is more comfortable here.

The following narratives were selected from interviews with Sankofa educators. The Founder, Director, and Teacher narratives speak to parental expectations and the approach taken on site to realize a culturally centered model of education. The Founder stated that in order for children to feel assured in the classroom and engage in self reflection there must be a feeling of "home" present at school. The Founder asserted:

People, children, have a desire to feel at home. How do we get that feeling of home in a school? We treat one another with respect and dignity and we talk about our gifts and recognize our gifts and understand that everybody has a gift. We build upon our gifts and our gifts make us stronger. We constantly reflect who we are to each other by our actions and the symbols and the messages we

surround ourselves with. We are positive and appreciative of each other and we never stop believing for one minute in the power of our heritage.

The Director stated that Sankofa's mission to guide children towards viewing themselves as learners and generators of knowledge became more challenging the longer Sankofa students had been exposed to culturally aggressive climates operating in traditional public schools. Additionally, the Director's narrative explained the purposeful process taken at Sankofa to refocus students who had internalized a culturally aggressive view of self through exposure to the low expectations and negative perceptions operationalized in the cultural deficit models informing traditional public schools. The Director offered:

We are trying to strip away the street images and replace them with authentic images of themselves. With the older students we are constantly talking about the need to replace behaviors that get in the way of learning. There are so many negative attitudes. . . . and there is a disregard for education for knowledge. We constantly reinforce our beliefs, our belief in the power of knowing who you are and deciding how you want to walk the earth. . . . Our mission is a place of higher learning. . . . Kids need to learn the importance of knowing your strengths and weaknesses, making a long term goal, and marking personal progress and growth. We are trying to create a place for that here.

Finally, the teacher's narrative informs the reader of the role all teachers must take in helping Black students access their true ability. The Teacher asserted:

We need to enlighten all teachers, White and Black, and all students that there is no deficit, just difference, and that difference was by design and can only be eradicated by design. Families need to understand that in order to overcome what we call the "uneven playing field" we need to know who we are first and not what folks in power force us to be.

Sankofa parents and on-site educators shared a common vision of an educational setting intentionally designed to foster student capacity to identify authentic self. All

respondents articulated a belief that a critical component in advancing Black student achievement is an educational setting that explicitly de-centers negative images of African and African American culture presented by society and enacted in traditional public school settings. Respondents believed that supplanting inaccurate and damaging descriptions and assumptions with the study of accurate African and African American culture would provide students with a safe educational setting creating the optimal atmosphere for self reflection and self knowledge, prerequisites to the discovery of the authentic self.

Cultural Indicator Three: Academically rigorous programs scaffold onto students' prior understanding, knowledge of the world, and cultural identity
(Shujaa, 1993)

Parent statements from focus groups and in-depth interviews conveyed parental concerns relating to traditional public schools and the disengagement from the learning process they witnessed their children experience. Parent statements revealed a desire for children to attend a school that challenged all students to learn, thrive, and participate in culturally meaningful, hands-on, activities.

The mother and father of a first-grade son shared their concern when they experienced their son's classroom teacher routinely voice negative remarks about her students as she communicated classroom activities with the parents at the end of the school day. Both mother and father discerned the level of disconnect the teacher felt towards her students and worried that the teacher's affect was harmful to the climate of the classroom and erected a barrier to learning. The father stated, "Now if the leader isn't happy what does that say for the children?" The child's mother continued, "They get their

ideas from the teachers.” Ultimately, the parents became dismayed by their child’s inability to relay information about his school day activities in the evening as he tried to complete his homework. As discussed under Cultural Indicator Two, the parents feared that their son would be placed in a “bracket” because of his inability to demonstrate academic growth during classroom assessments. Searching for an alternative educational setting, the parents chose to enroll their son in Sankofa.

The mother’s narrative tone changed dramatically during her in-depth interview as she revealed her son’s awakening to the African-centered routines and rituals practiced at Sankofa. The mother’s narrative detailed her sons’ budding enthusiasm and enjoyment in performing Sankofa’s morning routine at home each morning before school as well as her son’s eagerness to share his classroom activities with his father at home each evening:

We do the morning routine, the song, the Harambee, the stories from Africa and off we go. When he comes home he can’t wait for his daddy to come home. The first thing out of his mouth is, ‘Daddy look what I learned in school today!’ and my husband is like ‘That’s not first-grade work that is second- or third-grade work!’ He can’t wait for his daddy to come home to show him his work and to tell him something that he saw or something that he learned.

The mother’s account detailing her first grade son’s notable change in motivation, communication, and increased ability to perform the skills he acquired at school indicated that Sankofa’s African-centered curriculum fulfilled the parents’ wish to find an educational setting that would elevate their son’s interest in school.

A narrative offered by the mother of a fourth grade son and a second grade son stated that the educational environment at her sons’ former traditional public school was culturally aggressive prompting her to an unsettling sense of urgency to remove her children from the traditional public school. The mother’s search to find an appropriate

educational setting for her sons led her to Sankofa Charter School. This choice required that this single parent and her two sons move hundreds of miles away from her mother, her ailing grandmother, and the only home her children had ever known.

Again, there was a change in narrative tone as this mother detailed her oldest son's resurgence in confidence and interest in learning once he engaged in Sankofa Charter School's curriculum centered in African world culture and history. Additionally, the mother described Sankofa as an educational atmosphere that encouraged students to work at their own instructional level and pace while facilitating advancement through activities and projects designed to support a student's growth toward positive cultural identity. The mother shared:

My oldest is a fourth grader and he is doing sixth-grade reading and writing. Here he is able to work at whatever level he is capable of working at. This makes him excited. He is excited to be in the fourth grade. . . . I mean he loves to go to school. . . . he is excited and bringing home hard work and loving it. He has a little pride thing going on. At home he sings the songs and he says the [CIBI] pledge before he goes to bed or if he is having a hard time getting his work done.

The mother of the fourth grader further illustrated her son's gain in motivation and educational rigor by offering accounts of her son and his grandmother's increased communications. The mother remarked that although the grandmother and grandson no longer lived in the same community they were growing closer to each other as the quality of their interactions improved. The fourth grader's mother was delighted to share that her son's grandmother perceived growth in the level and quality of work her grandson was engaged in at Sankofa. The mother shared:

My mom is pleased. She can't believe the difference in my son. She can't believe the things that he talks about, the work that he does, and the questions that he asks her about her life and my life

and our family history. I send her the papers that he writes and she sees a difference between last year and now and tells me that I did the right thing moving away from home. You've got to do what you've got to do for your children.

However, not all parents were convinced that enrolling their child in Sankofa was their best educational option. The narrative of a parent of a daughter in second grade indicated that she had unresolved questions about Sankofa as an appropriate educational setting. While the mother felt deeply about the positive influence the culturally affirmative/culturally relevant educational paradigm had on her daughter she expressed her concern over a potential organizational barrier to her daughter's academic trajectory. This parent was not comfortable with the multi-aged classrooms and the level of planning required of the classroom teacher to design engaging activities meeting the needs of all students. The second grader's mother stated:

My daughter can work at her own pace and at her own level she doesn't need for the rest of the class to catch up with her. I know her self-esteem is up from last year at the public school because she talks more about what she wants to do when she grows up and the things she wants to do are different then last year. They are things that would put her in college. But I think the multi-grade level is a struggle for the teachers and I worry about that. . . . I worry that my daughter may not get what she needs if we stay with two grade levels in one room and no help. I don't want to move her out. I want her to have this kind of school. Right now this is more important and I need to give them time to figure it out.

To address the lack of adult help available for the classroom teacher the second grader's mother became an active volunteer. The mother shared that volunteering in the classroom was something she had never done in her daughter's traditional public school. Although the mother was able to find a solution she was comfortable with it appeared to be a temporary comfort as the mother's concern for the quality of her daughters' education in the multi-aged setting was unmistakable.

Parent narratives described positive changes in their children’s attitudes towards school, an increase in their willingness to share their experiences in school with family, and higher aspirations for the future after entering Sankofa. The Founder of Sankofa Charter School articulated a desired outcome of offering a culturally relevant program of study, “Content wise, we integrate our culture and heritage into the curriculum. Amos Wilson wrote about the importance of a child’s learning from a socio-historical perspective. . . . Our children. . . are being taught by individuals who. . . transmit. . . high expectations. . . so they will in turn become high achievers.” The Director of Sankofa spoke to the need for children to know themselves and their dreams in order to internalize the purpose of working toward academic achievement, “. . . we can’t get them to the rigor if they don’t believe there is a reason.” The Director emphasized the need for educators teaching Black students to realize and commit to the need for eliminating culturally aggressive images of African Americans presented in curriculum and replace damaging images with accurate cultural history and information. The Teacher’s narrative reinforced Sankofa’s educational mission, “educate to liberate.” Additionally, she imparted that traditional public schools do not share and in fact are ill-equipped to adopt this mission. The Teacher’s narrative called for all educators to understand the critical need to afford Black students a culturally relevant education built upon historical accuracy and informed by personal experience. The teacher posed:

. . . if children don’t know why they are being educated and that their experiences inform their education then you don’t have the makings of a relevant education. . . . They have nothing to relate what they are learning to in order to remember it and use it as a point of reference when they need to use the information to later solve a problem. . . . If you don’t know why you need to learn and you don’t know what the end result of that learning is then how are you motivated to learn when the learning process gets challenging?

A common theme in parent narratives throughout the analysis of Cultural Indicator Three was an increase in inter-generational exchange. Parents noted positive intergenerational exchanges between a grandmother and a grandson, through telephone calls and letters, and between a father, mother, and son at home, through sharing songs, African-centered stories, and activities, as well as an increase in parent involvement at school as a mother identified an instructional need and took action by volunteering.

Interestingly, while all parent narratives included a desire for their children to achieve and realize their potential as learners, parent respondents did not mention high test scores or grades as motivating factors informing their decision to abandon the traditional public school setting. Parent respondents indicated that they were motivated to exercise a choice option because they were seeking an educational setting that supported their child's emotional well being and academic growth primarily through a positive and accurate African-centered cultural model of education.

There is evidence running throughout the narratives of parents and educators that a focus of Sankofa Charter School is to build the capacity within students to engage in academically rigorous programs that scaffold onto students' prior understanding, knowledge of the world, and cultural identity.

Cultural Indicator Four: Interpersonal relationships are fostered; emphasis on creating learning communities and de-emphasis on the individual and competition

(Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993)

Parent narratives relating to this indicator affirmed that respondents felt welcome at Sankofa. Themes that emerged from the data indicated the formation of relationships that created a sense of family, the feeling of a safe home, as well as a place that honored

children and families for who they were rather than the material possessions they owned. Parent respondents identified their desire to de-emphasize individual competition, especially as it related to economic backgrounds. The parent of a second grade daughter offered:

We wear uniforms so we can show our unity of purpose and, as a result, I don't know what you do or don't have just by looking at you. Children can come to school and focus on school and not on the fact they don't have this look or that look. You have a lot of kids who don't want to go to public school because they don't have this type design. Whereas children know why they are here. They are here to get an education and to be the best they can be and to be a part of something that is positive.

