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STUDENTS', TEACHERS', AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF
AN AFRICAN CENTERED PROGRAM: ILE OMODE

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Tiffany S. Wright
San Francisco, California
May 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Students', Teachers', and Parents' Perspectives of
an African Centered Program: Ile Omode

This participatory-action research study explored the perspectives of students, teachers, and parent groups of an African-centered education program. The perspectives provided by the participants in this African-centered program explained how change from the mainstream educational environment impacts academic success for African American students. The research revealed 5 significant findings for African-centered programs: (a) curriculum, (b) teacher expectation, (c) family environment, (d) culture, and (e) social conscience. These findings emphasized the need for the use of culture and relevant skills in promoting African American students' success.

Two major conclusions were drawn from the findings in the study: (a) The 5 aspects of African-centered programs heavily influenced the educational environment and (b) the definition of education must be extended to promote life skills for African American students. Two theories guided the research, critical race theory (CRT) in education and culturally relevant education. CRT in education demonstrated the need for African-centered education programs. Culturally relevant education revealed the African-centered education program's different approaches to teaching.

_____ _____
Tiffany S. Wright, Author   Patricia Mitchell, Ph.D.,
                                     Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in the work represent the work of the candidate alone.

_____   _____

Tiffany S. Wright   Date

Dissertation Committee

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Dr. Betty Taylor   Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father Louis Wright, my grandmother Geneva Wright, Uncle Benny, and my aunties Virginia Wright, Patricia Washington, and Gail Hargarett.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my son, Kobie Dozier, and all the children of our family, to continue to strive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who has supported me by allowing me time to study and attend my classes, especially Marcia Tillman, Kimberly English, and Charles Wright. From the smallest deed to the largest, you have all been a blessing.

Last, but not least to Kobie and Lionell for your unconditional love, understanding, and patience.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

The public-education system has been brought under scrutiny due to its overall

lack of success in educating American youth. The U.S. public-education system pales in

comparison to other countries in Asia where students excel (National Center for

Educational Statistics, 2007). In 2007, the Trends for International Math and Science

Study showed the United States with only 15% of students in the fourth grade reaching

the advanced international benchmark in science. Singapore topped their list at 36%,

followed by Chinese Taipei at 19%; ranked third was the Russian Federation with 16%.

For the eighth grade, the United States was out ranked by more than 10 countries

including Japan and Hong Kong (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). The

educational system in America has fallen behind in the world's educational arena.

For African American students in this country the figures are even worse. As a

result of failure in America's schools, many students have dropped out of school

altogether, which leads to an array of issues such as an increase in incarceration, teenage

pregnancy, and poverty. In California, African American students have the highest

percentage of dropouts, 35.8% compared to the lowest percentage of dropouts 9% by

Asian students (California Department of Education, 2008). Of the different ethnic

groups, the Asian population has managed to be relatively successful. Yet, how do some

minorities manage to succeed while others do not?

Some researchers have sought an explanation for the differences in achievement

levels. The success of Asian students has been connected to cultural differences in our

society. Asian families have a high level of expectation when it comes to performance in schools. An early article (Sue & Okazaki, 1990, p. 915) stated:

> Investigators have identified the following values or practices in Asian families that may promote educational achievements: demands and expectations for achievement and upward mobility, induction of guilt about parental sacrifices and the need to fulfill obligations, respect for education … and obedience to elders such as teachers.

Of the ethnic minorities, African American students rank the lowest. Researchers and scholars have discussed the disparities between African Americans and the majority of students in the U.S. educational system. Some of the disparities have been linked to a student's economic status. Yet, in 2007 African American students, from both higher- and lower-income families, were out performed in mathematics and language arts by White and Latino students, according to the California Department of Education (2007). Consequently, many African Americans have sought alternatives to the traditional public-school system.

Some parents have chosen private schools as an alternative. Many private schools offer smaller teacher-to-student ratios and better facilities. Unfortunately, few private schools are culturally diverse and many people are not able to afford the cost of private-school education. For African Americans, another alternative is African-centered education programs. African-centered education programs address the needs of African American students. "The African centered education campaign is related to the chronic failure of the education system to provide equal educational results and opportunities for African Americans" (Carruthers, 2000, p. 3). Proponents of African-centered education programs believe that African American students achieved higher academically when their culture was used in the service of their education. This belief is also connected to the idea of cultural relevance in which a student's particular culture is used to help

facilitate learning. "African centered pedagogy and curriculum are designed to teach African American children in a manner that takes their history, culture, identity, and politics into account for the ultimate purpose of solving their problems" (Asante, 1988, p. 2). African-centered education programs are located in urban areas and generally serve students in the communities where they live.

African-centered education programs may range from preschool through high school. They are not to be confused with charter schools or historically Black colleges. With the emergence of charter schools, some have adopted aspects of African-centered education programs. Charter schools are public institutions; unlike charter schools, African-centered education programs operate independent of the public-school system. "Though Independent Black Institutions have been willing for some time now to serve in this needed capacity, their growth has been challenged by financial concerns" (Bush, 2004, p. 368). Many of the schools started from churches or grassroots organizations, which may operate from limited resources.

African-centered education programs are also called Independent Black Institutions. Currently, African-centered education programs are being defined in the larger society.

> The term "Independent Black Institutions" has been in use for at least 20 years. It was used in 1971 by the Congress of African People (Satterwhite, 1971) and became the organizational identifier of the Council of Independent Black Institutions in 1972. Lomotey and Brokins (1988) differentiate "traditional African American private schools" and independent Black institutions by pointing out that the latter focus on African American culture as the basis for the curriculum. (Shujaa, 1992a, p. 147)

African-centered education programs incorporate curriculum that emphasizes African history and the use of African culture to further the goals of African American youth.

Members of other ethnic groups have created schools that incorporate their cultural heritage and serve their communities in the same way that Jewish community schools serve the Jewish community. These schools are present in communities where various ethnic and racial groups live.

> Unlike the visible, established, voluntary-aided religious ethnic minority schools of the Jewish, Seventh Day Adventist or Muslim community, the schools are difficult to locate as they exist deep within the informal Black community and supported by the Black church networks. (Majors, 2001, p. 90)

As issues in education address topics such as school choice and reform, the topic of African-centered education is one that should be explored as a viable option or model to address to the needs of African American youth in the current educational system.

Statement of the Problem

African American students in the public-education sector have not experienced as much academic success as their peers of other racial groups. Both African American males and females overall have been out performed by their counterparts. Standardized tests results in California for 2007 ranked African Americans at the bottom compared to other racial groups (California Department of Education, 2007). Of the students tested, 40% of African American students with higher income levels were proficient in language arts compared to 67% for White students. The absence of relevant skills to further the interests and ideas of African Americans in the current educational system has created some difficulties in African American communities. The lack of equity in education for African Americans intensifies existing problems in the African American community such as unemployment, incarceration, and high dropout rates. In 2006, for Alameda County it was estimated that African Americans, over a 4-year period would have a dropout rate of 25.7% compared to 6.6% for White students (Ed-Data, 2007).

History has shown that the issue of inequality in schools is not a new topic. African-centered education programs are faced with the challenge of doing more with fewer physical resources. "In the landmark 1954 case, Brown vs. Board of Education, Thurgood Marshall argued not only that the separate schools of the South were physically substandard but also that their very existence was psychologically damaging to African American children."

> Kozol, in his work, Savage Inequalities, discussed how inequity in schools is still an issue. Yet now, 40 years later, some African American educators and parents are asking themselves whether separate schools that put special emphasis on the needs of their children might be the most expedient way to ensure that they receive a quality education. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 2)

The quality of an education for African Americans has been brought into question. Some believe that a quality education should mean more than just better schools and smaller class sizes. It should mean an education that serves the interest of its youth and the communities where they live (Freire, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shujaa, 1992; Woodson, 1933/1977). Unfortunately, education has been used to serve the interests of the dominant groups (Palmer.

The continued development of schools in the United States has maintained the status quo. The absence of African American culture in public schools has contributed to the lack of interest in the curriculum and success of African American youth.

> The Eurocentric curriculum, more or less, serves the cultural interest of most European ethnic groups. It does not serve the cultural interest of most people of African descent. Since population patterns are such that most African Americans live in predominantly African American communities and attend predominantly African American schools, it is logical that they should be taught from an African perspective if they so choose. (www.africawithin.com/carruthers/africaneducation.htm).

Many become disinterested when they do not see their culture reflected in text books and school culture. "All too often, ethnic minority children are expected to check

their cultures at the door, their thought processes—and are penalized if they continue to engage in behaviors that are misunderstood and misinterpreted in schools" (Townsend, 2003, p. 14). African American students are expected to conform to Eurocentric ways of being and knowing. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally relevant educators used the student's African American culture to assist in the development of a relevant instructional curriculum, allowed the students academic excellence, and transcended the negative effects of the dominant culture by identifying with their own culture.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents and discuss aspects of an African-centered educational program (Ile Omode) and its impact on the academic success of African American students. This study has given insight into a specific African-centered educational program. Members of the African-centered education program reflected on and highlighted aspects of the program that have been successful and discussed areas for improvement.

Background and Need for the Study

As an alternative to the traditional public-school experience, many have formed African-centered education programs. The achievements of African-centered education programs have not yet been fully explored. Ladson-Billings has contributed information regarding the success of teachers who serve African American youth (1994, 1995, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Much of this information includes the experience of teachers in these settings. Other researchers such as Shujaa (1992), Murrell (2002), and Lomotey (1992; Lomotey & Brokins, 1988) offer information on the development of

African-centered education programs. A study by Brookins (1984) included a look at 10 different African-centered education programs and found commonalities in the philosophy of African-centered institutions. Yet there is a need for information regarding the perspectives of African students, parents, and administrators who participate in these programs. "These institutions can and should be studied and their expertise drawn upon to facilitate the development of African centered curricula for public and private school use" (Lomotey, 1992, p. 456). More dialogue on the approaches to African-centered education would contribute to the field to demonstrate the strides that the African community has taken to solve its own problems.

This insight could contribute to developing information to explain the significance of African-centered education programs to African American communities and society as whole. True educational reform should explore all viable solutions to serve its diverse population, which largely includes African Americans. Students exposed to African-centered education programs can lend insight into the educational approaches that may be viable in other educational settings. "Students should start their education with self-definition in the context of their own experience. But, their definitions must expand to include their families, neighborhoods, culturally 'significant others,' nations, and finally the globe" (Verharen, 2002, p. 317). Further inquiry may also illustrate a need to increase African-centered education programs throughout the nation. "To really get people to buy into culturally responsive teaching we're going to have to prove its effectiveness through evidence-based research" (Townsend, 2003, p. 15). Coupled with existing information on African-centered education programs, input on participant perspectives serves as a valuable look at African-centered education institutions.

One factor that has influenced the condition of education in this country is race (Kozol, 1992). Inequity in education has led to inequality in the classroom, as well as a need for educational discourse on the contributions of advocates for African-centered education. Much of the current discourse on Africans in the educational system highlights negative results in school communities and offers little information on addressing their concerns. "Indigenous peoples and people of African descent were not thought educable and therefore not part of the mainstream educational discourse" (Ladson-Billings, p. 207). The relationship between race and education has been further highlighted by researchers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2006). Development of African-centered education programs relates directly to the history of racism in America. "One of the places where course work is particularly weak is in its lack of attention to the perspectives and concerns of African Americans" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 211). Understanding aspects of African-centered education programs could lead to an eventual resolution or at the least bring greater attention to the needs of Africans in the educational system.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

The theoretical framework for this study was centered in critical race theory (CRT). CRT has been used to explain the history of race in America. The structure of this society was built on the basis of racial inequality. Race is imbedded in the cultural fiber that exists in this country. CRT examines race from the point of historical documents such as the constitution and other legal cases that have been used to define the society in which we live. "CRT acknowledged that racism was endemic, perhaps even permanent, in U.S. society. … It was ingrained legally, culturally, psychologically into the very core

of the social order" (Lynn, 2002, p. 88). The lack of success in African American students has been linked to lower socioeconomic standing, yet the discussion of race in the role of education is rarely mentioned. The concept of race in education is a topic that can lend understanding to inequalities in society and in education.

The work of Ladson-Billings and Tate has shed light on the connection between CRT and education (1995). The researchers linked the connection between the uses of race and property, which in the past were used to limit African Americans in their quest for progress. "In their analysis, rights of property are seen to shape education in multiple ways as in 'better' schools located in 'better neighborhoods' with higher property values and tax assessments" (Lynn, 2002). CRT in education provides a lens through which to view the relationship between race and education. At least five themes inform the extension of CRT to education: (a) The intersectionality of race and racism with gender, class, and sexuality, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the use of interdisciplinary approaches (Yasso, 2002, p.95). African-centered education programs use history, the challenges of African American people in this country and their struggles surrounding race, to empower its participants to challenge the issues facing African American youth and underachievement.

CRT examines the underpinnings of race in education in America. "We need to bring racism as an explanatory factor more overtly back into the discussion. CRT brings much greater theoretical specificity to these arguments about how to frame and transform African American education" (Lynn, 2006). CRT is useful in understanding the perspectives of participants in African-centered education programs. CRT affirms the

foundation on which African-centered education programs have been formed. Many of the programs exist due to a lack of representation of African culture in traditional educational settings. "Studies that look at the impact of culture in the classroom must consider wider social and cultural factors and how they affect the ability of teachers and schools to change society" (Lynn, 2006). CRT offers an explanation for the need for African-centered education programs. CRT also creates an opportunity to problem solve. "A critical race analysis of Black education starts from the notion that education, as we know it, was never intended to have liberatory consequences for African Americans" (Lynn, 2006). The use of CRT and the perspectives of participants in African-centered education programs lend valuable insight into African-centered education programs.

The psychological impact of race in America, particularly in traditional classrooms settings, has resulted in biased curriculum that grew from a Eurocentric perspective. As a result, participants in African-centered education programs have sought to create programs and teach curriculum that relates to the experiences of African American people and address their own concerns.

> In the contemporary United States, race is both a matter of social identity and institutionalized social structure. … The social-psychological and institutional dimensions of race are tightly linked. How people are treated in institutional settings is the product of deeply rooted racialised social practices that shape how they view themselves and the world. (Powers, 2007, p. 155)

The discussion of race and education using CRT moves from the examination of the problems to identifying solutions to the many issues connected to race in America.

> Critical race theory (CRT) in education, a new movement of scholars in the field of education who are concerned with how race operates in schools and society, have begun to tackle these issues in a way that addresses not only the problems inherent in the racial order but also the kinds of responses that can bring about positive change. (Lynn, 2006, p. 107)

African-centered education programs seek to address the problems of African American students. In an African-centered education program, African American students, teachers, parents, and administrators can use their experiences and prior knowledge to discuss viable solutions to the historical role of racism in education.

Research Questions

This research study describes the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents in an African-centered education program (Ile Omode). It answered this inquiry by posing the following questions:

1. How do African American students understand the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

2. How do African American teachers understand the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

3. How do African American parents understand the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

4. From the perspectives of the students, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

5. From the perspectives of the teachers, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

6. From the perspective of the parents, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

African, African-American, Black, and Negro. Synonymous terms used to refer to people of African descent (Webster's Dictionary, 1997).

Afrocentric/Afrocentricity. An epistemology that seeks to recenter/relocate African people—Black Africans on the continent of Africa and the people of African descent in the Diaspora—in their own particular, yet connected, cultures for the ultimate purpose of their social, political, and economic liberation (Asante, 1988).

Council of Independent Black Institutions. Founded in June 1972, 2 months after a conference hosted by African American Teacher Association that planted the seeds for an independent, African educational system. The Council began with 28 members representing 14 Independent Black Institutions with the purpose of organizing these existing institutions into corresponding political and educational objectives (Lomotey, 1992).

Critical race theory. The work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination (Powers, 2007)

Critical race theory in education. A rapidly emerging discourse on schooling and inequality, as a potential tool for framing more lucidly the conditions under which African Americans are educated, and also for suggesting possible solutions to the perennial problems faced by this historically marginalized group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Culturally relevant education. Culturally relevant education seeks to educate students in relation to their own interests using their cultural experiences to help facilitate learning.

Culture. Refers to a particular group of people and their shared symbols, values, and beliefs (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

European, White. Synonymous terms used in this study refer to the ethnic grouping of European descents (Webster's Dictionary, 1997).

Ile Omode. From the Yoruba language of West Africa, meaning House of the Children. Ile Omode is an African-centered school located in East Oakland, California.

Independent Black institution. An independent Black school or institution can be defined as a nonpublic, precollegiate, self-governing institution that is not dependent on a larger public or sectarian organization. In African American communities this definition must be expanded to include schools supported and governed by an individual church congregation (Lomotey, 1992).

Inner city/urban. Refers to a geographical region in a large city that is densely populated, usually deteriorating, inhabited mainly by poor and often minority groups (Webster's Dictionary, 1997).

Kemet/Kemetic. Ancient Egyptian religion which developed in the United States beginning in the 1970s (Wikipedia.org, 2009a).

Kwanzaa. A harvest festival celebrated from December 26th to January 1st among some African American organizations (Webster's Dictionary, 1997).

MAAT. Ma'at as a principle was at least partially codified into a set of laws, by concepts of truth and a respect for, and adherence to, this divine order. This divine order

was primarily conceived of as being modeled in various environmental, agricultural, and social relationships (Wikpedia.org, 2009b).

Nguzo Saba. (From the Swahili language) Seven Principles. The seven principle of Kwanzaa are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, creativity, purpose, and faith (Kwanzaa, 2000).

