

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WHEN CULTURE AND EDUCATION MEET: AN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION OF AN  
AFRICENTRIC PRIVATE SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON, DC

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Black children living in the urban cities of America largely depend on public schools for an education. However, public schools face the lingering problem of not addressing the cultural needs of Black children and communities. There is a mismatch between Black cultures and that which public schools offer, expect and are willing to incorporate. Many teachers and administrators have been unable to incorporate successful strategies for addressing the mismatch between the larger culture (which includes public schools) and Black (African/African American) cultures. Furthermore, much of the literature (e.g. multicultural education) fails to provide strategies that consistently produce positive cultural and educational

outcomes for Black children. One approach to addressing the educational and cultural mismatch problems for Blacks that is becoming more popular is the institutionalization of African-centered, or Africentric education.

I have examined Africentric education as a means for addressing educational and socio-cultural challenges and issues in Black communities by addressing questions of Africentric values transmission, nationbuilding, and agency within one popular Africentric private school in Washington, DC. I used the qualitative tradition of the ethnographic case study. The design of this research called for active inquiry through structured and unstructured interviews, direct observation of Africentric education in action, and participation in extracurricular activities such as African cultural experiences and travel to cultural arenas such as shrines and African villages. Data were compiled as a result of more than two hundred hours of observations at the school and other relevant events.

In the findings I discuss the setting, staff, foundation, history, affiliations, aesthetics, and cultural offerings of the school. I examined the central cultural arguments made by Africentric educationists within the cultural setting. I investigate un-chartered territory by delving into the central propositions made by Africentric educationists; I view Africentric education through the lens of Africentric educationists themselves. I also participated in cultural system activities such as rituals and a host of other exercises to ensure fully competent understanding of the Africentric endeavor.

The findings of this study include an emphasis on cultural adoption, rather than mainstream notions of academic achievement (e.g. high test scores, GPA's), to

create qualitatively different people of African descent via the vehicle of education. The process of creating qualitatively different people requires people of African descent to engage in a process of reattaching themselves to African cultural frameworks. Reattachment to African cultural frameworks involves the deliberate and necessary process of exposing children of African descent to the imperatives of Africentric education, which include identity clarification, Pan Africanist sentiment, African/African American culture, African values adoption and transmission, Black Nationalism, community control/institution building, and education as opposed to schooling. All of the imperatives lead toward the major objective of nationbuilding, and Africentric schools serve as a “community center” in the movement toward the major objective.

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WASHINGTON, DC

by

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## DEDICATIONS

To the Creator, Reggie, Mrs. Smith, and Warren.

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## Chapter I *Introduction*

### *Statement of the Problem*

The inability of the American educational system to properly address the cultural and educational needs of Blacks is one of the most perplexing problems in U.S. society today. Blacks and other non-White groups comprise a sizeable proportion of the population in urban school districts, yet some scholars posit that the educational system remains solely White interested. Between 1986 and 1997, the population of non-Whites in elementary and secondary schools grew from 29.7% to 36.5% (NCES, 1999). While the number of Black students in public schools also continues to increase, Blacks face the mitigating problems of disproportionate interface with the criminal justice system (Kunjufu, 1995), unorganized/disenfranchised communities (Anderson, 2001), and major socio-educational problems such as a mismatch between Black culture and the culture of schools (Lomotey, 1992).

An example of what happens as a result of the cultural mismatch is evidenced in research indicating that Black students continue to linger behind their White counterparts (NCES, 1999). Lomotey (1992) explains that, "...the academic achievement of a large number of Black children across the country – as measured by standardized achievement tests, suspension rates, special education placement rates, and dropout rates has deteriorated considerably over the last twenty years" (p. 455). According to Africentric scholars, the problem of the mismatch between Black cultures and the culture "offered" and to be adhered to in schools is cause for complete socio-educational change for Black children and communities. Africentric

educators believe that cultural mismatch is the significant problem for Black students, and must be dealt with as though it is the most salient problem; however, mainstream education leaders continue to focus on symptoms (such as mainstream notions of academic achievement).

In recent years researchers have shown that the American public has become increasingly dissatisfied with the state of public education. Many have documented the continued failure of public education to change conditions that have deep history for Black people. Those researchers report that today many Blacks maintain their historical place at the bottom of educational and social tiers (such as disproportionate imprisonment rates and economic disparities). A growing number of scholars studying this phenomenon now argue that there is a need for Africentric (or African centered) education. They base their argument on a belief that Black children will only be able to produce and compete on the new global world stage if their education is revolutionarily re-conceptualized. Scholars such as Anderson (2001) argue that the education that Blacks receive is not uplifting them; it is keeping them in the position of world consumer for the purpose of maintaining the current social order. Many scholars view Africentric education as a comprehensive solution to the miseducation of Blacks (Afrik, 1981; Akoto, 1992; Anderson, 2001; Asante, 1980, 1990, 1995; Brookins, 1982; Doughty, 1973; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 1997; Kunjufu, 1995; Lee, 1973, 1992; Lomotey, 1978, 1992; 1997; Ridley, 1971; Satterwhite, 1971, 1992).

Africentric education is the act of placing the needs of Black children at the center of their education. Rather than teaching Black children unneeded facts and

unusable information (such as un-centered perspectives on historical matters e.g. the Columbus story, which serves to confuse Black children), in general, Africentric education attempts to equip Black children with self-knowledge for the purpose of instilling in them a sense of agency for the purpose of nationbuilding.

While Africentric education is seen as a "politically charged" endeavor, it is actually no different than what most other groups do. For example, Catholics engage students in Catholic-centered education by purporting the primacy of Catholicism, Jewish-centered schools teach students that they should participate in the larger society, but they should pledge primary allegiance to Jewish needs and causes. Asa Hilliard (1997) reports similar activity among Asians and Latinos. African centered education is similar, only instead of imbuing senses of Catholic, Jewish, Asian or Latino allegiance, it instills a sense of African allegiance. Unfortunately, Africentrics have been largely unsuccessful at trying to convince the population at large, including some Blacks, that Africentric education is a critical imperative for Blacks in the United States and across the globe.

What must not be lost though, is the importance of African agency for Black children. In the context of this research, a "sense of agency" is understood as a people's ability, empowerment, and entitlement to control and mandate the arenas of life around them. The American educational system does not inspire a sense of agency in Black children (Asante, 1980). Even so-called "successful" schools (those producing Black children with high test scores and GPA's) have been unable to produce large numbers of Blacks who desire to use their skills to improve Black communities. Only Africentric schools have attempted to imbue a sense of agency in

Black children (Akoto, 1992). Additionally, education reform efforts (such as modern multiculturalism) are not strong enough solutions to end what Africentric educators call Black self-hatred and Black community powerlessness. Africentric education purports to offer a holistic approach for bringing about a sense of agency for Blacks by using education as one vehicle for such change. Asante (1998) explains that Africentric ideology is the "total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions in the African American community" (p. 4). Africentric education must be understood not simply as a tool for improving educational conditions, but as a tool for holistic change in the Black community.

### *Problem Focus*

There is clear evidence that mainstream education for Blacks has resulted in pervasive problems (such as academic achievement gaps, educational/cultural mismatch, and continued Black self-loathing). Analyses from one group of scholars and researchers have outlined an alternative approach that has come to be called Africentric education. These scholars argue that the misalignment between Black cultures and the culture of public schools surfaces as a major reason why Black students are not educationally competitive. Africentric educationists continue to impress upon the educational community that educational attainment is rooted in cultural alignment and approach, not pedagogy and self-esteem. For example, Black cultures are observed as "circular" in nature and Black psychologists generally describe Blacks as "relational" in their thinking. Educational psychologist Asa Hilliard (1997) explains that, "In general, Black children are more relational, but schools reward analytical thinking" (p. 35). Hilliard further explains that, "African

American people tend to respond to things in terms of the whole picture instead of its parts. The European American tends to believe that anything can be divided and subdivided into pieces and that these pieces add up to a whole” (p. 42). Lawrence Stedman (1997) explains that, “The typical school remains a White, middle class institution whose language and world vision are alien to members of different cultures and classes” (p. 5).

Stedman is echoed by many Black scholars who believe that Black children have a different cultural perspective than the (Eurocentric) schools (Akbar, 1975, 1991; Anderson, 2001; Asante, 1980; Brookins, 1982; Doughty, 1973; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 1997; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1978, 1992; Madhubuti, 1960; Ridley, 1971). The aforementioned scholars believe that in order for Black children to be successful in schools, the educational system must be revolutionized to meet the student’s cultural needs. Africentric educationists purport to offer solutions to the problem of “cultural mismatch”; and therefore, such practices must be examined. These aforementioned scholars’ assertions provide some clarity when examining the cultural factors which might affect the misalignment between Black cultures and the culture of the schools Black children attend. The school I studied, National Africentric School (NAS), infuses culture into the curriculum for the purpose of returning Black people, via Black children, to practice affirming cultures. One way school leaders attempt to return Black people to affirming cultures is through a comprehensive program called the Nyansa Nana Nom (NNN), a cultural experience I participated in that is designed to reAfricanize people of African descent. The problem of cultural mismatch has its roots in the United State’s historical intentional

attempts to use education as a mental training weapon against Blacks (Woodson, 1933). To investigate the complexities of the cultural issues that exist between African centered schools within a mainstream paradigm, I developed Africalogical critical ethnographic case study as the method of choice to investigate practices in the school.

### *Background*

1948 U.S. presidential candidate Strom Thurmond said that there were not enough troops in the U.S. army to integrate Black children into America's public schools. Obviously, Senator Thurmond was not prophetic in his statement; however, he did express the sentiment of a large number of Americans of that era. Before 1948, Blacks were not allowed to attend K-12 or university institutions that were predominated by European Americans because the nation operated via de jure and de facto racism. De facto racism was established when the U.S. Supreme Court decided in Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896 that separate but equal institutions and facilities were constitutional. The 1954 Court overturned the 1896 Court's ruling in the Brown vs. Board of Education case, stating that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal. The 1954 Court's ruling invited desegregation, but desegregation is "used" and interpreted in many different ways. For example, one major "mainstream utilization" of desegregation was to integrate Blacks into American society. To many in the Black community, desegregation was a process of removing racism from social and political processes such as dismantling "Whites only" and "coloreds only" educational institutions. That is, "Blacks wanted to end the use of mandated separate facilities and institutions," (K.A. Akoto, personal communication, March 2002).

De jure desegregation has occurred for the most part; however, integration has accompanied it. Claude Anderson (2001) views integration as an assimilation process. During the era of segregation, Blacks were forced to build educational institutions in their own communities. Blacks are being assimilated into the larger European American culture, and has taken away from Black led educational institutions. Assimilation, as opposed to desegregation, makes it seemingly unnecessary to have “White only” and “Black only” educational institutions. As a result of the attempts to assimilate Blacks, many of the educational institutions that Blacks established during the period of segregation were lost. Upon losing the Black founded, administered, and interested organizations, due to assimilation instead of desegregation, many in the Black community began to notice some negative effects on Black children being integrated into schools with Whites. They also began to notice Black children suffering from the past negative effects of segregation. For example, Kenneth Clark’s (1954) study of the psychological effects of racism on Black children demonstrated that Black children believed themselves to be unattractive. Gunnar Myrdal (1949) points out the following inequities in American public schools: “Blacks often experience inferior buildings and equipment...Black teachers get lower rates of pay, Blacks have little control over their schools, many common academic subjects are not offered in the secondary schools” (p. 58). James Coleman’s (1966) *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report found that “...White teachers work in predominately Black schools, but seldom do Black teachers work in White schools” (p. 1). He also pointed out that “...twelve years after the Supreme Court decision of 1954, America’s public schools remain unequal” (p. 1). The

aforementioned studies by Clark, Myrdal, and Coleman are examples of some of the issues that many Black and other scholars and activists perceived Black children to be experiencing.

Still another group of scholar-activists held the belief that Black children were experiencing issues that were part of a larger systematic problem being experienced by Black people as a whole. For example, Blacks faced the following social ailments that stem from racism: harassment by police officers, they were lynched, castrated, raped, denied access to adequate health care, housing, economics, justice, labor, law, and politics. The group of scholar-activists with this viewpoint believes that Black children suffer from the same social ailments stemming from racism, and when such ailments manifest themselves in education, Black children suffer educationally. For example, racism and bias in education cause Black children to suffer. This group of scholar-activists, those believing that Black children's educational challenges are simply part of a larger group of challenges that Black people face, established educational institutions designed to address the challenges Black children face in education. They wished to develop "Pan Africanist minded" Black children, equipped with the skills to control the psychic and physical spaces that Black people call theirs, and reconnect with (more usable and appropriate) African cultural frameworks as a way to (1) advance the worldwide Black cultural community by advocating the values of African centeredness, and (2) escape from the throes of White supremacy by transmitting a sense of African agency to students.

Early attempts to salvage Black children came in the form of "Freedom Schools" which were established by Blacks who were interested in offering true

education to Black students. The Freedom Schools movement was challenged by the fact that schools were largely funded by non-private sources. That is, the schools such as Harlem Prep were able to “demonstrate that the public schools have failed bright Black students,” however, “...the failure of these schools was hastened by the loss of corporate money and their remaining peripheral to the public school system” (Doughty, 1979, p. 80).

Another attempt to salvage Black children was the community control movement. “The community control movement brought the first introduction of incipient Black Nationalism into the public schools of America” (Afram Associates, 1968, p. 7). The Black Nationalist movement led to the movement for independent Black schools. Doughty points out that four major conferences facilitated the growth and development of independent Black schools: the California Association for Afro-American Education and Nairobi College Workshop (August, 1970); the First Congress of Afrikan Peoples (September, 1970); the First New York City Afrikan-American Teachers Convention (April, 1972); and the Founding Sessions of the Council of Independent Black Institutions-CIBI (June, 1972). Doughty reveals the historical significance of the CIBI Founding Sessions:

On June 30, 1972, the Founding Sessions of the Independent Black Institutions was opened in Frogmore, South Carolina. The first CIBI Work Meeting was held at Penn Community Service, Inc., a Black institution in rural South Carolina. The theme of the session was “Making Excellent Education a Reality for Our Youth.” Five goals were identified for the new organization: (1) to make CIBI the political vehicle through which a

qualitatively different people are produced; (2) to establish a reputation for CIBI as being dedicated to excellence; (3) to charge CIBI with the responsibility of developing the moral character of its students, parents, and staff; (4) to establish CIBI as a source of well-reasoned leadership in the struggle for freedom and internal community development; and (5) to have within CIBI the structural capacity to act upon our continuing responsibility to the majority of our children who are still in the public schools. (p. 87)

The ideological foundations of CIBI are “based on an understanding of and commitment to practice Kawaida, Black Power, Black Nationalism, and Pan Africanism” (Doughty, 1979, p. 97). The African centered independent Black institution is a vastly different type of institution than an American public school. Some Africentric educators held to the belief that the goal of independent Black institutions was not to reform public schools, but to pick up where Africans left off before the European invasions of Africa. That is, Africentric educators wish not to develop Black children who, for example, are competitive with White children academically, but to prepare Black children for the tasks they must tackle as members of the larger worldwide African cultural community. A major goal of the independent Black institution is to transmit African centered values to children of African descent, and thereby make them “new”, qualitatively different people who are ready and able to qualitatively change the Black community, that is, they wish to make Black children agents for nationbuilding. CIBI is attempting to offer Black children an African centered education.

The CIBI movement began in 1972, and Black children continue to face the problem of cultural mismatch between themselves and the public schools they attend. Further, the Black community continues to struggle in all areas of people activity. We are compelled to understand how and what African centered values are transmitted to African children in these schools, and to understand how a sense of agency, to the desired end (which is nationbuilding) is transmitted to students in these schools. Obviously, such understandings may inform us of how such educational practice can lead to further the growth and development of Black communities. The findings focus on values and agency transmission processes and nationbuilding at one of CIBI's oldest and most treasured institutions.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The overall purpose of this research is to understand how Africentric education works in a leading Africentric school in Washington, DC. I explore Africentric education in relation to its ability to act as a tool for transmitting a sense of agency for the purpose of nationbuilding and values transmission for the purpose of empowering Black students and communities. I emphasize the use of Africentric theory and ideology as developed by Africentric scholars (Akbar, 1992; Asante, 1987, 1990; ben-Jochannan, 1972, 1973; Clarke, 1991; Diop, 1987; Kambon, 1992; Karenga & Carruthers, 1986; Obenga, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996). I examine community empowerment through the vehicle of education as developed by Africentric education scholars (Afrik, 1981; Akoto, 1992, 2001; Brookins, 1984; Doughty, 1973; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1978, 1992; Madhubuti, 1973; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1993; Satterwhite, 1971; Shujaa, 1987; Ridley, 1971).

I have examined how an Africentric private school takes an Africentric approach to enacting Black “cultures” (culture defined as the way a people define, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves, Karenga, 1966). My general approach to this research assists educationists in developing greater understanding about this issue through an exploratory ethnographic case study involving an established Africentric school where the leadership has established "Africentric nationbuilding" as its main objective. I conducted interviews with school leaders, observed classrooms, and participated in cultural activities in order to address my research questions.

### *Research Questions*

In meeting the purpose, I explored Africentric ideology as a mechanism for transmitting agency to Blacks through education. I have responded to the following questions:

1. What are the values of the school, and what is the values transmission process used by school leaders?
2. What does Africentric theory offer as a means for transmitting a sense of agency toward the goal of nationbuilding to Black students and communities?

### *Sub Questions:*

1. How do leaders of the school understand culture?
2. How is culture used and woven into the life of the school?

### *Significance of the Study*

Addressing the above questions enhances our understanding of the values of Africentric education and its usefulness as a tool of empowerment and agency.

Addressing these questions also provides insight into how Africentric theory is used

to improve social conditions in Black communities. In the aforementioned ways, the findings of my research further the existing general knowledge base in education, Black studies, general cultural studies, and community development.