Parents asserted a desire for the African-centered worldview of survival of the community to displace the traditional public school environment that supports and encourages rewarding the individual for singular achievement. Additionally, respondents addressed the effect high poverty has on the climate of a school when the focus is on individual gain as opposed to community. Parents did not express a concern for their children to attend a racially or ethnically diverse school; conversely, they were supportive of the racial makeup of Sankofa and emphasized that the diversity of the school was achieved through students' economic backgrounds. Parents emphasized the need for traditional public schools with a "no-hope attitude" to be replaced with an alternate lens to educate children. One parent pointed out, "We may not have a mix of other types of kids here but what we do have here is a mix of Black kids. We have professional children, two-parent households, single parents, grandparent parents, kids from projects, kids from middle class homes. . . . here we have a variety of Black families." The mother of a son in first grade interjected:

At some public schools all it is, is poor kids from the projects. Then teachers get a no-hope attitude. But with the children here you can't do that because all of these kids are from different walks of life. And that gives us a chance to say to kids, "Well hey, you know there's something else better out here."

The mother continued by stating her dissatisfaction with the choices offered to her by the traditional public school system and her disdain towards the practice of busing to desegregate schools, "I hate, I hate, that children. . . . children are not meant to be bussed. They don't need to see what they don't got but they also don't need to go to no-hope schools. It seems all we are offered in the public school system is one or the other and we need something different." Parents desired to de-emphasize the materialistic stratifications that existed in their previous traditional public school settings. Finding an alternative setting that valued the contributions of all students in the classroom was identified as a motivating factor informing parents' decision to enroll their children in Sankofa. One parent suggested, "I think if we all share what we know with one another then we can all learn together. I might not come from the same background as you but I do have experiences you might not have. In public schools . . . some children never get to speak to one another even if they are in the same room." The parents acknowledged that there was "something different" going on at Sankofa and attributed the difference to "the feeling of one accord" between parents, teachers, and students. Parent statements affirmed that students learned the "importance of teaching others" and all but one parent respondent whole-heartedly supported the multi-aged classrooms and the notion that "each one teaches one."

The Founder of Sankofa relayed an experience that was the catalyst to her call to action and inspired her to advocate for a community-based school focused on the uplift of

collective achievement as opposed to the uplift of individual achievement. The Founder revealed:

Five years ago I was motivated by something that was said to me in a session I attended at a local bookstore concerning the obligations of all of us with respect to our children. . . . That is that if we are acquiring knowledge then it is our duty to share that knowledge with others and not just acquire as much knowledge as we can for the sake of personal benefit but that the object should be that we share that knowledge with others. The sharing of knowledge is for the benefit of the community and is a small gesture that contributes to the belief that we must put into practice everyday habits that lift us up and not pull us down.

The Director of the school described the circular relationship the school had to the community and the community to the school. The Director affirmed that Sankofa's mission and vision go beyond the schoolhouse door to address issues effecting children and families not only in the academic arena but in the emotional, social, and economic arenas as well. The Director asserted:

We look like the Black community in this city. We are heterogeneous in that we have families who are strong academically, weak academically, emotionally strong, emotionally challenged, mixed economics with two parents, single parents, grandparents as heads of the household. We do represent the community. We have a sense of cohesiveness and we want to build the children a community that focuses on the good of the group.

The themes of shared knowledge and positive relationships resonated in the Teacher's narrative as well. Her belief in serving the whole child and reflecting upon group dynamics to create an optimal learning environment did not end in the classroom or at the schoolhouse door. The Teacher's narrative related how student learning and the acquisition of knowledge could ideally influence the surrounding community. The Teacher described the importance of her students understanding that learning impacted not only their lives and the lives of their classmates but held the potential to impact the

community at large. She emphasized her belief that traditional public schools did not facilitate African American students' connection to the idea of the "uplift" of the community nor did they acknowledge the importance of recognizing their future roles as leaders in the community. The Teacher was clear in her resolve:

We are more concerned with the development of the whole person and then how to relate to the people in the room, in the school, in the community. . . . In order for the community to thrive we must offer our best. Right now kids don't see the urgency to be bright and be committed to the good of the whole and it is our job as educators as adults to help them see that while we have come a long way we have a long way to go and we can't just let others take care of it for us. We have to take responsibility ourselves.

Parent respondents as well as Sankofa educators affirmed their belief in interpersonal relationships and learning communities as critical components in schools that are responsive to all students' needs and promote the uplift of the total community regardless of each individual's cognitive ability or economic background. Parents spoke of their desire to de-emphasize materialistic stratifications that exist in traditional public schools and instead placed value on the contributions of all members in a class. These concerns were identified as motivating factors informing parents' decision to withdraw children from their previous public school setting and enroll them in an African-centered charter school. Sankofa administrators and teachers stated their belief that, by teaching an African-centered culturally affirmative/ relevant curriculum and honoring the Nguzo Saba, strong relationships within the school as well as the within the surrounding neighborhood and community would be forged. The educators' statements revealed that modeling this for students is a component of a culturally appropriate education. On-site observations revealed rituals and language that promoted students' understanding and practice of the African-centered belief in community. Valuing the community over the

individual is an essential belief in African-centered worldview and this belief informed the practice and presence of Cultural Indicator Four at Sankofa Charter School.

Cultural Indicator Five: Hidden curriculum dismantled; students gain ability to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions

(Gordon, 1990; 1993)

Analysis of the parent focus group narratives for Cultural Indicator Five yielded no significant data; however, in the individual in-depth parent interviews, the mother of two sons noted a change in their visions of future accomplishment as they learned a Africa- and African American-centered view of history. The change the mother noted was evidenced in the family's conversations at home as dreams and goals for the future were discussed. The mother shared that her sons' visions and imaginings of what they would be when they grew up began to broaden as they attended school at Sankofa. She said:

Now when my children come home they talk about what they could be and it's not just builders it's architects. After they learned about the man who found all the uses for peanuts they talked about being chemists. Knowing these things makes them want to go on to further their education and find something that they would love to do. . . . You know you can do it now because there are more opportunities available but you got to know what's out there. Now my sons want. . . to succeed. He got big, big, dreams and I like that. And my boys are all the time talking about what they are going to do because they read about people like them and what they have done and what they are doing. And they talk about college and I want that. . . . We never talked big like that before.

The mother attributed the upsurge in achievement aspirations to her sons' studying affirmative African and African American cultural history and heritage. However, the mother did not indicate whether or not she was aware of her children being

taught to critique and evaluate the information presented by “dominant societal institutions” that create and fortify structural barriers affecting Black student achievement and academic success. An African-centered curriculum is taught at Sankofa. While it is clear that the mother attributed her sons’ newly envisioned “big, big, dreams” to being informed of and knowing “what’s out there” her awareness of and opinion as to the importance of her children learning to critically evaluate society’s structural barriers as well as examining the sources of information presented at Sankofa is not.

However, Sankofa educators, administrators and teacher alike, were explicit in their belief that students must have the appropriate tools to analyze, critique, and, if required, dismantle information generated by the dominant culture. The Founder stated her belief that the intent of dominant authority in regard to educating Black children was to apply a negative lens with the purpose of undermining accurate scholarship on the subject of African and African American contributions to historical narrative, intellectual thought, and culture. The Founder unmistakably names what she believed to be the ultimate purpose of an education at Sankofa:

Our objective is to teach children the content of the curriculum and integrate our culture and our heritage and our perspective into the content. It is not the history of the European we are teaching it is the histories of the people who have inhabited the world we are teaching. If one person has control then it is going to be one person’s perspective and all other perspectives are oppressed or made invisible.

The Director of Sankofa asserted her belief that the current African American exit from traditional public schools and enrollment into African-centered charter schools is a liberatory move happening throughout the country, a move to take back control of Black children’s education. The Director was pointed in stating, “The perspective of the

African-centered school which many cities have throughout this state and the United States is ‘educate to liberate’ and we are looking to be liberated from a system that has consistently presented us in disparaging ways and in untruths.”

The teacher respondent communicated her belief that the concept of colonization did not solely apply to land and its inhabitants but is inclusive of a people’s contributions to knowledge. The teacher asserted that the roots of the information presented in traditional public schools were colonized by explorers as they worked their way through Africa. The teacher stated, “There is a core of knowledge that already existed in Africa that was taken and claimed as something original to the explorer or the colonialist.” The teacher shared her desire to guide students towards developing the skills crucial to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions both inside and outside of the educational setting. The teacher contended:

African American people on the whole are an oppressed people and I think that part of that is due to a lack of knowledge that they have. . . . about the system of oppression that we experience here in the United States. It is fairly well known that education/ language are used as weapons to create the system of oppression and in order for us to confront the system of oppression then it would be necessary to educate people, particularly African Americans, about themselves and their heritage. You won’t find that discussion in a public school. . . . So when we read and as we learn. we work hard to ask, “Am I comfortable with this [information]?” “Do I need to look into another perspective?” and “Do I need to respond?”

The phrase “Educate to Liberate” was evident as a driving force at Sankofa Charter School and challenged teachers and students to be active learners and to embrace their role as generators of knowledge within their educational community and beyond. While parents did not explicitly articulate the dismantling of the hidden curriculum presented by dominant societal institutions as a motivating factor driving their choice in

educational setting, they indicated an awareness of their need and a desire to break from traditional public schools' deficit model and opt for a culturally affirmative and culturally responsive model of education. The administrators and teacher asserted their belief that educators and students shared a critical role in the analysis of information presented during instruction. The Sankofa educators expressed their desire to empower students as they instructed classes in the habits of inquiry and routinely analyzed the dynamics at play between the intellectual foundations of information presented by dominant society as "truth" and the consequent impact on Black students' thought, ability to identify authentic self, and behavior. Although the narratives of Sankofa educators were supportive of Cultural Indicator Five's presence at Sankofa Charter School in relation to identifying the source and purpose of information presented by dominant societal institutions, the narratives of Sankofa educators did not reveal an awareness of a concern for or a process to dismantle a hidden curriculum within the African-centered program of study. Cultural Indicator Five was not strongly supported in the narratives of parent respondents.

Cultural Indicator Six: Teacher and students purposely dialogue about strategies to influence popular and intellectual culture through social and economic justice activities

(Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000)

Sankofa parents shared the supportive techniques of the school in the community at large when they encountered community perceptions of their school. The father of a son in the first grade relayed that he approached each encounter with sensitivity to the setting and the individuals involved. The father described the defining moment for his choice occurring when he overheard a group of parents speaking in negative terms about

African-centered curriculum as he traveled with a church group on a bus. The father reported, “I figured right then and there that it is a person-to-person one-at-the-time thing. That’s how we will get the message out. I don’t need to take on loud people. Their minds are already closed.” His solution was to offer to accompany people to Sankofa for a tour of the facility and to meet the staff if they asked him about his son’s new school.

Another parent relayed how she encouraged her daughter to talk about what she is learning at school when people in the surrounding community inquire about Sankofa. The mother’s admiration for her daughter’s ability to speak in public is evident:

I tell her that she is representing something bigger than herself and folks need to see a well-behaved and well-spoken child in the uniform. . . . She talks about a place of higher learning and tells them what she studies and I think that folks are surprised that a child so young can talk about those things. . . . I couldn’t do that as a child. I never knew why education was so important I just knew I had to go to school. My daughter as young as she is knows why. That makes me proud.

Evidence from on-site observations at Sankofa indicated that Nguzo Saba, the Seven Principles of Nation Building, had been woven into the belief system of the school. Kujichagulia (self-determination): “to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined and spoken for by others,” is operationalized in the actions described in the above parent narratives.