Limitations of the Study

A limitation to this study is its small sample size. Results of the study may not be generalized to all students in African-centered education programs. This study contains information from one African-centered institution. Research on another African-centered institution may reveal findings that may or may not be the same. Another limitation to this study is researcher bias. With a background of African Studies and Education, the researcher's perceptions of issues related to this topic may differ from other researchers. Further, the researcher has a child who attended the preschool program. Researcher bias was minimized through feedback from the participants. Participants took an active part in reviewing the transcripts that revealed recurring themes and ideas. This study was not generalized to all African American students, teachers, and parents that participate in African-centered schools.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to information on African-centered education programs and Independent African Schools. It also informs the educational community of the benefits African-centered education programs have on the students that attend them. African institutions offer equity for African American students in an environment that

can maximize their achievements. Educators may use this knowledge to engender support for African-centered institutions or to replicate aspects of the model in a public-school setting.

Information regarding the perspectives of African American students, teachers, and parents provides possible solutions to existing problems that exist in the traditional public-school setting. Researchers and policymakers may use the findings in this study to further research in this area. Advocates for African-centered education programs and independent African schools may also use this information to produce schools that serve the African community.

The researcher hopes to add to the body of theoretical knowledge on how CRT in education has influenced change in the African-centered education community. Along with other research on African-centered programs it was hoped that the researcher could describe aspects of African-centered programs that would influence teacher-preparation programs for teachers who work with African youth. It was hoped to discuss the approaches to educating African youth that have contributed to academic success.

Students, teachers, and parents of African-centered programs may use this study to improve existing programs. This information expands the dialogue on strategies for success of African students in the American education system. Finally, this research provided an alternative perspective for educators and policymakers to increase their understanding of African-centered programs.

Summary

The following chapters will discuss a review of related literature and theories connected to African-centered education programs. This information will provide a

historical overview of some of the educational challenges faced by African Americans in this country. The literature review includes a discussion of the historical significance of African-centered education. It includes information from earlier writers such as Woodson (1933/1977), who identified issues for Africans in education that are still relevant.

Further, a review of research connected to this topic will offer a general idea of associated theories such as culturally relevant education and Afrocentricity. Other pertinent researchers include Asante (1988) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Asante's work on Afrocentricity discussed the use of African history in philosophy and education, and in sustaining African culture. Ladson-Billings' study of cultural relevance has provides an understanding of how culture can be used in the service of education.

Chapter 3 expands the dialogue to an understanding of the influence of race in education. The relationship between race and education was explained using the theoretical framework of CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research study, which includes the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents that participate in African-centered education programs. The chapter highlights their perspectives and aspects of African-centered education programs that impact academic success. Finally, chapter 5 summarizes the study and its implications, and offers recommendations for the field.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature discusses three areas of significance connected to African-centered education programs: historical significance, the African American student experience and culturally relevant education, and African-centered education programs' strategies for success. Historians such as Woodson (1933/1977) explained the importance of education in America for the African. Cultural relevance is discussed using the work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The African-centered education programs and strategies for success section includes an overview of aspects of African-centered education programs. The abovementioned topics relate to the development of African-centered education programs.

Historical Significance of African American Education

The movement for African-centered education programs in the United States grew out of the history of resistance of African American people in this country. The enslavement period brought groups of Africans from different parts of the African continent and Caribbean who were forbidden to communicate in their native languages. Oppressors feared Africans who spoke in their native tongues could rebel and dismantle slavery's stronghold. Slavery held Africans in this country in not only physical, but mental bondage. Most noted for documenting the ideology behind the "breaking" of the slave came from a British slave owner named Willie Lynch in a speech given in Virginia in 1712. His strategies included dividing the masses by emphasizing differences among

slaves and fear. Lynch's speech encouraged the "breaking" of the slave to ensure the economic stronghold of Europeans over Africans.

> For fear that our future generations may not understand the principles of breaking both of the beast together, the nigger [sic] and the horse. We understand that short range planning economics results in periodic economic chaos; so that to avoid turmoil in the economy it requires us to have breadth and depth in long range comprehensive planning, articulating both skill and sharp perceptions. We lay down the following. … Both horse and nigger [sic] is no good to the economy in the wild or natural state. Both must be broken and tied together for orderly production. … Accordingly, both a wild horse and a wild nigger [sic] is dangerous even if captured, for they will have the tendency to seek their customary freedom, and in doing so, might kill you in your sleep. … Hence both the nigger [sic] and the horse must be broken; that is breaking them from one form of mental life to another. Keep the body and take the mind! (Lynch, 1999, p. 13)

Slavery provided Europeans who came to settle in this country the opportunity to build capital using the free labor of Africans who were captured and brought to this country. This relationship between the African and the European did not include education for the purpose of elevating the African from their state of mental or physical bondage. This relationship was tied to economics: Europeans used the divide and conquer strategy to attempt to prevent Africans from pulling their resources together to plan uprisings or escape to freedom. Though forbidden, many Africans sought to educate one another whenever possible. Yet, some Africans pursued education at the risk of death. "Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom" (Williams, 2005, p. 7).

Slavery did not prevent Africans in this country from learning these skills, because many believed that learning to read was connected to freedom (Franklin & Moss, 2000). Africans during the enslavement knew the value of literacy and went to many lengths to achieve it. "Slaves would dig a pit in the ground way out in the woods,

covering the spot with bushes and vines. Runaways sometimes inhabited the pits, but they also housed schools" (Williams, 2005, p. 20). Just as Africans who were enslaved wanted an education, Whites wanted to keep this knowledge away from them. "Whites feared that literacy would render slaves unmanageable. Blacks wanted access to reading and writing as a way to attain the very information and power that Whites strove to withhold from them" (Williams, p. 22). If enslaved Africans could learn to read and write, they could possibly escape to freedom. Some Whites, including abolitionists, did not object to the attainment of education for Africans in this country as long as it did not interfere with the status quo.

Northern philanthropists were advocates for education and accepted the notion of educating African Americans as long as it did not interfere with the interests of the White dominant culture. Self-help was an acceptable idea for Northern philanthropists when they stood to gain from the efforts of African Americans. Religious organizations gave funds with the understanding that African Americans would submit to a doctrine of Christian education, while wealthy merchants gave funds with the hope of furthering their capitalist gains.

> It was the general view of Jefferson's slave owning associates—who were farmers and planters—that educating slaves was not good policy because expanding their general knowledge would create among them a greater desire for the same constitutional rights as those granted to themselves. They also pointed out that if education were provided over their objections, it should be limited to the teaching of the fundamentals of the Christian religion. (Morgan, 1995, p. 39)

The idea of racial inequality in education was reinforced in the legal system through laws that sought to increase this divide.

> Even with the 13th Amendment (1865) that supposedly ended slavery, the 14th Amendment (1868) that gave Africans citizenship, and the 15th Amendment (1870) which gave Africans the right to vote, and the Civil Rights Act of 1875, mental slavery was enforced even further, and a systematic process of denying

> African people American identity was introduced. … In addition, the Supreme Court decisions of 1883 that nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which invoked the 3/5 of a man clause, the 1896 *Plessy vs Ferguson* Supreme Court decision that legalized segregation … also helped to reinforce mental slavery among African people. (Nkrumah, 2007, p. 20).

The quest for education posed the question of education for who and for what? Historical figures in African American history, most notably Woodson (1933/1977), documented the obstacles of the historical educational efforts of African Americans in his work, The Mis-education of the Negro. Many of these points mentioned by Woodson are still relevant today.

> Taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature, and religions which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. … He will find his proper place and stay in it. (1933/1977, p. xix)

Early historians such as Garvey and DuBois were advocates for the education of African people in America. Garvey's Back to Africa Movement presented an alternative for Africans in the Americas who desired to return to their native lands. Many opposed Garvey's efforts as they did not serve the interest of the oppressor. Although both Garvey and DuBois have been thought to be oppositional in their beliefs surrounding the education of the African in America, both believed that race in America presented obstacles to educational attainment. Vocational skills were often stressed in early educational programs, as these skills would prove useful during the industrial period for the oppressors (Dubois, 1969; Hill, 1987). The education of African Americans received fewer objections when the skills that were learned served the interest of business owners.

The issues of the education of African Americans are linked to the issues of race in America. During the segregation period Africans sought to educate their own. African

Americans developed many schools that served their interests. After slavery, segregated schools and African American institutions of higher learning were created. The institutions that were created for African Americans in this country were not created equally.

> Nothing was more persistent in the first half of the twentieth century than the disparity between the money spent for the education of White children and that spent for the education of Black children. … In 1935–36 the current expenditures per White pupil in ten Southern states averaged $37.87, while such expenditures per Black pupil averaged $13.09. In the new educational services, such as transportation, visual aids, laboratory equipment, modern buildings, and the like, the differentials were even greater. (Williams p. 446)

> The segregation period and the desire for education fueled the building of

institutions for African Americans. Early institutions emphasized agricultural and industrial development.

> During the days of segregation (the days of "colored" and "Negro"), children were encouraged by their teachers to "work twice as hard as a White person in order to get as much" and "to be a credit to your race." Today—for many reasons—that concept is not taught or expressed. During the days of segregation, there was a sense of community when parents encouraged their youth to "know who you are and where you belong." (Gill, 1991 p. 6)

The question of separate schools for African Americans posed social and legal issues. Many African Americans believed they had the right to attain the same educational goals as Whites. African Americans were forced to be self-sufficient when denied the same access as Whites. History has shown that despite many obstacles, Africans in America have continued to fight for their right to freedom. "The relationship between human rights and education must be considered by educators and policy makers who wish to weave it into an overall fabric for culturally literate students" (Gill, p. 34). The lessons from history include the struggles of the 1960s, which included cultural expression and efforts by African Americans to demand economic as well as political freedom.

The 1960s and the Black Power Movement in this country was a time of political, social, and economic evaluation.

> Education is wedded to economics, and economics is wedded to politics. Given the history of the United States, forms of colonialism, imperialism and corporatism will continue to have serious implications on the educational status of African Americans and other nonwhite persons living in this country. (Gill, 1991, p. 40)

The issues posed during the time of the Black Power Movement are relevant issues for the Black community now. This era is viewed critically by both the Black community and the dominant community. Discussion of this era is often confused with counterracist dialogue. Ture, an activist during the Black Power Movement and a former member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee defined the term as such.

> Black Power, it is a call for Black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society. (Ture & Hamilton, 1992, p. 44)

Activists and organizers such as Ture and Malcolm X opened dialogue and discussion in the context of the social, economic, and political realm when discussing solutions for the Black community.

In Ture and Hamilton's book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, they wrote, "We must devise new structures, new institutions to replace those forms or make them responsive. … The search for new forms means the search for institutions that will, for once, make decisions in the interest of Black people" (Ture & Hamilton, 1992, p. 45). African-centered programs were developed to work in the interest of Black people. The Black Power Movement was significant to the educational history of African people in this country because it influenced their world view and how they were perceived by the world community. The development of African-centered programs created a foundation

for its participants to build structures to further the goals and interests of the African community, thus improving society as a whole. Not all people in this country embraced the notion of African-centered education programs, although similar concepts exist among other groups of people.

African-centered education programs are current examples of resistance and self-determination in this country. A closer look at the ramifications of the existing public-education system provides a basis for the development of alternative educational programs. The African American student experience in this country aids in the explanation of the need for culturally relevant education.

African American Student Experience and the Need for Culturally Relevant Education

Since the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision to overturn segregation in American public schools, Americans have struggled to overcome racism in education. Many hoped that forced integration would lead to equality in education and a more just society. However, more than 50 years after the decision to end segregation in public schools, genuine educational equality for African Americans, Latinos, and other people of color remains elusive. The emergence of multicultural education, an antiracist pedagogy that celebrates the sociocultural backgrounds of all students regardless of their race, language, gender, social class, sexual orientation, or ability, raised hopes that the educational attainment gap between Whites and students of color may eventually be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the promise of multiculturalism has yet to be fulfilled. In many instances, multiculturalism exists in the form of recognition of holidays, and cultural differences in food and dance. Multicultural education has been thwarted by the

resurgence of a new form of racism. This new racism is embedded in the ideology of colorblindness, which ironically was shaped by the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Colorblindness asserts that the social, economic, cultural, and educational institutions of America are accessible to all; and that in a colorblind society, all members should be judged by the content of their character and not their racial background. According to Tarca (2005), "at its core, colorblindness implies that race actually doesn't make a difference in the life experiences of people living in the United States" (p. 4). In the public school system, for African Americans this has not been the case. "All too often, ethnic minority children are expected to check their cultures at the door, their thought processes—and are penalized if they continue to engage in behaviors that are misunderstood and misinterpreted in schools" (Townsend, 2003, p. 14). Many become disinterested students who do not see their culture reflected in textbooks and school culture. According to Kunjufu (1982), apathy and limited interest is apparent in African American students as early as the fourth grade. He attributed this to a disconnection between teachers and students.

The problem is magnified because many teachers are unable to relate to the experiences of the students they teach. The lack of success and interest in African American students creates issues for all teachers. One of the factors contributing to the lack of success is the disregard for African culture in many of the schools (Palmer, 2002). Teachers in the public-school system are challenged with maintaining the interest of African American students by teaching a curriculum to which they do not relate. Teachers work in an educational framework and are faced with the difficulty of presenting a curriculum that is of little interest or service to the population they teach.

"An observer from outside of the situation naturally inquires why the Negroes, many that serve their race as teachers, have not changed this program. These teachers however, are powerless" (Woodson, 1933/1977, p. 22).

In the traditional public-school system the many issues that students face inside and outside the classroom are not usually addressed.

> African Americans must confront many unique problems in western culture. One major problem, society and school curriculum are designed to encourage all children to conform and to internalize the values of the dominant culture in order to survive and for economic success. (Gill, 1991, p. 3)

Traditional public education programs fail to address the complexities of African American youth.

The result has meant that as a whole, African American student's needs are not met. "The African centered education campaign is related to the chronic failure of the education system to provide equal educational results and opportunities for African Americans" (Carruthers, 1995, p. 3). Culturally relevant education and African-centered education programs may empower students, teachers, and parents who desire to positively effect change in the lives of African American students. Culturally relevant education promises better educational outcomes for African American students in African-centered education programs. According to Nieto (2003) "a consistent finding concerning African American students is that when their teachers understand, appreciate, and use these students' culture in the service of their education, the students are better able to reach high levels of achievement" (p. 41). Culturally relevant education seeks to educate students in relation to their own interests, using their cultural experiences to help facilitate learning.

The work of Ladson-Billings offers an explanation of culturally relevant education. Ladson-Billings' work offers an explanation of the effect of cultural significance in the classroom.

> Culturally relevant education includes three major areas 1) Academic achievement. Standards were high in these classrooms. Students were expected to work hard, and they welcomed this responsibility. 2) Cultural competence. It is supported through the use of curriculum content selections that reflect the full range of humanity extant in students' culture. 3) Sociopolitical critique. This aspect of culturally relevant teaching links it closely with a critical pedagogy that argues for students and teachers alike to participate in a collective struggle. (Ladson-Billings, 2000)

Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant education and the perspectives of participants in African-centered education programs may be closely related.

One key aspect is the curriculum. The content of the curriculum as well as its execution is of concern for advocates of African-centered education programs. Both teachers and students may experience success when the curriculum is of interest. In White-dominated educational institutions, the educational curriculum is not culturally relevant to African American students. African-centered education programs use African American teachers who may relate to student experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Because African American students achieve higher academically when their culture is used in the service of their education, education needs to be culturally relevant in order for enthusiasm and success to take place (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

> Schools within the United States have incorporated very little curriculum or pedagogy related to African American students' culture and life experiences. Education has been used as one of the primary channels through which cultural alienation and annihilation has occurred. … That is, the way in which education has been transmitted (teaching style) and the content of educational materials (curriculum) have discounted the social and cultural capital of Black populations (consciously or subconsciously) and have therefore minimized the culture of Black populations. (Nieto, 2003, p. 52)

The absence of relevant skills to further the interests and ideas of African Americans in the current educational system has created some difficulties in the larger African American communities. African American students in the public-education sector have not experienced as much academic success as their peers of other racial groups. "One aspect of African centered curriculum that helps to increase academic achievement is the connection of students with their own historical and cultural traditions" (Ashanti, 2003, p. 6). The use of a curriculum that is culturally relevant and teachers that identify with African American youth may prove useful in the attempts in eliminate the achievement gap.

Culturally relevant education and African centered education programs can have a positive effect on the success of African American students. "The intent is to reshape consciousness so that they feel they have value and self-respect, that they are equal to anyone," (Robertson, 2005, p. 3). There is an apparent need for more African-centered education programs. Students who have had experiences in African-centered education programs may have greater academic success. "For the past decade, the concept has struggled against significant opposition and skepticism. African centered education expects to meet and exceed the same state standards in math, language and science and prepare students for college" (Robertson, p. 4). Information from researchers in the field of education on the significance of culturally relevant education can provide much-needed alternatives to the problems of education in America. "To really get people to buy into culturally responsive teaching we're going to have to prove its effectiveness through evidence-based research" (Townsend, 2003, p. 15). The theory of cultural relevance highlights the concerns of African-centered education programs.

African Centered Education Programs' Strategies for Success

African-centered education programs grew out of the desire to address the needs of African people in America. Although movements such as the Black Power Movement of the 1960s advocated for the rights of African people in America, the educational system on a whole has yet to convey education from a non-Eurocentric perspective. African-centered education programs are rooted in Afrocentricity, which was introduced in 1988 by Asante. "Afrocentricity is a critical discourse that is being used to form a critical pedagogy known as African-centered education" (p. 1). African-centered education focuses on the African experience. The experiences are not limited to life for the African in America, but the African experience in Africa, America, and other parts of the world as well.

> Afrocentricity is an epistemology that seeks to re-center/relocate African people—Black Africans on the continent of Africa and people of African descent in the Diaspora—in their own particular, yet connected, cultures for the ultimate purpose of their social, political, and economic liberation. (Asante, p. 23)

African-centered education programs allow students to see the contributions of African people in the world that does not include the European perspective.

Researchers such as Lomotey (1992) believed African-centered education allows African American students to see the world with Africa as the center. This also allows them to see themselves as descendents of contributors to civilization. Lomotey stated further that Independent Black Institutions can be used as models for public schools.