My findings also contribute to our understanding of approaches that may improve educational and social conditions in Black communities. Since I have a focus on culture, education policymakers and practitioners who are interested in aligning the educational and cultural needs of Blacks will be aware of potential means for addressing recurrent educational challenges faced by Black children. Furthermore, legislators and social activists who are interested in finding ways to improve the community conditions and the quality of life of Blacks will become more conscious of ways that a sense of agency can empower people to take an active role in improving the conditions under which they live. Inferences can be drawn for using this research as a potential means for improving the educational, social, and living conditions in other cultural communities.

In addition to contributing to policy and practice, the findings also contribute to Africentric and more general education theories. Africentric education scholars are multi-focused, and concentrate on various cultural and educational challenges that persist in Black communities, but what is missing from the literature is an articulation of what "Africentric education" means to the various participants in Africentric schools. My findings clarify what Africentric education means to the Blacks who use it at NAS. Additionally, more general education theorists are unable to develop ideas that serve to change the reality for the masses of Blacks. My findings offer direct

analyses of an approach that is designed to holistically improve Black socio-educational challenges.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following terms are defined for the purposes of the study:

*Academic Achievement.* Refers to the various ways of assessing scholastic success or failure. Mainstream means for assessing students' academic achievement (e.g. test scores, GPA's) is seen by African centered educationists as being an insufficient "window" for evaluating Black children.

*Academic achievement gap.* Refers to the academic achievement "distance" between Black and European American (White) students, where Blacks as a group consistently post lower and sometimes extremely poor academic results as compared to their European American counterparts. Africentric educationists do not believe that the gap has an "academic" origin, but instead it has an origin in the historical racial problems that have plagued the United States.

*Adinkra symbols.* African pictorials that are given meanings, the symbols represent phrases such as, "God is omnipotent."

*African agency.* Refers to the concept of Blacks as "agents" or purposeful actors behaving in ways that are in concert with the overall interests of bettering the Black community. It also refers to a "sense" of having control of your surroundings and community.

*African empowerment.* Refers to a condition where Africans and African Americans are able to control their life destinies through a process of being able to "self-determine" how they will use their resources and how they will manipulate their

own environments. It also refers to a condition of Blacks owning and controlling the institutions in their communities.

*Africentricity/Afrocentricity.* The total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions in the Black community (Asante, 1980). Africentric ideology is considerate of the needs and cultures of other peoples and does not infringe upon their humanity.

*Africentric education.* The total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions in the Black community through the vehicle of education.

*Bendera.* The bendera is a red, black, and green flag that symbolizes the pan Africanist sentiment that there is one aim and one destiny for all people of African descent. Red symbolizes African bloodshed; black symbolizes the people; green symbolizes the land, which must be reacquired for purposes of sovereignty.

*Culture.* The way a people define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves (Karenga, 1966), and is the totalization of the historical, artistic, economic, and spiritual aspects of a people's lifestyle (Asante, 1980).

*Eurocentricity.* The total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions in the European American community.

*Metu neter.* Also known as hieroglyphics. Literally translates and refers to the sacred picture writing used by ancient Ta Merians.

*Miseducation.* A term coined by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1933 in his seminal book *The Miseducation of the Negro*. The term refers to a process when one is educated away from his/her own needs and interests.

*Mismatched educational/cultural needs.* Refers to the tendency of the K-12, higher education, and other systems of education to use methods and ideologies that are misaligned with the cultural needs and styles of Blacks.

*Nationbuilding.* Refers to a conscious and focused application of African people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that is theirs (Akoto, 1992). When Blacks act as purposeful actors (agents) behaving in ways that are in concert with the overall interest of bettering the Black community, they are nationbuilding.

*Nyansa Nana Nom.* Literally translates to “the order of the ancestors.” In this dissertation, it also refers to the location of National Africentric School’s cultural training experience.

*Ta Meri(an).* Ta Merian culture refers to the ancient cultural practices of the Africans who inhabited what is now known as Egypt.

*Watoto.* A child.

### *Summary and Overview*

The primary purpose of the study was to understand how culture, values and agency are transmitted to students at an Africentric educational institution in Washington DC. To investigate the culture and the cultural transmission processes, the interactions between members of the cultural community and within the school were analyzed in classrooms, at cultural events, and during rituals and traditional ceremonial practices.

In Chapter I, I began with a statement of the problem and the problem focus. The background and purpose of the study and the research questions were presented

next, followed by a discussion of the significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Finally, I present the assumptions that are central to this study.

In Chapter II, I provide the conceptual context of the study, and then I go on to discuss the questions raised by Africentric ideology, and the importance of adopting an African centered orientation for some Black students. The chapter also outlines Africentric education as a potential “agent” for change in Black communities. I conclude the chapter with a review of relevant literature as pertains to African centered education, and finally a summary of issues raised in the literature.

In Chapter III I include the research design and methods used to conduct the study. Specifically, I include a discussion of the research tradition of ethnography, Africalogy, critical ethnography, and case study. Next, details of the data collection and analysis procedures are presented. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

In Chapter IV, I present the findings of the dissertation. The setting, staff, aesthetics, and foundations of National Africentric School (NAS) are discussed. The aforementioned sections are followed by a discussion of the “mirage” that appears when onlookers view the school through inappropriate lenses. The section continues with a discussion of how my personal background was not enough to equip me for the challenge of viewing the school through an alternative lens – my eventual adoption of that alternative lens led to an epiphany for me; in this same vain I discuss how marginalization and miseducation have been the tools used to silence the voices of Africentric educationists. Next, Nyansa Nana Nom (NNN) is explained as the “tool

of my epiphany.” Next, I outline the structure and goals of NNN, and then I offer a glimpse of what life was like at NNN.

Following my discussion of NNN, I discuss the important and almost overlooked imperative of immersing into the culture of NAS participants, which is followed by a discussion of the NNN cultural example and clarity of understanding that came as a result of my epiphany. Next I present a discussion of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), an Africentric education “umbrella” organization, and I conclude the chapter with a discussion of NAS as a model Africentric school and the NAS general Africentric approach to educating Black children.

In Chapter V, I present a summary of research. In the first section I present an overview, which includes interpretations and conclusions. In the concluding section, I offer an analysis of this project’s contribution to policy, practice, and theory, and finally makes suggestions for future research.

## Chapter II *Conceptual Context*

### *Africentric Ideology and the Questions it Raises*

Africentric ideology raises a great many questions, especially for non-Africentric thinkers. Africentric ideology is seen by authors such as Schlesinger (1992) as an attempt to disunite America. While Schlesinger argues that Africentric education is detrimental to American society, Asante (1999) argues that:

Afrocentricity seeks to understand [phenomena] by beginning all analysis from the African person as human agent. In classes, it means that the African American child must be connected, grounded to information presented in the same way White children are grounded when we discuss literature, history, mathematics, and science. Teachers who do not know this information with respect to Africans must seek it out from those who do know it. Afrocentrists do not take anything away from White history except its aggressive urge to pose as universal. (p. 16)

Africentric ideology requires a re-orientation of thinking on issues pertaining to education because when traditional “lenses” are used, oftentimes they are insufficient tools for understanding Black phenomena. But some scholars are concerned that Africentric education is an overshoot to address academic achievement challenges for Black children. The claim is sensible because if academic achievement (in the mainstream sense) was the concern, it appears that Africentric educators would be well served to conduct research on the best practices for improving Black academic achievement. However, it appears that academic achievement (as it is usually referred to, e.g. test scores, IQ tests, etc.) is to

Africentric what, for example, school violence is to the mainstream education community. That is, the mainstream community views school violence as a problem that is birthed from mounting societal problems and issues – such as parenting issues and the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system, in other words it is a symptom. Africentric view mainstream notions of academic achievement similarly – as a problem that is rooted in issues of cultural mismatch and racism. Many in the mainstream believe that school violence is best solved by addressing the home/social problems of young people, not by making them prisoners at school. Africentric view more holistic approaches to understanding academic achievement as an issue that is best addressed by applying a Black (African) culture to Black students, not by attempting to find best teaching practices, but by bringing the academic achievement problems into context, which requires addressing issues of cultural mismatch and racism.

Some scholars argue that Africentric education is a very hostile version of educational reform for Black children. A few educational reform efforts, such as the charter schools movement, are reported to have some benefits for Black children (School Choice, 2001). Other movements such as the community control movement have also gained attention as efforts to reform the educational system. What is important to note about the Africentric schools effort is that it in itself is not a movement or a reform project. Africentric education is viewed by leading proponents as an expression of culture within education. To explain, the term “Africentric education” is used because it is fitting: education that is centered on Africa and its people. However, the main goal of the group of African centered educationists that I

studied is not to push a set of “anti” Eurocentric values and propositions; the main goal is to advance a culturally relevant experience for Black people, and what is commonly known as Africentric education emerges as the expression of that cultural mandate in education. In the aforementioned sense, Africentric educationists do not call for educational reform, they call for Black (African) culture for Black children. Cultural adoption requires educational experiences that are relevant. For Africentric educationists, reformed American public education is not relevant, nor is it desirable because reformed education is an incomplete attempt to address a problem that is much larger than education. Lomotey (1978) expresses the sentiment by explaining the principle held by Africentric educationists, “Africa is the home of all people of African descent and all Black people should work for the total liberation and unification of Africa and Africans around the world...and schools for African American children should be based upon this principle” (p. 36)

### *The Cultural Imperative*

Africentric educationists stress cultural practice as the most important element for empowering and transforming Black communities. African cultural practice is understood as the answer to the plethora of challenges faced by Black children in education. The belief is that the current cultural order is debilitating and stifling of the growth, development, and chances of Black children. Therefore, Africentric educators call for Sankofa, which literally means to return and retrieve that which was lost during the period of African destruction (e.g., loss of independence and culture).

There are multiple views of culture that align more or less with Africentric understandings of culture and how it works in education. Explanations and views of

culture are becoming more and more complex – from functionalist to interpretive paradigms, from understandings of culture as systems of values to understanding culture as being shared viewpoints. Early functionalist writing such as that of Bates (1987) concentrates on culture by arguing that, “understanding a culture requires discerning the struggles between dominant and subordinate subcultures” (p. 79). Bates’ discussion of culture acknowledges that there is a reactionary and ideological component to culture building. Africentric educators believe that the dominant culture is Eurocentric, meaning that they believe it is centered on the needs and interests of people of European descent. Although Africentric educators recognize that the dominant culture exists, they do not hold the belief that the dominant culture is usable to all groups of people. Whereas Bates discusses the struggle between dominant and subordinate cultures, calling the subordinate a subculture, Africentric educationists view the dominant culture as only being dominant because of conquering, pillaging, and the deliberate destruction of the African cultural cosmology. Using the Africentric lens, no culture should be deemed as a subculture, because the “sub” categorization is a matter of where one stands in relation to the culture itself. Africentrics believe that European Americans tend to see things that are specific as universal. That is, European Americans tend to believe that things that come from their own cultural paradigm are also applicable to the paradigm of others.

The interpretive turn in cultural studies provided explanations of culture as a method for decoding organizational symbols, which speaks to the different paradigmatic frameworks held by various cultural groups. Swidler (1986) proposes a model for how culture shapes action by introducing the notion of the culture “tool

kit.” The tool kit provides “strategies for action that members of the culture can use in many different ways” (in Firestone & Louis, 1999, p. 299). The notion of a cultural tool kit complements Akoto’s (1999) Africentric assertion that, “What is required of Afrikans at this moment in the cycle of Afrikan history is the elaboration of a coherent and effective cultural/ideological construct or paradigm that is securely grounded in Afrikan history and cosmology” (p. 3). The tool kit for cultural assertion in this sense is African history. That is, African historical cultures are the tools that are needed at this moment in history to secure the future of people of African descent. In some ways Africentric cultural notions do not diverge from interpretive explanations, they only add the components that are relevant to Africentric educationists need to incorporate ideological components to the cultural explanations. Although some cultural theorists differ in the degree to which definitions of culture can be ideologically deterministic, Africentric educators believe that adding ideological components to cultural explanations is appropriate.

As postmodern perspectives continue to envelop definitions of culture, making definitions of culture more complicated and ostensibly more ethnocentric, Africentric theorists turn away from postmodernist sentiment asserting that definitions of culture must be “...made relevant to the political needs of those who have been victimized by Europe, and Europe must be brought into focus as a cultural entity. By emphasizing the ideological function of culture, it is possible to make sense of the intimidating confusion and superficial complexity [surrounding definitions of culture]” (Ani, 1994, p. 4). Ani speaks to the need for those who have been victimized by Europe, such as people of African descent, to carefully apply

definitions of culture that empower them rather than neuter their ability to use language to empower themselves.

Using the power of self-definition and self-determination, Africentric theorists and educationists have applied their own definitions and understandings of culture to the task of attempting to liberate Black children. Africentric educationists understand culture as the way a people define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves (Karenga, 1966) and they combine this definition with their observation of practices in Africa to develop their understanding of African American culture.

An important tool that Africentric educationists use to develop Black children through culture is by incorporating African languages into the educational experiences of young people. Africentric schools have incorporated the use of kiswahili words such as “Habari Gani!,” which means ‘what good news do you have?’ Africentric schools such as NAS in Washington, DC use aspects of specific African cultural groups to inform school practice. NAS uses Akan to inform school practice; so it is common to hear words such as “maakye”, which means ‘good morning’ in the Akan language of Twi. Teachers are referred to as “Mama” and “Baba”, which are Swahili words that translate to ‘mother figure’ and ‘father figure.’ Several African language words replace English words to demonstrate the validity of African language, the power of self-determination, and the necessity to go back and fetch that which was lost during the period of African destruction.

Schein’s (1992) definition of culture captures some measure of what Africentric educationists view as culture:

[Culture is] a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

When Schein's definition of organizational culture is applied to understand the behavior of groups, we are able to see how culture emerges from human need. That is, Schein's definition clarifies that culture is practical as well as ideological. Schein's definition of culture is aligned with Africentric theorist Marimba Ani's (1994) assertion that, "Culture is ideological since it possesses the force and power to direct activity, to mold personalities, and to pattern behavior" (p. 5).

Although the symbolic use of language exemplifies the Africentric imperative of using African culture, the deeper structures, meanings, and uses of culture are also apparent. Akoto's (1999) requirement for reAfricanization calls for people of African descent to reattach themselves to African cultures. Although African culture is understood as non-static, the traditional practices of continental Africans are viewed as proper cultural examples for people of African descent. The three broad overlapping stages (rediscovery/historical recovery, redefinition/cultural reaffirmation, and revitalization/national liberation) under gird the curricular focus of Africentric schools. The three stages indicate crucial aspects of what is considered to be a return to African cultural practice.

The Africentric understanding of culture includes Blacks from all over the world adopting African cultures because within African culture lies the answer(s) to

many of the challenges that Black people face. Africentric theorists and educationists see African cultural practice as an “entity” that must be traditional African, but also fully able to adjust ideologically to the challenges presented by the modern world. That is, Africentric educationists advance our understanding of culture and how it works by presenting the notion of culture as steadfast and traditional, yet able to protect African people from European/American universalism, supremacism and hegemony. These cultural assertions under gird what Africentric educationists wish to transmit to students in Africentric schools.

*Africentric education.* Molefi Asante (1998) describes Africentricity as the “...total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions in the Black community” (p. 4). Asante argues that:

The psychology of the African [American] without Africentricity has become a matter of concern. Instead of looking out from one’s own center, the non-Africentric person operates in a manner that is negatively predictable. The person’s images, symbols, lifestyles, and manners are contradictory and thereby destructive to personal and collective growth and development. (1998, p. 1)

Africentric education is the employment of Africentric ideology and the use of “culturally relevant pedagogy” in order to effectively teach and reach Black children. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001) proposes effective and culturally relevant pedagogy as education that (1) looks beyond explanations of cultural deficit, (2) seeks to improve student achievement while maintaining identity, and (3) challenges inequitable school and societal structures” (p. 18).

According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy is centered in a way that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically” (p. 4). While Billings calls for transformation of the public education system through the use of culturally relevant methods, Africentric educationists do employ culturally relevant methods, but generally do not petition or seek redress from the American public education system because they believe it to be the responsibility of Black people to solve their own problems. While Ladson-Billings’ discussion of identity also fits within more mainstream conceptions of identity development in student’s educational processes, Africentric educationists view “identity” vastly different – as a concept that is connected to a larger struggle for African people’s survival and independence, which is rooted in their conception of African cultural adoption.

*Africentric education as agent.* Many U.S. citizens believe that the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement was a result of the hard work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; however, the movement was sparked largely by students on college campuses. With the exception of Kwame Ture (Stokeley Carmichael) and a few others, most of these students remain nameless and their contributions are now “summed up” and in a way “packaged into” the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But the struggles that Blacks face today (such as educational and law enforcement abuse) exemplify the fact that the Civil Rights Act, its antecedents, the subsequent executive orders, laws, and other mandates have not served their originally conceptualized liberatory functions (as conceived by some Civil Rights leaders).

A manifestation of the civil and human rights challenges faced by Blacks includes the educational outcomes of Black children. For example, many believe that

(as a composite) Black children perform poorly on educational measures is less an indication of their intellectual ability, and more an indication of the inability of the American educational system to meet their needs. More succinctly put, as Carter G. Woodson (1933) said, Blacks are miseducated. A consequence of miseducation is the depressed conditions in Black communities.

Black children must be imbued with a sense of their own personal and collective abilities to control the psychic and physical spaces that are theirs. Africentric education literature points to the necessary imperatives of the effort to advance agency toward nationbuilding.

## Review of Related Literature *Introduction*

### *Imperatives of Africentric Education*

Africentric education scholars appear to be advancing several big concepts that constitute the cultural imperatives Africentric education. The first cultural imperative of African centered education is identity. Identity is primary because if the Black child does not know who s/he “is” s/he cannot know his/her purpose. Learning who you are leads to the need to understand the relationship between you and others, Africentric educationists stress the importance of this through a concept called Pan Africanism, the second imperative of Africentric education. Pan Africanist ideology is the understanding that all people of African descent are African. This principle is important because it molds the African child together with his community, that is, Pan Africanism teaches the African child that he has shared interests with the rest of the African world.