Ujamm (co-operative economics): “to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and profit together from them,” is another principle taught through Nguzo Saba. Parents actualize Ujamm by role modeling economic justice in the community; this was evident as parents discussed fund-raising efforts, the relationship Sankofa was in the process of developing and strengthening with the surrounding neighborhood, and the concerted effort people supportive of Sankofa Charter School’s

mission made to give back to the local business community. Parents noted that they routinely receive updates from the office documenting local business support and encouraging families to shop at the local businesses. The economic action of Ujamm was made explicit through the following parent account:

We talk about what being a part of a community is and how we need to take care of each other and putting money back into the community is one way, an important way. I tell my boys, ‘You don’t know the owner of Sam’s Club and he don’t care about you so why would you want to put money in his pocket?’ We know Brother and he knows us and that’s where we shop. It may cost us more but it makes me feel like I am doing something with my money.

These actions are an extension of the African-centered philosophy and practice of intergenerational exchange and “each one teaches one.” The importance of children understanding that they benefit from the work of community activism is conveyed by the Founder in the following narrative:

It has taken a community effort to start this school. Children see the work of community activists everyday and their commitment to the school. The board members and I have come together with a local store owner, parents, teachers, staff, a motorcycle club, students from a local university, fraternities, a local painter, carpenter, volunteers, a group of men, brothers, host cookouts to raise funds, and there have been lots of bake sales. People have donated money but more importantly time and knowledge.

The Director shared her observations of the impact the school has had on children and their parents. She acknowledged that although some parents may arrive at the school with little or no intention of becoming involved with the school community, they soon learn otherwise. The Director disclosed:

Some people use charter schools as the run-away school. But in running to this charter school, Sankofa, parents begin to understand that they must take ownership of the school because it

is up to us to make it what we need it to be for our children. It happens by us and because we are child centered and the focus of the school is a place of higher learning and the learning is interactive and community based. . . . We are a community-based school that is a part of something much bigger than just rejecting what public schools have to offer.

The Teacher spoke of her intent for students to recognize the importance of focusing their actions on utilizing knowledge to advocate for social and economic justice. She maintained that popular culture and the comfort of middle class status often masked people's ability to recognize the need to push society towards delivering true social and economic justice. The Teacher voiced her resolve to instill in students the skills they needed to meaningfully engage in actions that promote social and economic justice:

We have a much larger middle class but as a result of that I think that some how we have lost a sense of urgency. . . . and I think that it is unfortunate because we can't really afford to be comfortable because nothing has really changed we just have a larger Black middle class now. . . . I worry about the lack of urgency and I am constantly looking for examples of how to help [students] take it to the next level. How to put words into action and action that is not driven by my need for them to understand but by their need to act on their understanding, their knowledge and create a world that is a more just place.

Parent narratives communicated their approach to role modeling and teaching their children about social justice and economic justice. The statements and practices of school-based respondents, on-site observations, as well as Sankofa's website, address the school's focus on teaching self-determination and co-operative economics as set forth in the Nguzo Saba. Sankofa's goal of social justice through meaningful education is clearly stated in the charter application. The leadership states that economic justice is enacted by the school through supporting and encouraging the support of community businesses. The

above data indicate Cultural Indicator Six is a practice promoted by and enacted at Sankofa Charter School.

Conclusion

Sankofa Charter School was studied because it was a unique educational setting made available to students and families in the initial stages of the charter school choice movement.

Through immense community effort, Sankofa Charter School opened its doors as an African-centered charter school with a clearly defined mission and vision, supported further by five years of volunteerism on the part of the founding members. Data from Sankofa reveal parent respondents who sought an educational environment that would match their cultural and educational beliefs, a school community committed to embracing children as cultural, academic, and social beings, and a neighborhood and surrounding community that rose to action to accomplish the opening of an African-centered school.

Summary

Chapter 4 has presented the results of the data collection and data analysis as outlined in Chapter 3. A combination of categorical analysis and direct interpretation of the six Cultural Indicators designed specifically for this study as the research framework guided the analysis of respondent narratives and material evidence.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation will review the research problem, the major methods used in the study, and discuss the study's results. The chapter will conclude with lessons learned, recommendations and implications for practice, and finally, suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5.

DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this study restates the research problem, reviews the research methodology used in the study, and discusses the results of the study as well as the relationship of the study's results to previous research. The chapter reports lessons learned, makes recommendations with implications for educational practices, and concludes with suggestions for additional research.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to observe, describe, understand, and analyze the motivating factors that inform Black families' decisions to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in an African-centered charter school. Additionally, the study sought evidence of the motivating factors communicated by the family participants at the school of choice.

The respondents' narratives make possible a deeper understanding of the educational vision and values held by the Black families who left traditional public schools to enroll their children in an African-centered charter school early on in the charter school movement. The data that emerged from the participants' narratives share a connectedness and awareness, as revealed through the analysis of parent focus groups and in-depth interviews. Parent and family connectedness and awareness resonated at the study's site in the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the charter school administration and

teacher. In the selected case, the data that emerged from the study offered a fusion of insights and images that communicate a resolve and a vision shared by all respondents. In what ways do the narratives of Black students' parents and families and those of the Sankofa Charter School on-site participants interface with the theoretical and empirical research on school choice?

Review of the Methodology

As detailed in chapter 3, this research sought to discover, when African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision? The study employed a qualitative design and focused on a charter school in North Carolina from a district that had seven of its eight charter schools enrolling in excess of 90% Black students. The specific context of the study was an African-centered charter school in its first year of operation as a charter school. The research design utilized on site-data collection strategies including observation, individual interviews, document gathering, and field notes. To focus the research a blended framework was designed specifically for this study. The blended framework drew from the literature of liberatory/emancipatory educational researchers Shujaa (1993), Gordon (1990, 1993), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) with the purpose of identifying cultural indicators congruent in each researchers work that may be factors motivating parental choice. Data collection occurred in the spring of 2000. As previously noted, interview questions and probes were designed by a research team under the guidance of Dr. George Noblit for a NCDPI grant studying "best practices" in charter schools.

The study asked, “When African-American families choose an African-centered charter school in place of a traditional public school for their children, what motivating factors inform that decision, and what evidence of the motivating factors identified by family participants is present at the school of choice?” and identified Sankofa Charter School as the research site. The data collection relied principally upon focus groups, interviews, and observations. Triangulation occurred through the analysis of the charter school application to the state granting agency, the school’s website, school brochures, school newsletters, and local newspaper articles. The researcher observed classrooms, school common areas, interviewed parents, administrators, teachers, and community representatives.

The Relationship of the Study to Previous Research

This study’s site was an African-centered charter school. The purpose of the study was to observe, describe, understand, and analyze what motivating factors inform Black families’ decisions to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll their children into an African-centered charter school. Additionally, the study sought evidence of the motivating factors communicated by the parent and family participants at the school of choice. The review of the literature speaks to the liberatory/emancipatory educational research that informs both historical and contemporary perspectives of African-centered education. This section of the study relates the findings at Sankofa to the body of research informing the literature review. This section will discuss the six Cultural Indicators that framed the study. The reader should understand that there is an overlap among the six Cultural Indicators and that the relationship of each to the study

will be as precise as the organizational composition allows. That being said, where salient discussion is warranted in a more integrative presentation, it will be provided.

Cultural Indicator One: Culturally affirmative/culturally relevant classrooms

(Shujaa, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000)

The results of this study indicated that the first Cultural Indicator was a motivating factor informing families' decision to exit traditional public schools and enroll their children in an African-centered charter school. Parents related experiences illustrative of the negative impressions and effects traditional public schools revealed to them as they encountered their child's classroom environment. A mother commented "one teacher in the public school my son attended complained everyday," another mother identified the instructional materials presented in her daughter's class as "destructive or disrespectful of her heritage," while a third parent shared that "[My son] was only eight and he would have been a eight year old drop out if he could have dropped out of school." These findings support the literature asserting that Black families and children continue to experience cultural isolation as a result of hegemonic paradigms embedded into the organizational and instructional fiber of traditional public schools (Spring, 1989; Wells et al., 1999; Franklin, 1989).

Data revealed that as a result of parental dissatisfaction in relation to teacher and student estrangement parents were motivated to seek out an alternative educational setting that would offer their children a positive educational experience (Raywid, 1985). A positive educational environment was identified by parent respondents as schools which purposely sought to staff classrooms with "Black leaders [for children to] look up to," taught reading, writing, and arithmetic with instructional materials purposely

designed to include “the Black child in the teaching,” and routinely included culturally affirmative activities into the instructional program to foster the growth of “self-confidence and self-pride” in students. The above motivating factors voiced by parent respondents reflects literature advocating for the infusion of historically accurate information in regard to the heuristic contributions Blacks and non-Anglos have made in every discipline to purposefully support the growth of all students’ social and psychological strengths by restructuring traditional public schools to be culturally responsive as opposed to culturally aggressive (Bowers, 1984; Asante, 1991, 2000; Madhubuti, 1993).

A sense of urgency was noted in the data as a motivating factor leading parents to exercise their school choice option. One parent was adamant that she was not going to wait for traditional public schools to “get it;” another parent detailed the progression of her son become physically ill as he lost his passion for school. The depth of her concern was striking as she quietly stated “I had to hurry up and do something quick, to save my children.” The literature states that parents who choose to leave their previous schools because they are dissatisfied are more focused on “going away” from a school then they are “looking towards” the school of choice (Goldring and Hausmann, 1999, p. 474). However, this assertion, made by Goldring and Hausmann (1999), is not supported by parent respondents’ statements analyzed for this study. Even though parents revealed that there was a sense of urgency in their exit from the traditional public school setting, parents clearly articulated that they had enacted a purposeful choice when opting for the new educational environment for their child or children. The mother of the child who became physically ill shared her school choice process: “So I researched, I checked out a

lot of charter schools, church schools, and different schools and I liked the message that they had.” Another parent offered that “When I came here to check it out it is just the fact that there seemed to be a partnership between the staff and the parents and the community which I didn’t see in the public school setting. It made me feel good.” The respondents’ statements indicate that they were clearly “looking towards” their school of choice at least as much as they were “going away” from the traditional public school setting. Though it might be argued that the “look towards” was occasioned by the “going away” as a catalytic “push,” the parent statements confirm their investigation of their school of choice options and choosing a school which they could “look towards.” The distinction is an important one as it significantly illustrates the thoughtful school choice process parents enacted in their decision making.

The parent narratives contained in this study are therefore not confirming of Goldring and Hausmann’s (1999) research. A possible explanation for this finding is that Sankofa is a charter school. As noted in Chapter 2, charter schools are characterized as “semi-private” choice programs that are “neither clearly public nor clearly private” (Metcalf et al., 2001, p. 4). Semi-private choice options focus on parent concerns as well as student needs and are not driven by district needs (Wells, 1998; Vergari, 1999). As stated earlier in Chapter 2, research on charter schools has identified dozens of school programs, the majority of them not dissimilar to previous school reform initiatives offered through the “public-public” choice arena (Metcalf et al., 2001, p. 4). Among charter school settings, Sankofa Charter School offers an unconventional and innovative approach in that it offers an African-centered curriculum. A possible variable here is that parents opting out of a traditional public school and into an African-centered charter

school may be more purposeful in exercising agency as they seek a culturally relevant educational paradigm shift. The narratives offered in this study by Black parent respondents must not be taken lightly as the words of people who are simply “going away” from the traditional public school setting. In purposely “looking towards” their school of choice, the Black parent narratives included in this study provide an invaluable opportunity for educators to reflect upon and plan for the critical process of effectively dismantling the deep structures of schooling (Tye, 1987) that serve as standard operating procedures and mask the effects racism imposes on the educational trajectories of Black students by normalizing low student achievement.