> The Independent Black Institution model is a useful one that provides inspiration for parents and teachers in the public schools because it (1) demonstrates that African Americans can effectively educate their own children, (2) illustrates African American institutional development and financial independence, and (3) provides a training ground for tomorrow's African American leadership. (Lomotey, 1992, p. 460)

African-centered pedagogy and curriculum are designed to teach African children in a manner that takes their history, culture, identity, and politics into account for the ultimate purpose of solving their problems (Asante, 1988). The development of African-centered education programs has provided an educational alternative for African American parents and students to traditional public-education programs. Most African-centered education programs are owned and operated by African Americans. Founders and administrators of these schools can operate without much outside influence. Others are considered public charter schools with an African-centered curriculum.

A recurring theme in African-centered curriculum is the Nguzo Saba, or seven principles. The Nguzo Saba were principles developed by Dr. Maulana Karenga and are highlighted as part of an Afrocentric education. The principles are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, creativity, purpose, and faith. "These schools, commonly referred to as African centered independent school or institutions, employ a curriculum and pedagogy rooted in the ancient African concept of Ma'at and the Seven principles of Blackness known as the Nguzo Saba" (Murrell, 2002). The Nguzo Saba presents a framework of beliefs and goals that the students use in their daily lives.

<div align="center">Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles)</div>

1. Umoja (*unity;* oo-Moe-jah). To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.

2. Kujichagulia (*self-determination;* koo-jee-cha-Goo-Lee-ah). To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

3. Ujima (*collective work and responsibility;* oo-Jee-mah). To build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.

4. Ujamaa (*cooperative economics;* oo-Jah-mah). To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit together from them.

5. Nia (*purpose;* nee-Ah). To make, as our collective vocation, the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

6. Kuumba (*creativity;* koo-Oom-bah). To do always as much as we can, in the way that we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it.

7. Imani (*faith;* ee-Mah-nee). To believe with all our hearts in our parents, our teachers, our leaders, our people, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Students are more interested and empowered once they begin to learn a curriculum that relates to and teaches about their contributions to society. Further, students are held accountable for their actions. "The intent is to reshape consciousness so that they feel they have value and self-respect, that they are equal to anyone" (Robertson, 2005, p. 3). The incorporation of their cultural experiences and teachers that relate to the African experience provide students with an opportunity to learn who they are. A positive self-image may encourage positive self-esteem, which could lead to success in education. "Students should start their education with self-definition in the context of their own experience" (Verharen, 2002, p. 317).

Strides in African-centered education programs seek to address the need for growth and development in the interest of African people. "Afrocentric curriculum provides the critical consciousness necessary for African people to overcome past (and present) oppression" (Asante, 1988). The documentation of the experiences of African American participants in these programs may prove useful in arguments for the development of African-centered education programs; as well as possibly make improvements to the current educational system.

African-centered education is holistic educational reform aimed at maximizing the human potential of African Americans. It is centered in the cultural experiences, values and learning modalities of African American people (Lee, 1992). African-centered education is a pedagogy based on self-determination in the fight against oppression. Social justice and reform in education should include reflection and action on the part of the oppressed. Freire explained, "The pedagogy of the oppressed, which is pedagogy of (wo)men engaged in the fight for their own liberation. … The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (Freire, 1992, p. 39). Participants in research for African-centered education programs should engage in useful dialogue about their experiences in the context of a White dominant society. Reflections on their experiences in African-centered education programs in relation to this context will provide views on African-centered education programs. "True reflection leads to action. … That action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (Freire, p. 52). Students, teachers, and parents participating in African-centered education programs could lend valuable insight from their experiences. Freire (1992) described the essentiality of dialogue:

> To substitute monologue … for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication. Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which may be manipulated.

Freire also described the necessity for participants be active in the creation of the infrastructure for future community problem solving:

> Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only to the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.

Freire's comments show that an open critical dialogue between participants and researchers can lead to the discovery of students, teachers, and parents as "permanent re-creators" of their schools and community. Further, this information may offer suggestions for improvements in African-centered education programs and the current educational system as a whole.

Summary

The historical significance of the education of African people in America has been met with its challenges. Strides in education continue as researchers begin to explore viable options and approaches to serve African youth. Culturally relevant educational practices and Afrocentricity are key aspects in the development of African-centered education institutions. The people are the biggest resource in the development of programs that serve their interests. Participants in African-centered education programs can offer suggestions to create the necessary changes in existing educational programs and society. This information may prove useful to students, teachers, and parents in their own liberation.

The work of researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2000), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Lomotey (1992), and Shujaa (1992a, 1992b), have all shed light on the efforts of Africans in education. Culturally relevant education describes the need to have education relate to the experiences of its students. With this information, the question arises, How can we use the information to bridge the gap in the educational success of the youth? As the concept of African-centered programs develops, input from its participants, particularly students, teachers, and parents, will further contribute to an understanding of African-centered education.

This study describes particular aspects of African-centered education at a time when some of the ideas of African-centered programs are developing in charter schools, and education in America is in need of reform. Despite the efforts of educational programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, years later there is still a need to address the needs of the failing youth in the current educational system. African-centered programs offer a nontraditional alternative to address the needs and provide examples that could influence the entire educational community.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to describe the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents of African-centered education programs. Through reflection on their experiences the participants were able to highlight aspects of African-centered education programs that were believed to attribute to academic success. Using a participatory research methodology, the participants had an opportunity to discuss areas for the improvement of their school community.

A qualitative method of participatory research was used to give a detailed explanation of the experiences of participants in African-centered education programs. This study offers insight into the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents who have participated in African-centered education programs. Participatory Action Research "is recursive (reflexive or dialectical) and focused on bringing about change in practices" (Creswell, 2005, p. 556). Participatory Action Research is committed to "social, economic, and political development responsive to the needs and opinions of ordinary people" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 568). The perspectives of the participants are valuable resources. Their experiences and insight provided an overview of an African-centered education program. This methodology was chosen to highlight practices in African-centered education programs that are beneficial. Using this methodology the participants were able discuss areas of improvement for their school community. The study was guided by seven principals for implementing Participatory Action Research in community research (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor, & Davis, 2004, pp. 22–24):

1. Consider participants as social actors, with a voice, ability to decide, reflect, and capacity to participate fully in the research process.
2. The ultimate goal of PAR is the transformation of the social reality of the participants by increasing the degree of control they have over relevant aspects of their community or organization.
3. The problem originates in the community/organization itself and is defined, analyzed, and solved by the participants.
4. Active participation leads to better understanding of the history and culture of the community/organization and a more authentic analysis of the social reality.
5. Engaging in a dialogical approach also leads to critical awareness.
6. Recognizing people's strengths also increases their awareness about their existing resources and mobilizes them to help themselves.
7. The research process also promotes personal change both for participants and researchers.

The researcher set out to inquire about the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers that participate in an African-centered education program, Ile Omode. The findings served to create improvements to Ile Omode, the African-centered education program, as well as a reference for existing programs that serve African American youth. Information collected can be used to improve existing programs, suggest the creation of like programs, and offer public information that may be useful in making changes to the traditional public-education system in which African American youth as a whole have not been the most successful.

Research Design

Participants participated in dialogues with the researcher. This study used descriptive research with an observational design. The researcher set out to inquire about the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents of an African-centered program, Ile Omode. The approach throughout asked what aspects of African-centered programs contribute to academic success. The work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) strongly influenced the study because the concept of cultural

relevance and CRT in education relates to an understanding of African-centered programs.

A background questionnaire was used to establish demographic data and the personal history of the teachers and parents (see Appendix A). The data included age, gender, college level, area of study, and job classification. The data was transcribed and coded according to themes that arose through data analysis. The findings were reviewed with the participants. Through follow-up dialogues, the participants offered further validation of the findings and discussed improvements to be implemented into their existing program and their role in its establishment. This reflective process led to further insight into the comments and experiences of the participants in Ile Omode and the development of an action plan for each of the participant groups.

<div align="center">Research Setting</div>

Ile Omode is an African-centered educational institution in the Bay Area. All participants are students, teachers, and parents of Ile Omode. The name, Ile Omode is from the Yoruba people of West Africa meanings House of the Children. The name is fitting for the environment. Many students of Ile Omode view their school environment as a second home. The teachers are nurturing, and the environment has images of African leaders that represent the endless possibilities that await the children of Ile Omode. The school is nestled in the heart of an inner city area that can easily be deemed a war zone. Teachers of the school community are respected by the students and parents. The teachers' interactions are more like brothers and sisters than coworkers. It is through this collective struggle that Ile Omode exists. The school is a safe haven for the members of the community that are able to attend the school.

Ile Omode is an extension of the community church which was started in 1981 by former ministers of a popular church in Oakland, California. The ministers both came from the Christian tradition and desired a more African-centered church. The church is based on Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) teachings and various practices from West Africa.

The school is centered in an economically depressed area in East Oakland. Ile Omode began formally in 1986 as a licensed preschool with three teachers Mama Jamila, Mama Ola, and Mama Jakira. The school began out of the home of Mama Jamila, who still teaches at the school. Currently, Ile Omode is located in the same building as its church in East Oakland. The church is in the lower level of the building. The school has two upper levels for classrooms and activities.

The school's main entrance has a large mural on the wall which depicts a large kinara (candle holder) and candles for the seven principles of Kwanzaa in red, black, and green with a bright yellow and orange background. The wall also has a photo of one of the founders of the school and graduates of Ile Omode. From this entrance, to the right is the preschool. This open space also has a mural. With the same bright yellow and orange background, the students see images of Egyptian pyramids and the sun. The murals use symbols associated with African people that beautify the space and adorn the entire wall of the preschool.

To the left of the entrance is the main office area and classrooms along the hallway. This downstairs area is used for the lower grade levels. The walls in the hallways are decorated with the work from students of the lower grades. At the time, the students created stop lights and colored pictures of Garrett Morgan, who invented the stop light and the gas mask. This was part of their display on African inventors.

The upstairs classrooms are for the upper grades. In the main hallway upstairs there is a large round table used for group work. The computer laboratory is also upstairs. It is a long narrow space with computers acquired from grants written by the director. From the upstairs level one can look out the window to see the playground area. Much of the equipment on the playground area is in need of repair or replacement. The perimeter of the playground is surrounded by fences. The playground area is used by both the younger and older children.

Population and Sample

Three participants from a group of students, teachers, and parents were selected for a total of 9 participants for the study. The participants are members of Ile Omode as students, teachers, or parents. The study used a convenience sample based on access to students and their availability to participate in the study as well as recommendations from their teachers and administrators. The students selected were from the fifth and sixth grades.

Three students participated in the study. There were 2 female students and 1 male student. The first student, Zahara was 10 years old and in the fifth grade. She has been a student at Ile Omode since kindergarten. Unlike the other 2 students in the study, her mother is a teacher at the school. When asked if she liked the fact her mother was a teacher at the school, she replied "It's nice, I can tell her if something is wrong or whatever I need to tell her." She was also a member of the student council. Her favorite subjects are mathematics, language arts, and writing.

The second student, Briana was 11 years old and had experience in a private Catholic-school setting. She was a student at Ile Omode in kindergarten and returned to

Ile Omode after attending the private school. I asked her why she returned to Ile Omode and she replied, 'Well, my mom thought that it wasn't hard enough for me. And what they would do there is have everyone go at the same pace and they would take you on the pace that they want you to go." Her favorite subjects are writing and health. She indicated that she liked writing because her teacher related their lessons to the real world. She was later asked that if there was anything she could change about the school, she replied, "I would change the grades here so that the school would go to a higher level, to eighth grade at least maybe? Umm … I think that's about it because … yeah, I think the school is good already." Briana had an outside school experience and, based on her comments, she preferred Ile Omode.

The third student, Malcolm was 11 years old and also had outside experience in other schools. His favorite subjects are mathematics and health. Prior to Ile Omode, he attended a public school. In the second grade he came to Ile Omode. For the third and fourth grade, he left Ile Omode and returned to a public charter school. He returned to Ile Omode for fifth grade and is currently enrolled in the school for the fifth grade. When he was asked what he liked most about the school he replied, "I like how they challenge you; they give me the hardest work than any school I've ever been to." Malcolm enjoyed the academic challenges that Ile Omode presented.

The teachers were selected from various grades, based on their willingness to participate and suggestions from the school administrator. The teachers used for the study had a range of experience at the school. Mama Jamila is a founding member of the school. She and other members of her church community started out of her home in Oakland as a family childcare. They later became a licensed preschool and moved to their

current residence, which houses the school and the church. Her work with Ile Omode began in the 1960s. She left Ile Omode for a short time and currently teaches the preschool class.

Baba Bakari has been with Ile Omode for 11 years. He teaches history and language arts for the fifth and sixth grades. He has been with the school for over 11 years. He lives in the East Oakland community in which he works. He has a martial arts background and teaches martial arts in addition to his regular classes. His daughter, Mama Zanobia is the third participant and has been a first grade teacher for 2 years. She has been a teacher for a total of 8 years. Her children attend the school, ages 1 and 3 years old. Currently, she is studying for a bachelor of arts in psychology.

Parents were also selected based on their willingness to participate, availability, and suggestions from the school administrator. The first parent, Sherry, is 36 years old she is divorced and has three children who attend Ile Omode, ages, 2, 9, and 10 years old. Her children have attended Ile Omode for 4 years. Both parents are active in the lives of the children. She is a returning student and has 1 year of college experience. Her area of study is business and she describes her socioeconomic background as low.

The second parent, Janet, is from the east coast and has recently moved to the Bay Area. She works as a flight attendant and studied liberal arts at a 2-year college. She is single and has one son in the program, age 5. Currently, she is the only parent active in her child's life. She was introduced to Ile Omode after attending the Wo'se Community Church with a friend.

The third parent, David, is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. He has had two children in Ile Omode. He used to live in the East Oakland Community.

During that time his oldest daughter attended Ile Omode. She now resides with her

mother and no longer attends Ile Omode. Although, she no longer attends Ile Omode, he

credits Ile Omode with giving his daughter an academic head start. Currently his

youngest daughter is in the preschool program. Although he lives a suburban community,

he commutes over an hour each morning to drive his youngest daughter to school each

morning.

<div align="center">Questions to Guide Initial Dialogues</div>

The participants were asked to discuss their experiences at Ile Omode (see

Appendix B). The questions to guide the dialogue for students differed from those for

teachers and parents, because the questions were modified for students. The dialogue

with teachers and parents were guided by the same set of questions.

Questions that guided the dialogue with children:

1. What do you enjoy most about Ile Omode?

2. What are you favorite subjects and what helps you learn?

3. Who are your favorite teachers and why?

4. How do your teachers help you learn?

5. If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it be and

why?

Questions that guided the dialogue with teachers:

1.   Describe your relationship with your peers and other members of Ile

        Omode?

2.   Describe the relationships that you believe have helped to foster

        educational achievement.

3.   Describe the curriculum of Ile Omode.

4.   How does the curriculum affect personal, social, and academic

development?

5.   What teaching methods do students experience at Ile Omode?

6.   If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it

be and why?

Questions to guide dialogue with parents:

1.   Describe your relationship with your peers and other members of Ile

Omode?

2.   Describe the relationships that you believe have helped to foster

educational achievement.

3.   Describe the curriculum of Ile Omode.

4.   How does the curriculum affect personal, social, and academic

development?

5.   What teaching methods do students experience at Ile Omode?

6.   If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it

be and why?

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

A total of 9 participants, 3 participants from each group of students, teachers, and

parents were asked to discuss their perceptions of the African-centered education

program. Through a series of dialogues the participants were asked to disclose their

experiences and beliefs concerning the benefits of attending this African-centered

program. In addition, participants were also asked to discuss any areas that may be improved in the African-centered education program.

The demographic data included age, gender, marital status, educational background, and economic background. Only the researcher had access to the information gathered from the background questionnaire. Transcripts were returned to the participants for verification (see Appendix C). Once transcripts were approved, the tapes were destroyed.

The dialogues took place from January 2008 to February 2008. The initial dialogues took place separately with each participant during the month of January. Initial dialogues took place individually on the school grounds. Dialogues were transcribed and sent to each participant for verification. The follow-up dialogues were collected in a group dialogue/discussion during the month of February, with participants collectively reflecting on their experiences.

Collecting the data, the researcher

1. Discussed the research project with school administrators

2. Received approval from the Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects to begin the study.

3. Contacted the director of the institution to discuss who would participate in the dialogues and set up a formal tour.

4. Observed teachers and students in a classroom setting.

5. Selected student, parent, and teacher participants with the assistance of the administrator and based on observations of students and teachers in the classroom setting.

5. Obtained participant consent to conduct a dialogue and receive proper permission (see Appendix D).

5. Chose students in the desired grade levels. Students from the fifth and sixth grade classrooms were selected.

6. Chose teachers with different numbers of years of experience at the institution from less than 5 years to over 10 years experience.

7. Selected parents of students in different grades based on suggestions from the administrator.

8. Provided a questionnaire for teachers and parents and established a date and time for each dialogue.

9. Conducted dialogues (on the school grounds for convenience).

10. Convened the dialogues at the agreed on day and time.

11. Observed the class interaction for additional support and clarification of the educational environment.

12. Coded data and transcribed the dialogues.

13. Validated typewritten transcription with participants for accuracy.

14. Set up a date for follow-up dialogues with each of the participant groups.

15. Confirmed themes and findings with each of the participant groups, discussed areas for improvement, and devised an action plan to implement the suggestions.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of the initial dialogues were sent to provide the participants with the opportunity to confirm their comments. The transcripts were read by the researcher and

participants to ensure that the data was accurately recorded from the dialogues. In the follow-up dialogues, the researcher and participants verified and discussed the transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the data. The researcher coded the transcripts, developed a description of the collected data and highlighted recurring themes (Creswell, 2005). Written documents such as the school's mission statement, educational philosophy, and pedagogical approaches were collected from Ile Omode and triangulated with data. On completion, the researcher worked with the participants to provide an accurate description of the African-centered education program:

1.   How do African American students, teachers and parents perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success? Data analysis consisted of field observations, collected field data, and dialogues with students, parents, and teachers.