Pan Africanist understanding leads to the important act of using “traditions which affirm you” (Madhubuti a.k.a. Lee, 1973); for the African child, these traditions are present in African/African American culture, which is the third imperative of Africentric education. Knowing your culture teaches you the values that are a part of your tradition; many Africentric educationists refer to African value systems (e.g. Nguzo Saba – a kiswahili phrase meaning seven principles of a Black value system), which is the fourth imperative of African centered education. The Nguzo Saba is one example of an African value system. The Nguzo Saba and other adopted African value systems are critical elements because they open the door for a needed sense of Black nationalism, which is the fifth imperative of Africentric education. Once the African child is imbued with a sense of African nationalism, he will understand the need to take agency and build and control the institutions in the community, which is the sixth imperative of Africentric education. Finally, in order for the six imperatives to be transmitted, the African child must be educated, not schooled – the final imperative of African centered education.

It appears that Africentric educationists combine Africentric ideology and cultural relevancy to produce “Africentric education.” Using Asante’s (1988, 1990, 1998) general definitions and explanations of Africentric ideology, and Ladson-Billing’s (1994, 2001) descriptions of culturally relevant pedagogy. I discuss the seven major imperatives of Africentric education.

### *Identity*

Who are African people? Africentric education scholars identify Africa as the true source of identity for Black children. The question of who the Black child “is”,

is understandably complex, especially considering the fact that s/he has come from one of many African cultural groups (i.e. tribes). The identity crisis began for African (Americans) as soon as the first ship left the African shore. That is, the Black identity crisis has its roots in the chattel slavery experience in the Americas.

The literature on Africentric education ranges from explanations of Black children as Africans in America, that is, they are Africans who happen to be in the United States, to Black children as African Americans – a group of people who have their roots in Africa, but have developed a distinct and unique culture of their own called “African American.”

Africentric educationist/theorist Kwame Akoto explains that Black children are simply African because their cultural roots are in Africa. He explains, “Leadership in our school practice the Yoruba tradition as a way to inform the cultural direction of the school; however, we do not force that tradition on others, we wish not to use foreign and alienating cultures such as the European/American culture, which continue the diatribe against our children” K.A. Akoto (personal communication, March 2002). Akoto’s idea is that if Black people become acquainted with African cultural traditions, they will be more productive because they are practicing something that is “known” to them, rather than completely submersing themselves in the foreign and alienating Eurocentric American culture. Others advance a more general Africentric approach; Haki Madhubuti (1973) explains that “...we must choose from the best of African culture and refine and adopt those practices which advance our cause...” (p.4). Madhubuti’s assertion pertains to the fact that African culture is not “static”, and neither are African people. Although

Akoto and Madhubuti agree that Africa is the source and origin for Black people, Akoto uses Yoruba culture to help inform the direction of his school, whereas Madhubuti applies general Africentric understandings, such as the need for Black unity, self-determination, and community building, at the Africentric school he leads, which is called New Concept Development Center of Chicago, IL.

In keeping with the Africentric requirement to keep African people centered on African culture for the purpose of correctly answering the identity question, Madhubuti's statement about choosing from among the "best practices" of Black people globally refers to the fact that as Africans move forward as a people, they must choose from the best of what African cultures have to offer. Although Akoto differs from Madhubuti in that he would advance using one frame as "cultural informant" (such as Yoruba), he also seems to advance that general Africentric practice is best within Africentric schools. Both Akoto and Madhubuti advance Africa as the source of the Black child's identity. Akoto and Madhubuti also appear to recognize that some practices that have their roots in Africa must be abandoned and some refined. Madhubuti's assertion clarifies that African people control African culture, African culture does not control African culture. That is, "We refine and adopt those practices which meet our contemporary needs" (Madhubuti, 1973, p. 44). The Black child is actually an African and it is the responsibility of African adults to choose from the best that Africans have to offer and move the race forward.

Scholars advance the notion that if the Black child is an African, then a sense of responsibility for Africa should be transmitted to him/her. The Africentric belief holds that if Blacks in the U.S. understood themselves to be African, such

understanding would have a positive impact on their identity development. That is, knowing who you are is important because it builds self-confidence.

The idea that Blacks are African Americans seems to be rooted in an understanding that Blacks have a unique culture, they have an African culture, which they brought with them from Africa; however, their experiences in America are uniquely theirs. The “African American” concept is promoted by Africentrics who believe that acknowledging Africa as the root is important; however, ignoring the fact that those Africans who were forced to come to America have also built a nation takes away from the global accomplishments of African people. Janice Hale-Benson (1982) explains that, “West Africa is the source of many African American Africanisms” (p. 14). Hale-Benson also explains that certain traditions such as storytelling, weaving/art and craft making, and other traditions have been passed on to African Americans; yet, African Americans have developed their own unique expression of even those traditions.

Hales (1997) explains that Africentric schools were developed for the purpose of teaching racial identity. While there is a (small) range between those who believe that Blacks are Africans and those believing that Blacks are African Americans, all Africentric scholars hold that the Black child must be taught his “Africanness” because if s/he is not, s/he will be disconnected with who s/he is. Earlier Africentric writing, such as that of Ridley (1971) and Lomotey (1978), expresses a sentiment of “Black recognition,” that is, the idea of Black people accepting their Blackness and developing camaraderie among one another based upon their common struggle in the

U.S. The Black power movement of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement facilitated the call for identification with Black ideals and a "Black personality."

The calls for Black pride and Black power reflected the sentiment that African Americans must acknowledge their Blackness first – before their Americanness. However, a more focused call began to develop in the mid 1960's – the call for recognition of Africa as the true source of Black identity, that is – the call for Pan Africanism.

### *Pan Africanism*

Pan Africanism is the belief that all people of African descent are, in fact, African (Pan African Congress, 1970). Pan Africanism holds that where an individual of African descent currently resides is not necessarily applicable to who they are. Malcolm X provides insight into this in a 1963 speech, "...if a cat has babies in an oven, does she deliver biscuits, or does she deliver kittens?" The metaphor calls to mind the following: If an African has babies in America, are those babies African, or are they Americans? Malcolm X's sentiment mirrors the thinking of Africentric educators.

Although some Africentrics say that he was confusing race with nationality, Africentric education leaders such as Madhubuti share Malcolm X's overall point about the true racial identity of people of African descent. Madhubuti and other Africentric educationists believe that Africentric schools should enact Pan Africanism as the dominant ideology because it brings people of African descent together, and concentrates on the common struggles and interests of African people, rather than focusing on divisions and differences (Madhubuti, 1973). Pan Africanist ideology

imbues a sense of racial togetherness and pride in children, and encourages them to take responsibility for the forward progress of the African world community (Asante, 1980; Brookins, 1984; Doughty, 1973; Hilliard, 1987; Lomotey, 1992; Ridley, 1971; Satterwhite, 1992). Since most Africentric educationists advance Pan Africanism as the dominant ideology, a general Africentric approach appears to be advanced over a “culturally individualist” approach which these scholars believe concentrates on divisions and differences.

Lomotey (1978) calls for the enactment of Pan Africanism by asserting that “The Pan Africanist principle is the belief that Africa is the home of all people of African descent and all Black people should work for the total liberation and unification of Africa and Africans around the world...and schools for African American children should be based upon this principle” (p. 36). Africentric educationists support the enactment of Pan Africanism because the principle helps to mend some of the fissures that have been caused by the *maafa* (the middle passage). That is, it helps to bring people of African descent together to fight against the “dividing and conquering” they have experienced at the hands of outside forces in the past. If the Pan Africanist principle is transmitted to students at an early age, the idea is that by the time they are adults, they will behave in productive ways that will help bring healing to a damaged community (Anderson, 2001).

The rationale supporting Pan Africanist ideology is twofold. The first fold is that if all people of African descent (worldwide) accept the fact that they are African, the question of identity is resolved – which will lead to greater productivity and psychic resolution of the identity question. Akoto (1992) explains that when a people

do not know who they are, “They lack cohesion and are bunched together like so many millions of individual splinters as a consequence of any and all opportunistic currents that move them. In that people’s confusion and lack of direction they become the pawns and playthings of those who are directed and powerful” (p. 4).

The second fold is that Pan Africanist ideology assumes that when the African recognizes that he or she is an African, not an African American or an Afro-Brazilian (for example), he accepts responsibility for helping to make Africa better (Nkrumah, 1960). Akoto and Nkrumah’s assertions recall the importance of identifying with an African culture (such as Akan), while at same time holding to “general” practices and understandings (such as elder respect and ancestor acknowledgement) for the purpose of not getting splintered off as a consequence of outside opportunism.

Madhubuti (1973) explains that Pan Africanist ideology is not “anti” anything. The idea is that if children are inculcated with Pan Africanist ideology, they will be functionally educated because they will have the necessary tools to ensure the perpetuation of the African *race*. In the general African tradition, “all knowledge is functional...it is never knowledge just for knowledge’s sake” (Doughty, 1973), that is, it is never just knowledge for rhetorical regurgitation. Pan Africanism suits the African tradition of advancing functional knowledge because it calls for children of African descent to learn the “3 R’s” but additionally, it imparts a sense of responsibility for the need to change the conditions of African people worldwide. With Africa as the “common theme” among people of African descent, African/African American culture must be used as a guide to restore African humanity.

### *African/African American Culture*

Maulana Karenga (1966) defines culture as the way a people define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves. Traditionally, the ancestors of people of African descent have used various cultural practices and beliefs as guides to define, create, celebrate, sustain and develop themselves. Africentric educationists purport that this longstanding tradition of using African culture in such ways is threatened because Blacks are unaware of African cultures. According to Molefi Asante (1988), Blacks not knowing of the cultures that have brought them thus far causes, "...their images, symbols, lifestyles, and manners [to be] contradictory and thereby destructive to personal and collective growth and development" (p. 1). According to Asante, such ignorance leads to self-annihilation.

Baratz and Baratz (1997) state that, "African American children need to be part of an educational system that recognizes their abilities and culture, and draws upon these strengths and incorporates them into the [teaching and] learning process" (in Hales, 1997, p. 4). Black educationists believe that knowledge of African/African American cultures is important because without such knowledge, Black children take part in an alien and alienating process of schooling (Hale-Benson, 1982; Lomotey, 1978; Ridley, 1971; Shujaa, 1992). The problem that Black children have is that they are expected to participate in a process of schooling which is demeaning to them because it does not affirm nor recognize them as being part of a group that has contributed to world progress (Hales, 1997). If culture is the way a people define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves, Black children are in trouble because the public education system does not teach them anything significant about

their historical journey, that is, how they have made it through trials and tribulations, and what accomplishments they have made. Lomotey (1978) explains that, “Information about African people is usually left out of textbooks, and when it is included, it usually starts discussing slavery, and leaves out any information that can help Black children gain a sense of responsibility and respect for self...” (p. 25).

Some Africentric scholars believe that Blacks “...have a fundamentally African worldview” (Ridley, 1971, p. 19). This belief is supported by recognition of certain Black “traits” as having their roots in Africa. In Hale-Benson’s (1982) study of Black children and their cultural frameworks, she states that, “West Africa is the source of many African American Africanisms” (p. 14). The idea is that those who have contact with Black children should possess functional knowledge about Africa because those cultures are the root of who Black children actually are. This belief challenges the sentiment that Blacks are primarily “American” and because they have existed in the U.S. for so long, they have lost touch with their African roots.

Some Africentric educationists appear to focus more on the political aspects of Black children knowing their history. Lomotey (1992) explains that, “African centered education seeks to meet a set of cultural as well as academic and social goals...[Educators] must identify culturally with African American children to teach them about their culture, life, and about where they fit in society and the world” (p. 457). The idea that should be stressed is that functional knowledge of African/African American cultures transmits a sense of “location” for the Black child. Asante (1999) explains that Africentric [education] puts the Black in a “centered place.” The centered location (centered on Africa, that is), anchors and roots the

Black child so that he is not ideologically “floating around” thinking s/he is somebody s/he is not. Proper cultural grounding places the Black child in context, which is necessary because the dominant Eurocentric/American culture is creating mayhem for Blacks because Black children are expected to behave in ways that are not consistent with who they are. Hale-Benson (1982) explains, “There are important cultural differences between Europeans and Africans that account for the different learning styles of African American children” (p. xiii). Lee (1992) suggests that when African/African American culture is used as a means for educating Black children, research shows that they flourish. Africentric educationists believe that the American public school system is actually designed to maintain the status quo, not to transmit a sense of African agency (Brookins, 1984; Hilliard, 1997; Lomotey, 1978).

Still other Africentric scholars explain that one of the reasons why Blacks have such a difficult time in the American public education system is the mismatch between the cultural standpoints of Blacks and the culture of the schools they attend (Hales, 1997). Africentrics hold that the “achievement gap” is merely a result of the larger problem of societal racism and discrimination, and the schools are not equipped with the right resources to teach Black children. Tharp reports that, “...research indicates that children’s identity, culture, and social experiences are foundations for academic success” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 28). The authors suggest that if African/African American cultural knowledge is not part of the educational enterprise, then Black children will surely fail to reach the higher goal of African agency. Lomotey (1992) posits that children learn best in an environment in which their own culture is the focus of the curriculum (1992, p. 461). Writers seem

to attach more to “general” African cultural knowledge (finding common African cultural themes) rather than advancing a specific culture that people of African descent should choose.

There is an overarching suggestion that Black children are “doomed” from the outset in American public schools because teachers are not equipped with knowledge of African/African American cultural frameworks at all. Lisa Delpit (2001) explains that no one knows the best methods for teaching Black children because no one has been taught what they are. The literature draws one to picture a school where European American children and European American teachers are the majority, yet no one knows the best practices for teaching/reaching European American children. Africentric educationists call for a sojourn of the insidiousness of ignorance of methods and cultures, and they call for a re-conceptualization of Black education in order to help Black students to become productive and producing members of society.

As stated before, Africentric education is not simply concerned with teaching the “3 R’s”, it is the necessary use of method for a complete and total change in the education of Black children. African cultural infusion is important for Black children because the cultures carry within them certain values that have been used to guide the actions of people of African descent throughout time. Africentric educationists stress the importance of an African-centered value system for Black children.

#### *African Values Adoption and Transmission*

African cultures carry within them values and spiritual systems. For example, Akoto (2002) explains that, “religion was unnecessary in African culture when it was practiced before the [European] invasion, because the cultures already

had within them the necessary spiritual and values systems needed for our commune and survival” (p. 7). The Nguzo Saba is a good example of a general Africentric value system used by Africentric educationists. For example, Baba San uses the Nguzo Saba for his African centered school; however, the Nguzo Saba system is not part of the Akan system, which Baba San uses in his own personal life practice. “Nguzo Saba” is a Kiswahili word that means, “Seven Principles of a Black Value System.” Dr. Maulana Karenga developed the Nguzo Saba in 1966 as the cornerstone principles of his system of Njia/Kawaida (the way). Karenga’s research included studying several cultural groups on the continent of Africa as he attempted to find ways to concretely demonstrate what an African system is, and how such value systems relate to the cultures of Black people. Africentric educationists believe that Black children need to know the values that have helped sustain the Black community. The seven principles and their popularly used Kiswahili translations follow:

Umoja – Unity

Kujichagulia – Self Determination

Ujima – Collective Work and Responsibility

Ujamaa – Cooperative Economics

Nia – Purpose

Kuumba – Creativity

Imani – Faith

The Nguzo Saba is a frame of reference for Africentric educationists.

Madhubuti (1973) explains that, “Our frame of reference has been reversed from that

of our Afrikan selves to accepting a frame of reference based upon the value system of Europeans and European Americans” (p. 25). Africentrics charge that “...the educational experiences occurring in schools today tend to be conforming with the dispositions and experiences of European American middle class children, for example a focus on dominant cultural values...” (Hales, 1997, p. 190). African value systems serve to recapture the essence of “who African people really are” and what values/principles they used in the past to secure their future. Asa Hilliard (1997) explains that “...in order for African Americans to resurrect themselves, old traditions and values must be used” (p. 69).

Lomotey (1992) explains that “African centered education engenders a reorientation of students values and actions” (p. 456). Africentric educationists believe that Blacks are not acting in their own best interest because they have adopted an alien value system. The Nguzo Saba and other value systems (such as the value systems within African cultures) center Blacks on values that will help to uplift their community. Brandwein explains that “Education [is] the process of transmitting from one generation to the next, knowledge of the values...and all the things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness. Every cultural group must provide from this transmission or it will cease to exist” (1981, p. 3). Africentric educationists are concerned that Blacks have adopted a frivolous value system for two reasons: (1) because of their meager position in American society, and (2) their reactions to and relationship with the system of capitalism. A reorientation of the Black value system that calls upon tradition and culture is critical because if something is not done about

the “inappropriate behavior patterns” (Anderson, 2001) of African Americans, they face annihilation (Shujaa, 1993).

The rationale behind using the Nguzo Saba and other value African value systems seems to be that the inculcation of relevant values will lead to a commitment to the principles and practices of togetherness and collective action. The Nguzo Saba calls for Blacks to build and maintain the communities of which they are a part. Madhubuti explains that “Our survival lies in our ability to operate out of an African frame of reference based upon a proven value system that incorporates a sense of African love and responsibility” (1973, p. 14). This type of transmission leads to a sense of African nationalism.

### *Black Nationalism*

Africentric scholars appear to be asking: what space can Blacks call their own? In the U.S. there are many areas that are designated to certain peoples, for example – in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Washington state, and other places there are “China Towns.” These “towns” are comprised mostly of Asians from China who live in a shared space, own the shops, stores, and schools in those spaces, and support each other’s endeavors. In Miami, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and other places, Latino’s do the same. Finally, in New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, and other cities in the U.S., Jews also adhere to a sort of “communalism.” While Blacks (just as others) live relatively segregated lives (Census, 2000), the question is: “why do they not own and control the areas where they live” (Anderson, 2001; Kunjufu, 1999)?