The analysis of parent and educator narratives as well as material evidence gathered on site support Cultural Indicator One as a motivating factor in parent choice, operational at Sankofa Charter School.

*Cultural Indicator Two: Instruction designed to guide students
to be self reflective, gain self knowledge, and discover authentic self
(Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993)*

The results of this study indicated that Cultural Indicator Two was a motivating factor in families’ decisions to exit traditional public schools and enroll their children in an African-centered charter school. Parent respondents related that they wanted an educational setting that would surround their children with culturally affirmative images, guide students to recognize and access their true abilities, and lead students to develop self-confidence as learners.

Parent respondents shared several motivating factors related to Cultural Indicator Two that led them to exit the traditional public school setting. One mother recounted the

story of her once-confident and bright kindergartener devolving over time into a third grader who “was no longer confident, no longer knew he was bright and didn’t have a clue what he was good at or liked.” She offered the following explanation: “I think that comes from folks teaching kids in ways that makes them not like who they are or what they see. If you teach a child that their ancestors were only good enough or smart enough to pick cotton then they are going to shut down. What will inspire them?” The mother has identified what literature asserts is a culturally aggressive interpretation of Black people (Oyebade, 1990). Asante (1991) attributes the child’s decline as a motivated learner and his eventual inability to know self as the outcome of the effect Eurocentric paradigms have on Black students enrolled in traditional public schools. Asante identifies effective teaching models as instruction that places students in the center of the curriculum and guides students to actively participate in gathering and generating knowledge. In Asante’s (1991) view the student’s inability to articulate “what he was good at or liked” was due to his lack of social and psychological strength, strength that traditional public schools either fail to foster or eventually extinguish in Black students, as traditional public schools are structured to maintain the social and economic status quo (Spring, 1989; Shujaa, 1993; DuBois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933).

Another mother noted that her kindergarten son was shy and struggling to perform the skills he was being taught in school. The following statement described her perception of the curriculum when the mother observed her son in his traditional public school classroom, “I went to watch . . . and I didn’t like what they were doing. The songs they sang, the poems they recited, they were silly and had nothing to do with anything.

Where is Thumbkin? My son knew where his thumb was. I couldn't blame him 'cause I agree, Thumbkin isn't all that much to talk about."

In each of the above accounts, parents speak to the curriculum as a source of concern. One parent's concern was the negative images presented to her son, while another parent worried that the choice of instructional material was not meaningful to her child and therefore operated as a barrier to his ability to engage in the learning process. Pedagogical debate relating to the control of and choice in curriculum has appeared in literature since the early 19th century when African American leaders demanded community control of the African Free Schools in New York City as Black parents became wary of the effects White educators assumptions about Black culture would impose on their children (Banks, 1996). The parent narratives included in this study indicate that control of the curriculum continues to be a parental concern in relation to traditional public schools and was identified as a motivating factor leading parents to remove their children from traditional public schools and opt for an African-centered school of choice (DuBois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933).

The mothers shared a different picture of their children since their enrollment at Sankofa. The child who no longer saw himself bright and was unable to identify what he liked or what he was good at began to speak to his mother about his dreams for his future. The child who would not respond to his teachers in the traditional public school "is still shy but when he has something to say he says it out loud in class." Both parents attributed the positive changes in their sons' ability to see themselves as learners and to be comfortable in their learning environment to their children being taught historically accurate and culturally centered information in relation to African heritage and African

Americans. As one mother stated, “Now I see the difference when children learn their true history and they can see that we come from a proud group of people.” The literature attributes the behavioral changes the students experienced to the culturally responsive/relevant educational lens offered at Sankofa Charter School. The culturally centered view affords students an opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum and engage in self-reflection. Self-reflection leads to self knowledge, and self knowledge is a step students must take as they begin to identify and relate to their authentic selves. The literature maintains that the authentic self is a developmental step towards self-assuredness. Self-assured learners have the psychological strength and energy required to meaningfully engage in learning/knowledge generating processes (Asante, 1991; Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993).

Data supported these motivating factors identified by parents/families were addressed by the administration and teacher respondents at Sankofa, the school of choice. Sankofa’s Founder shared her vision of creating a school that had the feel of a “positive and appreciative” home through purposeful routines and rituals that introduced students and families to culturally affirmative actions, symbols, and messages. Her vision is supported in Irvine’s (1990) work promoting a paradigm change from cultural deficit models and the resulting culturally disadvantaged lens that work in tandem to bind rather than liberate Black students and families (Bowers, 1984). Additionally, Irvine (1990) and Franklin (1989) call for traditional public schools and dominant societal organizations to shift their focus from the “supposed deficiencies” (Franklin, 1989, p. 2) of Black children and families and focus instead on helping students and families realize the strength that comes through the exploration and appreciation of cultural identity as well as recognizing

the need to embrace and draw on the self knowledge that stems from understanding the rhythms of cultural mores.

The Director of the school spoke to her mission to aid students in casting off the negative images they absorbed from popular culture and traditional public schooling and help students realize positive educational trajectories through locating their authentic selves. This process is supported in literature by both Gordon (1993) and Shujaa (1993). Gordon (1993) believes that introducing children to accurate culture history and culture knowledge is essential to knowing the authentic being. Shujaa (1993) suggests that high achievement expectations are attainable as long as students have the personal strength to counter the structural conditions that society imposes on non-Anglos. Shujaa (1993) believes that this personal strength comes through the identification and maintenance of authentic self.

The teacher viewed her work at Sankofa as critical to the positive outcomes of the educational trajectories her of students. The teacher stated that, when the state course of study is infused with African-centered knowledge, the deficit myth propagated about Black history is eradicated. The teacher counters the dominance of European heritage in the curriculum by informing students of Africa's role in the origin of civilization. This pedagogical choice is reflective of Gordon's (1993) belief that one of the benefits of an African-centered curriculum is that it presents Eurocentric Anglo history in perspective as one of many "vast and powerful civilizations in the history of the world" (p. 463).

Parent narratives show that Cultural Indicator Two is a motivating factor informing Black families' decisions to exit a traditional public school and enroll in Sankofa. It was incorporated at Sankofa by the administration and the faculty through the

design of daily routines and rituals that supported student growth. As stated previously, the culturally-centered view afforded students an opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum and engage in self-reflection. Self-reflection leads to self knowledge, and self knowledge is a step students must take as they begin to identify and relate to their authentic selves. The literature maintains that the authentic self is a developmental step towards self-assuredness (Asante, 1991; Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993), and the data indicate that Cultural Indicator Two is a motivating factor operational at Sankofa.

Cultural Indicator Three: Academically rigorous programs scaffold onto students' prior understanding, knowledge of the world, and cultural identity
(Shujaa, 1993)

The results of this study indicated that Cultural Indicator Three was a motivating factor informing families' decisions to exit traditional public schools and enroll their child in an African-centered charter school. Parent respondents voiced concerns with their child's or their children's previous traditional public school settings. A mother and a father were concerned that their son would be put into a "bracket" because his kindergarten assessments indicated he was not learning at the rate of his classmates. They were dissatisfied with all of the worksheets their son brought home from school and his inability to remember the skills required to complete the worksheets sent home for independent practice. The parents decided to seek out a hands-on curriculum that would be meaningful to their son. After researching and visiting both private school and charter school settings the parents chose to enroll their son at Sankofa Charter School. The mother shared that she became aware of a change in her son's interest in school two months into his studies at Sankofa. Mother and father reported that their son was

finishing his work at school, recalled what he was learning in school, and excitedly talked to his father about his activities in the classroom. The parents felt that the program of study offered at Sankofa was more advanced than the traditional public school setting their son had attended and delighted in their son's ability to show mastery of skills he had difficulty performing in his previous traditional public school classroom. The parents attributed this change to Sankofa's hands-on African-centered curriculum and asserted that the curriculum was meaningful to their son. Both parents felt that the increase in their son's ability to focus in class, produce work, and retain information was directly related to the interplay of student-centered activities and a culturally-centered curriculum. The parents were hopeful that this positive school experience would lead to high educational achievement. Additionally, the parents were heartened by their son's excitement to share his lessons with his father, as well as sing songs and tell stories he learned at school. They sensed that these activities made the relationship between home and school stronger and would help their child understand the importance of education to the family.

A mother of two sons expressed concern with their previous public school setting because she felt they were not being challenged. One of her sons developed a school phobia and eventually was unable to leave for school without begging his mother to go with him. After researching alternative educational settings the mother chose to withdraw her children from the traditional school and enroll in Sankofa. One son, who was struggling to show grade level mastery in the traditional public school, eventually started to come home from Sankofa with work two grade levels above his cohort year grade level. He no longer begged his mother to go to school with him, and he began to engage in long telephone conversations with his grandmother on the subject of her life and their

family history. It was the mother's opinion that this change in behavior occurred because her son began to see positive images of his culture and history in his lessons. Through the daily routines and rituals offered at Sankofa, her son's comfort level rose; his confidence rose; he began to identify himself as a learner; and his love for learning was reignited.

In the first of these two parental narratives, the father and mother shared their concern for the son's educational trajectory. They voiced concern that their child would be put into a "bracket" as he experienced more and more difficulty in the traditional public school classroom. The "bracket" the parents made reference to is representative of the public-public choice option of tracking. Tracking is the practice of separating students by ability; it is identified in the literature as a long standing parental concern. Oakes (1983) and Rosenbaum (1976) revealed that, once placed in a low track students rarely have the opportunity for upward movement; if there is any movement, it is likely to be a downward move to a lower track. The narrative reveals a mother and father frustrated with worksheets sent home for practice and deeply concerned over their son's disengagement from the classroom with his teacher, his classmates, and the instructional activities. The parents' choice to look for a different school setting was motivated by their belief that their son was capable of more than he was producing in school as well as their perception that neither the teacher or the school were supportive of providing the hands on, experiential learning activities they judged would help their child advance towards the goal of high student achievement.

In the second parental narrative, a mother details her son's academic decline and his emerging physical ailments when faced with the daily stress of attending school without her. After witnessing her son's increasing difficulties over time, from

kindergarten to third grade, the mother made the decision to seek out a different school setting. Her research led her to enact a school choice option and enroll her son in Sankofa. The mother's narrative chronicles a change for the better in her son's behaviors, his academic progress, and the emergence of his interest in family history. The mother attributed the reawakening of her son's interest in learning to Sankofa's African-centered curriculum.

Both Tyack (1974) and Raywid (1985) believe that a key motivating factor contributing to parental participation in the school choice movement is the rejection of tracking strategies practiced in traditional public schools in light of consistent evidence chronicling systemic failure of traditional public schools to work effectively with all student populations. Parent narratives offering detailed accounts of their children's inability to thrive in a traditional public school setting concurrently illustrate and confirm reports in the literature that parents believe that the majority of traditional public school teachers and principals have lower expectations for Black students, due to stereotypes propagated by hegemonic constructs and reified in popular culture (Bradley, 1998; Banks, 1996).

A point of interest is that three of the parent respondents included in the study spoke of an increase in intergenerational exchanges of knowledge since enrolling children into Sankofa. The intergenerational exchanges noted in the data connect parent to child, grandson to grandmother, and parent to class. Nobles (1976) states that intergenerational exchanges are essential to the growth of an individual in African tradition as one can only become conscious of one's being through one's people. Additionally, Nobles (1976) supports the notion that the "survival of the community" is

enacted through children learning in human-centered environments as opposed to object-centered environments. The literature suggests that the intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals, sensibilities, as well as knowledge about culture and history is critical to the uplift of the community (Asante, 1991; DuBois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933; Nobles, 1976).