2.   From the perspectives of the students, teachers, and parents, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement? Data analysis consisted of field observations, collected field data, and dialogues with students, parents, and teachers.

<div align="center">Background of the Researcher</div>

The educational background of the researcher includes an undergraduate degree in African Studies from the State University of New York at Albany. While studying at the State University of New York at Albany the researcher studied abroad at the University of Ghana at Legon in Ghana, West Africa. Overseas travel revealed the importance of strengthening ties between the African Diaspora and the motherland, Africa. The

researcher also holds a Masters of Science in Educational Administration from the College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York.

The researcher has a great deal of experience working with African American youth in different settings, such as leadership retreats with students from low to high socioeconomic backgrounds. Teaching in different communities from Brooklyn, New York to the Los Angeles County Correctional Facility, a common denominator is a higher level of interest for African American students when studying topics that relate directly to the African experience.

The researcher became interested in serving inner-city youth while working with Glenmont Job Corps in Glenmont, New York, which provided job training and educational opportunities for students who were not successful in the public educational system. It was this experience that led to work in a juvenile correctional facility to help guide youth who have been incarcerated. The researcher later began work as a counselor for the Alameda County Probation Department. In this position the researcher challenged the administration to allow the creation of programs in the facility to serve in rehabilitating youth**.** Using celebrations such as a Kwanzaa tapped into the creative talents of the young people and served to educate them about the cultural significance of this holiday. The researcher hoped to help change the lives of youth in juvenile probation, but later realized that efforts could be more substantial by reaching youth prior to their incarceration and became an educator.

Protection of Human Subjects

With the permission of the participants, the researcher conducted dialogues and recorded their responses. The students' parents signed written consent forms granting

permission to obtain feedback on their experiences for the purpose of this study.

Participants met individually with the researcher to engage in dialogue. Participants were

given opportunities to review transcripts, then met collectively in a designated area. In no

way were the participants harmed during this process. This research was conducted with

the approval of the Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects to protect

the rights and interests of the participants in this study. A copy of the approval can be

found in the School of Education Dean's Office and in Appendices E and F.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of student, teachers, and parents of Ile Omode, an African-centered school. "African centered pedagogy and curriculum are designed to teach African American children in a manner that takes their history, culture, identity, and politics into account for the ultimate purpose of solving their problems" (Asante, 1988, p. 2). Each group discussed aspects of African-centered education that contribute to academic success. The study further explored how this group of students, teachers, and parents would like to make improvements to their school community. This chapter describes the findings and insights acquired as a result of dialogues and observations. The two research questions that were addressed here are concerned with the participant's view of their educational success based on their perceptions of their school environment. The questions that guided this investigation were (a) How do African American students, teachers, and parents perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success? (b) From the perspectives of the students, teachers, and parents, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

This chapter describes the findings from the dialogues with the participants. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a description of the participants. The second section describes the themes that were generated as a result of the dialogues with the participant groups. The third section discusses the responses to the research questions for each of the participant groups.

Pseudonyms were used for all the participant's names. This small sample population presented concerns over the reliability of this research. The researcher used responses from transcripts of students, teachers, and parents to inform the findings of the study. The transcripts were reviewed and used to describe the perspectives of each of the participant groups.

Meeting the School Community

The school is a familiar place as the researcher's first-born child first attended Ile Omode's preschool. It offered the desired type of environment for the child's first school experience. Although no longer living in Northern California, the school left a lasting impression. The school's administrator, Baba Jabari is committed to the success of the school as he has three children that attend the school. The Ile Omode Board of Directors granted the researcher permission to conduct the study and Baba Jabari partnered with the researcher in developing the study findings.

On entering the school the researcher observed that parents are greeted using the titles Mama or Baba, (Mother or Father). This title was extended to all adults that enter the school. There was a sense of camaraderie between the school staff and parents. The teachers were also called Mama or Baba. The title required a certain amount of respect be given from students to adults.

A strong sense of African identity was observed as the researcher walked through the school, hearing the names of the children being called between one another. Many of the names were African and Muslim names that had significant meanings such as "one with the creator" or "warrior." Some of the students also had names with creative spellings that were quite different from common European names. The children wore

African Dashikis in red, black, and green colors with gold embroidery. The dashikis were either red or green and the children wore black bottoms. The students and teachers wore natural hair styles in the form of locks, braids, afros, or head wraps. This was significant as it was a way of expressing their culture and illustrating a sense of pride in the culture.

The students of the preschool were not required to wear the dashikis. Their classroom area was an open space that is divided into sections used for dramatic play, story time, and instruction, and doubles as a lunch area. In this space there was also an alter used for ancestral worship. The alter had pictures of ancestors and an ankh, which is the ancient Egyptian symbol for eternal life. The alter offers protection and guidance from ancestors. Remembering ancestors allows the students to remember where they come from and their responsibility to do more than those who came before them. Each Friday morning the students and staff would gather to pour libation and conduct a drum circle. Sherry, a parent who participated in the study, described her feelings about the drum circle.

> I think that it affects the children is such a way that it kind of preps them for the day and gets them ready for learning. They are learning in the circle too, by calling off their ancestors. Some of the children lead the drum circles. It's amazing seeing some of the fifth and sixth graders leading the younger children with the other children drumming behind them. It's a good thing!

Libation is the practice of pouring water or liquid to the earth to summon the presence of ancestors and honor their memory. The drum circle served as a sense of community building.

Mama Jamila, one of the founders of the school and the lead preschool teacher, was very happy to hear about the study and explained that she felt the school needed this sort of attention. Since she was a founding member and had a depth of knowledge concerning the school and its development over time. Other teachers were also willing to

participate in the study and offered their assistance. The teachers were informed of the study prior to the initial study visit of the researcher.

There were 3 parents who participated in the study who were also school volunteers. The parent dialogues were held in the main office area. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and the possible benefits and risks associated with the study. The dialogues with the parents were beneficial as they offered insight into their perspectives on the school.

As the researcher entered the second-floor classrooms the teachers introduced the researcher and explained the purpose of the visit to the students. In each of the classrooms the researcher sat in the back and watched the students interact in the classrooms with the teachers. During this time the researcher was able to witness the more vocal students, which was a characteristic looked for in the selection of students. The researcher recorded the names of some of the students that might be good to conduct for the dialogues. Using observations and the suggestion from the teachers and administrators, the students were selected and spoken with individually in the upstairs common area.

Profiles of the Student Participants

There were 3 students who participated in the student dialogues. The students openly expressed their beliefs and experiences in an African-centered school. The students were chosen by the teachers and administrator. During the time of the selection many students were eager to participate in the dialogues. Some of the students chosen were also members of the student council. Those students were the most vocal and displayed a deep concern for the school and their classmates. They were also very

enthusiastic about brainstorming ideas for solutions to what they deemed to be areas of improvement for the school. The selection of the student participants was biased on those the researcher thought were the best and the brightest.

The 3 students were named Zhara, Briana, and Malcolm. Zhara was 10 years old and in the fifth grade. She has been a student at Ile Omode since preschool. She was a member of student government. She has been a student at Ile Omode since preschool. Her mother was a teacher at the school and was also a participant in the study. She was pleased that her mother was a teacher at the school since it allowed her to speak with her mother whenever she needed to. Zhara believed that all the teachers were very caring. "All the teachers are nice here and they take good care of you." Her favorite subjects were mathematics and language arts.

The second student participant, Briana is 11 years old and in the sixth grade. Her favorite subjects were writing and health. She was a student at Ile Omode and then left the school for a short period of time to attend a prestigious private school. After her experience in this private school she and her mother later decided that she would return to Ile Omode to complete her elementary-school experience. She stated that the reason for returning to Ile Omode was because her mother felt that the studies at the other school were not challenging. "Well, my mom thought that it wasn't hard enough for me. And what they would do there (the private school) is have everyone go at the same pace and they would take you on the pace that they want you to go." She believes that the teachers at Ile Omode are helpful to the students because they relate their lessons to the "real world." She stated, "I like Baba Bakari, because he likes to relate lessons to the real world so that it actually becomes useful." Like the first student participant, Briana

explained that the teachers take time out to be sure that the students understand the lessons. She explained that she enjoyed her mathematics class due to the time and attention the teacher gives his students.

> If he's doing a math problem he will stop at the end of the lesson and make sure everyone has got it." He will say, do you get this and if we raise our hand and say that we don't then he explains it to us. And if we still don't get it, he will probably do another example or something to make sure that we get it.

Briana appreciated the relationship she had with the teachers at Ile Omode compared to teachers at other schools. When asked to explain what makes the teachers at Ile Omode different she explained:

> The teachers here care about you more. They help you and they make sure that you actually get stuff. And they understand everything because they know that they have been where you are and they really care about you.

The relationship between students and teachers was a significant finding in the study as it revealed that the relationship between students and teachers was connected to the success of the students of Ile Omode.

The third student participant, Malcolm is 11 years old and in the sixth grade. His favorite subjects are mathematics and health. He is the only male student participant and a member of student government. Like the second student participant, Malcolm had experience outside of Ile Omode and later returned to Ile Omode to complete his elementary-school experience. Prior to his experience at Ile Omode he attended a private school. Malcolm came to Ile Omode for second and third grade then attended a public charter school for fourth grade and returned to Ile Omode for fifth and sixth grade. He expressed that he was pleased with his experience at Ile Omode. When asked what is it that he likes about the school he stated, "I like how they challenge you here. Out of all the schools I've been to they give the hardest work."

The student participants were very articulate and eager to participate in the study. All the student's dialogues were insightful. Although the participants had different educational backgrounds, their dialogues revealed similar perspectives on Ile Omode.

Profiles of Teacher Participants

The physical appearance of the teachers included some expressions of African culture. The female teachers wore natural hair styles or head wraps. The male teachers were neatly dressed with African print shirts and natural hair styles such as locks. The teachers in the program had a commitment to teaching their students about their history and excellence in academics. The teachers' approach to teaching can be described as what Ladson-Billings described as culturally relevant education. In her book *Dream Keepers, Successful Teachers of African American Students*, Ladson-Billings wrote,

> Culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or seeing it distorted…Or they many result from the staffing pattern in the school (when all teachers and principal are White and only the janitors and cafeteria workers are African American) and from the tracking of African American students into the lowest-level classes. (1994, p. 17)

Culturally relevant education supports the idea that teachers are connected to the lives of the students they serve.

Culturally relevant education also emphasizes the development of students who are dedicated to the betterment of their community. African students

> continue to experience high drop-out, suspension and expulsion rates. Although possessing a high school diploma is no guarantee of success in the U. S. society, not having one spells certain economic and social failure. Thus, when we fight about education, we indeed are fighting for our lives. (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 212)

This belief was echoed by Mama Zanobia who expressed the difficulty that African

American students face in society and the American educational system.

> They focus so much on the curriculum and so called standards and No Child Left
> Behind that they don't look at individual students, and unfortunately as Black
> students we already have so many things working against us as far as economics
> and class systems that we need some place, our children need some place where
> people are looking out for them specifically.

The teachers were passionate about their work and affectionate toward their

students. The relationship between teachers and their students can be described as a bond,

which aids in their approach to education. Mama Zanobia explained,

> I treat my students like my children and their parents know that. I am not going to
> send you home and not think about you anymore until I have to come back to
> school. It's a family thing, it's a family affair here. I see that you are having a
> rough day and you are not getting the lesson, I am going to sit down with you and
> I am going to talk to you. I am going to give you a hug and tell you that it's ok
> and I am going to kiss the boo boo when you fall down and hurt yourself and I
> think that is something that as Black people we are naturally affectionate like that
> and we are naturally family oriented. So, when you have a school that is centered
> in that, it is going to come out. And you don't have to feel like you have to hold
> back. Aside from the curriculum and the test scores and all that, this is what fuels
> that success. I am looking at my students like my children and I want to see them
> successful. I want to see them do well, so I am going to put my all into it to make
> sure that they do well.

There were 3 teachers who participated in the study. Of the teachers there were 2

female teachers and 1 male, Mama Jamila, Baba Bakari, and Mama Zanobia. Each of the

teachers offered a wealth of insight into their beliefs about African-centered education

and their relationships with their students, parents, and coworkers.

The First Teacher Participant (Mama Jamila)

The first teacher participant, Mama Jamila, is a founding member and one of the

oldest members of Ile Omode school. She began working with the school in 1987. The

school started as childcare in her home. She and other women of the Wo'Se Church

began the preschool when the number of children began to grow. She later left Ile Omode and moved from the immediate area where she started her own family childcare. She returned to Ile Omode after one of the other founding members who ran the preschool passed away. She and the current director believed that it would be good for her to return as lead teacher because she was one of the founding members of the school community and was familiar with the curriculum.

Her early experience with Ile Omode was a source of conflict because she believed that the current generation of students and parents was very different from when Ile Omode first began. Mama Jamila was conflicted because she had been with Ile Omode from the beginning. She believed there was a disconnect between her generation and the current generation.

> It's a struggle you know, because you really have to know you're dealing with another generation that is not really aware of some of the things that we were aware of when we were coming up, you know back in the day, so um, it's not the same as it was.

The researcher asked Mama Jamila to further explain what she believed changed from when she was a teacher in the earlier days until now. She explained,

> I'm 60 years old, so I think that my children's generation doesn't look at the struggle in the same way like we did. Now you have a few, but that's a few, so the parents are not as aware. I think it's like a fad to them as opposed to a real feeling of struggle to make change. Their sense of identity is not the same. Their sense of connection with Africa is not the same. I would say 50% of them that are here do not have a strong African identity. They like the school because it is cultural. They like the education, they like the fact that it is a family type of vibe, but in terms of what they do when they get home, I don't believe that it is carried out, as opposed to when we first started. Most people were cultural nationalists or they were revolutionary minded on some kind of level. That's not the case today, so some of the things that I felt real comfortable about doing back then, I don't feel the same way now, because I don't know it is perceived by them and I know that it is not reinforced at home.

The discussion with Mama Jamila further expressed what she believed to be a missing connection. Mama Jamila felt the parents who participated in the school's origin, which began with the Wo'se church and grassroots beginnings had been replaced with parents that thought of African-centered education as a fad or novelty. She also believed there was a gap between the home and school community. There were two concerns she mentioned, which was African identity/cultural nationalist and revolutionary minded. For Mama Jamila the connection to the school and growth of its students was connected to the survival of African people and their ideological views concerning African identity. The dialogue with Mama Jamila revealed an additional finding, that the level of awareness concerning African culture may not be reinforced in the home environment. Mama Jamila believed that African-centered education was more than an approach to education; for her it is a way of life.

The Second Teacher Participant (Baba Bakari)

Baba Bakari has been a teacher at the school for over 10 years. His daughter was a teacher at the school and his grandchildren are students in the program as well. He was viewed as an elder in the school community and well respected. He teaches fifth and sixth grade as well as martial arts classes. The idea of the missing connection between the home and school community was shared by Baba Bakari.

> When I first started here, the school came out of the Wo'se Church. So socially and academically it helped. The church really had an impact on those two aspects. But now we are getting a lot of students that are coming from different religious backgrounds. The students and parents are also coming from different social backgrounds you find in public schools. So they don't have a lot of the mannerisms that the Wo'se Community Church had or people that are quote unquote "African Centered." Therefore the school is not affecting them socially as much as I think it should**.**

The researcher asked Baba Bakari how to change the missing connection. He responded that there must be greater parent involvement. "I think that one of the things that you really have to do is to engage the parent because unfortunately that is where it starts." This comment revealed an additional finding, which was the need for greater parental involvement. The dialogues with the parents also solidified this finding as some parents revealed that they themselves do not know enough about their culture to reinforce some of the cultural practices at home.

Baba Bakari's role as an elder and a male teacher in the school was important to him and many of the students and parents of the school. One of the students, Briana, mentioned that Baba Bakari is her favorite teacher. She stated, "Baba Bakari, because he knows a lot and tells you about life." Baba Bakari further explained his approach to teaching African American students.

> I personally think that African American children primarily receive and process information for the first kinetically, then visual. I think the males primarily learn hands on. And I think the females primarily learn from hearing, audio. So, me personally, I am an advocate for writing. I love teaching my children to write because I think that it definitely develops their penmanship, concentration, focus, and I think it helps to establish their thought process. So one of the things that I do a lot is put an emphasis on reading and writing. Even in math I make them write out their examples even before we go over the test. I say, write the example out. It helps toward being neat and orderly. All those things are real valuable tools for me.

Baba Bakari explained the concept of teaching the students lessons that will go beyond the classroom to the real world and why it is important to do so. His belief is that students are not interested in the public-education system because the curriculum that they are taught is not relevant to their lives.

> As a martial artist I am always looking for life lessons. I try to be conscious of are students looking at this information in a way in which they can utilize it? They understand that they may not be able to utilize it right at this moment. But, they should be able to utilize it eventually. And if you can't utilize it, what you are

being taught then to me it's not relevant. Therefore, I don't think that we should be teaching irrelevant information to our children at this point. I think that a lot of times that's why we lose them. We are losing our children in the public schools because we are giving them things that they can't use.

A second student, Malcolm, also believed that teachers like Baba Bakari and their relationship with their students was one of the factors that helped promote academic success. "The teachers here care about you more. They help you and they make sure that you actually get stuff. And they understand everything because they have been where you are and they really care about you." The relationship between the students and the teachers distinguished Ile Omode from many public-education programs.

The Third Teacher Participant (Mama Zanobia)

Mama Zanobia has been a teacher at Ile Omode for 2 years. She teaches the first grade. She is a Muslim and prior to her experience at Ile Omode she taught at Mohammed University, which she does not describe as African-centered, but as an all Black school. She has also taught writing classes in the public-school system for an afterschool program.

Mama Zanobia enjoyed working for Ile Omode and described the school as a family environment for both the students and the teachers.