Africentric education scholar Jawanza Kunjufu's book *Critical Issues in Educating African American Youth* (1999) explores the baffling phenomenon of Blacks, who live in relatively segregated neighborhoods, not owning the shops, stores, businesses and schools in their neighborhoods. In the past, when others (such as politicians and political leaders) have asked why this phenomenon of destitute communities exists, it has not been framed in an educational sense; however, Kunjufu explains that in order for Blacks to take control over their lives, they must be taught how to do so. That is the only way that Blacks will be able to "take control of the psychic and physical space that they call theirs, and [to take agency] over their lives and the institutions needed for their survival" (Akoto, 1992, p. 3).

For Blacks, agency includes the process of "owning and controlling the psychic and physical space that they call their own" (Akoto, 1992, p. 3). Black children must be the catalysts for helping to instill a sense of agency in the Black community because generations before have only been taught how to consume and be dependent upon outside entities (Anderson, 2001). Agency eventually leads toward nationbuilding. Agency and nationbuilding involve the intentional and focused attempt to "develop African youth to be specifically trained to further develop and administrate the state" (Lomotey, 1978, p. 11). Blacks cannot learn to "administrate the state" if they are not equipped with attitudes that teach them that they, in fact, should administer and be agents for Black upliftment. Black nationalism is the carrier of such sentiment, that is, Black nationalism teaches Black children that Blacks constitute a nation (Akoto, 1992). This belief, coupled with the belief that Blacks should liberate and build the psychic space that they call theirs, revolutionizes the

current attitude that permeates Black communities. Lomotey (1978) explains that, "...the American educational system will never meet the needs of African American students because the successful accomplishment of that end is not in the best interest of those who are in power" (p. 11). Carter G. Woodson (1933) suggested that the education that Blacks receive only teaches them to serve in the system, which oppresses them; therefore, they participate in their own oppression. The preceding are a very strong claims, yet they are simple to understand when you consider the principles of capitalism.

Africentric educationists are charged to transition Black children from the "worlds puppets and playthings" (Akoto, 1992) to "thinkers" who are able to build a nation (Akoto, 1992; Asante, 1999; Brookins, 1984; Doughty, 1973; Hilliard, 1997; Lomotey, 1978; Ridley, 1971).

Anderson explains that Blacks are the number one consumers in the world, "...as a group, last year [they] spent over \$500 billion. A dollar turns over once in the Black community, it turns over six times in the White community, five times in the Asian community, and seven times in the Jewish community," C. Anderson (personal communication, March, 2002). Africentric education scholars purport that the principles and practices of Black nationalism will transmit a sense of agency to Black children, (and thereby) Black communities. The American public education system is not preparing Blacks to be producers and controllers of their own destinies. Africentric educationists call for Blacks to be equipped with the tools they need to bring themselves out of the "spending cults" they are in, and into a world of productive activity.

Black nationalism is radical concept when compared to the present order. But, when viewed through the lens of Africentric self-preservation, it is not so politically charged. Furthermore, nationalistic sentiment parallels the behavior of other groups in society – they live in relatively segregated areas (according to the Census 2000), and they build and maintain institutions to perpetuate themselves and their culture (Asante, 1998). In order for Black nationalism to work, and in order for a sense of agency to be transmitted to people of African descent, they must be properly organized and prepared to take on such responsibility (Akoto, 1992). The literature identifies nationalistic community building as a call for Blacks to build institutions that will sustain African life.

#### *Community Control/Institution Building*

Community control involves making important decisions about the institutions that exist in one's community. Institution building involves creating the necessary agencies that are designed to "impart knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to survive and progress" (Doughty, 1973, p. 3). Independent Black institutions (IBI's) were designed for the purpose of creating the necessary agencies designed to serve the interests of the Black community. According to Doughty (1973), "...the belief can be maintained that the masses of Black children will show significantly higher achievement rates in separate, independent, Black schools, not in desegregated or integrated schools" (p. 111). Doughty claims that power, ideology, relevant curriculum, and sound instructional practices are important concepts that are properly transmitted in IBI's. Lomotey points out that there is some evidence that suggests that Black children in IBI's perform above the normal

standard. Lomotey (1978), and Ratteray (1990) found that Blacks in IBI's score higher on standardized achievement tests. These findings (among other observations and perceived cultural needs) lead Africentric educationists to believe that it is optimal for Blacks to attend IBI's.

The assumption made by Africentric educationists seems to be that Black-owned and controlled education systems "...will eliminate the injustices and miseducation of the present educational system, and create a strong basis for change in the lives of people of African descent" (Doughty, 1973, p. 3). Africentric educationists do not believe that education should be solely for personal gain. The goal is to change the entire community, but in order to do so, Africentric scholars desire a generation of Africans that are taught from a perspective that is "self-centered." Lomotey (1978) explains that, "IBI's are a vehicle for community development..." (p. 35). Lomotey and others believe that if Black children are imbued with a sense of agency, (which includes owning and controlling all of the institutions in one's community), they will eventually take control of their own destiny – which adheres to the principle of kujichagulia (self-determination).

The rationale behind the imperative of community control and institution building is most simply stated by Haki Madhubuti, "Either a people prepare their youth to be responsible and responsive to their own needs, or someone else will – for their needs" (1973, p. 30). Africentric educationists believe that Black children should be taught to take control of their communities because the current arrangement, (which is apartheid-like), is dehumanizing, demoralizing, and lends to low self-esteem. The idea is that self-made and self-controlled institutions are more

likely to produce “self-interested” results. Lomotey (1978) sums up the idea by explaining that:

...the American educational system will never meet the needs of Black students because the successful accomplishment of that end is not in the best interest of those who are in power. What we are suggesting then is that public education in the U.S. has not worked in the best interest of African American people. Some of us have consequently concluded that an alternative (the IBI) needs to be developed in order to address the specific needs of African American children. (p. 11)

As stated before, the ability to control the institutions in one’s community is tantamount to having control over your own destiny. Africentrics hold that if someone else builds and controls the institutions in the Black community, then Blacks are at the whim of those who control those institutions (Asante, 1980, 1999; Hilliard, 1997; Lomotey, 1978, 1992; Madhubuti, 1973). African community control and institution building bring Blacks closer to being in control of their own destinies. Africentric education appears to be a fairly simple call for Africans to be taught to control their own lives. It follows though that since the adults in Black communities have been miseducated (Woodson, 1933) a process of reclaiming responsibility and resurrecting the race must take place in schools for generations to come. Africentric educators worry though, because schools train, they do not educate.

*The Call for Education, not Schooling/Training*

Psychologist Na’im Akbar (1996) explains that training is a process of teaching someone or something how to “do something.” Akbar uses dogs as an

example, he says, "...you can put a sweater on a dog and teach it how to stand on its hind legs so that it can entertain you...but, an educated dog knows that it needs to hunt for its food, and defend itself against attackers" (p. 1). Africentric educators purport that the same is true for human beings, that they can be trained, educated, or both. Africentric educationists worry that all too often, Black children are trained, not educated. Brandwein (1981) explains the difference between education and schooling/training, he says, "Schooling teaches the Black child to conform to the needs and interests of someone else...Education, on the other hand, is an enterprise that affects all of life and living..." (p. 46).

Woodson (1933) explains that "...[African Americans] have an attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own as well as their mixed schools, they are taught to admire the Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and taught to despise the African" (p. 1). This behavior explains why Africentric educationists believe that Blacks must have an African-centered education. Hilliard (1997) explains that schooling does not transform individuals. He states, "...we can expect little more than schooling from America's public institutions, we cannot expect education for our transformation" (p. 7). The purpose of schooling is to maintain the status quo (Lomotey, 1978). Obviously, Africentric educationists are unhappy with the status of Blacks, so they call for true education for Black children. Lomotey (1992) explains that the competitive and individualistic principles of capitalism present an ironic challenge to the goals of diverse groups of people attempting to uplift Black children from educational malaise.

The goals of Africentric education do not seem possible unless Blacks begin to receive true education – which is primarily “knowledge of self” (Akbar, 1996). Knowledge of self is inclusive of information pertaining to one’s personal identity, their group identity (Pan Africanist), cultural identity and recognition, appropriate and proper values, a national plan/agenda for betterment, and the building of institutions to perpetuate “self.” According to Lomotey (1992), it is improbable that the education that Blacks receive in public institutions will ever reform itself to the point that Blacks receive the tools that are necessary for them to have agency over their lives. For this reason, Africentric educationists call for a revolutionary re-conceptualization of Black education.

### Chapter III *Research Design and Methodology*

#### *Research Genre*

The complexity, and to some, novelty of Africentric ideology requires the collaboration of traditional research genres and less traditional genres for research design. The design, implementation, and analysis of this research combines reconceptualized critical theory as presented by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) and Africalogy as developed by Asante (1990). The combination of both theoretical considerations is crucial because they seek to resolve intensely conflicting modes of research, that is, the traditional modes demand adherence to the developed and developing rituals of the qualitative discipline, while Africentric theorists demand methods that are “wholly consistent with the unique position of African Americans in American society” (Asante, 1990, p. 147). In this research I advocate for what I identify as the imperatives of Africentric theory and education and I employ reconceptualized critical theory as a basis for examining Africentric education practice.

Critical theory is best understood as “an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 291). Simon and Dipbo (1986) point out that critical work is “situated, in part, within a public sphere that allows it to become the starting point for the critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulation” (p. 10). In the past, critical theory has conjectured that all human enterprises are shaped by economic forces, particularly those of capitalism (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). More recently, social and historical forces such as

race, politics, and economics have been included in critical discourse. This *reconceptualized* version of critical theory “questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the nations in the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). Educational disparities between Black and European American children have become part of the national discourse as disparities persist (Maryland Institute for Urban Education, 2001). Meanwhile, the world moves more toward global interaction and competition leaving Blacks in “last” place. Critical theory has been used to help uncover such problematic injustices faced by “minorities” in the American educational system.

Issues of social justice are paramount for researchers employing re-conceptualized critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). In explicating concerns for social justice and responsibility in qualitative research, Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2000) explain that, “Our responsibility in this work, as we see it, is not to feed the dismantling of the state by posing a critique of the public sector as it has been seen, but instead to insist on a state that serves its citizenry well and responsibly” (p. 122). Most ‘states’ mandate in their individual constitutions a free and adequate public education for all citizens. Critical review of the practices of “the state” has found discriminatory discrepancies in the degree to which “all citizens” receive an adequate education. In the case of this research, Africentric scholars and educationists call for enactments and advance proposals that are meant to provide holistic and culturally relevant learning for Black children, and I advocate for their enactments and propositions; however, a critical lens is an important tool not just for

examining the practices of the state, but must also be applied in the context of examining Africentric practice. Since Africentric ideology has become popular as a means for seeking social justice, at this stage, viewing Africentric education practice through a reconceptualized critical lens means understanding how it *can* serve as a tool for advancing justice for Blacks so as not to “dismantle” it during its infancy stages.

The complexities of examining a disenfranchised community by using a mainstream critical paradigm must be properly moderated – for this reason I also adopted Africentric research methods as a tool for analysis. Some Black scholars call for appropriate and relevant research methods for examining Black phenomena (Asante, 1988, 1990, 1998; Doughty, 1973; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 1997; Lomotey, 1978, 1992; Richards, 1989; Ridley, 1971). Asante (1990) has developed Africology as a research genre for analyzing and interpreting Black phenomena. Africology is defined as, “The Africentric study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa” (p. 14). Asante explains that the “mere study of phenomena of Africa is not Africology but some other intellectual enterprise” (p. 14). Therefore, the most important element of Africentric research is that it is “Africentric.” Africentricity literally means, “...placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” (Asante, 1998, p. 2). In other words, Africentric researchers are able to view phenomena with crucial reference to African history, traditions, and culture – which informs analyses and interpretations of events and data. Asante provides insight into the shape of the discipline of Africology:

Centrism, the groundedness of observation and behavior in one's own historical experiences, shapes the concepts, paradigms, theories, and methods of Africalogy. In this way Africalogy secures its place alongside other centric pluralisms without hierarchy and without seeking hegemony. As a discipline, Africalogy is sustained by a commitment to centering the study of African phenomena and events in the particular cultural voice of the composite African people. Furthermore, it opens the door for interpretations of reality based in evidence secured by reference to the African world voice. (p. 12)

The Africentric research method requires personal examination and reflection for the purposes of revealing biases and to ensure trustworthiness and verification of research. The method insisted that I examine myself introspectively and retrospectively. During introspection I questioned myself in regard to Blacks in the U.S., the educational system, and complex cultural questions, such as “what culture do I practice and why?” I reflected and kept a journal on the topic of Africentric education before beginning this research project. Asante recommends retrospection, as well, and during retrospection I questioned myself after the project was completed to ascertain if any personal obstacles exist to a fair interpretation.

The Africentric research method also requires that researchers become familiar with the phenomena being studied. Cultural and social immersion is preferred over “scientific distance.” Asante explains that, “This [immersion] process in itself is extremely difficult because it means that the researcher must have some familiarity with the history, language, philosophy, and myths of the people under study” (p. 27). Cultural immersion helped ensure that I understood the ethical value

of the research. I was able to immerse into most elements within the cultural community. Immersion also served as a tool that helped me to develop an appropriately informed lens for understanding the researched, and aided in helping me to gain some appreciation for my informant's folkways and mores. I believe that my decision to immerse into the cultural community was crucial to helping me gain perspective into their internal operations. The Africalogical research method demand for *introspection* helped me to ensure that I understood and properly unveiled and dealt with my biases and pre-judgments, retrospection has helped me to ensure fair and accurate reporting along the way, and the cultural immersion has led to two-way learning. The abovementioned methods are essential for Africentric research because they have helped me to ensure fair and accurate reporting, and they have helped me to generate a culturally relevant research project. These methods are also "lens shaping", that is, they have affected the way that I view this community.

The Africalogical research genre requires that research be "culturally relevant" to the population being studied. This means that research should be wholly considerate of the "cultural frame of reference" (as coined by Ogbu, 1993) of those being researched. Africalogical research does not suggest some posture of cultural or racial "neutrality." Instead, Africalogists are cognizant of the ways that traditional research methods have resulted in the maintenance of the status quo. Asante argues that, "One of the most subtle forms of racism is in the use of terms like objective, neutral, color-blind, and nonracial to refer to openness of the psychological/cultural system" (p. 188). The idea is that the system is already based on racial stratification and regardless of how "nonracial" certain approaches may seem to be, the hegemonic

system operates on default. Ronald Walters (1990) clarifies the sentiment by positing that one of the impulses of imperialism is to “create other systems in its own likeness, not only to serve its economic interests but to reflect its particular brand of political philosophy as right and virtuous by the establishment of similar institutions” (in Asante, 1990, p. 188). Africalogy also informs critical and postmodernism paradigms by informing researchers of why those perspectives fall short of providing the necessary tools for examining Black phenomena.

While many research genres decry the use of “grand narratives” and determinism, Africalogists view such decrying as obstructions to true and eventual emancipation for Blacks. The Africalogical research genre holds that “One cannot study Africans in the United States or Brazil or Jamaica without some appreciation for the historical and cultural significance of Africa as source and origin” (Asante, 1998, p. 15). The practices and beliefs held by school leaders at National Africentric School (NAS) exemplify the importance of knowing the historical and ideological source of the group under study. In this case, I was compelled to comprehend the culturo-ideological practices and rituals of leaders within NAS as a way to understand the values and agency transmission processes in Africentric schools.

### *Methodology*

NAS, located in Washington, DC, was selected as an appropriate locale because of its popularity among Africentric educationists as a model Africentric school in the United States. Participant observations and informal interviews of the founder (Kojo) and other NAS leaders were conducted in classrooms, during meetings and conferences, during school rituals, and during a summer cultural

experience (called Nyansa Nana Nom-NNN). I also interviewed Kojo and various participants throughout the study.

In keeping with the demand of personal integrity in research, and the demands of the Africalogical research genre, I adopted the position of advocate for the imperatives of Africentric education. However, personal integrity and requirements for trustworthiness of qualitative research call for the “refining of working hypotheses as an inquiry advances in light of negative or disconfirming evidence” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202); for those reasons I adopt a critical posture for examining school practices. That is, the research design and methods for this study employs the critical theoretic perspective for interpretation, while I advocate for the theoretical propositions made by Africentric theorists. As advocate for theory and critic of practice, Africentric education methods and practices are examined using not some outsiders’ ideological standpoint, but instead I was able to competently and fairly use insider logic and beliefs to critically examine practice. The combination of these theoretical considerations is optimal because it allowed for examination of this phenomenon from the position of insider as advocate of the goals and propositions of the theory and outsider as critic of praxis.

### *Research Tradition*

This research employs an Africalogical critical ethnographic case study as the qualitative method as coined by Asante (1990), Quantz (1992) and Stake (2001), respectively. Asante explains the importance of introspection, retrospection, and knowledge of African/African American culture for researchers attempting to examine Black events and phenomena (p. 27). Quantz illustrates that critical

ethnographers work for material, not just theoretical and symbolic transformation (p. 466). Stake argues that the intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case study techniques allow researchers to understand particular cases and their nuances, and allows for the investigation of particular phenomena (p. 437). These methods form the Africalogical critical ethnographic case study design.

*The Africalogical Method.* The Africalogical method was useful as it allowed me to continuously consider and be informed by the present and historical psychological and material conditions in the Black community. This method prevented me from approaching informants without proper consideration of who the informants actually “are” in the context of history. In other words, I was forced to learn who Black people are, and to grapple with how they have arrived at their present “locations.” Asante (1990) explains that, “One cannot study Africans in the United States or Brazil or Jamaica without some appreciation for the historical and cultural significance of Africa as source and origin” (p. 15). The Africalogical method requires a certain “discipline of mind” because it incessantly negates attempts to understand Black people in a historical “vacuum.” Asante (1999) explains that the research of scholars who are uninformed of Black history and culture “...is rejected outright because it disconnects the African in America from thousands of years of history and tradition” (p. 15). I proceeded with introspection once I understood the perspective of who students in the school actually “are” from a historical perspective (Asante, 1990).