The increase in intergenerational transmission is not a coincidence, given that it is integral to the mission and vision of Sankofa Charter School. The administrators' and teacher's narratives revealed that they were purposeful in their planning of the educational design of the day and the programs offered at Sankofa. Conversations between parent and child and between parent and school were encouraged through homework and after school activities. Interviews revealed that cultural identity and scaffolding new knowledge onto prior knowledge were identified as key strategies in the teaching learning process. Madhubuti (1993) proclaims that "it is the responsibility of African American parents, educators, and citizens to develop educational settings—formal and informal—where cultural understandings (political, historical, literary, technological, financial, health, law, etc.) are not transmitted accidentally, but by design" (p. 6).

Parent respondent data revealed that the habits of motivated learners fully participating in gathering and generating knowledge (Asante, 1991) were not observed in their children during their previous attendance at traditional public schools. The Director of Sankofa brought to light the absence of purpose she had witnessed in faculty teaching at traditional public schools and the detrimental outcome to which it consigned Black students by ignoring their abilities to visualize themselves as learners and engage in

rigorous educational activities (Asante, 1991; Shujaa, 1993). The Director affirmed, “Once a child knows themselves and has a dream then we can educate them. They have a purpose and a reason to work hard and achieve. We can’t get them to the rigor if they don’t believe there is a reason.”

Parent statements from focus groups and in-depth interviews conveyed parents’ concerns relating to traditional public schools and, in particular, their observation that their children experienced disengagement from the teacher and the learning process. The disengagement reported by the parent respondents is tantamount to the cultural isolation Spring (1989) refers to as perpetuating the alienation of the American public school system from the Black community.

Parent’s statements express the desire for their children to attend a school that challenged all students to learn, thrive, and participate in culturally meaningful, hands-on activities. Interestingly, while all parent narratives included the desire for their children to achieve and realize their potential as learners, parent respondents did not mention high test scores or grades as motivating factors that informed their decision to exit the traditional public school setting. Parent respondents indicated that they were motivated to exercise a choice option because they were seeking an educational setting that supported their child’s emotional well being and academic growth primarily through a positive and accurate African-centered cultural model of education. Caire (2002) notes that many Black parents and families believe standardized test scores measure a limited subset of knowledge and skills and are not accurate as the sole indicator of student achievement and growth. Parent respondents’ beliefs and values affirm Cooper’s (2005) assertion that Black parents may forgo reliance on traditional school indicators like test scores,

location, and funding (Neiman and Stambough, 1998; Wells, 1998) and instead opt for culturally specific indicators.

The parent's statements suggest Cultural Indicator three was a motivating factor leading them to exit their previous public school setting and to opt for school choice. The statements of the administrators and the teacher indicate that Sankofa Charter School practiced Cultural Indicator Three. Additionally, material evidence and on-site observations presented compelling evidence of a philosophy and pedagogy focused on the Cultural Indicator Three.

Cultural Indicator Four: Interpersonal relationships are fostered; emphasis on creating learning communities and de-emphasis on the individual and competition

(Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993)

The results of the study indicated that Cultural Indicator Four was a motivating factor leading families to leave traditional public schools and enroll their children in an African-centered charter school. Parent respondents' desire to de-emphasize individual competition was clear, especially as it related to economic background. Parents expressed a desire for an educational setting fostering strong authentic relationships; they maintained that all children and all families were welcome at Sankofa. Parents described a feeling of "home" and "family" and were undivided in their belief that the families enrolled at Sankofa were heterogeneous within the Black community. Parents asserted that African-centered education would benefit all students no matter their race or ethnic background. Parents narratives disclosed dissatisfaction with the options they were offered within traditional public school choice programs: busing to a racially balanced school, busing to a magnet program, or attending a "no hope" neighborhood school.

When the practice of busing was discussed within the focus group, a parent adamantly declared, “children are not meant to be bused” and the focus group spontaneously chorused affirmative support. Parent narratives articulated a need for schools to be community-oriented and committed to supplanting society’s proclivity for material gain with a genuine focus on culture, academics, and positive relationships regardless of cultural origin or status.

Literature suggests that the antidote for “no-hope schools” is a culturally relevant and culturally responsive curriculum focused on the uplift of the members of the learning community (Shujaa, 1993). Parent focus group statements support Gordon’s (1993) research that all students naturally fit into a culturally affirmative classroom because all students are authentically centered into the social interactions within the classroom. Parent respondents maintained that the African-centered philosophy of Sankofa was human-centered as opposed to object-centered (Nobles, 1976) and that the school community did not shine a spot light on the economic privileges or disparities families experienced. Financial disparities were the occasion for lessons in resource identification and possibility, not predetermination or innate deficiency.

The parents in the Sankofa focus group indicated the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at Sankofa was not a concern. The position voiced in the focus group parallels a report issued in 1998 where only 9% of Black parents taking part in a Public Agenda survey identified diversity and integration as a priority (Bradley, 1998). The school choice charter movement opened a door for Black families to leave the traditional public school settings; national data verifies that Black families are exercising their option to exit desegregated traditional public school settings and enroll their children in charter

schools with Black majority (or entirely Black) student populations (Frankenburg & Lee, 2003; Bifulco & Ladd, 2007).

The narratives generated from this study by Black parents on in the topic of busing brought up the existence of what parents identified as “no-hope schools” and revealed a great passion for and concern with both issues. Parents plainly stated that they were no longer interested in schools that did not include their values in the educational process of their children and that many of the choices they were offered within the traditional public school setting continued to be driven by district needs and not the needs of Black families and children. Busing practiced for desegregation purposes and “no-hope schools” that fail to meet the educational needs of Black children were no longer acceptable options. The literature indicates that once families believe that their student has been “sentenced” to a particular educational setting their support of that setting appreciably diminishes (Wehlage, et al., 1982). Black parents’ narratives verify that investigating and rectifying the negative impact of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, is an urgent and critical matter because the decision’s constitutional mandate failed in its purpose to improve educational settings to increase Black student achievement. Wilkinson (1993) asserts that desegregation resulted in a trade-off : Blacks gained access to public accommodations and other institutions, but Black communities lost schools and Black student achievement was derailed. Desegregated school settings have been ineffective in meeting the developmental, academic, and cultural needs of Black students.

The study also revealed an urgency that was not evident to the researcher prior to the data collection and data analysis in relation to the exit and voice research described

by Ogawa and Dutton (1997) and adapted from Hirschman's studies conducted in the 1970's. Voice is said to occur when dissatisfied clients register a complaint with an organization. The literature asserts that as a result, the organization may improve the quality of the product to retain or regain the client. Data gathered for this study indicated parent respondents had voiced their dissatisfaction to teachers and administrators at the traditional public schools their children had previously attended. Parent narratives indicate that the circumstances causing their concern within the public school setting did not improve as a result of their exercising voice. Ultimately, exercising voice in the traditional public school setting did not work for the Black parent respondents contributing to the study. The respondents' experiences within the traditional public school setting reflect an alternate body of work documenting exit and voice as a derisory pathway to school improvement for Black parents/families. Liberatory/emancipatory literature chronicles widespread examples of traditional public schools' failure to acknowledge the concerns of Black parents: the schools persistently teach Black students with curricula and programs of study imbued with cultural and pedagogical bias. The narratives contained in this study contextualize and provide insight into Black families' isolation from (Spring, 1989) and frustration with traditional public schools, ultimately resulting in the "mis-education" (Woodson, 1933) of Black children. Respondent narratives illustrate deep parental concern with climate, curriculum, pedagogy, and every aspect of the quality of education offered to their children in the traditional public school setting (Franklin, 1989; Marable, 1997). The rich, contextualized portrayals these narratives offer of society's structural conditions (Shujaa, 1993) imbedded within the standard operating procedures of traditional public schools explain why Black parents

may not consider voice an option even when exit is not available (Tye, 1987; Owaga & Dutton, 1997). Parent respondent narratives focused heavily on the value of relationships and the need to feel comfortable and accepted in the educational setting. When relationships with administration or staff are perceived to be weak, duplicitous, or nonexistent, voice may be considered an ineffective use of time by parents. When power differentials come into play, protests may not occur until an event forces the issue, thereby complicating the “voice” process and creating animosity between the adults and children involved. Although the combined avenues of exit and voice have the potential to make a difference at traditional public schools, it may be difficult to create a feeling of safety for Black parents and students in a setting that does not lend itself to the feelings of “comfort,” “home,” “family.” Black parents and families are a constituency where there is no literature to suggest that the typical “what we can do to retain or regain your support?” messages prevalent in private business and in traditional public schools (and often regarded as common decency by White constituencies) are ever conveyed to Black parents who are dissatisfied with the course of education for their sons and daughters. The results of this study suggest that there is urgent need for more extensive research in the area of exit and voice. Before the passing of charter school legislation, there were few viable options for Black families in regard to school choice. With the current exodus of Black families from traditional public schools into charter school settings, Cooper’s (2005) and Ogawa and Dutton’s (1997) calls for research capturing voice after exit should be heeded.

The narratives of on-site respondents revealed a phraseology advocating for the “uplift” of the school community as well as the surrounding neighborhood and

community. The Director stated that the rituals and routines at school were, “a way of life, a lifestyle change involving adults and children,” and that Sankofa was not a quick fix or “an escape route for folks who are running from the public school system.” The purposefulness of the Sankofa parent respondent narratives show that Cultural Indicator Four was a motivating factor in the family decision to abandon a traditional public school and enroll their children into the family’s school of choice, Sankofa. Evidence gathered on site indicates that the motivating factors identified by parent respondents were valued by the educational respondents at Sankofa Charter School and informed both pedagogy and practice.

Cultural Indicator Five: Hidden curriculum dismantled; students gain ability to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions

(Gordon, 1990, 1993)

Data from parent focus groups and parent in-depth interviews did not yield narratives that either supported or refuted Cultural Indicator Five as a motivating factor in Black families’ decision to exit from traditional public schools and enroll their children in an African-centered school. Parents communicated several changes they observed in their children once they began their studies at Sankofa: improved interest in school, positive dreams and visions of the future, and self-confidence. Parents attributed the positive changes to the children’s exposure to African-centered, culturally relevant curriculum. All of the changes noted above by parent respondents as significant to children’s well-being are described by the literature as critical steps to acquiring knowledge of authentic self and developing self-assuredness as a learner (Dubois, 1903/1953; Woodson, 1933; Asante, 1991; Shujaa, 1993; Gordon, 1990, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The literature

establishes these traits as foundational to forming the psychological strength needed to identify society's structural conditions and evaluate constructs presented by dominant societal institutions (Asante, 1991; Shujaa, 1993).

The absence of explicit references to Cultural Indicator Five in the parent narratives may be explained by when and where the parent respondents attended school and the purpose of their education. The literature reveals Black families' desire for Cultural Indicator Five since the Colonial period of United States history. The literature does refer to isolated instances where students were "educated" rather than "schooled," but overall, students who attended traditional public schools, and even university, were never purposely taught the vocabulary or the strategies required to critique and dismantle the very system responsible for sanctioning the information they were taught. With the exception of a brief period of time which coincided with the American Civil Rights Movement, the American Women's Rights Movement, and the Vietnam War Protest Movement, questioning society's structural conditions has not been widely debated in mainstream America and was never a traditional public school curriculum initiative. Wells et al. (1999) state that efforts in the multicultural arena have failed because the end result was that educators sought to mold an "autonomous, prejudiced-free, individual" (p. 178) rather than educate individuals who were collectively aware of, and connected to, their cultural identities and thereby capable of discerning and dismantling harmful power relationships and creating more equitable distributions of power. Shujaa (1993) agrees, arguing that "While there are many who would cast schooling reforms as vehicles that can facilitate the attainment of unmet achievement expectations, I believe that this is possible only when such expectations are not contradictory to the existing power

relations. Reforms do not challenge schooling's role in the maintenance of status quo power relations on society" (p. 23).