It's a family affair here. You don't have to feel like you have to hold back. You don't have t feel like I can't be this way with that person because I am at work. You can be that way. You can be like a sister to your co-worker or brother to your boss and it's ok. (Mama Zanobia)

Her father is also a teacher at Ile Omode and a participant in the study.

Mama Zanobia believes that African American students in the program have the benefit of learning from African American teachers who are committed to their success.

A positive self-concept and teacher expectation was key in her explanation of the success of her students.

> I have always been told that you are what you eat and think and that is what I tell my students. So if you have always been told that you are not going to be successful or if you do not have examples in front of you of a successful person that looks like you then what do you aspire to? We all look like you and we're doing this, so we are not going to expect any less of you. We expect you to do the same thing and reach higher.

The teachers' use of culturally relevant educational practices created interpersonal relationships that fueled academic success. The teachers' ability to relate to students on a social and cultural level helps students prepare for life inside and outside the classroom. Ladson-Billings explained,

> African American children cannot afford the luxury of shielding themselves with a sugar-coated vision of the world. When their parents or neighbors suffer personal humiliations and discrimination because of their race, parent, teachers and neighbors need to explain why. But beyond those explanations, they need to arm African American children with the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to struggle successfully against oppression. These more than test scores, more than high grade-point averages, are critical features of education for African Americans. (1994, p. 39)

Profiles of the Parent Participants

Many of the parents who agreed to participate in the study were very involved parents in the school community and in the lives of their children. Some of the parents had sacrificed time from work to participate in the study. Other parents had more flexible schedules and offered their time as well. Of the parents who participated in the study, 1 was from a mid- to high-socioeconomic background. The other 2 participants were from a mid- to low-economic background. The majority of the parents whose children attended Ile Omode made financial sacrifices in order for their children to attend the school. For others, Ile Omode was the best educational choice for them despite their ability to afford more expensive educational programs.

First Parent Participant (Janet)

The first parent participant, Jamaya, was new to the school and was a single parent. For this parent as well as the others, the school was vital to her child's development. The African-centered curriculum of the school was important to her. She also explained that the presence of African male teachers was just as important. Jamaya and her son recently moved to the west coast and her son's father was not living in their household. The need for more African male teachers was an additional finding in the study. Kunjufu explained the need for African male teachers in the work, Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys:

> My concern is based on the realistic profile that Black boys in the 9 years (K–8) of elementary school, may encounter a maximum of two male teachers—possibly none. And if male teachers are available, they will be in the upper grades.

The presence of positive African male role models for her son in the school environment was important to Jamaya. She explained,

> Coming from a single parent, it is interesting raising a boy. To me, he needs to see another man with respect as well as the whole education part and the cultural part. We really need it as a people and especially for a young Black man. I can't teach him how to be a man, so the more uncles that he has, the more dads he has, the more whoever, he can adopt the better. I know that he has to go out into the world, but the foundation is here.

The presence of African male teachers and an African-centered education was one of the main reasons Jamaya chose Ile Omode. She believed that the school offered a positive prospective of African people:

> Here they get the positive one-on-one experience where they get to see our people as leaders and I think that is much better for our kids. I like the idea of the culture and the drums and all that stuff that I personally don't use at home, so he gets to learn about it. To me it's more self-awareness; it's so important, because when you get out there in the world, you can get lost, you are not really sure. But if you are growing up with it and you have that confidence, it does not matter what the world shows you out there; you have that confidence to survive.

She explained that she has few family members here and felt the school embraced her and her son. She is also a member of the Wo'se community church. For many parents like Jamaya, coming to Ile Omode represented a significant financial sacrifice. Yet, parents of comfortable middle-class status chose Ile Omode as the best educational option.

Second Parent Participant (David)

The second parent participant, David, was a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and has two daughters. He has been with the school community for some time and explained that although he now lived outside of the local community, he commuted over an hour to drive his youngest daughter to school each morning. During the time that his older daughter attended Ile Omode, he lived in the community. In our dialogues he was asked to explain why he chose Ile Omode.

> It keeps me on my toes and makes me learn more about African culture. I enjoy the activities they have here. And the food, the children love the food. They did not have good food like this when I was coming up. It's like home. It's home cooked style food and I like that. The kids love it and don't want to be late for breakfast, or lunch. That's a good thing. It's a big help and being on the run … coming here you know that your kid is going to have a healthy meal.

Third Parent Participant (Sherry)

The third parent participant, Sherry, has a son that attends the school. She and her son have been members of the school community since he was in preschool. She was married and both Sherry and her husband worked full-time positions and considered themselves middle class. She believed that Ile Omode has been a great positive influence in the life of her son. During our dialogue she explained what she thought to be the top three positive aspects of the school:

> Well first of all I value their African history with the education, it is core. And I value the fact that he has a Black male teacher in this life. That is important to me and my son's father. I think it is important because he is a boy and boys need that. I just like the family environment too,.I come in and its like, hey, how are you doing? What did you do this weekend? I like that it is a school that is like having a family too.

Sherry, like Janet, felt it was important to have a Black male teacher as a role model for her son despite the fact that she was married. The dialogues with the parents provided a view of how parents felt about the school and the effect the school had on their child. With the input from all three participant groups, the researcher was provided with a broad perspective of the school. Follow up meetings and dialogues with each of the participant groups continued as the participants confirmed comments made in the initial dialogues and reviewed transcripts.

Follow Up Meetings

Follow-up meetings were held individually with each of the participants to confirm the information in the transcripts. The participants also met collectively in each of the participant groups. The parents met first. The teachers met second during their preparation time and the students met last. Each group member received copies of their transcripts prior to their follow-up dialogues. The transcripts were reviewed prior to the meeting and verified by each participant and their parents. The themes that were generated from each of the participant groups were coded and discussed during the final follow-up meetings.

The purpose of the follow-up meetings was to discuss the significance of the data and receive input from each of the groups. During this time, the participants were given an opportunity to validate or refute the findings. With input from the participants the researcher discussed the positive aspects of Ile Omode as well as areas for improvement.

Many of the comments from each group required action on the part of each of the participant groups. Each of the groups were asked to come up with suggestions they would like to see implemented in the school.

Summary

The participants in the study offered their perspectives on their experiences at Ile Omode. The members of the school community were willing to share their experiences in an effort to inform others about the positive experiences they've had at the school. They were also eager to share their input in an effort to improve the school community. Their perspectives have contributed to the core of the study, which seeks to define the impact of African-centered education programs and its impact on the success of its students.

Generative Themes

Themes were generated through the dialogues with each of the participant groups. The researcher organized and coded the findings from the dialogues with each of the participant groups into generative themes. The dialogues were guided by the following questions:

1. How do African American students, teachers, and parents perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

2. From the perspectives of the students, teachers, and parents, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

The themes were divided into three categories that were a result of dialogues with the students, teachers, and parents. The research questions were discussed with each participant group. Figure 1 illustrates the student group and the

themes that emerged as a result of the student dialogues. The middle circle of the diagrams indicates the student group. The outer circles illustrate the themes generated from the student group.
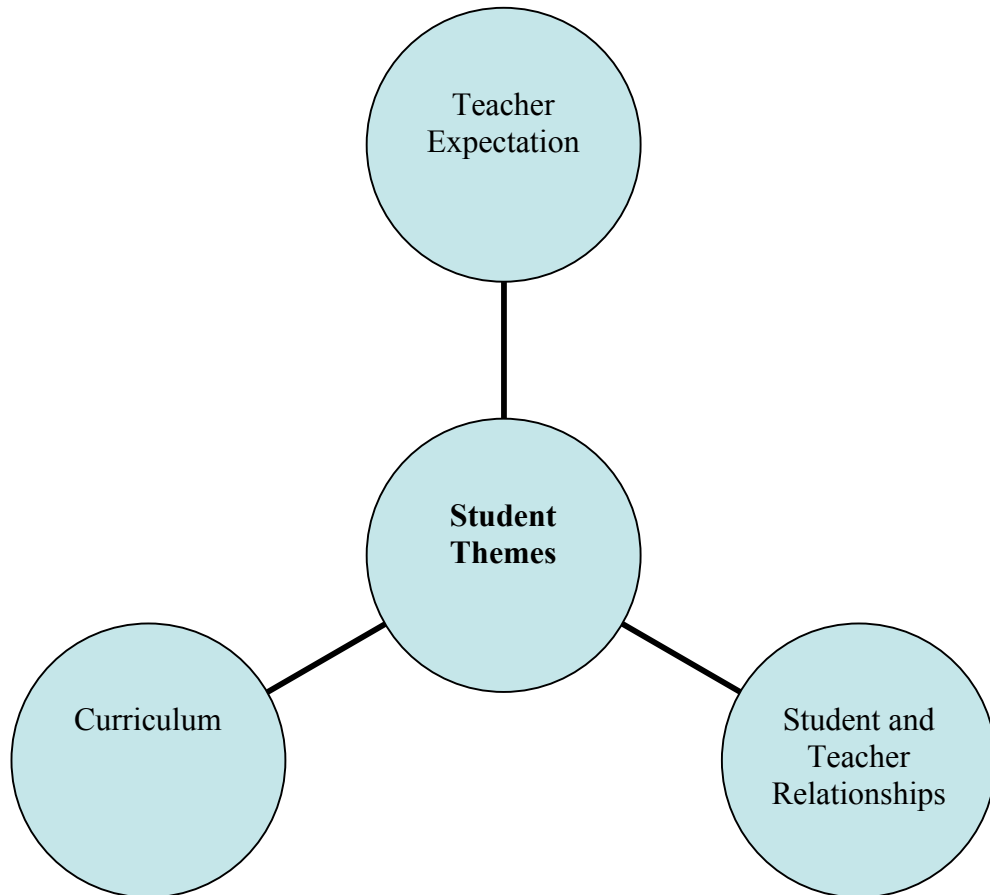

Figure 1. Student themes.

Data from the student dialogues revealed three themes:

1.   Students felt that their teachers had high expectations.

2.   Students felt that their relationships with their teachers were important.

3.   Students felt that the curriculum was challenging.

Student Themes

The 3 student participants were in the fifth and sixth grade. Two of the student participants were girls and 1 was boy. There were three recurring themes that were generated with the student participants: teacher expectations, teacher and student relationships, and curriculum. All students described a high level of expectation on the part of the teachers. The students gave examples of how the teachers would persist while teaching assignments to their students. Briana described the high level of expectation and persistence on the part of her mathematics teacher as she explained:

> If he's doing a math problem he will stop at the end of the lesson and make sure every has got it. He will say do you get this and if we raise our hand and say that we don't understand then he will explain it to us. And if we still don't get it. He will probably do another example or something to make sure that we get it.

Malcolm was a student that had left Ile Omode for a short time and attended two other schools. One of the schools was a charter school. His opinion of the curriculum at Ile Omode and teacher expectation is described, "They give harder work than any of the other schools I have ever been to and I like that. I like how they challenge you. It's not boring, it's interesting learning about scientists and people who look like me."

For Zhara, high teacher expectation was important to her. She felt that the teachers took more time with the students to explain concepts. Her belief was that the teachers did not give up on their students.

> The teachers here are nice. They take time and explain things to the students. If you don't get something they tell you and help you with it. And if you still don't get it they will help you with it until you do.

The second theme that emerged among students was the relationship between students and teachers. The students explained that the teachers at their school care about them and could relate to their experiences. The teachers were viewed as extended

relatives and held in high regard. Zhara believed the teachers at Ile Omode cared more for

their students than public-school teachers. She stated, "I enjoy that the teachers help you

with stuff and they take a lot of care with you and care about you a lot more than public

schools." This belief was also shared by another, Briana, as she mentioned, "The teachers

here care about you more. They help you and they make sure that you actually get stuff."

The third theme that emerged with the students was the curriculum. The students

explained that the curriculum was very challenging. The thought of having a challenging

curriculum was welcomed by both the students and the parents. Although the work was

sometimes difficult, the relationship between the students and teachers allowed both the

students and teachers to persist despite the difficulty. Briana enjoyed her school

experience at Ile Omode. She is in the sixth grade and concerned about which school she

will attend after her experience at Ile Omode.

> You learn a lot here. You learn about your history, you learn about your culture.
> They don't have school like this around here. I wish the school could go past the
> sixth grade to at least the eighth grade maybe. If I could change anything about
> the school I would change that. Other than that, the school is good already.

During the dialogues with Zhara, she was asked what her favorite subject was and

why? In her response she could did not name just one subject. Her response explained

why an African-centered curriculum was important to her and what aspects of it she

enjoyed.

> My favorite subjects are math, language arts, and writing. When we learn math
> they tell us that we were the first people to do math and if our ancestors could do
> it we can do it too. When we read books we read books about Black people and
> stories that teach you stuff. When we write, sometimes we write about what's
> important to us. That's why I like the work here.

Malcolm explained that the curriculum was not boring and that his favorite

subjects were mathematics and health. He described how the curriculum helped him both

inside and outside the classroom. In the dialogue he was asked what helps him learn. He responded,

> I would say what helps me learn is how our teacher, he brings all of our lessons from the real world and tells us how to use it in the real world too, not just in the classroom. Like our ethics class: we talk about improving ourselves, improving our community, and developing it. Our math teacher does it the same way, he puts his math into the real world. We talk about money, how we spend our money, where we spend it, and what we could do with. He tells us how to use it in the real world, and the math is skipped a grade higher too.

Student Responses

Research Question # 1: How do African American students perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

The students explained that their teachers were responsible for their academic success. All the students expressed how their teachers were persistent in teaching difficult concepts. The students explained how their teachers would use different examples to explain concepts and would persist until the students understood the information being taught. Zhara, was asked why she likes her teachers and she explained, "Well, they are like my family at school and they explain well." Malcolm was asked what he likes most about Ile Omode and he explained, "our school is hard, but you don't mind doing it because it's interesting too. The teachers want you to learn too, so they help you." The third student participant expressed similar beliefs to the other student participants concerning teacher expectation. Briana was asked to explain how her teachers help her learn and she explained, "The teachers here don't let you sit and say nothing or give up. They challenge you and make you work hard. You have to do your work at home or they will make you do here."

A second theme that impacted academic success of African-centered education programs was the relationship between students and teachers. The students believed that

the teachers genuinely cared for them. Zhara believed that the teachers in their schools care more for them than teachers in public schools cared for their students, although she had never had experience in a school other than Ile Omode. "I enjoy that the teachers help you with stuff and they take a lot of care with you and care about you a lot more than public schools." The students also believed that the teachers could relate to their experiences. The dialogue with Briana helped explain this point. She attended Ile Omode in kindergarten and later returned to Ile Omode after attending a highly regarded public school. She was asked, How would you compare, if you had to, your experience here at Ile Omode compared to the other school you attended? Her response was, "The teachers here care about you more. They help you and they make sure that you actually get stuff. And they understand everything because they know that they have been where you are and they really care about you."

The third theme that impacted African centered education was the curriculum. The students thought that although the curriculum was difficult, it was more interesting than that at other schools. Briana was later asked why she returned to Ile Omode after attending the private school. "Well, my mom thought that it wasn't hard enough for me. And what they would do there is have everyone go at the same pace and they would take you on the pace that they want you to go." The students understood that the curriculum at their school was taught at least a grade level ahead of other school and welcomed its challenges. The students at Ile Omode had many of the same classes as public schools such as mathematics, language arts, and health. What was telling about the curriculum by the students was their belief in the teacher's ability to make the curriculum interesting for their students. Malcolm was asked to explain his feelings about the curriculum. He

replied, "They don't give us boring stuff or easy work and treat us like we are stupid! Our work is about the real world."

The comment regarding the "real world" was a belief shared by all 3 student participants. The concept of the "real world" referred to the ability to identify with their immediate circumstances as it related to their personal experiences as African American students. This concept of the real world indicates that the teachers in some way identified with the lives of the students and taught information that is relevant to their lives. One example was the use of mathematics. Malcolm explained that mathematics was one of his favorite subjects because his teacher didn't just teach mathematics, but taught him how to use math in the "real world." The ability to teach students information that they felt was relevant to their lives helped to promote academic achievement. The thought that the curriculum they were learning was actually useful made the curriculum more appealing to the students.

The students were eager to express their feelings about their school and their experiences. At the end of the dialogues, each of the student participants was ask if there was something that they could change about their school or environment to make it better. The responses included the need for better equipment, art supplies, and enrichment classes such as Art. One student, Briana, responded, aside from extending the grade level to at least the eighth grade that she would not change anything, "It's perfect the way that it is." The information regarding the desired changes was forwarded to the school administrator.

Research Question# 2: From the perspectives of the students, what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

The aspects of African-centered education that help promote academic achievement from the perspective of the student participants was echoed in the themes that were generated through the student dialogues. The students' relationship with their teachers was a key aspect in promoting academic achievement. The students understood that the teachers wanted them to succeed and would take the time out to make sure they understood the concepts that were taught before moving on to a new concept. Another aspect that helped to promote academic achievement was the curriculum. The students found the curriculum interesting and preferred a rigorous academic curriculum that they felt was relevant to their lives.

Teacher Themes

The 3 teacher participants were from the preschool level through the sixth grade. The level of experience at the school ranged from 2 to over 10 years. There were 2 female teachers and 1 male teacher. There were three major themes that emerged as a result of the dialogues with the teachers: The data from the teacher dialogues revealed three reoccurring themes.