Introspection is important in Africalogical research because it unearths hidden or underlying assumptions relating to the topic. “Introspection means that the

researcher questions herself or himself in regards to the topic under discussion” (Asante, 1990, p. 27). Spradley (1980) also explains introspection as an important ingredient for ethnographic research. He states that introspection is a process of “looking within [yourself] to assess how [you] feel about certain experiences” (p. 37). I began this research with a journal of introspection as a means for ascertaining any obstacles to proper conduct of the Africalogical project. As the project ensued, I remained introspective; that is, I consistently considered what mental and/or physical obstacles could possibly hinder the research endeavor. I did not continue with the journaling once I was comfortable with questioning myself, my thoughts, and constantly trying to remove some personal biases. Once the research project was complete, I engaged in retrospection, meaning that I have attempted to do as Asante has prescribed, to “...question [myself] after the project is complete to ascertain if any personal obstacles exist to a fair interpretation” (1990, p. 27). I have found that the Africalogical method engenders a reflective researcher. I remained constantly conscious of my intentions (though sometimes good and sometimes biased), I also remained conscious of Black history and culture throughout the research process. These (aforementioned) reflective practices complement the ethnographic requirement for meaningful and rich descriptions of cultural group customs, which I was able to do because I was granted sufficient access to the cultural system.

*The Critical Ethnographic Method.* The critical ethnographic method combines critical theory and the discipline of ethnography. Critical theorists hold that, “...schools, as venues of hope, can become sites of resistance and democratic possibility” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 280). In the case of this research, the

critical posture acted as “method” as I examined the school’s ability to act as a venue of hope and to “...serve its [students] well and responsibly” (Fine, Weiss, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 122), by adhering to the imperatives of Africentric education as advanced by Africentric educationists and scholars. As Africentric educationists and scholars continue to advance the imperatives of Africentric education for the purpose of emancipation, this research critically examined the practices of school leaders. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) explain that, “Those who seek emancipation attempt to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community” (p. 282). The attempt to “critically uncover” Africentric practice as a tool for emancipation is best investigated by the precepts of ethnographic research.

Ethnographic methods were suitable for this research because of my desire to examine the culture of an Africentric school. The findings of this research also clearly indicate that without becoming submersed in the daily life and cultural practices of the people involved, I would not have been able to understand the culture of those involved. Creswell (1998) explains ethnography as:

[A] description and interpretation of a cultural or social group system. The researcher examines the group’s observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life...As a process, ethnography involves prolonged observation of the group, typically through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people or through one-on-one interviews with members of the group. The researcher studies the meanings of behavior, language, and interactions of the culture-sharing group. (p. 58)

The combination of the critical theoretic perspective and ethnographic methods generate “critical ethnography.” Quantz (1992) defines critical ethnography as “...a discourse, a form in which a researcher utilizing field methods that place the researcher on-site attempts to re-present the “culture,” the “consciousness,” or the “lived experiences of people living in asymmetrical power relations” (p. 448). Critical ethnography made it possible to examine some aspects of this phenomenon in an in-depth and delicate fashion, which has provided for rich descriptions of the cultural system. Quantz explains the difference between ethnography and critical ethnography:

Whereas the traditional ethnographer understands the ethnographic project as either complete or in itself as a part of the idealist project of ethnology, the critical ethnographer sees the ethnographic project as an aspect of critical theory, which must eventually be completed in political and social action. (1992, p. 467)

The critical ethnographic method used in this research complements Asante’s position on the importance of employing Africalogy when studying events involving Black people because it is aligned with the requirement to consider history as an important variable for analysis. Quantz explains that, “...all evidence, supporting or refuting [hypotheses and assumptions] must be considered within historical/structural conditions and pointed toward emancipatory possibility” (p. 473). The Africalogical and critical ethnographic methods served as optimal research tools for examining Africentric education. In this study I used both methods since critical ethnography is “recognized as having conscious political intentions that are oriented toward

emancipatory and democratic goals” (Quantz, 1992, p. 449); such goals are aligned with Africentric educators’ desires for Black freedom and independence. Examining a bounded cultural system captured the descriptions and interpretations that are required for an Africological critical ethnographic project.

*A Bounded System: The Case Study.* Case studies are “bounded systems,” that demarcate certain elements as “inside” and others as “outside” a given case. Stake (2000) explains, “It is common to recognize that certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features are outside” (p. 436). The cultural and material elements inside the Africentric school and enterprises that directly affect African agency, are seen as “inside the case,” and elements not seen as having an effect on African agency and the transmission of African centered values are not inside the school and cultural system and are seen as “outside the case.”

Stake (2000) identifies three different types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study is used as the researcher seeks to understand a particular case and its nuances; the case is the primary interest in the research. Stake explains that, “The researcher [subordinates] other curiosities so that the stories of those “living the case” will be teased out” (p. 437). In the instrumental case study, the case is not the focus of the research, instead the case plays a secondary role and advances our understanding of something else. Stake explains that in the instrumental case study, “the case is still looked at in depth, but only to help the researcher pursue the external interest” (p. 437). The collective case study extends the instrumental case study and several cases are examined. Stake explains that

collective case studies are chosen when "...it is believed that understanding [several cases] will lead to better understanding [about] a larger collection of cases" (p. 437).

This is an instrumental case study because the purpose of the study is fulfilled by offering stakeholders an understanding of how the experiences of participants in NAS (which constitutes a particular case) may impact African agency and support the enactment of the values of Africentric education. Understanding this case also advances our understanding of Africentric thought and practice and advances our understanding of how Africentric education may be used to address concerns in the Black community. The use of the Africological critical ethnographic instrumental case study as the overall design has framed the sampling and data collection of this study.

#### *Data Collection Activities*

During the 2001-2002 school year I began my observations informally at the CIBI National Conference in Trenton, New Jersey. In the observations I became aware of the ways that CIBI members interact with each other, the protocols within the community, and relationships among people. The CIBI conference lasted two full days. The conference participants discussed the direction, state of, and purposes of independent Black schools. Then CIBI National Executive Director (NEO) Dr. Mwalimu Shujaa allowed me to attend the executive board meeting. During this same year, I met for the first time, Kojo – founder, principal and teacher at NAS.

I began observing at the school in the spring of 2002 when I met Kojo's daughter Maya and most of the teaching staff. In January of 2002, I met with Kojo to discuss my observation schedule. He let me know that it would be "tentative"

because things change at the school. In other words, the school does not run on a tightly regimented schedule – as things come up (such as various events, e.g. the Million Man March) they are flexible. I visited the school several times between January and March 2002 in order to become familiar with the environment and the people. In March 2002 I began my informal interviews and classroom observations, which I conducted one to two times per week (depending on the changing schedule). It did not prove to be beneficial to visit the school on a set pattern (such as every Tuesday and Thursday at 9AM) because various ceremonies, rituals, drum classes, etc. took place at unscheduled times on occasion. I continued observing in the classrooms and school-based meetings throughout the spring semester. Although I was not allowed to take notes at the school staff meetings, I attended four of them and was highly informed about some of the politics between various leaders and teachers within the school by attending those meetings. The first two meetings lasted two and a half hours, the second one lasted three hours, and the last one I attended in April 2002 lasted almost four hours. I made seventeen classroom observations all lasting 1 hour over a four-month period from March through June. I originally planned to attend two classes per week, but other activities (such as conferences, etc.) offered more insight into the cultural picture and the transmission processes used by the school leaders. I spent five months at NAS simply trying to understand the context of the school, what Africentric ideology is in practice, and learning who people are generally.

In March 2002, I attended the CIBI Annual Science Fair in St. Louis, MO. The science fair lasted two full days, and featured impressive hands-on science

projects of students from CIBI institutions around the country; it also featured speakers who explained CIBI's stance on the purposes of education – which include sovereignty and nationbuilding. There were approximately 100 students (grades 5-8) in attendance at the CIBI conference.

I attended the *NAS Return and Retrieve It Conference* in April 2002 and April 2003; each conference was three full days. The conference featured cultural presentations and relevant cultural discussions that informed attendees of the important cultural issues in the African world. Some of the issues they addressed include the co-optation of certain African leaders, reAfricanization, media, and African cultural commercialization.

In late June 2002, I attended NNN, which lasted seven full days (See Appendix A). NNN featured NAS leaders and others practicing a variety of African cultures. Nationbuilding was the key concept in discussions at NNN. Much of what goes on in classrooms and at other functions is put in context at NNN. Data were compiled as a result of more than two hundred hours of observations at the school and other aforementioned events.

#### *Classroom Observation Post*

Classroom observations allowed me to collect data on what values of Africentric education are being used/espoused in classrooms. Classroom observations also allowed me to conceive how a sense of agency toward the goal of nationbuilding is transmitted to students. I observed various classrooms while at NAS. Kojo teaches middle school grade level children. By observing him I was able to understand how the espoused cultural values translate from the complexities of

theoretical postulation to “ground level” transmission to students. Most of the time I was allowed to observe, but a few times I was called upon to participate by helping students. Classroom observations also allowed me to gain some understanding of how teachers relate to students and vice versa. Classroom observations helped me to understand the unspoken rules of behavior within the cultural community. Unspoken rules include understandings about using hostile and inappropriate language and certain popular culture body movements and gestures. Classroom observations were conducted at NAS to increase my own understanding of Africentric education practice.

#### *Participation in Rituals*

I participated in rituals at NAS, meetings/conferences, and during NNN. Ritual participation is key to being able to understand the precepts and underlying assumptions of the NAS leadership. The rituals in which I participated during NNN were powerful experiences. The rituals took me from knowing about Africentric education to truly understanding it and its placement in the larger agenda items of the cultural community. Ritual observation as opposed to participation creates skepticism among participants. My decision to participate helped build trust between group members and myself. Members attempted to help me understand the meaning of rituals, which also helped to bring about a sense of trust and closeness. I participated in rituals at NAS, at the *Return and Retrieve It Conference*, the annual CIBI Science Fair, and at NNN.

### *Observation at Meetings and Conferences*

I attended some of NAS' open meetings, and I was also allowed to attend some closed meetings in which NAS leaders participated. Observations at meetings gave me a perspective of the lived relationships between NAS leaders and parents. Meetings also helped me to understand the relationships between various actors in the cultural community. While I was an "intruder," and was often identified at the meeting, but once the meeting started and people became focused on the issues being discussed, participants tended to pay little attention to my presence, which made meeting observations much richer. I did a fair bit of traveling to attend conferences that were associated with NAS. The conferences revealed the overall purposes of the cultural community, and offered a sense of the national agenda and interconnectedness among other members of the cultural community. Conference attendance also allowed me to become familiar with members of the cultural community by aiding in the trust-building aspect of conducting effective ethnographic research. That is, my attendance at conferences enriched my own learning, but also made me a familiar face among members across the country. I observed during the NAS Teacher/Parent Night, NAS Staff Meetings, CIBI Meetings, CIBI Science Exposition, the Return and Retrieve It Conference, and the Teacher Development Institute Training Meeting.

### *Participant Observation and Cultural Practice at Nyansa Nana Nom*

Attending NNN was not part of my original observation plan. Kojo told me about the cultural experience, I attended, and I learned a great deal about this community's cultural practice while there. I learned about the cultural practice by

joining in as a cultural participant. During NNN I was able to discuss many of the ideas I had about Africentric education with many different people. The opportunity to practice the culture of NAS leaders gave me an “inside” perspective for understanding the goals and practices of this community. I was able to observe just as much as anyone else at NNN, but the requirement is cultural practice, in which I fully engaged to obtain the perspective of insiders.

#### *Observation and Informal Interviews of Informants*

Throughout my experience at NAS and NNN I observed and informally interviewed Kojo, Maya, other school leaders and students. Observations and informal interviews helped me to understand the different ways that participants understand their cultural practices. Informal interviews included asking questions that clarified why certain rituals are done and why certain languages are used to describe things. Because new and unfamiliar words were used continuously, it was important for me to (informally) ask staff what various things meant. I made it a habit to always ask a few people what certain symbolic things meant (such as the dance rituals) for the purposes of conducting member checks and attempting to understand certain cultural practices.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

In designing this study, I considered Schwandt's (2000) question, "How should I be toward these I am studying?" (p. 203). The critical theoretic perspective engaged me in the study, and discouraged me from being an "unattached, objective observer" (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 124). I adopted the stance of being an active participant, which made my role in this research collaborative in

nature. In some ways I did not have any choice but to collaborate, because spectacle observation is viewed as “suspicious.” I chose to work in “cultural and social immersion as opposed to ‘scientific distance’” (Asante, 1990, p. 27), that is, alongside Africentric educators who are attempting to improve the academic and life achievement of the students.

I believe that this examination of NAS Africentric school is a critical step for understanding how Africentric education may serve as a possible corrective for some of the challenges in the Black community. Because ethnography looks intensely at a “cultural system”, I conducted an ethnographic study of a longstanding Africentric school, which will provide some insights into how the Africentric school transmits values and agency. Knowledge of such transmission will surely be of assistance to the larger society and especially the Black community. The data collection procedures (as discussed below) support the specifics of the investigation.

#### *Data Collection*

Spradley (1980) suggests that ethnographic research is the work of describing a culture (p. 3). Malinowski (1922) states that the goal of ethnography is “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, and realize *his* vision of *his* world” (p. 25). Ethnographic data collection is not the act of “studying people,” instead, as Spradley suggests, it is the act of “learning from people” (p. 3). Stake’s posit that the “qualitative case study is characterized by researchers spending extended time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (2000, p. 445) creates a perfect union between the characteristics of ethnographic and case study research. That is, I developed an

understanding of the “native’s” point of view by spending extended quality time with the case and by being open to participate in various cultural activities.

Asante (1990) provides necessary “coloration” for ensuring that the ethnographic case study data collection methods are Africalogical by insisting that researchers be (primarily and most critically) informed of the “history, language, philosophy and myths of the people under study” (p. 27), and that researchers engage in introspection and retrospection. The collection of data for this study adheres to the tenets of what I coin as an Africalogical critical ethnographic instrumental case study. For five months, I met with, interviewed, and observed the actions and interactions of school leaders and other key participants of this case. Over the course of a year and a half, I also engaged in formal and informal dialogue with other stakeholders (such as the CIBI executive directors and parents) in order to provide the rich, thick descriptions that are characteristic of ethnographic studies.

*Observation.* Observation is a key method of ethnographic research, and was a most critical element of this research. Spradley (1980) identifies two reasons why the participant observer comes into a social situation to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation (p. 54). Active engagement in activities in the school is important because it created a higher level of trust between the participants and I, and it satisfied Asante’s (1990) requirement that Africalogical researchers culturally and socially immerse, as opposed to keeping ‘scientific distance’ (p. 27). Observation of the activities, people, and physical aspects of the school was a central component for analysis in this study. Angrosino and de Perez (2000) identify observation as “the

fundamental base of all research methods” (p. 673). The observation technique is critical in this research because the task of seeking to understand meaning through the cultural context of the school was made possible by constant participatory interaction and dialogue with those in the culture, which also allowed me to simply “be among” those I was interested in understanding. Participatory observation put me “in the midst” of the cultural scene, as opposed to on the fringes, which helped me with interpretation of cultural system nuances. My actual engaged participation ranged depending upon the setting.

I used observation techniques that ranged from passive participation to active participation (Spradley, 1980, p. 59). Spradley defines passive participation as an enterprise where the ethnographer is “present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent” (p. 59). This (observation post) technique was useful at times when the participants were engaged in certain ritualized activities such as meetings, pledges, or when values transmission was occurring via disciplinary/corrective means. There were other times when certain rituals called for me to actively engage, such as during the summer NNN. Spradley defines active engagement (or participation) as an endeavor where the ethnographer “seeks to *do* what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behavior” (p. 60). Active engagement can help place the researcher in the same “psychological mode” of participants, which helped with interpretation of cultural events, because interviews are not always sufficient means for interpretation.

*Interviews.* Fontana and Frey (2000) explain that interviews “[have] always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers” (p. 645). Although researchers must be careful not to assume that interviews convey the whole of meaning, interviews are an essential ingredient in ethnographic and Africological research because they help the researcher begin to more fully understand what things mean to participants (Asante, 1990; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Spradley, 1980). This research incorporated structured interviews with Kojo that included attempts to more fully understand his stances on important issues. I also employed unstructured interview techniques (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Unstructured interviews allowed me to ask questions during rituals and activities for the purpose of checking meaning and providing fuller understandings. During structured interviews I asked Kojo questions pertaining to many of the culturally specific rituals I witnessed. Unstructured interviews are traditional in ethnographic research. Fontana & Frey (2000) explain that, “Unstructured interviewing can provide a greater breadth of data than other types...the traditional type of unstructured interview [is] the open-ended, ethnographic (in-depth) interview” (p. 652). Unstructured (open-ended) interviewing has led to findings in and deeper understandings of what otherwise may have remained uncharted territory. This technique was intermittently employed throughout the study and allowed me to triangulate and understand alternative ways to view cultural events.

The simultaneous use of these interview techniques allowed me to switch my data gathering techniques when called for, and satisfied the need for flexibility that exists in qualitative research methodologies (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; and

Maxwell, 1996). Additionally, technique switching is useful because the research methods for this study had to fluctuate between informal and formal interview procedures, and between informal and formal observation and participation posts.

Spradley (1980) explains that, "...informal ethnographic interviewing occurs whenever [the ethnographer] asks a question during the course of participant observation" (p. 123); formal interviews are more structured procedures, he states that, "...formal interviews usually occur at appointed times and result from a specific request to hold the interview" (p. 124). During data collection, formal and structured interviews were a time for checking for meaning as well as checking in with participants on day-to-day issues that revealed important themes. The above data collection methods fulfill the demands of both the Africalogical and the ethnographic research enterprises and were flexibly used throughout the research endeavor.

Data were collected from the following primary sources: (1) individual interviews with Kojo, conversations, and observations pertaining to the school culture, which took place on and off school grounds, (2) classroom observations, and (3) observations at extracurricular activities and at school-wide and other meetings. A complete schedule of data collection activities is provided (see Appendix B).