The absence of Cultural Indicator Five in parent respondent narratives may be explained in several ways. Perhaps the interview protocol was not sensitive enough to draw this topic out during the interview process. Possibly, the interview setting was not conducive to discussing this particular topic. Or, parents may not have perceived this indicator as important. At this juncture, no conclusion can or should be drawn about this lack of data.

However, Sankofa administrators and the teacher explicitly addressed Cultural Indicator Five. The Founder stated, ". . . the curriculum is an issue of control, power and control, and I think that the individuals who control the education system don't have the same objectives in respect to educating our children as we do." The Director of Sankofa asserted, "The perspective of the African-centered school, which many cities have throughout this state and the United States, is 'educate to liberate' and we are looking to be liberated from a system that has consistently presented us in disparaging ways and in untruths."

In the above quote, the Director of Sankofa articulated her belief that the exit of African Americans from traditional public schools into African-centered charter schools is a liberating move. Her statement is supported by Gordon's (1993) belief that schools have a "liberatory intent" when African American paradigms are cast as normative and not as otherness (p. 67). Additionally, the literature indicates that Charter schools offering culturally relevant curricula are viewed as pockets of political resistance to traditional public schools (Wells et al., 1999).

The Teacher's narrative illustrated her awareness of the hidden curriculum informing practice in traditional public schools and transmitted through the state course of study as "taken for granted" knowledge (Bowers, 1984). The Teacher's narrative expounded on her purposeful approach to dismantling the hidden curriculum presented by dominant societal institutions and her efforts to teach students the skills requisite to critically read and evaluate information. The literature supports the strategies employed by the teacher at Sankofa and maintains that, in order for people to make informed decisions that will improve their lives and the lives of those within their community, they must be provided with alternate lenses to through which perceive, view, and understand society's structural conditions and the world beyond those conditions (Gordon, 1993; Shujaa, 1993).

It is important to note that although Cultural Indicator Five was not specifically identified in parent narratives as a motivating factor in their decision to exit the traditional school setting for Sankofa it should not be dismissed as a motivating factor. The decision to report data in a way that respects the subtleties of the Cultural Indicators, as opposed to collapsing data into major sub themes, was purposely chosen for the study. The intent is that the narratives of Black families be analyzed while honoring the integrity of the respondents' stories, attending to the reality that experiences are often relayed in subtle and layered acts of meaning-making (Fabien, 2002). Duncan (2005) counsels that the stories of people excluded by hegemonic policies and practices perform multiple functions, a fact which should guide researchers to uncover a more layered reality than is immediately apparent. The body of data collected during the study overwhelmingly conveys stories of parents compelled to exercise a choice option by seeking out and

enrolling their child or children in an educational setting that offered “something different” rather than accepting pervasive teacher-student disconnection, the presentation of “destructive and disrespectful” information about the children’s heritage, “no-hope schools” located in economically distressed neighborhoods, low expectations that placed African American children into low expectation educational and cognitive “brackets,” and a lack of “Black leaders to look up to.” The purposeful choice to break from schools operating under deficit models and opting for an educational setting offering an African-centered worldview suggests that although the language of Cultural Indicator Five is absent from parent narratives the actions of the parents, this indicator may well be an unarticulated value and belief. The purposeful decisions made by Black families detailed in the study’s narratives support Cooper’s (2005) insistence that Black parents are not “pawns” (p. 175) in the school choice movement despite claims to that effect in the previous research literature (Apple, 2001; Carl, 1994; Henig, 1996).

Analysis of parent and Sankofa educator narratives reveal no evidence relating to a discussion of any need or desire to identify and deconstruct the hidden curriculum at Sankofa Charter School. There are a myriad of possible explanations for the absence of this topic in the data. At the time of this study Sankofa Charter School was in its first year of operation as a charter school. Even though an African-centered curriculum and pedagogy were identified in the charter application and evidenced during data collection, the program of study offered at Sankofa was in the early stages of development and not yet fully implemented. On-site evidence revealed Sankofa educators to be purposeful in their choice of information to be taught and learned. However, study data do not reveal whether or not a self assessment and evaluation process of Sankofa’s hidden curriculum

had been discussed by administrators and educators. The possibility exists that the infancy of the school and program of study impacted data collection in relation to Cultural Indicator Five. Or, possibly, the observation protocols and interview guidelines were not sensitive to this issue. Further investigation into the influence of Cultural Indicator Five on families' decisions to continue to enroll their children in Sankofa, and further research to determine the extent of efforts by parents, staff, and students to examine the hidden curriculum within the African-centered curriculum taught at Sankofa, would be informative.

Cultural Indicator Six: Teacher and students purposely dialogue about strategies to influence popular and intellectual culture through social and economic justice activities

(Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000)

The results of this study indicate that, while Cultural Indicator Six may not have initially been a motivating factor leading parents to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in an African-centered school, once parents and children became a part of the school community, Cultural Indicator Six was actively supported by parents and educators and role-modeled for students.

Parent narratives illustrated their individual enactments of social and economic justice activities, as well as how they chose to act as role models for and encourage their children's personal growth and involvement in the areas of social and economic justice. Collectively, Sankofa parents worked with existing community partnerships to continue fund-raising and facilities-improvement efforts for the school. Sankofa's leadership kept parents aware of the school's community business partnerships as part of Sankofa's fund raising initiatives. They encouraged their students' families to continue their support of

businesses that supported Sankofa. Parent narratives revealed purposeful approaches to practicing community outreach and teaching children how to live the mission, vision, and principles of African-centered worldview through enacting Kujichagulia (self-determination) and Ujamm (co-operative economics).

A mother shared her insular understanding of the purpose of education as a child, “I never knew why . . . I just knew I had to go to school” and her pride in her daughter’s ability to articulate the objective of her studies and her school as a “place of higher learning” when asked about Sankofa by neighbors and the surrounding community. Another parent reflected on the power of teaching her sons to shop in local businesses first rather than support national conglomerates. The Founder made an explicit connection between Kujichagulia (self-determination), the purpose of an African-centered approach to education at Sankofa, and the role each plays in helping students counter structural conditions present in the community and popular culture (Shujaa, 1993):

This school gives children a chance to decide where they want to walk. It helps them make a plan to get there. . . . It puts all the negative things they see every day in their neighborhood or in the newspaper or on TV into a category they can identify as not their path. Not their future or destiny. It does not have to be their fate.

The Director explained that Sankofa’s mission to educate African American children includes reorienting parents who may have disengaged from the learning process. The Director shared:

Some people use charter schools as the run-away school. But in running to this charter school, Sankofa, parents begin to understand that they must take ownership of the school because it is up to us to make it what we need it to be for our children. . . . You can run here but after a while you see you are a part of something that is positive. . . . African-centered schools are

growing nationwide and we are a part of that movement. We are a community-based school that is a part of something much bigger than just rejecting what public schools have to offer.

Ultimately, the teacher's narrative reveals the significance of the teaching and learning process children experience almost daily when the purpose is to educate children rather than school them (Shujaa, 1993). The Teacher shared her concerns as she endeavored to craft a meaningful education to help her students understand their connection to knowledge, action, and social justice. The Teacher reflected, "I struggle with how to help children understand that it is up to us to get it right so we can be leaders in the community and educate not only our own people but people who do not come from our background. . . . to create a world that is a more just place."

The respondent narratives related to Cultural Indicator Six reflect all of Ladson-Billings's (1995, 2000) propositional notions informing culturally relevant pedagogy. The parent, administrator, and teacher narratives speak to the need for students and parents to recognize the importance of focusing on academic achievement, to the significance of African-centered literature and thought in informing a critique of popular media and culture, and, lastly, to the need for intentional instruction in skill sets that students and communities must master if they are to meaningfully engage in sociopolitical action.

Lessons Learned

The evidence presented here and the most persuasive literature relating to this study shows that Black families thoughtfully and purposefully consider the strengths of the school they are choosing when they decide to remove their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into an African-centered school. As mentioned previously,

parent narratives did not indicate that they were “pawns” in the school choice movement, as asserted by Apple (2001); Carl (1994); and Henig (1996), nor were they more focused on “going away” from a school than “looking towards” the school of choice, as stated by Goldring and Hausman (1999). The parent narratives informing this study reflected Cooper’s (2005), idea that Black parents’/families’ choices are influenced by “subjective positionality” and therefore are the actions of parents enacting positioned choices rather than parents falling prey to political manipulations. Parents’ narratives revealed that their decisions were informed by their personal experiences and those of their children attending traditional public schools with respect to race, class, gender, and relationships.

The study does not imply that Sankofa was a completely actualized African-centered charter school, nor did it seek to assess whether or not the African-centered paradigm resulted in higher student achievement. The study was not evaluative in its design. What the study does reveal is the motivating factors that informed Black families’ decisions to withdraw their children from traditional public schools and enroll them into an African-centered charter school by examining the variables parents considered in making these decisions and the educational (as opposed to strictly academic) benefits they anticipated. The study also describes the first-year results of those decisions: what parents found at Sankofa, and what they valued in this educational setting of choice.

Several lessons emerged from this study. The research results revealed parental concerns in relation to the traditional public school setting in three areas: climate, curriculum, and the extent to which society’s structural conditions were embedded in the standard operating procedures of traditional public schools.

Ample previous research regarding the educational climate within schools is extended by this study. In the narratives, concern for a chilly climate can be identified in complaints about the absence of genuine relationships between school staff and students' families, between students and staff, and among students. Parents felt that the traditional public school was not culturally relevant to Black children, and that an element of care and concern was missing from the daily interactions between educators and Black students. Parents felt that their children were failing to thrive because of the detachment they experienced daily from the teacher, the students, and themselves. Parent narratives provided detailed examples of the toxic, culturally aggressive, educational settings they witnessed in their child's traditional public school environment. The image of toxicity was confirmed in scenarios recounted by Sankofa educators as they described the difficulty that older students encountered when challenged to take on the intricate work of locating their authentic selves at Sankofa charter school. These concerns are exemplified in the narrative of the mother of a fourth grader who lost his image of self as a learner and in the story told by mother of a first grader who was not able to view himself as a learner. Each child was innately capable, yet each was placed in grave danger of failing due to a toxic, un-engaging educational climate.

Concern for curriculum is also evident in parent narratives. The curriculum taught in traditional public school is typically culturally aggressive and harmful to Black children. It has been established in the educational literature that the curriculum legitimized by traditional public schools upholds the values, traditions, and cultural heroes of America's dominant Eurocentric worldview. Efforts by educators to diversify the curriculum have failed; the hegemonic world view persists as the lens used to

evaluate and teach the approved information. Programs of study deemed “inclusive” and appropriate by traditional public school systems have obscured the cultural divide and created a paradox imperceptible to educators who were educated in traditional public schools: The language and concepts intended to teach a multicultural K-12 curriculum continue to alienate the very students and families that curriculum was designed to embrace.