1. Family Environment

2. Teacher Expectation

3. Curriculum

Figure 2 illustrates the teacher group and the themes that emerged as a result of the teacher dialogues. The middle circle of the diagrams indicates the teacher group. The outer circles illustrate the themes generated from the teacher group.
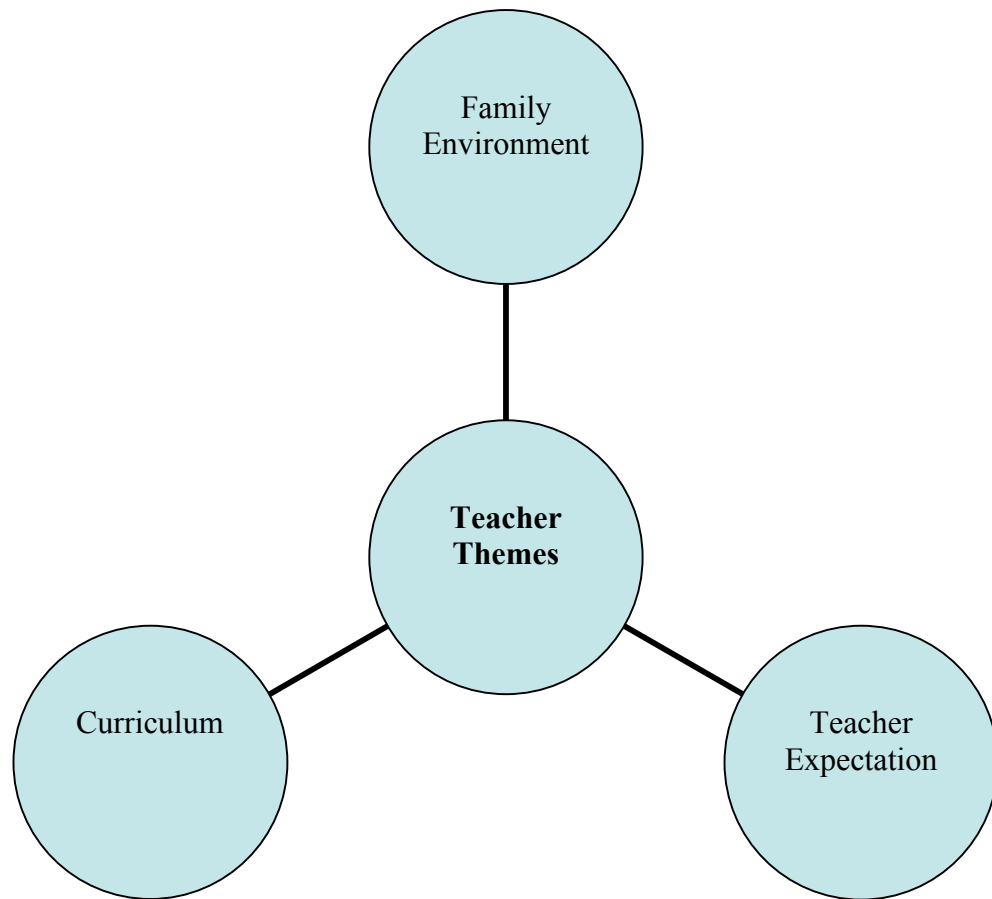
Figure 2. Teacher themes.

Teacher Themes

The school environment was a key theme mentioned frequently by the teachers. The environment was described as a family environment. The relationships that the teachers had with both fellow teachers and the students created a sense of responsibility that went beyond the requirements of a mere job description. One of the teachers described her feelings on the school environment and her relationship with her coworkers.

> Its very family oriented so with personal issues and things that are going on we are able to lean on one another for support and assistance and those types of things, so it's not a 9 to 5 type of work thing. It's a home! You know, it's a second home, a home away from home.

Mama Jamila explained how the importance of family is built into the curriculum. Each year the school has a family dinner they organize for the parents. It's called Ujima. Ujima is one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa meaning collective work and responsibility.

> All the children helped prepare the food, as much as they could. And they serve their parents, so there are two concepts. One concept is Ujima, collective work and responsibility and working together. And the other is remembering the ancestors and understanding they are serving their elders.

The teachers viewed their students in some cases as their own children. Some of the teachers explained that they had interpersonal relationships with their coworkers and parents in which they could talk about more than just work-related issues. The teachers were connected to the members of the school community on many different levels. Baba Bakari is considered an elder at the school and described how Ile Omode is more than a regular school environment.

> I've had parents whose children ate over my house. I've had parents whose children I have dropped off. The director and I have spent time together away from here and I have gone to lunch with them and even breakfast together. I've taught an aerobics class with both parents and students and teachers that come. I also teach a martial arts class with the students. So it's family!

Baba Bakari was also helpful in clearly stating how teacher expectation is a key aspect to the success of the students at Ile Omode. Teacher expectation is closely tied to the third reoccurring theme, curriculum.

> I think number one is that our expectations are high. We don't take no for an answer. We don't allow for a child to say that I can't do it. And we have a discipline structure in place so you can not come here and not want to do the work. So along with being involved in their own culture, along with seeing your own heroes and she-roes, this plays a part in our success.

All the teachers expressed that they had high expectations for the students. This high level of expectation was connected to the success of teaching an advanced curriculum.

Here at Ile Omode all of our students pretty much from third grade up are being instructed a grade above their regular grade level, so when they leave here and go to public schools in most cases they are always advanced. They are so advanced that they have come back to us literally bored because everything that they received is mediocre in terms of what they were receiving here. So that impact alone has been a very positive impact.

Baba Bakari explained that the curriculum includes similar information to that of

the local unified school district and explained its differences:

Right now our curriculum is closely affiliated with the Oakland Public Schools standard of achievement, only with higher expectations. We do this primarily for the benefit of preparing our children for college. Particularly in history, we cover ancient Egypt. We cover the Metu Neter. We cover a more thorough background of the enslavement. We cover our heroes and sheros that you don't normally hear about in public schools and we have things like libation, which is honoring our ancestors, which you don't see in public schools, so those are all areas that we have here that you are not going to find in a public school.

In the program, African culture is used to illustrate examples of greatness and

place a high level of expectation for students to strive for with the understanding that if

their ancestors can do it, so can they.

Teacher Responses

Research Question #1: How do African American teachers perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

First teacher participant (Mama Jamila). Mama Jamila was the oldest teacher of

the school. Her experience as one of the founding members of the school provided a

critical look at the school and its impact on the success of students in the program. She

believed that the emphasis on mathematics, history, and the arts helped African American

students excel academically. Most importantly, Mama Jamila believed that the use of the

Principles of Kwanzaa, the Nguzo Saba in the curriculum, was a great contributor to the

success of African American students. She also believed that the use of the principles of

Kwanzaa helped the students with their social development and identity. Identity was a

key piece that she believed was connected to the success of students. She worked on

developing the confidence level of the students and a positive self-concept.

> I think for our children it is important because they are up against negativity when it comes to Black people or people of African descent. So you are not going to be looked at in the same way. African people, the majority of us look different than most any other people. I think that the whole identity piece does mean something to them. They are comfortable with that. They know that they are special here. You are not special somewhere else. They might be a little token or whatever, but I know that they can feel the difference.

Second teacher participant (Mama Zanobia). The second teacher participant

believed that the small class size offered by the school was a great contributor to the

academic success of her students. The small class sizes allowed her to work more closely

with her students and meet them on the individual levels of ability. She also echoed the

first teacher participant's comments by indicating that identity and a positive self-concept

was a main contributing factor that separates African-centered schools from other schools

and contributed to their overall success.

> Regardless of whether it is African centered or not, the size definitely makes a difference, and being African centered definitely helps our students with their self-esteem. These children are proud to be Black. They are proud and they think that they are beautiful. They have contests over who is the darkest. Where else are you going to find that? You are not going to find that in a public school or anywhere else. When you have high self-esteem around who you are then that transfers over to the academic success.

Third teacher participant (Baba Bakari). The third teacher participant, Baba

Bakari, believed that the accelerated curriculum at Ile Omode has a huge impact on the

success of students. The students are taught at least a grade ahead of schools in the local

public-school district.

> Well, particularly here at Ile Omode all of our students pretty much from third grade up are being instructed a grade above their regular grade level so when they leave here and go to public schools in most cases they are always advanced. Not

only are they advanced whereas they have come back to us literally bored because every thing that they are receiving is mediocre in terms of what they are receiving here. So that impact alone has been a very positive impact.

Baba Bakari also emphasized that the curriculum alone was not the only contributing factor to the success of their students. The curriculum, along with a high level of expectation from the teachers to encourage the students to excel also had an impact on the success of the students in their African-centered program.

Research Question #2: From the perspectives of the teachers what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

First teacher participant (Mama Jamila). The aspects of African-centered education that promote education were consistent across teachers in the program. Some aspects were more greatly emphasized by some teachers than others. For Mama Jamila, the oldest teacher in the program, one of the key aspects of the program was the teaching of a positive self-concept. As a preschool teacher she believed that this was especially important for children at a young age.

> We had one little girl that came in one day. She didn't have her hair combed that day. She had her braids out and they were all standing all over her head. So, one little girl laughed, but while she was laughing I said, oh gosh, you look so cute today. I like your afro and then all the other children you know, were touching her hair and said they liked it too. So umm, if I hear them saying anything negative, I would just say to them, why is that ugly? You know, just try to say something positive.

Mama Jamila believes a positive self-concept instills higher self-esteem. The reinforcement of a positive self-concept was emphasized more than their physical appearance. It meant that the students in the program were instilled with the belief that because of who they are they are unique and special. Many of the teachers expressed that students believed that they are special. Baba Bakari used African people in history as a tool to empower students:

The reality is that we are the original people … and when you look at other cultures around the world, everybody is trying to be like us. So to hear that and to see that and to be able to give them pictures of that is very powerful and reinforces the fact that I am special, I am important. I do have my part in this, and those are the instruments that we use.

Mama Zanobia believes that the African perspective creates a positive self-worth in the students. The concept of feeling special and having a connection with their community is another aspect that has an impact on their academic success.

It gives them a sense of pride, it gives them a sense of belonging to something. It makes them feel special, so that when they go out into the community, they have something to hold their heads up about. They don't feel like they are just another face in the crowd and I have watched them. I've watched them go out into the community and just hold their heads up and they just walk a little different. They kind of interact a little different because they feel like they have something that is unique about them, that is special about them.

Teacher expectation was a key aspect of African-centered education that promotes academic achievement. The teachers expressed that students were expected to excel.

I think number one is that our expectations are high. We don't take no for an answer. We don't allow for a child to say that I can't do it. And we have a discipline structure in place so you cannot come here and not want to do the work.

The high expectations were backed by the discipline structure (described below). This, along with smaller class sizes and the personal relationships with the students made it possible for teachers to achieve academic success with their students.

Parent Themes

The parents who participated in the study were eager to share their beliefs regarding their experiences at Ile Omode. The data revealed four themes that emerged through the dialogues with the parent participants:

1.   Student/Teacher Relationships

2.   Family Environment

3. African Culture

4. Curriculum

Figure 3 illustrates the parent group and the themes that emerged as a result of the parent dialogues. The middle circle of the diagrams indicates the parent group. The outer circles illustrate the themes generated from the parent group.
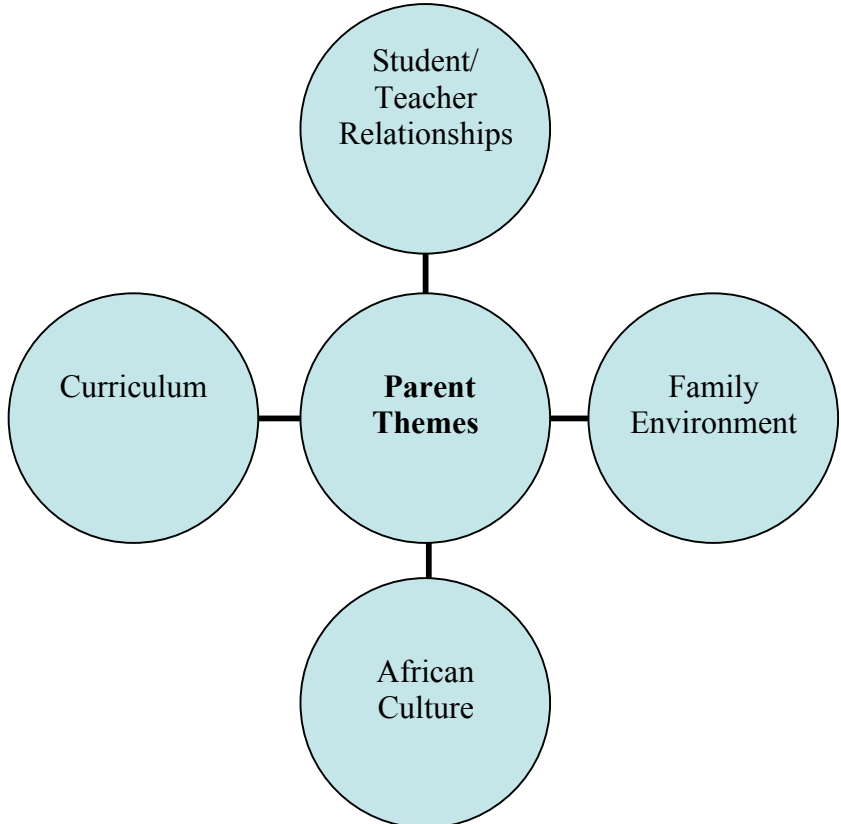

Figure 3. Parent themes.

Parent Themes

Many of the parents believed that the relationship between the students and the teachers was a key aspect in the success of their children. This relationship extended to the entire school environment. The parents felt comfortable leaving students in a school where they believed that the students would be well cared for and treated as belonging.

Sherry explained that the relationship between the students and the teachers extends to the relationship that the parents have with the teachers. As a result of this relationship, the students, teachers, and parents have a connection and feel a sense of security. Sherry explains:

> It is helpful when your child can see that you have these varied people that you have a relationship with and it's not just your teachers. I know that I can call his teacher right now or he will call me. It's great that your child can see that you have this bond with these people. It's a bond that is going to last after my child leaves Ile Omode. It will be throughout life and I think that it helps the child. They know that it is like their father or mother watching them. It helps them.

Another influence that emerged as a reoccurring theme was the influence of an African culture. The teaching of African culture was believed to instill a high level of self-worth and pride. As a result it contributed to the overall success of students in the school.

The curriculum was a theme that parents shared similar beliefs. Parents felt the inclusion of African culture in the curriculum was important. All parents recognized that the Nguzo Saba was a part of the curriculum and instilled confidence in the students. Like the students, parents viewed the curriculum as challenging. The male parent participant, David, had an older daughter that attended Ile Omode, but now attends another school. Currently he has a younger daughter in Ile Omode and explains why he chose Ile Omode for his daughter despite having a long commute from his home.

> The fact that my child is learning African culture is first. They understand the principles and morals. I also love how the teachers know how to work with our students. They take the time to find out the weaknesses and the strengths, then build each individual child up. That's one thing I do like. I watched my older daughter just turn out to be a super smart child. And even though she is at this other school, the teachers don't know how to handle her because coming from Ile Omode to there she is too advanced. So, with all the work that they have given her, she says "it's too easy. I did this at my old school." So they were thinking about skipping her and things like that. Ile Omode prepared her. And that's why I put my younger daughter in here, so she can have that same education. Education

wise, this school is the best, so that is why I drive so far to drop my daughter off each morning.

Research Question #1: How do African American parents perceive the impact of an African-centered education program on academic success?

First parent participant (Sherry). The parents in the program believed that African-centered education programs have a positive impact on the academic success of its students. Many of the parents chose the school for its emphasis on African history and believed that its impact was significant because of an emphasis on character development and smaller class sizes. One belief that was shared among the parents was the feeling that the school provided a family environment for its students, teachers, and parents. Parents also believed that another impact of African-centered education was it instilled confidence in the students to succeed.

Sherry has a son who has been at Ile Omode since preschool. In our dialogues she explained what she valued most about the program and how it impacted the success of her son and other students in the school:

> I would say that the work load is a lot and I do sometimes struggle with that, but I believe it's challenging for a good reason, and if they see that your child is not meeting the expectations, they will work with your child on a personal level to assure that they are getting what they need. Since the class sizes are so small they will work with your child on a personal level if they are falling behind or if they need to move up a level.

The high academic standard of the school was important to the parents. The environment as well as high academic standards had an impact on the success of students in an African-centered program.

Parents believed that high academic standards and teacher expectation had a huge impact on the success of students. The parents in the program recognized the difficulty of the curriculum. The smaller class sizes allowed teachers to meet students on individual

academic levels and take extra time with students who may need extra time and attention

in an area of concern. Sherry went on further to explain how the curriculum has an

impact on the success of her son in an African-centered program.

> My child is in the third grade and he has some very challenging work. He has moved up to 5th grade math which is not only a challenge just for him, but for me too. And the curriculum is good because not only are they teaching them their core subjects they are also teaching them about their history. They are teaching them African history, and not just the basic principles like Kwanzaa and not just in December, but all throughout the year.

There was an apparent connection between the teaching of African history and the

cultural environment that impacted the academic success of students. This connection

was believed to have one of the greatest impacts on the student's success.

Second parent participant (Janet). The parents believed the students had a sense

of pride and knowledge of themselves and their culture, which raised their self-esteem

and consequently had a positive impact on the success of the students.

> I like the idea of the culture and the drums and all that stuff that I personally don't use at home, so he gets to learn about it. To me it's more self-awareness. It's so important, because when you get out there in the world, you can get lost; you are not really sure, but if you are growing up with it and you have that confidence. It does not matter what the world shows you out there; you have that confidence to survive.

Third parent participant (David). The third parent participant, David, plainly

stated that he believed African-centered education has a positive impact on the success of

students. He believed that the teachers are solution oriented. The persistence on the part

of the teachers and their relationship with the parents contributed to the success of the

students in the program. During the dialogues David explained how teachers seek to find

solutions with the parents to help the students succeed.

> They don't say oh, it could be this or it could be that. They try and get the parents on the same level. And at the same time, they are always saying that there is a solution; they don't say what might be wrong without offering a solution. That's

what I like and I know how some of the other teachers are. They tell you something about your kid, but they never come up with a solution. They make it seem like, oh well this is how your kid is, that's it. I don't know what to say or what to do, but tell you to do something at home. Here they come up with a solution and they come up with a solution with the parents.

The relationship between the parents and the teachers is an essential part of African-centered education that impacts the success of the students. Through this relationship the parents know that the teachers want the students to succeed in the classroom and in life.