*Individual interviews, conversations and observations pertaining to the school culture – on and off school grounds.* Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations between the key informants and I were conducted throughout the study. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data pertaining to participants' perceptions of the meaning of the rituals and practices in the Africentric school. Participants were observed during rituals and cultural practices. I used the formal

interview technique sporadically and when it was necessary. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to an hour, and were audio taped and transcribed. A sample of initial interview questions is attached (see Appendix C). While interviews provided clarity on issues of perception, informal conversations and observations on and off school grounds clarified topics raised in interviews and provided understanding of underlying issues.

*Classroom Observations.* Classroom observations served two purposes in the collection of data for this research. First, classroom observations allowed me to collect data on what values of Africentric education are being used/espoused in classrooms. Second, classroom observations allowed me to conceive how a sense of agency is transmitted to students. I originally planned to conduct one classroom observation in different classroom settings at the beginning and end of each week; however, the school does not operate rigidly by the clock. Instead, I observed in classrooms once per week, and attended several extracurricular functions where the values are illuminated, but not discussed. I repeated visits to some classrooms because of the information gleaned from those interactions. I originally intended to have a student informant and an outside school informant in this research; however, my interaction with people in the cultural community (including students) proved that such interviewing was unnecessary to gather the data I needed. Each classroom observation lasted an entire class period, or approximately one hour.

*Observations at extracurricular activities and at school-wide and other (relevant) meetings.* Observations at extracurricular activities and meetings served three purposes. First, the underlying issues and transmission processes that were not

apparent in classrooms become apparent at functions such as school assemblies, during rites-of-passage programs, at Kwanzaa celebrations, and during events such as the *Return and Retrieve it Conference*. The same is true with observation of faculty and staff meetings, parent meetings, and at school-wide meetings. During meetings, it was not always appropriate for me to take notes, therefore I would immediately journal about the meetings directly after they ended.

The second observation post was at extracurricular activities which provided for a more relaxed environment where teachers, students, and other school personnel interacted in ways that were unseen in the more formal teaching and learning setting. The ability to observe people in different settings revealed underlying ideas that were not apparent in the formal environment of the African centered school. Last, observation of extracurricular activities helped me to examine the true goals of the school as opposed to its stated goals. That is, the stated goals are in line with societal education goals, but the African centered institution has had to balance its needs with the mandates of the U.S. Constitution and the norms of the society. Observation of extracurricular activities provided insight into how the school transmits non-mainstream beliefs and values to students. Observations of extracurricular activities and meetings occurred quite frequently. Observations were ongoing throughout the data collection process.

*Trust Building.* An important part of this research was building trust between myself and NAS leaders, parents, staff, and students. I believe that my first observation at the CIBI Conference in Trenton New Jersey was an important trust builder. The conference offered an opportunity for me to become a part of the group

with no “research” strings attached. I was interested in trying to understand how members of the group interacted with each other, but moreover, as a concerned educator, I was interested in simply understanding how CIBI functions.

I was able to become an insider because I had a genuine interest and concern in the way that African centered education works for Black children. The people involved in NAS are spiritual in their approach to outsiders. After the first observation at the school, I felt that I was suspected of being someone who only had his research interests at heart. Becoming involved in the extracurricular activities at NAS (such as the rituals, NNN, the Return and Retrieve it Conference and other events) made me a familiar face and helped me to gain the kind of trust that was needed to conduct this research. My genuine interest was sensed by members of the community, and in that access was granted. I also believe that my decision to constantly ask them informal, relevant, and informed questions about practices and rituals demonstrated my sincerity and will to help in any way to improve the community.

*Member Checks.* Member checks allow qualitative researchers to verify that what they believe is occurring in a setting matches the way that participants see things. The difference between the cultural paradigm used by NAS leaders and the mainstream cultural paradigm created the need for constant member checking throughout the data collection and analysis process. The rituals and routines of NAS members were complex happenings that I came to understand could not be “assumed upon.” Assumptions usually led to misinterpretations because they are acting in a different cultural paradigm. As I observed practices such as the watoto singing

birthday greetings, I assumed that such greetings were (as in the mainstream paradigm) to simply recognize another year of life for the aging member. After checking with Kojo and Maya I came to understand that birthday greetings allow adults and peers an opportunity to speak to the aging member about ways that they have or have not been a good citizen within the community. The most important part of the birthday greeting is the practice of spotlighting the person to discuss things that the community has noticed about their personality and their individual practices.

In this research, member checking became an imperative serving as proof that there are major differences between the ways that members of this cultural community see things as compared to the mainstream lens. Member checks were conducted formally and informally. During rituals and routines I asked members of the community what things meant. I also asked Kojo what some things meant during formal interviews. Member checking was the most important tool for helping with the difficulty of interpretation due to cultural differences, but also helped in the process of correctly thinking about the data collected.

#### *Data Analysis: An Africalogical Approach*

In ethnographic research, analysis is defined as a way of thinking about the data that have been collected. Analysis is a search for patterns, cultural artifacts, and cultural knowledge in order to discover the relationships that exist among data (Spradley, 1980, p. 85). I combined the traditions of ethnographic research with those of Africalogical, case study research, and Spradley's tools for making sense out of member's meanings.

Maxwell (1996) suggests the importance of beginning data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continuing to analyze as long as the research continues. He states that, “[the qualitative researcher] should only stop analysis to briefly write reports or papers” (p. 77). This research followed Maxwell’s suggestions as a way to adhere to the requirement for continued introspection, (as introspection is a type of self-analysis), and for data management. The ethnographic approach allowed me to build middle range theoretical frameworks. I used the Ethnograph version 5.0 to assist me with the coding (See Appendix D).

*Coding.* Coding involves the use of symbolic analytical markers which helped in the process of creating the themes. I defined and categorized data, which helped me sort through the large amounts of observation and interview notes. Coding was helpful in this research as a way to find patterns and relationships among things (such as people, behavior in certain environments, or statements made).

Because I focused on understanding how African centered schools transmit values and agency, coding of data was guided by the following themes: (1) a focus on the transmission of Africentric values, principles and resulting imperatives, particularly Africentric values and nationbuilding, (2) a focus on the transmission of agency, particularly through the imperative of Black Nationalism, and (3) cultural transmission and meaning. (See Appendix E).

During data analysis, the historical imperatives pertaining to Black people were considered. That is, data were analyzed in consideration of the unique historical journey of Blacks. Asante (1990) explains that the Africological researcher should “use history as the fundamental integrater of data” (p. 31). Asante offers three

important analytical tools for consideration by purporting that Africological research should adhere to the following: (1) it should provide logical explanations of African peoples' experiences from the origin of civilization to the present, (2) it should develop a holistic approach to the role of Africa in world culture, and (3) it should explain the behavior of African people by interpretations and analyses derived from an Afrocentric perspective (p. 31).

The preliminary data were collected with emphasis on creating codes using The Ethnographic data analysis computer program that extrapolated from the imperatives of Africentric education (e.g. Pan Africanism, the value system adoption and Black nationalism). The extrapolation came from initial interviews, observations, meetings, conversations, and extracurricular school activities. During data transcription and analysis, new or modified themes surfaced which were then used to guide the data collection process. This process was cyclic throughout the research process. Charmaz (2000) explains that, "...codes spur the writing of useful memos because they help us to see interrelated processes rather than static isolated topics" (p. 517). (See Appendix F).

*Memo writing.* Spradley (1980) suggests creating fieldwork journals (or field memos). I used the Ethnograph's memo writing function in the data analysis process. Memo writing helped to ensure that the codes I was using were reliable, and it acted as a "bridge" between the coding and the initial written analysis. Memo writing is reflective; it allowed me to begin to understand my own habits of mind as related to the research process. The memo writing helped me to link my analysis with reality. I placed data directly into some of the memos.

Throughout the data collection process memos were utilized in the following ways using the following methods:

1. For recording and reflecting upon emergent codes,
2. For modifying codes when necessary as new data emerged
3. For introspective reflection in addition to journaling
4. For clarifying relationships among codes, and
5. For providing a basis for reflection with regard to how Africentric school leaders and participants transmit relevant values and agency to Black students.

Memo writing included hand written and computer generated notes, which were organized first by dates, then by codes. The computer program assisted me with the analysis process, particular with finding code relationships, building “family trees” to help find subordinate and superior relationships among data, and identifying recurrent themes and patterns in the data. In the data collection and analyses processes, I sought to adhere to the standards of qualitative research and the traditions of ethnographic case study research.

### *Trustworthiness*

Qualitative research is trustworthy when it is dependable, credible, and confirmable. Stake (1995) describes trustworthiness as having “plausibility, consistency, interconnectedness, and accuracy in detail...” (p. 122). Stake further explains that trustworthiness involves, “Prolonged data collection, triangulation, member checks, collection of referential adequacy materials, [and] the development

of thick, rich descriptions” (p.122). I used four strategies to ensure that this research was trustworthy while also remaining cognizant of the study’s limitations.

This research employed four commonly discussed qualitative verification procedures. First, Creswell (1998) describes prolonged engagement and persistent observation as necessary practices for building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation” (p. 201). In this investigation of Africentric education, early data gathered suggested something different from later data gathered. Prolonged and persistent engagement and observation led to the understanding that the way I was thinking about the earlier data needed to be scrutinized (this is discussed in the findings section). Second, Creswell describes the triangulation of information as an important test of trustworthiness. Creswell (1998) defines triangulation as a process whereby “...researchers make use of the multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (p. 202). I applied triangulation of data from interviews, documentation, observations, meetings, rituals, and cultural gatherings to corroborate the imperatives, units, paradigmatic precepts and beliefs, to ensure trustworthiness in this research. Third, Creswell advances member checks as a way for researchers to solicit informants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations of research.

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, member checks were on going as the complexity of various cultural events required consistent input from members of the cultural group for understanding. As required by most qualitative researchers, the process of member checking involved “taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they could judge

accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Stake (1995) advises that participants “play a major role directing as well as acting in the case” (p. 115). Kojo played a major role in checking the accuracy of accounts as I understood them. Last, Creswell states that thick, rich descriptions allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability. Some aspects of this study (such as describing the ethos and aesthetics of the school) required thick, rich descriptions. Details of the ethos and aesthetics of the school should help readers to transfer information about NAS to other Africentric schools with similar operations and structures.

As a critical ethnography, I sought to give voice to “subjects.” Creswell (1998) explains that, “The critical ethnographer begins with the assumption that all cultural members experience unnecessary repression to some extent” (p. 211). In the case of Africentric educators, my intention was to help illuminate their intentions and offer voice to a marginalized community. The findings of my research offer insight into the ways and means of Africentric education practice at NAS.

## Chapter IV *Findings*

### *The Setting*

National Africentric School (NAS) is a private African centered school that was initially a pre K-8<sup>th</sup> grade institution established for Black youngsters. The school is located on a corner block in Washington, DC alongside row houses in a neighborhood predominated by Blacks. There is little grassy space around the school; there is a small dirt and concrete playground in the back with a basketball hoop and a play set (slides, swing sets, climbing bars). On the building are African symbols such as adinkra and ta meri. The building is a combination of brick and wood, and the chosen colors match those of the African unity flag (red, black, green, and gold). The environment of the school is very urban, and its outdoor African themed décor offers a stark contrast from the row houses it surrounds – most of the houses here use colonial styles and colors patterns.

NAS now serves as a model African centered institution for an average of 100 Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> graders who are accepted for admission by the core staff of NAS leaders. The school is part of a larger constituency of schools in an organization called CIBI – the Council of Independent Black Institutions, which was established in 1972.

Parents pay \$350 per month in tuition expenses to attend NAS.

When NAS first opened in 1974 it was located seven houses up the street from where it is now located. The relocation in 1981 was due in part to problems with the landlord, and in part to its increasing student population. Over the past 30 years, NAS has expanded its scope from being a school for Pre-K – 8<sup>th</sup> graders to a school for Pre-K – 12 graders; the school also serves as a cultural center for the community.

*The National Africentric School General Africentric Aesthetic*

Walking into the school is an experience. No grand major entrances, just a hallway, which is entered into directly from the outside. A hallway that is dimly lit, notices appear on both sides of the hallway walls. Some notices are to parents reminding them of various meetings, gatherings, or other important events. Some notices are to students reminding them of their responsibilities to the school community. Teachers and administrators can even find notes on the hallway walls – these walls are bulletin boards for communication. Nothing looks new. The paint is chipping in the hallway. It looks as though the building was painted about 30 years ago, and that few, if any touch-ups have been done since then. The colors are red, black, green and gold, which match the colors of the bendera. The floor is tile; it appears to be swept and mopped, but old.

There is a door between the outside door and the school access door. Once the old access door is opened, you have entered the school you are now in a corridor. There is no fanfare about the school. Upon leaving the entrance corridor and looking to my left, I noted signs ordering me to report to the office. The office is offset to the left of the entrance corridor. Looking to the right of the entrance corridor is an open space called the multipurpose room. The room is big; it is old; and there are African symbols (such as gye nyame, the bendera, metu neter) all over the place. The room looks like it was decorated years ago, things are kept tidy, but again, nothing in here appears new. The multipurpose room's bathrooms display the gender signs "brothers" and "sisters", not boys and girls. Entering the bathrooms (at least the

brothers' room) is cause for pause. An immediate reaction could be that the bathroom is not clean, where are the janitors? The janitors are the teachers, parents, and the students. And since no one's full time job is to clean anything, including the bathrooms, they appear to be cleaned only to the degree to which a person with other major duties would have time.

The office has a telephone, two computers, one full and one part time office attendant, and a large counter that stands between office visitors and office workers. The computers appear to work just fine, but they look old. The phones, file cabinets, carpet, countertop, walls, window air conditioner, curtains, ceilings, lights, and the smell are all old. The people in the office are dressed in clothes that do not appear contemporary. Their dresses are very colorful, and they wear head wraps. There is no sense of "charm" for visitors; they appear to be about the business of the office. They are courteous, but not overly nice. The office has posters and sayings on the walls that reveal a pro Black sentiment. Sayings by prominent and popular Blacks such as Dr. John Henrick Clarke and Malcolm X are posted in plain sight; they say: "If it's not about Nationbuilding, it's not about anything!" "Black Power!" "Always Organize!" Advertisements are available on the desk counter. The advertisements reveal Black cultural events in the local area. None of the advertisements are printed on plain white paper. They also seem to follow a colorful African themed pattern.

Walking out of the office to the right, the multipurpose room contains several large mud cloth pieces and African woodcarvings. There is a slight smell of food in the multipurpose room because this is where students eat lunch. Standing in the middle of the multipurpose room you see the red, black, and green color scheme.

You also see very little lighting, there are small chairs stacked along one wall, a set of stairs leading up, and a door to the back playground on one wall. There are instructions on the walls to all inhabitants: “Be respectful to your neighbor,” “Respect your elders,” “Speak quietly and courteously to others.” Many meetings take place in this room such as parent advisory council meetings, staff meetings, and community meetings. The watoto also have their morning gathering sessions here.

Heading up the stairs from the multipurpose room is the second level of the three level school. The second level looks more like a “traditional” U.S. public school. There are three classrooms on the second floor. There are instructions hanging from the ceiling, most of them instructing students on exactly how they can be responsible. Reminders about respecting your elders, “how we speak to each other, that we do our work, that we follow African principles,” are all posted in plain sight. There is more sunlight in these classrooms than down in the multipurpose room – there are a number of windows. The classrooms appear old; there is less of an old smell in these classrooms than in the multipurpose room though. Pictures, sayings, posters, and other African artifacts abound. The date is written on the board in English and in other African languages. The chalkboard is midnight black, with very neatly written words and phrases: “We are African people”, “Do all of your work”, “Respect yourself”. The restrooms on this floor also display the gender titles “brothers” and “sisters”. The hallway and classroom floors are wooden; they appear old; but a bit better taken care of than the area on the first floor. Mostly middle school students use the second floor. Upon leaving the second floor, I am struck with a sign that reads “NATIONBUILDING.”

Heading up to the third floor, it appears that the staircase needs to be refurbished. The stairs are old and rickety, but students flail around as though things are perfect. The stairs to the third floor lead directly into a classroom area. This floor is carpeted. The ceiling is low in certain areas because of the construction of the building. It appears that the building could have been designed to be a super large row house at one point. The carpet needs to be replaced, the students' desks are old, and on the walls hang huge pictures of Africa and people of African descent. On this floor are also a computer room, an additional classroom, and two office areas. Kojo and other teachers use the office areas. The third floor is used most by the older (high school) students. On the whole, the school appears to be relatively old, but definitely usable, and in need of refurbishment.

The overall look and feeling of the environment at the school encourages African decor, dress, grooming, and speech. All of the walls in the school are filled with reminders that what is going on is African – Peterson Projection Maps (which Africentricists believe portray landmasses more accurately), and pictures of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, the continent of Africa, Drs. Yosef ben Jochannan and John Henrik-Clarke, Elijah Muhammad, Nat Turner, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. All of the students dress in traditional African clothing (such as dashikis (African shirts) and kufi's (African hats) – oftentimes students do not dress in full African outfits, meaning that jeans or slacks may be worn with a dashiki. Featured are young people with natural hairstyles such as braids, hair locks, and afros. Teachers dress in full African attire (African shirt and pants or dress). Kojo dresses in full African outfits. Students are assigned to groups for projects. Group names hang on the walls

including Wolof, Zulu, Xhosa, Dogon, Asante, Ga, Ibo, Yoruba, and Malinke. Kente cloths, huge adinkra symbols, pictures of women and men from African countries are depicted in unity in stairways and on walls.

The aesthetics of the school follow a general Africentric pattern. For example, there are adinkra symbols that represent Ghanaian cultures, Ankh's and Maat, which represent Ta Merian cultures, and mud cloth, which represents Senegalese cultures. Staff members and students dress in clothes from various African cultural traditions.