As the charter school movement continues to grow nationally, frustrated and angry parents of all economic backgrounds, especially the working poor, no longer have to wait for public schools to “get it.” Charter schools afford Black families the opportunity to exit traditional public schools on their own terms. While Black parents are removing their children from public–public choice schools and enrolling into semi–private choice schools, school districts are scrambling to debate and discuss the latest U.S. Supreme Court rulings affecting race-conscious vs. race-neutral approaches to desegregation. The increase in charter schools’ popularity and changes in the demographic makeup of the United States may potentially impact a school system’s ability to design desegregation initiatives with any hope of stability. Educators and parents who value the vision of a culturally competent citizenry need to reflect on, and generate child-centered answers to, the question, “What is the pedagogical goal of diversity?” They must work to create culturally affirmative and culturally relevant curricula and educational settings that purposefully teach adults and children the skills required to authentically address racism’s role in society’s structural conditions, which include the schools themselves.

Parental concern that social injustices are embedded in traditional public schools' standard operating procedures raises an issue that has been addressed in literature since the mid-1800s and has yet to be resolved. The ramifications of society's structural conditions and the effects of those conditions on traditional public schools grow more insidious as educators and socially conscious community members try to restructure schools. Educators and concerned community members cannot directly address the problem so long as the predominant language used to describe it is indirect, and asks why Black families do not feel at "home," part of the "community," or "comfortable" in traditional public school settings. Indirect language is an institutional restraint. As public agents, educators who speak indirectly about this honor a code of conduct that ultimately hurts the children they are ostensibly charged with serving. It does children and adults no good to talk about the structural conditions that exist in traditional public school settings and not name racism or discuss racism as the root cause embedded in society's prevailing structural conditions.

The lesson to be learned here is that educators who are interested in working to dramatically change the life trajectories of the Black children, both male and female, who are in jeopardy of being harmed by the structural conditions racism imposes, must learn to genuinely listen to Black families. "Where tension and honest dialogue exist, where there is a recognition of difference and commonality, the environment for learning is extraordinary" (Marable, 1997, p. 99). To fulfill the dream of public schools as powerful centers of learning and knowledge, the larger community must acknowledge, generate, identify, and then extinguish the root cause of society's prevailing structural conditions, racism.

Recommendations for Educators and Implications for Practice

The findings of this research study do not provide an educational model or program for public schools to generate culturally relevant or culturally competent practice or instruct educators and students to be culturally literate. However, the lessons learned from the Sankofa narratives and other data and the success of the methods used to obtain and analyze those narratives, that is, the approach of seeking to understand Black families' school choice decisions and in rich narrative context, suggest that educational leaders and educators consider several questions and reassess their personal relationship to educational practice. The considerations include, but are not limited to, the following areas. Educational leaders and educators serve in positions of power and control.

Accepting that responsibility requires educators to behave in a manner that ensures all students receive access to high quality education. The Sankofa study suggests this requires that all educators:

1. Understand that culture is a complex and multilayered concept.
2. Reflect on the customs and traditions in one's own backgrounds.
3. Consider how one's cultural background influences the way one sees the world, makes decisions, and treats people like or unlike oneself;
4. Observe and reflect the customs and traditions of the adults and students at a school or site of practice.
5. Evaluate one's personal level of cultural competence and working to develop or deepen it.
6. Work to understand the cultural backgrounds of the children in one's care.

This includes learning how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomics,

history of immigration, religious beliefs, and family dynamics inform culture, becoming familiar with the cultural backgrounds of the people who work with the children in one's care, assessing the level of cultural awareness in the educational setting, and working to develop cultural competency within the educational setting.

7. Ask how the educational setting can help the children in its care develop the skills they need to reach their highest potential, including their cultural, intellectual, political, and economic independence.
8. Ask whether the educational setting is child friendly and child centered. Do all children see themselves in the curriculum? Are there symbols in the building that remind children of home? Is the tone of the building welcoming to parents and families? Does the educational setting reach out to families? Do educators listen to parents when they call? Do educators ask families, "How can we help you help your children achieve their dreams?"
9. Ask how the school can work together to behave as a welcoming and resilient community. Are welcoming and resilient community behaviors evident between the adults in the building? Between the adults and children in the building? Among the children?
10. Think about how to reflect on and plan for that community's challenges and celebrate its accomplishments.

Suggestions for Future Research

African American parents' concerns regarding traditional public school practices, school assignment patterns, and strategies has helped propel "Black flight" from traditional public schools. As public school district assignment plans come under scrutiny it would be beneficial to conduct further research on Black families' positioned choices regarding the schools their children attend. Most research on school choice is modeled on the decision-making processes of White parents and is insensitive to the social and political perspectives of Black families. When the school choice decision-making process of Black families is viewed through a research lens which treats the school choice process of White families as normative, the result is problematic, portraying Black families' decision-making as unwise or uninformed, and ignoring the question of whether Black families consider different factors than White families when choosing schools, and if so, why they do. Widespread further research which avoids this mistake is required to understand Black families' educational values and beliefs.

Additional research also needed in the area of exit and voice. Although the combined avenues of exit and voice have the potential to make a difference at traditional public schools, it may be difficult to create a feeling of safety for Black parents and students in a setting that does not lend itself to the feelings of "comfort," "home," "family." There is no literature at all to suggest that the typical "what we can do to retain or regain your support?" outreach prevalent in private business and traditional public schools functioning under hegemonic constructs of race and culture is ever extended to Black parents dissatisfied with the education of their sons and daughters. This area of research may inform efforts to restructure traditional public schools, so they can retain (or

prompt the reenrollment of) Black families and their children and finally deliver the promise of meaningful and appropriate public school education.

Finally, further research is indicated in the area of identifying and dismantling the hidden curriculum in all educational settings. Active inquiry into hidden curriculum—regardless of the educational paradigm being followed—will facilitate an authentic understanding of the relationship between knowledge, education, and human behavior. This area of research may serve to genuinely inform all educators committed to creating culturally relevant educational environments. Its focus on illuminating assumptive beliefs and embedded cultural bias provokes consistent examination of constructs of knowledge which are otherwise taken for granted. Leaving any curriculum, evident or hidden, unexamined may serve to derail the promise culturally relevant models of education offer, to restructure traditional public school settings as educational communities that genuinely prepare students to engage meaningfully in, and realize the significance of, democratic citizenship.

APPENDIX A.
CONSENT LETTER FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

School of Education

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
CB# 3500, Peabody Hall
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3500

**Charter School Evaluation
Consent Letter for Adult Participants**

As part of an investigation documenting the practices of charter schools in the state of North Carolina, evaluation teams are interviewing students, school personnel, and parents from fifteen charter schools in the state. The visits will involve gathering data to be shared with other charter schools and the wider educational community. Specifically, we are interested in examples of the best practices to be learned from the charter schools approach and from individual charter schools. The approximate dates of the study are from February 2000 – May 2000.

If you agree to participate, the research team will conduct classroom observations, individual interviews and focus group interviews over a two-day period at each school. Individual and focus group interviews will take approximately one hour. During the interviews, notes will be taken for later analysis. Some interviews will be audio-taped to help in the note-taking process. After note-taking is completed from the tape-recorded interviews, the tapes will be erased.

All information collected will be kept confidential, and reports about the inquiry will not identify individuals, place names, or events. The study will result in a report to the Department of Public Instruction and the state Board of Education, and the analysis may also result in published articles, dissertations, and presentations at professional conferences. The school districts will not receive a copy of your name or answers. You will not be able to be identified by the reports or publications resulting from the study.

If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may also decline to participate. You will not be penalized for withdrawing or declining. There is no reward for participation in the study. At the conclusion of the study, a summary of results will be made available to all interested parents and teachers. If at any time during this study you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board; David A. Eckerman, Ph.D., Chair; CB #4100 201 Bynum Hall; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Chapel Hill, NC 27599-4100; phone, 919-962-7761, email, aa-irb@unc.edu.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Professor George Noblit at CB #3500, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3500 (or phone 919-962-2513). Thank you for participating in the study.

Sincerely,

George Noblit, Ph.D.

Please indicate whether or not you wish to participate in this project by checking one statement and signing your name. Please sign both copies of this consent form and keep one copy.

I have read this consent form and wish to participate. I agree to be audio-taped.

I have read this consent form and wish to participate. Please do not audio record my interview.

I do not wish to participate.

(Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX B.
OBSERVATION PROTOCOLS

Classroom Observation Protocol

Background Information:

Project _____
Teacher _____
Subject _____
Observer _____

Date of Observation _____
Start Time of Observation _____
End Time of Observation _____

Classroom Demographics:

A. The total number of students in the class at the time of the observation:

- ___ 15 or fewer
- ___ 16 to 20
- ___ 21 to 25
- ___ 26 to 30
- ___ 31 or more

B. The approximate percentage of white (not Hispanic) students in the class:

- ___ 0 to 10 percent
- ___ 11 to 25 percent
- ___ 26 to 50 percent
- ___ 51 to 75 percent
- ___ 76 to 100 percent

C. The gender and race/ethnicity of the teacher.

- ___ Male ___ Female
- ___ African-American (not Hispanic origin)
- ___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ___ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ___ Hispanic
- ___ White (not Hispanic origin)
- ___ Other

D. The gender and race/ethnicity of the teacher's aide.

- ___ Not applicable
- ___ Male ___ Female
- ___ African-American (not Hispanic origin)
- ___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ___ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ___ Hispanic
- ___ White (not Hispanic origin)
- ___ Other

Classroom Context:

A. Rate the adequacy of the physical environment.

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. Classroom resources: | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Sparsely equipped | | | | Rich in resources | |
| 2. Classroom space: | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Crowded | | | | Adequate space | |
| 3. Room arrangement: | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Inhibited interactions among students | | | | Facilitated interactions among students | |

B. Written description of lesson observed. Placement of lesson in the overall unit of study:

Lesson Focus:

A. Write a description of the major content area(s) of this lesson or activity:

- B. The major intended purpose(s) of this lesson or activity based on teacher comments:
- ___ Identifying prior student knowledge
 - ___ Developing appreciation for key ideas/concepts in _____
 - ___ Introducing new concepts
 - ___ Developing students' awareness of contributions of scientists/mathematicians of diverse backgrounds
 - ___ Developing conceptual understanding
 - ___ Learning science/mathematics processes
 - ___ Reviewing science/mathematics concepts
 - ___ Assessing student achievement
 - ___ Developing problem-solving skills
 - ___ Transformative education
 - ___ Learning vocabulary/isolated facts
 - ___ Afrocentric pedagogy
 - ___ Coping skills

Classroom Instruction:

- A. Indicate the major instructional resource(s) used in this lesson. Specify the names of any published teacher guides, textbooks, or kits used in this lesson.