Research Question #2: From the perspectives of the parents what aspects of African-centered education promote academic achievement?

The aspects of African-centered education that parents believed promoted academic achievement were curriculum, culture, the family environment, Black male teachers as role models, and discipline. The curriculum was seen as challenging for the students because the students were taught at least a grade level ahead. Both the students and the parents understood the level of difficulty of the curriculum. The ability of the students to perform on this level was thought to instill a high level of confidence, according to the parents. David explained that his daughters were very confident as a result of the program.

I see confidence in them toward their academics, and socially now they hold presence of the things that they do. You know they have confidence because they know that they have been taught right and they know that even if they are wrong, it's like "oh, ok" and they don't get discouraged and put their heads down like you see from other kids or other children, so that is a big thing. It's just confidence in knowing your culture, knowing where you come from.

The curriculum is tied very closely to the African culture being taught in the school. The students are taught mathematics and science with the understanding that African people were some of the first mathematicians and scientists. The curriculum has

an emphasis on mathematics and science. The teaching of African history and culture is also a significant aspect that contributes to the success of the students. The parents believed that the culture connected the students to their school community and the world. When the students have an understanding of the significance of their race and the contributions of Africans to the world community it resonates with the students to create a high level of self-worth and high expectations for themselves. During the dialogues, Janet commented on how, as a single parent, the school serves to reinforce values she would like her son to have.

> What my son doesn't get at home he gets here. Not just the education, but also the respect for self and the respect for others. I feel like when it is a little bit mixed and the kids are just like numbers then they don't get that real respect for self as well as the education. Teaching African history with morals and tough academics makes them well balanced and grounded.

The school is considered a second home for some of the parents and students. This family environment gives parents the confidence that their child will be cared for by the teachers as if they were one of their own children. The parents themselves feel welcomed and look forward to seeing members of the school community as much as do the students. Janet recently moved from the east coast and appreciates the family environment of the school. "I feel that this is more like a family oriented environment. That is what I really like about it the most. It's friendly and you feel more like a family member than just a parent dropping a child off." This aspect was shared by all the parents. The parents were greeted with the title of either Mama or Baba. There is a certain degree of respect that is given to each adult that comes through the door by using this title. Further, the title connects each parent as member of the school community. David explained the feeling he gets upon dropping his daughter off at school.

> When you come in here, you know, me being a father, everyone is Baba, you know. It teaches me the culture as well as my child attending here. Everyone is just open arms and smiles and it's always inviting so that is always a plus.

Discipline was a key aspect for the parents that they believed contributed to the success of the students. There was a high level of respect that students were expected to have for not only the parents, but the teachers and any other elders they encountered. This relationship meant that students could be reprimanded by any adult in the school community. Parents believed that for the most part, the teacher viewed the students as their own child. There were fewer discipline problems for parents and teachers to deal with due to smaller class sizes and interpersonal relationships among students, teachers, and parents. The parents believed smaller class sizes assisted in identifying issues when they occurred. The dialogue with Janet explained how she felt the teachers' approach to discipline was a key aspect in contributing to the success of the students.

> I know that if he does something wrong and the teacher sees him it is more of a discipline thing with the love versus go to the principles office type of thing. So I think having a smaller class so you can see the development versus having 20 or 30 kids.

The dialogues with the students, teachers, and parents offered a view of an African-centered education program from the perspective of the people who attended the school, Ile Omode. The study included open dialogue that can be useful for other African-centered education programs as well as public-education programs that seek to increase the success of their African American students. This study was also a useful tool for the members of the school community to begin to discuss both the positive aspects of their program and areas for improvement.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation reiterates the statement of the problem and the background and need for the study. The study discussed the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents of an African-centered education program. The purpose of the study was to obtain a description of an African-centered education program and its impact on academic success. The achievements of African-centered education programs have not been fully explored. Particularly, there is an absence of literature on the perspectives of its participants. Use of African-centered education programs could provide an area of expertise in working with African American students to assist in reducing the achievement gap and identifying relevant methods of teaching African American youth. Through the dialogues the participants revealed that the attainment of academic success for African American children required more than just rote skills; it required an environment that was committed to the mental, social, political, and spiritual development of its students and their families.

Discussion

This study described the perspectives of participants of an African-centered program, Ile Omode. Each of the participant groups described the impact of African-centered programs on academic success and identified aspects of African-centered programs that had an impact on the success of their program. The attainment of information from the participants involved a reflective process on the part of the

participants to determine which aspects have an impact on the success of students and areas for improvement. Significant findings in the research included five aspects of African-centered programs that were discussed between the three participant groups: (a) curriculum, (b) teacher expectation, (c) family environment, (d) culture, and (e) social conscience.

The first aspect was the curriculum. The curriculum was thought to be challenging by all participant groups. As a result of this study, the researcher found that students in African-centered programs were considered academically advanced by the parents, teachers, and the students themselves. The students were taught at least a grade level ahead of students in different schools on the same grade level. The curriculum highlighted aspects of African culture such as ancestral worship and African dance and drumming. Values and social responsibility were emphasized through the use of the Nguzo Saba (the seven principles of Kwanzaa) and the principles of Ma'at which is a value system based specifically in ancient Egyptian history. The principles of Kwanzaa and Ma'at emphasized the importance of respect for self and others, which was a key aspect of the curriculum. The principles of Ile Omode's African-centered educational program were summarized in the book *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education*, in the essay, "The Rites of Passage: Extending Education into the African-American Community" (Warfield-Coppock, 1994, p. 388).

1.   Interdependence: mutual aid or helping each other out in times of need.
2.   Cooperation: Children must see adults cooperate for a purpose and have the chance to work cooperatively with each other to learn the concept.
3.   Respect: There are many levels of respect that must be modeled and taught. Self-respect, as well as levels of respect demonstrated with peers, elders … and the property of others.
4.   Reciprocity: Related to cooperation, interdependence, and respect for other people.

5.   Unconditional love: Our children feel secure and important when they understand that we love them—no matter what. We show them love by correcting them for inappropriate behaviors and separating the behavior from who they are as a person.

In the preschool and lower grades, the students were introduced to curricula that emphasized a positive self-concept using an introduction to figures in African history. This served to promote a positive self-esteem. The perceptions the students had of themselves helped fuel their success. The students viewed themselves as achievers and were taught to think of themselves as nothing less.

In the upper grades, the curriculum was closely aligned with the local public-school standards. Much of what separated the African-centered education program included the addition of African history and the analysis of material from an African perspective. This relates to the method of culturally relevant education and teaching methods that were prevalent in the curriculum taught to the students. Both the students and teachers affirmed that the teachers would explain concepts to the students using examples with which the students could identify. The insight offered by the teachers provided the students with a common window to their world and life experiences. Ladson-Billings (1994), in her book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* helped to describe culturally relevant education methods:

1.   When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence.

2.   When teachers provide instructional "scaffolding," students can move from what they know to what they need to know.

3.   The focus of the classroom must be instructional.

4.   Real education is about extending students' thinking and abilities.

5.   Effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both the students and

the subject matter.

The second aspect was teacher expectation. The influence of teacher expectation

was a consistent finding in the study. The teachers had high expectations of their students

and placed a great deal of hope in the students they served. This was balanced by a

respect for authority and the use of values and discipline. High expectations of students

from teachers helped students succeed in African-centered education programs.

In most cases, the teachers mentioned that they cared for the students in the

program akin to the care of a child of their own. The teachers invested time outside the

classroom in the lives of many of the students and held them to a high level of

responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. Interpersonal relationships were

built among students, teachers, and parents that provided a network invested in the

overall success of its students. Many of the teachers lived in the same communities as the

students and their families. This relationship made teachers feel that they were invested in

the success of the students for the good of the community and the people. Through this

relationship, students were offered positive role models that were connected to the

success of the students.

The third aspect was a family environment. The environment was described as a

family environment in which students and teachers thrived. For each participant group,

this aspect of African-centered education programs was discussed most by all participant

groups. Students, teachers, and parents were keenly aware of the difference in the

environment and treatment of students in non-African-centered programs. Participants

who had the opportunity to experience other school environments preferred African-centered programs due to its nurturing environment.

The school's greatest resources are the members of its school community. Each participant group expressed an appreciation for the program. Although there were areas for improvement, each of the groups recognized their ability to bring forth the changes they desired. A collaborative effort on the part of all groups is needed to implement the many suggestions and improvements. Follow up on the part of the school's administration is also needed to help improve the areas mentioned by each of the participant groups. The suggestions for improvements are discussed in the Recommendations for Action section.

The fourth aspect was African culture. The expression of African culture in the school influenced the school environment. The environment of the school was described as a family environment. The students and parents mentioned details such as the informal greetings of each of the parents as Baba (father) or Mama (mother). In contrast to other schools where hugs and embraces were replaced by handshakes and half-hearted hellos. The details also included the food that was served for the students, which was described as nutritious and "home cooked" food.

The culture was expressed in different ways such as style of dress, which included uniforms made with the colors of red, black, and green. These colors are significant in African culture as red represents the blood of the people, the color black represents the people, and green represents the land where Black people originate, Africa. The parents also expressed an appreciation for the use of African culture to develop a spiritual connection in the children with their ancestors. This was achieved with the ritual of

pouring libation in recognition of the ancestors who paved the way for students to be here today. These cultural aspects and others separated this African-centered program from common public-school environments.

The fifth aspect was social conscience. Ile Omode was not free of its challenges. Parents expressed a desire to become more socially and politically active by creating opportunities to network and tap into their resources with the school community. Yet, some teachers mentioned the need for more parent involvement. Some parent participants felt they were underused, although each family participated in expected volunteer hours. Many of the parents worked in various backgrounds from dentistry to computer science and real estate. They believed the school could be used as a platform or a base to create collective efforts to improve the school community and the conditions of African people as a whole, using their individual talents. In the follow-up meetings the parents were provided with an opportunity to discuss ways that they could be of greater service and make changes in the school community. The data collected from the parents was discussed in the Parent Suggestions section.

The five aspects served as a benefit to African-centered programs. Of the five aspects, culture and social conscience were significant aspects that could be further developed in the school community. Although students were taught and engaged in practices in African culture such as African drumming and ancestral worship, the use of history and culture to make students more sociopolitically aware was not a finding in this study. Hale-Benson (1982, p. 152) offered an educational philosophy for Black children: "1. Political/Cultural (ideology) 2. Pedagogical relevance (methodology) 3. Academic Rigor (content). Of the three components, the political/cultural part was said to be an area

for improvement by the teachers and the parents. The significance of this component in an African educational philosophy was further explained by Hale-Benson: "The political ideology of an alternative school will strengthen the commitment and identification of Black children with the group. They will understand that their individual survival is tied to the survival and development of Black people." The development of such an educational philosophy could create an environment where students, teachers, and parents contribute to the communities in which they live.

Parents, teachers, and students expressed the need to discuss topics that related directly to the needs and concerns of African people. African students in the public-education system have discussed a lack of interest in the public-school curriculum due to its lack of relevance in their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The concept of teaching students about the "real world" was frequently discussed by the students and teachers. African-centered programs provided students with an opportunity to discuss topics that related to the issues in their communities. During the dialogues, Mama Jamila used Hurricane Katrina as an example to explain the importance of teaching relevant issues for African American students to teach life lessons. She described,

> But that self-help situation, to me that is important. Survival skills for us as a people, a community, I don't care where you are. If you are Black in a predominantly Black situation they are not coming to get you. We haven't learned our lesson from Katrina. Children need to learn good survival skills here and we need to have safety because we have not, and we have to learn our lessons. Where I came from, our kids were taught strong survival skills and learned how to come up against what we are dealing with, be it on the streets or from the government or whatever. … Our children need to know what we are dealing with out here and we need to make them ready. So, I think that is just as important as the math and science and all that. Because you can get out of here with all the academia, but what does that mean if you can't wipe your butt (excuse the expression), but you gotta.

Students in African-centered programs are situated in urban communities and are faced with issues of crime and poverty. Although some parents could be described as members of the Black middle class, they were still affected by issues as a result of inequality and race in America. Unfortunately, the notion of success for some is the ability to make it out of these inner-city areas, also known as the *hood*. I pose the concept that students must not look to get out of the hood, but work to develop it to its full potential.

<center>Implications</center>

Central to this research study was the concept of culturally relevant education and CRT in education (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). There is a need to research viable solutions to address the needs of African students. The failure of African American students in the public-education system has been documented (Kozol 1992; Kunjufu 1982). This study highlights aspects of African-centered programs that have been beneficial to the development and academic success of African students. The findings of the study imply that its participants believe African-centered education programs have a positive impact on the academic success of its students. It further relates to the theory of culturally relevant education and to CRT.

The use of culturally relevant education by teachers to educate students in the program enriched their level of instruction to influence their educational experience and personal lives. CRT explains that race is a significant issue in education and the current educational institutions should begin to review its influence on their students and how schools function. As educators begin to discuss educational reform, a true analysis about

which approaches to use to educate students should include a review African-centered education programs.

Educators both Black and White must begin to view African students as the valuable assets they are to the inner cities and the world communities. There must be a shift in the thought process of educators in the field to seek real change to address racial inequality in our school systems. Some White educators in the field are aware of the challenges that face African American students in this society yet, are faced with the absence of strategies to effectively teach the African American students they are supposed to serve. In the book, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, author Howard admits the wrongs of some White teachers and their history of ignorance and dominance:

> Whites have had the power and the privilege to write our own versions of history. We have been able to determine the structure and content of schooling and in this way have institutionalized our ignorance in the name of education. Through the filter of our particular truth, we have projected only a narrow wavelength of light, usually tinted to favor our own countenance. (1999, p. 59)

Howard shed light on the racist thought process that has plagued the dominant educational environment. Howard speaks candidly about the feelings of a White educator:

> Given the challenges confronting us, some well-intended and once idealistic teachers have fallen into despondency and even cynicism. Some, who once believed that all students could achieve, have lost faith and blame the culture and characteristics of the child for the school's failure to effectively serve all of our students. Even Whites who have held true to our calling as educators continue to struggle with the issues of dominance, and we often ask ourselves: What can I do as a White teacher?

The process to correct the contradictions in our educational system must begin with reflection and honest dialogue with all educators. Eurocentric ideologies must be reevaluated concerning existing institutions and the formation of new ones. The process

will begin to address the changing tide to move education toward a more just

environment in which all students can be successful. For the African American student,

education must take shape to begin to address more than educational success, but expand

to address issues in their communities that may have a direct effect on their lives. Both

the teachers and parents in the study described the relationship between education and

survival. Some of the teachers described the need to teach students about the harsh

realities of life. Some of the parents were concerned with the obstacles they felt their

children would have as young Black students, especially male students. Whether Black or

White, educators are faced with the challenge of addressing the concerns of African

American students. Hale-Benson, in the book *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and*

Learning Styles explained,

> The educator advocating liberation has parallel purposes for educating the
> oppressed: education for struggle and education for survival. Education for
> struggle has a consciousness-raising function for Black people, instructing them
> concerning the following realities:
>
> Who they are
> Who the enemy is
> What the enemy is doing to them
> What to struggle for
> What form the struggle must take (Hale-Benson, 1982, p. 154)

The teachers and parents believed that it was their responsibility to extend life

lessons that would assist students in their overall development as human beings and as

members of the community. Hale-Benson further explained,

> Black parents want the political situation of Black people to be conveyed in the
> educative process through attention given to helping their children develop an
> alternative frame of reference, positive self-concepts, a Black identity, and a
> commitment to their people. This does not mean their children will learn to hate
> White people. It means they will disdain oppression, domination, exploitation,
> and repression wherever they see it. (Hale-Benson, 1982, p. 157)

The work of Woodson (1933/1977) described the significance of education as a means of survival. Institutions are crucial in the development of survival skills. Further development of social consciousness could expand community-building activities that could be practiced in the school community. Woodson explained, "But can you expect teachers to revolutionize the social order for the good of the community? Indeed, we must expect this very thing. The educational system of a country is worthless unless it accomplishes this very thing" (Woodson, 1933/1977, p. 145). This idea would translate more to the aspect of social conscience in which students recognize their importance in the community and view themselves as valuable resources in it. Teachers, like parents, have the ability to impart life lessons to the students and empower them in their personal lives. Participants in this program were aware of the need to be change agents and wanted to implement strategies to create the changes they desired.

This study gave voice to students, teachers, and parents in African-centered programs. The use of a participatory research approach enabled the researcher to hear directly from the members of the program. African-centered education programs illustrate that existing approaches in schools to educate African American youth in particular, should be restructured. The literature review mentions how education in the United States of America for the African American posed the question of education for who and for what? It is significant to reflect on the lessons from the history of slavery to the historical biases in education. Africans in this country were viewed as a commodity used to serve the interests of their oppressors. African-centered education programs function with this understanding. "The tools that are used to destroy men cannot be used

for his re-humanization" (Freire, 1992, p. 65). Educating students to support the current social structure as it exists maintains the status quo and fails to support change.

The perspectives provided by the participants in this African-centered program explained how change from the mainstream educational environment impacts academic success for African American students. Participants were able to reflect on their experiences and share their perspectives on the impact of African-centered programs on academic success using a participatory research approach (Jason et al., 2004). While reflecting on their experiences, each of the participant groups realized their potential to make improvements to their existing program. Through this course of action each of the participant groups were empowered by the process.

Recommendations for the Field

There were many limitations to the study. This study included the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers of one school. It would enhance the body of knowledge to gain the perspectives of other African-centered programs. The following recommendations are offered to the field: (a) Increase knowledge of African-centered programs, (b) increase the awareness of teachers regarding culturally relevant education, (c) increase the number of African male teachers, and (d) expand research and funding to this area of education.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study provides an overview of the perspectives of participants in an African-centered education program. Further research might include the perspectives of participants in other African-centered education programs. This would provide a broader

view of the participants in like programs. The field would also benefit from a detailed study of African-centered programs regionally and nationally. Such a study would identify like objectives of each of the programs and outline cohesive efforts on the part of program developers. This information would prove useful to the development and duplication of future programs.