### *The Staff*

NAS is governed by a core group called "NAS leaders." The school is operated under the "principalship" of one of the founders – Kojo, who is also a member of the core staff of NAS leaders. As principal, Kojo is an influential member of the core staff; however, he is not seen as having ultimate authority. Ultimate authority is granted to the core staff of NAS leaders, which consists of 4 of the original 17 families of NAS (these are literally groups of natal families that got together to create NAS). Heads of these families are the ultimate governing authority of the school.

Kojo is not an authoritative leader. Kojo believes that what is needed is "...working, stable, family-oriented and committed Africans – not charismatic leaders who possess charm, but have little to show for their work." Charisma is viewed as an energy that must be properly channeled because it can become destructive. This finding appeared to be consistent with observations made at NAS. Staff members do not adhere to a belief that a central dynamic figure is optimal for their operation. At

meetings, Kojo contributes by offering talks and he gives input, but he is not seen as having some final authoritative say. Generally, the staff appears to respect Kojo because he has proven his commitment and dedication by the work he has done with family and institution building. Kojo is seen as a “worker”, and work is viewed as a noble, respectable trait. According to Kojo, “Charm is an energy that should be transferred to production.” At NNN, Kojo did not spend many of his hours lecturing to us, instead he spent many hours cutting the grass, shoveling dirt, tilling the soil, and explaining which tree leaves were okay for human consumption. Kojo explains that the root of his perspective and behavior lies in his childhood:

What I experienced in my youth, you know, I was next to last in my family to experience [the] all Black schools. We lived in rural Mississippi – it wasn’t country. We had a cow, we had chickens. We had a farm, a mule. And then our little enclave. We were an extension of the bottom, you know Black folks lived at the bottom where flooding was more of a possibility. There was an enclave of families, about 8 families. The men would get together, when the water lines were down, we got together and took care of things. When things needed to be done, we did them. When my family moved to Miami, it was still a strong sense of community. Folks had a sense to go to college and come back. We were among the last of those that experienced that wholeness of a connected Black community. Every Black person you met on the road back then, you waved at them – gleefully. Simply because you were Black. Things were not simpler, but they were a lot clearer. A sense of accountability was there. I remember having to walk a couple of miles to

school. I remember cursing one day, and a lady said, “I’m gonna tell your grandmother.”

Kojo has attempted to make NAS a family environment. The staff is responsible for all of the general duties around the school (including cleaning). Currently, there are six part time teaching staff and six full time teaching staff members. Also, there is one full and one part time office worker. There is no “service” staff, such as housekeepers, cooks, teacher assistants, etc. Staff must work together to keep the school clean. All of the staff members interact with students, and they are tuned in to personal aspects of student’s lives, and while the teaching staff may instruct a particular grade level of students most of the time, there is fluidity to the grade levels that these staff members teach. Occasionally, students are reminded that teachers have relatively close contact with their parents. Maya said to a student, “You did a good job helping your grandmother last night; now can you sit still in this circle.” Another example of the close relationship between staff and students is that teachers regularly teach class while carrying “troubled” pre-K students on their hips. A family atmosphere is created as teachers sometimes (during class) ask older students to help with pre-K students. Once, Maya said to a sixth grade student, “take him [a pre-K student] to the restroom and help him do his business.” It was evident that most of the staff members were friendly but firm with students, and they have chosen to engage intimately, as opposed to distantly, with students.

One of the staff members is Kojo’s daughter Maya. Maya is a part time teacher at the school. She spends the other part of her days working as a businesswoman. Maya received corporate business training from Howard University

and uses her expertise to assist with many of the business aspects of the school. Maya teaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and, like most of the teachers in the school, she uses the direct teaching technique and call-and-response. She said, “If we run around this basketball court a few times, what will happen to our heart rate?” Maya has no children of her own; however she does have siblings that attend the school. Other staff members have placed their children in the school. It is not evident who in the school is and is not familial related, students treat all teachers as “mother and father” figures. Students refer to female teachers as “Mama” (mother figure), and male teachers as “Baba” (father figure). For example, Kojo is referred to as Baba Kojo.

#### *Foundations of the School*

NAS was founded by a core group of people who wanted to create an appropriate place to send their children to school, so when the school first began with 6 students in 1974, parents literally taught their own children at NAS. Kojo explains that, “We saw appropriate schooling as schooling that placed the needs and interests of Black people at the center of the school’s purpose. The school emerged as a result of the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement.” Popularly known Black activists such as Kwame Ture, Frantz Fanon, and others that came out of the Black power movement on Howard University’s campus influenced Kojo and other core NAS members.

Although the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) influenced NAS leaders, Kojo explains that “we were not interested in using the top-down, staunch, male-centered leadership style of the movement.” There was also a debate within the core group about what the ideological focus of NAS should be. There was agreement that the school should have a nationalist focus with an emphasis on Black sovereignty. The

group wanted to draw upon African traditions to assist with focusing their vision. Kojo explains the reason why NAS leaders strayed from the CRM and towards traditional African culture:

A shortcoming of the CRM was that we lost the community. The CRM did not necessarily facilitate the loss of family; it was the leadership. Too much of the national leadership found themselves and their energies being manipulated and channeled. The goals of the people were simple (freedom from terror, economic betterment, etc.). Integration, however, as a strategy was adverse to that, and electoral politics were adverse to that. Instead of community building, [things like] voter registration, and movement to the middle class took the elite out of our communities and took their efforts toward the mainstream. They decapitated the community. Then, highways went straight through the Black community. When the interstates came through, all of the establishments were lost – the economic heart of the community was ripped out. That was a strategic error on the part of the national leadership due to an incomplete assessment – I would never doubt the integrity of Martin Luther King, but that was a miscalculation.

As a result of core members' desire to connect with African traditions as opposed to joining the more mainstream CRM, the group sent Makia (Kojo's wife) to study traditional African culture. Makia traveled extensively attending workshops, conventions, and engaged in a host of other practices and rituals in the U.S. and in Africa. While Kojo and other members of the core group continued their studies at Howard (Kojo received a Master's degree from Howard), Makia was becoming

familiar with the cultural tradition of the Akan (which is not important for understanding NAS – this complexity will be discussed later). Makia studied with longtime cultural activist Yao Zulu – head of the U.S.’s oldest traditional African drumming group. Kojo explains Makia’s leadership that took NAS leaders towards the Akan tradition:

Makia studied with [Zulu at his famous school] in New York. He had been organizing since the 50’s to establish traditional culture, he had the oldest traditional dance group in the country – using Akan in Ghana. He had a branch in New York. She (Makia) had gone to some of his programs in the city and was impressed with his work here and abroad. This is how Akan became the cultural theme of the school. We don’t advertise that Akan is the cultural theme of the school, Akan informs the cultural direction of the school – we don’t try to sell that to parents, etc. Our principal motivating factor was the establishment of families. Because, you know, we actually thought about opening things like restaurants, clothing stores. We had organic gardening. We purchased the land in Virginia, originally to grow crops and farm, etc. Via Makia, Zulu helped us with, you know, some of the cultural issues.

Zulu was head of a community of Akan practitioners living in New York City. NAS’s Akan cultural focus is a result of Makia’s interaction with Zulu and other Akan practitioners. Currently, Makia does not teach at NAS; she is a practicing physician.

*Mirages*

I spent the first set of observations thinking I understood practice at NAS. At first it appeared that NAS was a public school that also had African cultural themes. Kojo stated the following to students during class, “You have to remember to respect those who came before you.” Respecting the people who come before you is understood by me (and certainly others) as a general call to respect those who are older and/or more experienced than us. I saw statements such as the one above as general mandates that any teacher or authority figure would make on students. When I first heard such statements being made I was unable to put them into the cultural context where they belong. After attending NNN and a number of other extracurricular activities, I am able to understand that the statement is loaded with cultural significance.

Practice at NAS is only decodable if the observer is clued into the cultural significance of events. As the students practiced drumming and dancing, and as I watched adults drumming and dancing I initially believed I was observing a group of people who were interested in having fun. The celebrations were featured colorful dresses, African décor, loud pounding drums, and painted faces. I thought about joining in on several occasions. As I watched the celebration, I smiled and turned to Makia and asked her, “Why aren’t you out there dancing?” She did not smile back. She looked at me and said, “You don’t just dance because you want to, you dance to send and receive messages.” I was curious about Makia’s answer, so I questioned other people about it. I found that the dancing is not done for the purpose of having fun. Though it may be fun, each motion has cultural significance. For example,

hands are waved a certain way to ward off certain spirits. Faces are painted to bring certain spirits in or to impersonate someone from the past. Where I thought participants in such rituals (teachers, students, community members) were merely having loads of fun, they had actually been possessed by an ancestor.

In order to understand what goes on at NAS, one must submerge into the culture. The examples above illustrate the importance of understanding the cultural reasons for behavior. But knowledge of the cultural reasons is not enough, one must submerge to understand from the participants perspective so that analysis is wholly informed. What seems like an ordinary interaction between teacher and student is actually a cultural lesson. What seems like fun and games is a call to the ancestors and/or a worship session dedicated to the Divine.

Much of what I observed at NAS had to be resifted through an African cultural cosmological viewpoint so that it could be analyzed from an appropriate cultural perspective. I saw Mama's carrying babies on their hips while teaching class. As one infant demands Maya's attention she also teaches social studies to a group of students. When I first observed the practice of Mama's teaching while holding babies, I was confused about why the infants didn't simply get babysat by one of the office attendants or someone who was not trying to teach class. I thought having babies in the classroom was a distraction to everyone. The cultural lens I was using did not allow me to understand that Mamas and Babas are constantly trying to teach a lesson about the importance of family and taking care of the young. Their practice is to demonstrate the notion that the children must be cared for; that they must always be at the center of attention. As I submersed into the culture, I begin to understand

Makia's proclamation that, "In European societies, children are treated as if they are a burden, but in African societies they and the elders are the very focus of our concern."

Seeing NAS through an African cultural lens is a requisite for understanding NAS practice. My initial observations were skewed by my cultural lens. Though I thought I was competent and able, I was in fact culturally unable to understand the context of interactions between students and teachers, I was confused about how the school was any different from a public school (add African artifacts), and even though I was informed on Africentric ideology, I was confused about how African cultural philosophy permeated the entire NAS project. My experience at NNN represents a turning point in my understanding of NAS.

#### *A Personal Background Sketch*

During the summer of my college sophomore year I was exposed to Black scholars who seemed to share similar background experiences. I was skeptical when I heard people such as Drs. Asa Hilliard, Molefi Asante and Lisa Delpit speak because I was (somehow) "well trained" to identify Black intellectual criticism and critique and label it as blaming and excuse-making. Because of my training, I was fully able to debunk most of what Black scholars had to say. Although I dismissed them as misinformed and embittered, their scholarship was transforming. After reviewing the scholarship of Black intellectuals, for the first time I understood that I had experienced some level of psychological trauma (because in a sense I hated Black people). While on the road to a better psychological place, I was able to

recognize that many of my colleagues were more like my “traumatized self” than like my “recovering self.” It was and still is devastating.

My initial contact with Africentric ideology helped me to understand complex theories and gain a firmer grasp of what learning and education is all about. As I indicated above, I was confused by “schooling” for years – I could not see the relevance to me or my “world.” In fact, I was bored by formal education and turned off by its nuances until I came into contact with Black scholars. Not all of these scholars would call themselves Africentric. The scholars helped me understand the connection between the power of intellect and its relationship to me – they explained that knowledge creation is part of Black peoples’ tradition. To be clear, they pointed out for me that I was, in fact, interested in learning. After years of exposure to Black intellectuals, I was able to connect myself to academics. Africentric scholarship excited me about learning, helped me to view scholarship from a perspective that properly “centered” me and lifted me from self-hatred. The “newfound” scholarship also helped me to become socially conscious and helped take me from being academically mediocre to the ‘Deans List’.

During the summer of 1991, my mentor exposed me to Africentric research at the Indiana Black Exposition’s Annual “Black Leadership Seminar”. This seminar showcased Black scholars and activists who had profound, and at times, radical messages of unity for the Black community. Presenters included Minister Louis Farrakhan, bell hooks, Oprah Winfrey, Jesse Jackson, Asa Hilliard, Jawanza Kunjufu, Al Sharpton, and Bishop T.D. Jakes. The seminar was the first time that I had heard Blacks speak about the conditions in the Black community. When I returned to

college in the following Fall semester, I encountered Black psychologists Na'im Akbar and Wade Nobles. After hearing the disturbing, but strong and powerful words of these elders, I engaged in a reading frenzy that included the following between 1991 and 1992:

- Na'im Akbar – *Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery*
- Ayi Armah – *Two Thousand Seasons*
- Molefi Asante – *Afrocentricity, The Afrocentric Idea*
- Derrick Bell – *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*
- Anthony Browder – *From the Browder Files*
- John H. Clarke – *Africans at the Crossroads*
- Cheikh Anta Diop – *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology,*  
*The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*
- W.E.B. DuBois – *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Frantz Fanon – *Wretched of the Earth*
- Asa Hilliard – (editor) *The Teachings of Ptah Hotep*
- John G. Jackson – *Introduction to African Civilization*
- George James – *Stolen Legacy*
- Maulana Karenga – *Introduction to Black Studies*  
*The African American Holiday of Kwanzaa*
- Jonathan Kozol – *Savage Inequalities*
- Haki Madhubuti – *From Plan to Planet: The Need for Black Minds/Institutions*
- Wade Nobles – *African Psychology: Towards its Reclamation*
- Ivan VanSertima – *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Early America*

Carter G. Woodson –*The Miseducation of the Negro*

The (above) books, in addition to a number of other books, articles, speeches, and demonstrations were the foundation for my understanding of African centered thought and practice. After a year of study, I began putting what I had learned into practice by becoming active in Black student organizations. In 1992, I became the president of the African American Studies Club (AASC). AASC was a club for African American Studies majors. While I was not an AAS major, (I was a piano major), I was more involved in AAS departmental events than the other AAS students. The department chair of AAS began to mentor me and encouraged me to take on a double major. One year later, I transferred to another university, and adopted an AAS major.

After transferring, in 1994 I became active in Black student organizations, and assumed the role of president of the United Afrikan Organization (UAO) – which is a Black Student Union on campus. While serving as president of UAO for two terms I initiated three longstanding programs. The first was a mentoring program for the city’s “underprivileged” youth. This program sent college students from the campus into the city public schools to act as mentors and tutors. The second initiative that I instituted was the volunteer corps for the African American Academy-AAA (an Africentric school in the inner-city). Volunteers were expected to spend two hours per week helping teachers in the school with their daily duties, and helping administrators with general school functions. The last initiative that I developed was “CATS”, the Coalition of African Tri-state Students. CATS’ goal was to foster meaningful ‘community-building’ relationships between Black college students and

the Black community. As Founder and Spokesperson for CATS in 1995, my career as an Africentric 'education' activist was launched. My goal was to educate the Black community about our need to organize our community and properly and effectively educate our children. CATS still functions; however it is now a national Black student organization.

During the 1995-1996 school year, I appeared in several local and national venues supporting the adoption of the values of Africentric ideology as a means for community improvement. For example, I appeared on MSNBC, C-SPAN, the Washington DC area's News Channel 8, and all of the local channels. I also accepted speaking invitations at Indiana State University, Morgan State University, Georgia Tech, Morehouse College, Ohio State University, Indiana University, the University of Louisville, the University of California at Los Angeles, Central State University, Purdue University, and the University of Maryland at College Park. In my speaking, I took an advocacy position for the principles of Africentric ideology.

While studying and advocating for the values of Africentric ideology, I conceptualized an institution called the "International Center for Worldwide Change" (ICWC). I submitted (written and video) proposals for funding for this institution, and I intended to administer this institution after graduating from college. After graduating from college with a BA in AAS in 1996, I decided to continue developing ICWC. Elders and professors of many cultural backgrounds advised me that more experience and expertise could sharpen my focus and help me to refine my goals. During the 1996-1997 school year I continued serving as spokesperson for CATS, sharpened the goals and vision for ICWC, worked as a public school teacher, and

completed my BS in Education. ICWC work continued, which included a number of engagements nationally, personal connection and consultation with many of the scholars that I referred to above, volunteer work at AAA, and intense study of the educational challenges in the Black community. After completing my Master's degree in Educational Administration in 1998, I relocated to the Washington, DC area to teach and to further prepare for the eventual institutionalization of ICWC (which now operates under a different name). I was surprised when in the Fall of 1999, I received the award of "Living Legend" from the University of Cincinnati before leaving for Washington.

My decision to relocate was centered on my ultimate goal to institutionalize ICWC using the values of Africentric education ideology. After researching, I found that Washington, DC is a critical area for developing such an institution. During the 1998-1999 academic year, I worked as a teacher for the Fairfax County Public School system (FCPS), and continued the process of attempting to procure grants for ICWC. While working as a teacher in FCPS, I was asked to coordinate a cultural enrichment program in the County. My work as coordinator of the program led me to understand the need to broaden my understanding of the educational tribulations of Blacks, and I became more convicted to the dire necessity for substantive change in Black communities.

As a classroom teacher, I usually did not employ Africentric education methods (such as Pan Africanism, and cultural based learning) because I could not figure out how to use the tenets of the ideology for a racially diverse student body. I also felt pressure from knowing that the Africentric and Eurocentric ideologies clash.

However, the few times that I employed Africentric methods in the classroom, I noticed fervent participation and engagement of many of my Black students.

Unfortunately, many of my teacher colleagues (including Black ones) see Africentric education as a threat to the mainstream instead of seeing it as a way to broaden the perspectives we use to understand best practices for teaching and reaching children.

My experience at NAS has helped me to understand the various ways that Africentric education is discussed, which places it on the margins in the field of education. In order to understand Africentric education, one must first take it from the margins, and then attempt to understand it from an African cultural standpoint.