- ___ Print materials:
 - ___ Published teacher guide/manual for hands-on unity: _____
 - ___ Published textbook(s): _____
 - ___ Teacher-created print materials
 - ___ Other published material (e.g., trade books, magazines) _____
- ___ Technology/audio-visual resources:
 - ___ Computers
 - ___ Calculators
 - ___ Videotape/film/filmstrip/TV program
 - ___ multimedia
 - ___ Telecommunications
 - ___ Chalkboard, overhead projector
 - ___ Other technology or AV resources (e.g., charts, maps)
- ___ Hands-on/manipulative materials/models:
 - ___ Tools & instruments
 - ___ Objects, specimens, or models
 - ___ Commercially-produced manipulatives
 - ___ Commercially-produced kits
 - ___ Teacher-assembled manipulatives/kits
 - ___ Other hands-on/laboratory supplies
- ___ Outdoor resources:
 - ___ Garden
 - ___ Nature trail
 - ___ Other outdoor area

- B. Indicate the major way(s) in which student activities were structured:
- As a whole group
 As small groups
 As pairs
 As individuals
- C. Indicate the major way(s) in which students engaged in class activities:
- Entire class was engaged in the same activities at the same time.
 Groups of students were engaged in different activities at the same time (e.g., centers).
- D. Indicate the major activities of teacher and students in this lesson. Indicate all subcategories that apply:
- Formal presentations by teacher:
 Disciplinary content/process information
 Demonstration of a principle or phenomenon
 Procedural instructions
 Other (specify): _____
- Students presenting and/or defending work orally
 Guest speaker/"experts" serving as a resource
- Discussion/seminars:
 Whole group led by teacher
 Whole group led by student(s)
 Small groups/pairs
- Hands-on/investigative/research/field activities:
 Followed prescribed steps in a _____ activity or investigation
 Designed or implemented their own investigation in _____
 Worked on an extended investigation/project (a week or more in duration)
 Recorded, represented and/or analyzed data
 Interpreted data to draw conclusions
 Worked on a model or simulation
 Designed objects within constraints
 Participated in field work
 Engaged in role-play or debate
 Played a game to build or review knowledge/skills

- Problem-solving activities:
 - Practiced routine computations
 - Determined if a problem was well-defined
 - Reflected on examples of problems and their solutions
 - Recognized patterns, cycles, or trends
 - Worked on solving a real world or abstract problem
 - Applied _____ principles or strategies in solving new problems
 - Formulated conjectures to generalize problems
- Proof & Evidence:
 - Tried to find a counter-example
 - Reflected on methods of proof _____
 - Evaluated the validity of arguments or claims
 - Tested a hypothesis or conjecture
 - Developed an informal proof or provided intuitive justification
 - Developed a formal argument or proof
- Reading/reflection/written communication
 - Read (or listened to a story) about science/mathematics
 - Answered textbooks/worksheet questions
 - Reflected on readings, activities, or problems individually or in groups
 - Wrote a description of a plan, procedure, or problem-solving process
 - Wrote reflections in a notebook or journal
 - Prepared a written product (e.g., report, synopsis, story)
- Used technology/audio-visual resources:
 - To develop conceptual understanding
 - To learn or practice a skill
 - To collect data (e.g., probeware)
 - As an analytic tool (e.g., spreadsheets or data analysis)
 - As a presentation tool
 - For word processing
 - As a communication tool (e.g., email, Internet, Web)
- Participated in assessment:
 - Homework/worksheet review
 - Informal assessment (e.g., questioning for understanding)
 - Short-answer tests (e.g., multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the blank)
 - Tests requiring open-ended responses (e.g., explanations, description, or justifications of solutions)
 - Performance-based assessment
 - Embedded assessment (using class activities/projects for assessment purposes)
 - Portfolios
- Other activities (specify): _____

E. Comments: (Any additional information considered necessary to capture the activities or context of this lesson.

Classroom Management:

A. Indicate the major classroom management strategies used in this lesson and/or classroom.

___ Positive sense of cultural identity ___ Student self-monitoring of behavior

___ Active on-task behaviors: ___ Quiet on-task behaviors: ___

___ Behavioral expectations: ___ Proportionate number of males & females called on by teacher

___ Other teacher behaviors: ___

C. Comments: (Any additional information considered necessary to capture the activities or context of classroom management strategies in use.

Design A. Ratings of Key Indicators	Not at all	To a great extent	Don't know	N/A
1. The strategies used in this lesson contributed to accomplishing the purposes of the instruction.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
2. The materials used in this lesson contributed to accomplishing the purposes of the instruction.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
3. The design of the lesson reflected careful planning and organization.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
4. The instructional strategies & activities reflected attention to issues of access, equity, & diversity for students (e.g., use of wait time, cooperative learning, language-appropriate strategies/materials).	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
5. The design of the lesson incorporated tasks, roles, and interactions consistent with Afrocentric education.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
6. The design of the lesson encouraged a collaborative approach to learning.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
7. The lesson was designed to build from simpler to more complex ideas and concepts.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
8. Elements of mathematical abstraction (e.g., symbolic representations) were included as appropriate.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
9. Adequate time and structure were provided for reflection.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
10. Formal assessments of students were consistent with best practices in content area(s).	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
11. Design for future instruction is being modified based on what transpired in the lesson.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7

B. Synthesis Rating

1	2	3	4	5
Design of instruction not at all reflective of best practices in education.				Design of instruction extremely reflective of best practices in education.

C. Supporting Evidence for Synthesis Rating:

D. Supporting Evidence for Synthesis Rating:

1	2	3	4	5
Design of instruction not at all reflective of best practices in Afrocentric education.				Design of instruction extremely reflective of best practices in Afrocentric education.

Implementation

A. Ratings of Key Indicators

	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	To a great extent	Don't know	N/A
1. The implementation of instructional strategies was consistent with best practices in education.		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
2. The teacher appeared confident in his/her ability to teach content area(s).		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
3. The teacher's classroom management style and/or strategies enhanced the quality of the lesson.		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
4. The pace of the lesson was appropriate for the developmental levels/needs of the students and the purposes of the lesson.		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
5. The teacher was aware of prior knowledge of students.		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
6. The teacher's questioning strategies were likely to enhance the development of student conceptual understanding (e.g., emphasized higher order questions appropriately used "wait time").		1	2	3	4	5		6	7
7. The lesson was modified as needed based on teacher questioning or other student assessments.		1	2	3	4	5		6	7

B. Synthesis Rating

1	2	3	4	5
Implementation of lesson not at all reflective of best practices.				Implementation of lesson extremely reflective of best practices.

C. Supporting Evidence for Synthesis Rating:

Content

A. Ratings of Key Indicators

	Not at all	To a great extent	Don't know	N/A
1. The content was appropriate for the purposes of the lesson & developmental level of the class.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
2. The content was significant and worthwhile.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
3. Teacher-presented information was accurate.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
4. The teacher displayed an understanding of concepts (e.g., in his/her dialogue with students).	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
5. The content was relevant for the needs/interests of most students.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
6. Content was portrayed as a dynamic body of continually enriched by conjecture, investigation, analysis, and proof/justification.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
7. Appropriate connections were made to other disciplines, areas of the humanities, and/or to real-world contexts.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7
8. The degree of closure or resolution of conceptual understanding was appropriate for the development levels/needs of the students and the purposes of the lesson.	1	2 3 4 5	6	7

B. Synthesis Rating

Rating:

1	2	3	4	5
Content of lesson not at all reflective of current standards elementary or middle school education.				Content of lesson extremely reflective of best practices in elementary or middle school education.

C. Supporting Evidence for Synthesis

D. Supporting Evidence for Synthesis

1	2	3	4	5
Content of lesson not at all reflective of Afrocentric education.				Content of lesson extremely reflective Afrocentric education.

Culture/Equity A. Ratings of Key Indicators	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	To a great extent	Don't know	N/A
1. Active participation of all was encouraged and valued.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
2. There was a climate of respect for students' ideas, questions, & contributions.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
3. Interactions reflected collaborative working relationships among students (e.g., students worked together, talked with each other about the lesson).	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
4. Interactions reflected collaborative working relationships between teacher & students.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
5. The teacher's language & behavior demonstrated sensitivity to issues of gender, race/ethnicity, special needs, LEP, culture, & socio-economic status.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
6. Opportunities were taken to recognize & challenge stereotypes and biases that became evident during the lesson.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
7. Students were intellectually engaged with important ideas relevant to the focus of the lesson.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
8. Students were encouraged to generate ideas, questions, conjectures, & propositions.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7
9. Intellectual rigor, constructive criticism, & the challenging of ideas were valued.	1	2	3	4	5			6	7

APPENDIX C.
INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Interview Guide Individual Parent Interviews

1. What is this charter school about? What is the mission, or goals of this school?
2. How is this school different from the school your child last attended?
3. Tell me how your child ended up at this school.
4. How has the charter school changed since it started?
5. What effects has the charter school had on your child (ren)? Your family? Neighborhood? Community? Other public schools?
6. What has this school done really well/What is the school good at?
7. What is the school struggling with now?
8. What do you think this school will be like in five years?

Interview Guide Charter School Board

1. What made you want to start the charter school?
2. Start at the beginning and tell us the history of the school.
3. Since you began, what has changed since the original charter?
4. How is your charter school different from other public schools?
5. What has helped you in getting your school going?

Probes:	Commitment	Services fro DPI
	Community Support	Other agencies
	Teachers	Consultants
	Partnerships	Organizations
	Enthusiasm	
6. How are you funding your school?

Probes:	State
	Other funds
	Nonfinancial resources
7. What has changed in the district and other public schools as a result of Charter Schools?

Probes:	Curriculum and Instruction	Student Diversity
	Public Relations	Finances
	Teacher recruiting/retention	
	Student retention./enrollment	
8. What long term effects on your district do you anticipate because of Charter Schools?

Probes:	Enrollment	Curriculum/Instruction
	Finances	Public Relations
	Local Politics	Teacher recruiting/retention
	Diversity	Student retention

Interview Guide Principal/Director

1. When did you start working here? What did you do before?
2. Tell me about your day – walk me through your typical day.
3. Tell me a little bit about this schools mission.
4. Describe the students here.
Describe the parents here.
Describe the teachers here.
5. What is your relationship with the board?
6. How are decisions made here? Who is involved in which decisions?
7. What personal accomplishment at the school are you most proud of?
8. How is the day organized for students and teachers?
9. What has helped you to get your school going?
 - Commitment Community Support
 - Teachers Partnerships
 - Enthusiasm Knowledge of organization, students, community
 - Services from DPI
 - Other agencies
 - Consultants
 - Other organizations
10. What has gotten in your way?
11. What is the school struggling with now?
12. What things can your school teach other schools?
 - Probes: governance parent involvement
 - Instruction relationships with other public schools
 - Curriculum
13. What do we need to know to understand this school well?

Interview Guide Parents

1. What is this charter school about? What is the mission or goals of this school?
2. How is this school different than the last school your child attended?
3. Tell me how your child ended up at this school.
4. How has the charter school changed since it started?
5. What effects has the charter school had on your child (ren)? Your family?
Neighborhood? Community? Other public schools?
6. What has this school done really well/What is the school good at?
7. What is the school struggling with now?
8. What do you think this school will be like in five years?

Interview Guide Teachers

1. What is this school about?
2. How is this school different from other public schools? What do kids get out of it?
3. How is the teaching different here from the teaching at other public schools?
 Scheduling Student population
 Governance
 Teacher autonomy
4. Tell me about the curriculum. How is the curriculum different from other public schools?
5. How did you learn to teach?
6. What different teaching styles are there in this school?
7. How are decisions made here?
8. Walk me through your day before school/after school.
 Probes: which students planning time
 What content meeting time
 Where other duties
9. Tell me about the kids
10. What things can your school teach other schools?
 Probes: governance parent involvement
 Instruction relationships with other public schools
 Curriculum
11. What are the students learning? How do you know? How do you know they are smart?
12. What do we need to know to understand this school well?

Interview Guide Students

1. How old are you?
 What grade are you in?
2. What is this school about?
3. What's your favorite thing about school? Least favorite?
4. Tell me about your teachers (a teacher).
5. Tell me about your day. Start with when you get up and just tell me about getting here, the whole school day and going home.
6. How long does your homework take? What is it usually?
7. How do you know that you are smart?
8. [if student is older than 5] How is this school different from the school you went to before?
9. How is this school special?

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