The students proved to be viable and insightful resources in their perspectives on African-centered programs. Students in the study were in the fifth and sixth grade. A study that includes information on graduates of African-centered programs could also prove to be informative. It would also be informative to discuss their contributions and involvement in the inner cities where many African students are concentrated. Graduates may be able to reflect on their experiences at an African-centered program and provide insight on its impact in their lives.

This study did not provide information on the perspectives of administrators of African-centered education programs. A study that focused on the perspectives of administrators could contribute to the body of knowledge on African-centered programs. The perspectives of the administrators could offer dialogue on the challenges of operating such a program and the philosophy of African-centered programs. Perspectives of other public or private institutions were not a focus of the study. Participants discussed some of their perspectives based on comparisons of other private and public institutions. A study that compared the perspectives of students who have participated in both African-centered and non-African-centered programs would provide data that could be used to improve both educational environments.

Conclusions

The works of Ladson-Billings have been influential in the development of this study (1994, 1995, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The connection between race and education is an area that policy makers must analyze to address the issues of equity in education. Culturally relevant educational practices in the program created an environment where African American students thrived. Two major conclusions were drawn from the findings in the study: (a) The aspects of African-centered programs heavily influenced the educational environment, and (b) the United States must extend the definition of education to promote life skills for African American students.

Participants of this African-centered education program believe the program has a positive impact on the academic success of its students. The influence of an African-centered education programs on the lives of its participants extended beyond the students, and included a positive impact on their families and teachers as well. The success of students in the programs went beyond their success in the classroom, and extended to the perceptions the students had of themselves, which was positive. The voice of the students was the most telling in the process. Because the goal is to influence the students, their input should be further explored. Nieto explained the need for more student input: "Student perspectives are for the most part missing in discussions concerning strategies and are rarely heard in the debates about school failure and success, and the perspectives of students from disempowered and dominated communities are even more invisible" (Nieto, 2003, p. 123). Their connection with their school communities was also connected to their perceptions of themselves in their local communities and the world community. Success for students also means their individual growth and survival as well

as the strength of their people. Therefore, education was not for the sole purpose of attaining good grades and later a good job. It included the ability to take relevant skills to make a contribution to the world community.

The development of such programs will require change in individual communities, as well as change on a much larger scale to influence policymakers to see the need to shift the tables of oppressive thought and behavior to a place of equality. For now, this thought has not been welcomed into the mainstream ideas of education, although there have been attempts on the part of such movements as multiculturalism to create a more inclusive school environment. African-centered education programs operate with a belief that has not changed much since the early writings of Woodson who stated, "A Negro with sufficient thought to construct a program of his own is undesirable, and the educational systems of this country generally refuse to work through such Negroes in promoting their cause" (1933/1977, p. 133). Thus, African-centered education programs receive little or no outside funding from the mainstream educational system. Despite this fact, the history of African people in this country reflects a people that will continue to work for change regardless of its challenges.

Recommendations for Action

Dialogues with the participant groups and observations revealed that Ile Omode would benefit from the following: The development of a student, teacher, and parent handbook would provide clarity in the written establishment of the rules and regulations of the school. This information could serve in producing a model that could be duplicated in other educational programs. The handbook would go beyond the traditional functions of student handbooks to include an explanation of the intricacies of an African-centered

program that may not be understood by someone without an understanding of African culture. Documentation of school-safety approaches could also include a life-skills section, which could extend to community development and life skills.

Each of the participants expressed that they were pleased with the programs. There were suggestions made by each of the participant groups to improve the school community. Each of the participant groups were willing to comment and provide assistance in the implementation of their suggestions. The information provided in this section is information gathered from each of the participant groups in the follow-up meetings. The follow-up meetings provided an opportunity to validate findings and use the participants' input to make improvements in their school community.

Members of each of the participant groups mentioned a desire to expand the school beyond the sixth grade. Limited resources prevented expansion to higher grade levels. A limited number of teachers meant lack of adequate supervision for students and the absence of regular extracurricular courses such as foreign language and art. The effort to expand the school should include collective efforts by its participants and tapping into community resources. The acceptance of resources from outside the community should be given based on a desire build and improve existing programs and not interfere with the original intent of these programs, which is to meet the need of its students.

<div align="center">Participant Suggestions</div>

The follow-up meetings with participants were an opportunity to discuss improvements they would like to see implemented in the school. Each of the participant groups met collectively to discuss the findings and brainstorm ideas for improvements to be made to the school community. The information gathered from each of the participant

groups was forwarded to the school administrator and redistributed to each group to be used in student council, teacher, and parent meetings.

Student Suggestions

There were two main suggestions by the students. First, the students expressed a desire to get more supplies in the school such as computers, play equipment, art classes, and a mural for the school yard. The students planned to acquire the supplies through fundraisers. Ideas for fundraisers included bake sales, car washes, and a Dollars for the Play Yard campaign. In the follow-up meetings the students discussed the steps to implement their fundraisers and indicated they would discuss further details in their student-council meetings and acquire assistance and approval from their school administrator.

Second, the students also expressed a desire to have the school increase its grade level. Although the students desired to make enhancements to the physical environment of the school, they also desired to attend the school past its currently offered grade level. During the follow-up discussions, the students did not discuss a plan of action to assist in increasing the grade level at this time.

Teacher Suggestions

Teachers were aware of the areas they wished to improve. There were two main suggestions made by the teachers, each of which required collaboration on the part of the administration. The first suggestion was to create two written documents to solidify the logistics of daily school procedures. The written documents would include a code of behavior or ethics implemented throughout the school. In the school there was respect for

authority, yet many of the teachers believed that a written document that all members of the school community adopted would create a more cohesive program. Suggestions also included a "formal" class such as the humanities class that is currently offered to the sixth grade. The teachers felt it should be extended to the lower grade levels, with age-appropriate content and examples.

The second written document would include a Parent and Teacher Handbook for the establishment of protocol. On-time arrival of students was very important to the teachers. The teachers believed that late arrival oftentimes interfered with classroom procedures and instruction time. It was important to the teachers that this point be emphasized to the parents by the administration. The teachers were just as critical of themselves as the parents. Some agreed that teacher accountability was an area needing improvement. The teachers wanted more opportunities to meet as a group to discuss concerns and monitor each other's progress in their classrooms. Other concerns for the teachers were connected to the safety of the students. The teachers believed that simple instructions that were regularly enforced would provide a safer environment for the students. Establishment of protocol would include safety procedures such as implementation of simple instructions when passing through hallways, the cafeteria, and yard activities.

The second suggestion from the teachers was to increase the social consciousness of the school community. The school grew out of the Wo'se Church and the older teachers felt the school should emphasize more of the spiritual component. The teachers believed that there was a need to bridge the gap between the church and the school community. Many of the students and parents that attended the school were not members

of Wo'se church, which, in the opinion of some of the teachers, did not help to reinforce in the home, some of the principles introduced in the school. An emphasis on the spiritual component would include an increase in the teachings of Ma'at and principles of Kwanzaa in daily lives/lessons, especially in the upper grades. The implementation of the improvements will require existing leadership in the school community to assemble the teachers and make consistent efforts to increase awareness of their internal challenges and problem solve to create the desired improvements.

Parent Suggestions

Parents supported the African-centered program and valued its benefits. There were two main suggestions made by the parents: (a) community development, and (b) increased funding. Many of the parents expressed a willingness to generate funds in their own community using their own efforts. It was believed that if presented with the opportunity to gather and discuss pertinent concerns, the parents would create programs and platforms to address their issues. Communication between the parents and the school community was a concern for the parents. Some of the parents believed that the teachers should create more opportunities to discuss the needs of the student and allow opportunities for the students to work in groups and create more creative collective projects.

Some of the suggestions to increase community development in the school included the creation of a parent resource list that would have information on the different skill and interests of parents in the school. The parents were happy to participate and meet as a group to discuss their concerns. One suggestion that evolved as a result of the follow-up meeting was to continue parent meetings on a regular basis to discuss

different topics and goals for the school or community. Many of the parents were interested in using technology to increase communication, such as a parent blog on the website to discuss events or ideas with the school. This could also be used to inform parents about school practices because some of the parents recognized that they were unfamiliar with some of the practices of the school.

The second suggestion by the parents was to increase funding for the school. The parents believed they could be more instrumental in generating funds, but did not have a plan to do so. They believed funds could be used to pay for teachers for enrichment activities such as regular foreign-language instruction, to make improvements to the play yard, and eventually to create a larger facility to accommodate students through high school. Although there were areas for improvement, many parents seemingly would not trade the experience of an African-centered program for a better equipped facility.

<center>Building Support for African Centered Institutions</center>

Increased knowledge of the success of African-centered education programs will provide the support needed to increase the number of African-centered education programs. The support for African-centered education programs must first come from the African community itself, to see the need to create programs and schools that serve the interests of African children and the communities in which they live. In the community there is a wealth of resources that can be used to pull support from local businesses and churches. African-centered education programs must clearly define the content and direction for the development of future schools. Further research that explains the makings of African-centered education programs will provide insight into the planning of future programs. Through a collaborative effort between existing schools, a clear outline

of the content, purpose, and structure of African-centered programs can lead to the

implementation of schools that can be duplicated in the region and eventually throughout

the nation and the Diaspora.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Participant Background Information

Please fill out this voluntary background information sheet. You are not required to fill out this form you may decline to do so if you wish.

Participant's Name_____

Contact Information

Address_____

_____

Email_____

Phone_____

Please Circle: Parent   Teacher

How many years have you or your child attended or taught at Ile Omode?
_____

Personal Information

Age_____

Married   Single   Separated   Divorced

Do you have a child in the program? Yes or No

If so, how many and what are the ages? _____

Do both parents live in the household?   Yes or No

If no, are both parents active in the child's life?

_____

_____

_____

Education (Please circle)

GED   High School   2yr College   4yr College   Grad School or Higher

Other_____

Area of Study_____

Current Occupation_____

Number of Years_____

How would you describe your socioeconomic background? (Please Circle)

Low   Middle   High

_____
_____
_____

Participant Signature_____

Researcher Signature_____

APPENDIX B:

SAMPLE DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

Dialogues with students, teachers and parents as co-researchers will be conducted to gain their perspectives on an African centered education program. These dialogues will be centered on the following research questions as well as participant ideas and concerns:

Questions to guide dialogue with children

1. What do you enjoy most about Ile Omode?
2. What are you favorite subjects and what helps you learn?
3. Who are your favorite teachers and why?
4. How do your teachers help you learn?
5. If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it be and why?

Questions to guide dialogue with teachers

1.   Describe your relationship with your peers and other members of Ile Omode?
2.   Describe the relationships that you believe have helped to foster educational achievement.
3.   Describe the curriculum of Ile Omode.
4.   How does the curriculum effect the personal, social and academic development
5.   What teaching methods do students experience at Ile Omode?
6.   If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it be and why?

Questions to guide dialogue with parents

1.   Describe your relationship with your peers and other members of Ile Omode?
2.   Describe the relationships that you believe have helped to foster educational achievement.
3.   Describe the curriculum of Ile Omode.
4.   How does the curriculum effect the personal, social and academic development
5.   What teaching methods do students experience at Ile Omode?
6.   If you could change or improve anything with Ile Omode, what would it be and why?

APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPT VERIFICATION

Partial Sample: First Grade Teacher

Question:

If you had to pick out certain aspects of Ile Omode or African centered education programs in general since you have had some experience with other school what aspects of African centered education programs or in particular with Ile Omode would you say help to promote academic achievement?

Answer:

I think one of the, well the first thing that I noticed when I started at this school was the color issue. I don't know if I should call it an issue or not, but you wouldn't think that in 2008 Black people would have an issue with color as far as light and dark and when I came here I noticed there was an issue, like I said they were having contests on who was the darkest and the children here are proud of their color. They are proud to be dark. (Code: Self- Concept) They are proud to have locks. They are proud to have curly hair. They are proud to be Black and you don't see that anywhere else. You don't see that anywhere else, but in an African centered school where we teach pride in Blackness and like I said that helps with that self-confidence. (Code: Self-Concept/ Identity) If you are proud of who you are, then you have a higher standard for yourself. If you know that you come from kings and queens and that there is something special about you then you are not going to accept F's in school. You are not going to accepts D's in school. You know that you come from better than that. And the children may not be able to articulate it like that, but you see it in them. You see that they have pride in themselves and in who they are. So it makes them want to do better. (Code: Self-Concept/ Identity) So that is the first thing. And that kind of really stood out for me. And the other thing is the sense of family. The sense of togetherness and community. I treat my students like my children and their parents know that. I tell the parents that it's family, it's not just a school and I am going to teach you what the curriculum says and I am going to send you home and not think about you anymore until I have to come back to school. It's a family thing, it's a family affair here. I am concerned about you when you go home. (Code: Teacher/Student Relationship) I am concerned about you. I am thinking about you on the weekends. When I see something that might help you in class on Sunday on Monday I am going to bring it with me to class so that I can help you. And if I see that you are having a rough day and you are not getting the lesson, I am going to sit down with you and I am going to talk to you. I am going to give you a hug and tell you that it's ok and I am going to kiss the boo boo when you fall down and hurt yourself and I think that is something that as Black people we are naturally affectionate like that and we are naturally family oriented. So, when you have a school that it centered in that, it is going to come out. And you don't have to feel like you have to hold back. You don't have t feel like I can't be this way with that person because I am at work. You can be that way. You can be like a parent to these children, you can be like a sister to your co-worker or brother to your boss and it's ok, so

I think that's one of the, I mean aside from the curriculum and the test scores and all that, that is what fuels that success. I am looking at my students like my children and I want to see them successful. I want to see them do well, so I am going to put my all into it to make sure that they do well. (Code: Teacher Expectations… Student/teacher relationship connected to survival/ family/ commitment and community)

If you could make any changes or improvements with Ile Omode what would it be?

Definitely learning more about the learning styles of students and try to incorporate different teaching methods and not just sticking to one type of method, but learning how to reach every type of child and we have the environment to do that anyway, since like I said the classes are so small. I want to learn how to reach each student so that they are all successful. (Code: Suggestion for improvement)

So, being able to identify the different learning styles.

That I think would be the only thing, because like I said, everything else is there, but just trying to make sure that we treat them as individuals and not just bunch them up as a standard, this is the curriculum, this is what everyone has to meet, but making sure that everybody gets there at their own pace and in their own way. (Theme: Meeting students where they are.)

Closing Remarks:

Ok, well I really enjoyed talking to you. I definitely want to take the information that you gave me and compile it and use it to look at what other teachers, students and parents are feeling and come together and look at it and talk about it and sit down and make some plans in terms of things that you might do that someone else would want to use or incorporate. I will speak with the director and get his input and collectively as a team we can come back together and look at all the information and have some good dialogue. thank you, I really appreciate it.

It's no problem.

APPENDIX D:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Ms. Tiffany S. Wright, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a study on Student, Teacher, and Parent Perspectives of An African Centered Education Program. Given the well documented strong positive correlation between sustained parent involvement and educational achievement in the general population and in African American students, the organization and support of African American parent groups, as a strategy for sustaining parent involvement, may help to increase educational achievement in African American students. This study will explore how these parents groups support sustained parent involvement.

I am being asked to participate because I am a member of an African centered education program (Ile Omode) as a student, teacher or parent.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in a 60 to 90 minute dialogue with the researcher, during which we will discuss my perspectives of an African centered education program (Ile Omode).

2. I will review and clarify the findings of the dialogue.

3. Along with the researcher, I will review the researcher's field observations to help explore the possible meanings of observable group dynamics.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions on African centered programs may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.
3. Because the time required for my participation, I may become tired or bored.

Benefits

A possible direct benefit to me from participating in this study is to contribute to information on African centered education programs. This may also lead to the development of the understanding of my perspective as a member of an African centered program. In addition, the information offered may lead to the development of future programs which serve African American students and communities.

Costs/Financial Considerations
There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.
Payment/Reimbursement

Other than my time, I will incur no cost as a result of my participation in this study. I am volunteering my time and do not expect to be reimbursed.

Questions

I have talked to Ms. Wright about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at XXX.XXX.XXXX or Dr. Patricia Mitchell XXX.XXX.XXXX.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with Ms. Wright. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Subject's Signature   Date of Signature

_____   _____
Parent Signature   Date of Signature

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date of Signature

APPENDIX E:

APPROVAL LETTER

Director
Baba Jahi Awakoaiye

Board of Directors
Minister Mxolisi Ozo-Sowande
Senior Minister, Wo'Se Community Church
Dr. Charles Bossett
Dentist
Jeffery Moore
Instructor, Laney College
David Steward
Owner, entrepreneur
Paulo and Ajanu Stewart
Write Members

Advisory Group
Marru Ampim
President, Advancing the Research
Dr. Raymond Davis
Scholar, educator, entrepreneur
Terrence Elliott
African Studies Chair, Contra Costa College
Greg Hodge
Oakland School Board Member
Dr. Theophile Obenga
Professor, San Francisco State University
Dr. Oba T'Shaka
Professor, San Francisco State University

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Ile Omode, I am writing to indicate our awareness of the research proposed by Tiffany S. Wright, a student at USF. We are aware that Tiffany S. Wright intends to conduct research by observing classrooms and conducting dialogues with parents, students and teachers.

As the Director of Ile Omode, I give Tiffany S. Wright permission to conduct her research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office at (510) 632-8230.

Sincerely,

Director, Ile Omode

Ile Omode
House of the Children
8924 Holly Street
Oakland, Ca 94603
(510) 632-8230 [office]
(510) 632-1286 [fax]
http://www.ileomode.org

APPENDIX F:

IRBPHS APPROVAL LETTER

January 24, 2008

Dear Ms. Wright:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #08-001). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
----
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----
http://www.usfca.edu/humansubjects/