*Toward a Turning Point: An Epiphany*

The training that I received as an educator, an educational leader, and a participant-observer in this study led me to believe that I was informed of how Africentric education works. I was preparing to write about how Africentric education is very similar to public education, but with a “twist” that places Black children at the center of their educational experiences. My own background experiences have offered an extensive understanding of Africentric ideology; however, a personal misunderstanding of my experience in the school coupled with the dearth of formal education on Africentric education offered in teacher education programs nearly led me down a path of erroneous analysis. I reveal the complexities of how I have come to understand Africentric ideology by revealing the following personal background sketch as a way to illustrate a larger point about how the formal education system’s decision to marginalize an entire school of thought can lead to permanent miseducation and systemic problem tautology.

### *Marginalization and Miseducation*

I have come to learn that while I was researching at NAS I had perfect “vision” to see what was happening, but a mental “blocker” that blinded me from understanding anything that was going on in that school. I witnessed classroom teaching, administrative functioning, ritual performance, spiritual events, etc. I was allowed to observe and participate in drum and dance activities. Doors were open for me to examine all aspects of operations at the school. I had perfect vision because there were no closed doors, no ambiguous answers to my questions, no refusals to fully clarify things for me, and no attempts to withhold information (I don’t think). With the exception of a couple of things, full access to the school was granted. I was confident that my write-up would be nearly flawless because all doors were opened, I believe NAS leaders trust me, and at times I was able to even roam freely throughout the school. But there was a major “catch” that I was blind to that deemed my access null and void. The catch was my ignorance of the cultural aspects of what was occurring right before my eyes, which served as a blocker that blinded me from understanding anything I saw.

In some very important ways, Africentric educators have far surpassed their fellow education colleagues in attempting to resolve recurring challenges for Black children in education. NAS leaders have systematized their practice to the point where an act such as examining the school can be embarrassingly un-interpretable to untrained minds. My initial inability to understand and interpret what was going on in the school is in large part due to the fact that the formal education system has marginalized Africentric education to the point where those in the mainstream are

behind in their offerings and understandings. The marginalization of Africentric education has led to a gaping hole between what Africentric educators know and what mainstreamers know and are willing to try. I am struck by how a group of people (such as NAS leaders) can be so marginalized, but have so many more probable solutions than those who choose to marginalize them.

The blinders that existed to a fair and accurate interpretation of NAS was cultural ignorance. I was unable to understand and interpret what I was seeing because everything that occurs in NAS is shaped and fashioned by African cultures. But it is not enough to say that understanding culture helps to inform the observer of NAS phenomena. It is critical to engage in aspects of the cultural practices in order to know anything about what is seen or heard, because using the mainstream (Eurocentric) cultural lens to view such phenomena is insufficient and misleading. In many ways, it appears true that in order to address the plethora of challenges faced by Black children, a proper cultural lens must be applied. I was using a Eurocentric cultural lens to understand the phenomena under investigation, and was therefore almost led to write about the doings and happenings within Africentric education in similar ways that many have – ignorantly and incompletely. The mainstream education system’s decision to keep Africentric education marginalized is the main ingredient for full-fledged miseducation via marginalization. I attended an annual conference held at the school, and through the conference I learned about my “cultural lens” problem. I was able to apply an appropriate lens that forced me to go back and rethink (and in some instances repeat) the activities in which I participated.

A captivating and life changing experience called Nyansa Nana Nom (NNN) enriched my understanding of events happening at the school.

*The Nyansa Nana Nom (NNN)*

NNN is a lived experience that informed me about Akan and other African cultural practices. NNN is not open to all people like NAS. Before arriving I thought I was attending a conference that focused on Africentric education for Black communities. The drive from Washington, DC to NNN was an experience in itself. After leaving the interstate, the directions forced me to dark roads that seemed to lead to more darkness. I was alone, and to be honest, I was afraid because I could not see anything. The NNN access road reminded me of some remote places I have visited in Africa. The directions stated, "Once you get off the main road (a road with one traffic light every mile or half mile), turn onto the small road off to your right." I turned to my right into some tall, dark overbearing trees. I wondered if my car would make it through the rough terrain. I continued to hope that soon I would see some light that would lead me to human beings. No such luck. I saw a small wooden edifice that looked like it had been abandoned years ago. The road became impossible, and after several twists and turns I realized I could not find my way back. I used my mobile phone to call the number I had written down. I said, "I'm lost; the road is dark; could somebody please help me!" The calm voice on the other end said, "Baba Kmt, is that you?" I said, "Yes, it's Baba Kmt, where am I?" She said, "Is it dark?" I said "Yes." She said, "Is the road winding with trees everywhere?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Okay then, you'll be here in about 5 miles." I was relieved but still a bit worried. After about 6 miles, I came upon some cars parked in front of what

looked like a huge plantation house. I made it! Kojo laughed and said, “You thought you were going to the Holiday Inn, huh?” I said, “Yes.” And literally, I thought I was going to some small hotel or conference center somewhere.

There were over 20 participants at NNN. Kojo and his wife Makia were present. All of the teachers from the school, some parents, and some children were present. Some of the participants were alternative cultural practitioners from various places throughout the country. Present were practitioners of the Akan, Ta Merian, Yoruba, Ashanti, and other cultures. It was difficult to ascertain which cultural practitioners were there, and who practiced what, because it is inappropriate to ask people what culture they practice. Most of the participants had been at NNN several times; however there were a few newcomers. The age of most of the participants seemed to range from the mid-20’s to mid-30’s. NAS leaders (teachers, etc.) helped explain the purpose of the experience. Kojo and Makia led the gender groups during “family talk” time. Most of the participants were younger, Kojo, Makia, and an elder from Mississippi named Balihan, were the respected elders. Mwalimu Shujaa (ex-CIBI NEO and college professor) attended NNN as a facilitator. During one session, he worked with the newcomers to try to help us understand the overall philosophy of NNN. NNN is a training ground for Black people wishing to reAfricanize, which is an aspect of the nationbuilding process. Shujaa explained that, “...it is a personal decision whether or not you just wanna be here this year, or be here next year, and the year after that, and the year after that...”

No returning NNN participants, facilitators, nor elders ever seemed interested in selling the idea of NNN to newcomers. Dr. Shujaa’s statement about one’s

personal decision about returning year after year very well represents their stance on proselytizing their beliefs. Kojo explained that "...we don't proselytize because when the student is ready, a teacher will appear. When the ancestors call, you must either go, or betray that which is in you!" The belief is that groups proselytize out of insecurity and a need for numbers and recognition. Returning participants are cordial to newcomers, but since they have no interest in trying to "recruit," they appear focused on self-improvement and cultural renewal.

*Nyansa Nana Nom Structure and Goals: Understanding National Africentric School*

The set up was quite a surprise. An old big house where the plantation master used to live in the 1700's and 1800's, and some cabins made by NNN attendees about 10 years ago where participants (such as myself) lived for the week. I was greeted with a U.S. meal consisting of noodles and meat, salad, and some fruit juice. I was glad the meal was not exotic to me – the place surely was. I had (nor have) no idea where I was. Kojo said,

"We are on an old slave plantation. [NAS leaders] purchased this 240-acre plantation some 30 years ago. We are using the land to build cabins; and we have refurbished the big house. We take care of the trees and plants that surround the big house. We use the resources of the land such as the wood to build crafts and things like that."

It was explained that a goal of NNN is to expose participants to a lifestyle consisting of the bare essentials. Makia stated that, "Most of the resources used by Black people are owned and sometimes even operated by non-Blacks." Kojo explains that NNN offers an opportunity for Blacks to build and maintain on a small

level, in preparation for larger levels. Each day, participants are expected to engage in five major aspects of living: physical, cultural/ideological, personal/family, application of knowledge, and assemblies.

Baba Balihan explained that, "...each year NNN calls African cultural practitioners to the 240-acre plantation for the main purpose of offering reAfricanization and nationbuilding training to Africans who wish to reattach to culture and nationbuild." ReAfricanization/nationbuilding refers to the process and practice of adopting an African cultural system, and using the precepts of culture to take agency over one's environment. At NNN Akan culture is the main example that is used to prepare people for reAfricanization/nationbuilding. However, Akan is not the only cultural example used at NNN.

Aspects of other African cultural communities are used to help with the reAfricanization process. For example, one married couple attending NNN practiced Ta Merian culture. One aspect of Ta Merian culture is the value system of Maat. The seven cardinal virtues (values) of Maat are: truth, justice, harmony, reciprocity, balance, order, and propriety. During NNN, Kojo, his wife, and other NAS/NNN leaders referred to Maat as a system of guiding values that should be adhered to throughout the cultural experience. There was also a Yoruba practitioner at NNN. During NNN, Yoruba dances were done and the Yoruba practitioner explained the meanings behind those dances. She said, "The torchlight [dance] is one we do when the [leader] is coming in." It is seen as an intrusion to ask people of their cultural affiliation (although sometimes they offer to tell); therefore it was difficult to say who practiced what at NNN. Cultural affiliation was more relevant at NNN than at NAS;

however cultural affiliation remained second to the notion that all people of African descent should practice one of the African cultures.

*Life at Nyansa Nana Nom*

I was forced to get over the initial shock of existing much closer to “bare essential” living. I was concerned about sleeping arrangements because the cabins did not appear to be wild animal-proof. My first night at NNN was restless because I was focusing on issues I had little control over, such as being attacked by wild animals. Since I originally thought that NNN was a conference on Africentric education, I wondered why was it necessary for us to go so deeply into the “back woods” just to have a conference on Africentric education. I was slightly irritated because I thought that the idea of being in such a remote location was overkill to replicate some African village concept. The deafening silence and deep darkness were a bit spooky and added to my worries as every single sound I heard was keenly concentrated upon. I heard owls, insects, and the wind knocking up against the cabin – all of the sounds gained my full and complete attention. I slept very little on the first evening. The fact that my roommate (Makau) had attended NNN the year before helped me to relax a bit because he told me that NNN is a completely positive experience and nothing negative has ever happened.

The next morning I was awakened by a bang at the door and someone yelling “maakye” (Twi for good morning). I watched Makau prepare for the day because I had no idea how to prepare. He said, “First, you have to brush your teeth, but not over a sink!” We left the cabin and joined a group of people who were brushing their teeth with standard toothbrushes and toothpaste. We used a water hose to rinse

things. Although I was willing and somewhat open-minded, I was irritated again – this time because I thought our use of the hose was another overkill to seek something African. After brushing our teeth and washing up we moved into the morning routines, which included exercises and breakfast. After breakfast we moved into the cultural/ideological units.

My first clue that this was not an Africentric education conference came when we broke into groups for cultural/ideological sessions. Groups were designed to attend to the needs of group participants depending on their level of African cultural adaptation. Kojo yelled, “All right, Fafanto over here, Ananse Ntonan with Mama Makia, Okodee Mmowere and Nyansapow with Baba Balihan!” Groups ranged from participants who had not chosen a cultural system to participants who had spent years practicing an African cultural system. NNN uses four phases of what they call “attainment and expansion”, that is, attaining and expanding knowledge of one’s culture and awareness of one’s responsibility to nationbuild. Senior members of NNN include Kojo, his wife Makia, a few other NAS staff such as Maya, and members of other cultural communities such as the Ta Merian couple named Mati and Senworset. Senior members have created the following four-phase system for delineating “who’s who” among NNN participants:

*Phase 1*

*Fafanto.* At this phase, new participants seek to define themselves, their life mission in spirit, and begin considering ways to advance family/clan and national development.

*Phase 2*

*Ananse Ntonan.* At this phase, participants seek to study and evaluate significant institutional/national development processes and models (contemporary and historical) within the Afrikan world, and to apply the knowledge acquired to the same or other community institutions. It is here that the mwanafunzi or family identifies and pursues mastery of specific knowledge areas.

*Phase 3*

*Okodee Mmowere.* At this phase, participants seek to assume positions of major responsibility within institutions committed to Nationbuilding and the Sankofa Movement, and therein to apply one's acquired knowledge and skills to their maximal use.

*Phase 4*

*Nyansapow.* At this phase, participants seek to maintain and competently manage positions of responsibility within family, community and society, and the Afrikan world to assume responsibility for the transmission of accumulated knowledge, skills and experiences to one's juniors. (taken from the NNN "Guide for Participants")

The Twi word (such as Fafanto) translates to a symbol that best represents the phase. I was assigned to the Fafanto group; Fafanto translates in English to "butterfly"; Maya explained that, "the goal in this phase is to define self and life mission in spirit, family/clan and national development, but sometimes you find out things you really didn't wanna know." Later she explained to me that, "sometimes people choose cultural paths that they have to alter, they choose one that doesn't fit."

She said, “The butterfly may be fluttering around a pot of palm wine but will not drink it; for it cannot afford to buy.” Butterflies flitter around trying to find their way; they can not fly in a straight line like an eagle; therefore, this phase is for participants who are not yet grounded in their understanding of their life mission; that is, they have not yet chosen an African cultural framework to order their lifestyles and set their paths.

Cultural affiliation orders one’s lifestyle by placing cultural mandates on them. For example, Akan practitioners know that it is wrong to eat a meal without making a food offering to the ancestors. The laws and mandates of a particular culture determine what is wrong and right. I found that Akan practitioners believe that one’s steps are ordered once he/she chooses the right cultural path. The length of time one stays in a phase is determined by the amount of focused work one does while in a phase. NNN participants (possibly excluding Fafanto who are newer participants) do not believe in proselytizing; hence, all of the participants are present because they want to be present. Or, as NNN leaders believe, they are at NNN because the ancestors have called them to NNN.

Once participants are placed in groups, the sessions commence. It is not possible for Fafanto to know what members of other groups are doing because Fafanto is the first stage of development – there are certain sessions that Fafanto must attend in order for them to gain a basic understanding of what NNN is all about. During sessions, senior NNN members discuss NNN’s stance on a number of relevant issues. Kojo, Makia and some seasoned members of CIBI led discussions surrounding such topics as the crisis of leadership, ideological confusion/ambiguity,

resistance and institution building, and Pan African issues such as reparations, land redistribution and cultural revitalization. Addressing important community issues as a group is part of Akan culture.

The first day continued with a construction and maintenance period. The phase one was in determined their level of responsibility during construction and maintenance. Fafanto participants were responsible for taking orders and making suggestions for how to make work easier and more manageable. Second and third phase participants (Ananse Ntonan and Okodee Mmowere) helped Fafanto by coming behind them (us) and making sure things were done correctly. I helped two second and third phase participants trim a large tree. They demonstrated for me how to trim the tree. I assisted by throwing ropes, preparing saws, belaying, and watching to make sure the branches they used could support them. Fourth phase participants (Nyansapow) drew up plans for building more cabins and constructing additions to the big house. On consecutive days, Fafanto, Ananse Ntonan, and Okodee Mmowere executed Nyansapow's plans.

The particular construction and maintenance responsibilities of participants at certain phases mirrors the overall production expectations of a person in a given phase. Maya stated that, "all participants are evaluated by their mentors, who are assigned years in advance for some and at the first attended NNN for newcomers, for successful or unsuccessful matriculation throughout the phases." Institution building is a requirement. Fafanto and Ananse Ntonan are required to develop institution building visions and plans. Okodee Mmowere are expected to have implemented some important aspects of their plans (such as achieving LLC or Inc. status, etc.), and

Nyansapow must have an established institution. Careful observation as well as participation helped me to understand the relationship between the operations at NNN and NAS.

The school is a cultural center where members of the Black community are welcome to send their children if they wish to reconnect their children with African culture. While the school uses general Africentric practice that is informed (largely) by Akan culture, students are becoming prepared for nationbuilding and are being imbued with values over the course of 13 years (recall that NAS is a K-12 institution). Kojo sees NNN as “an unnatural occurrence that is only in place because people of African descent have not been taught to take [agency] over their own communities.” Simply put, the school is designed to create a reality where NNN is no longer needed because students will have the necessary tools that will make NNN redundant to what they have already been prepared for at NAS. In other words, the school is a place where students are being embedded with the precepts of nationbuilding to the point where such activity and belief will become second nature to their existence.

NNN participants’ and NAS leaders disinterest in recruiting people toward reAfricanization is likened to their disinterest in attempting to push Akan as the right cultural motif for all people. What appeared to be basic lessons in NAS, through my participation in NNN became easier to understand as steps NAS leaders are taking toward transmitting a sense of agency toward nationbuilding to Black children. My observation of and participation in rituals at NNN helped me to understand that there are certain practices that are common to all African people such as the drum and dance rituals, which are general practices, and then there are other practices that are

specific to the cultural group, such as the Akan ancestral food plate, and the Ta Merian ancient concentration on kupigana ngumi (what we now know as martial arts). My first inclination was that what I was seeing in the school was a Black version of public schooling. NNN helped to clarify the goals of NAS leaders, which is to offer a general Africentric institution for parents from all cultural walks of life, with aspects of reAfricanization as a central element to such learning for the ultimate purpose of nationbuilding. Had I not gained further understanding of the cultural practice by immersing into the cultural aspects of NAS/NNN, my interpretation of NAS would have been either incomplete or erroneous.

### *Immersion*

Makia yelled out, "Take the hand of the person next to you." We walked through dark places. I could not see anything. I was told repeatedly, "Kmt, you will be okay!" I was shocked at how dark and quiet it was. I could only hear footsteps, bugs, and animals. The walk seemed like miles and miles. I heard Kojo saying something in another language. I walked up a wooden plank. Someone had to take my hand. "Kmt, give me your hand, walk slowly, you're gonna be all right!" I was scared again. We walked and walked and walked. Why couldn't I see anything, but others could see? We reached a stopping point where there was chanting in another language (Twi). There was dancing. I could not see it, though. The drumming was loud and encompassing. I felt my body start to move. Finally I noticed a small fire. I am not sure where the small fire came from. People were jumping over the fire. I wanted to watch, but I could not. I was compelled to jump over the fire, I did. I began singing although I did not know what I was saying. Once I participated, I

could see. I helped others who needed help seeing, like they helped me when I could not see. We were all dancing, jumping the fire, and chanting. No one had to convince me that what I was doing was meaningful, because I was living the meaning. I was a participant in the culture. I had become, for moments, the tool of Africentric education. Not Africentric education in the theoretical sense, but Africentric education in the sense that these NNN and NAS participants see it as a simple aspect of nationbuilding. I jumped, and jumped, and jumped again until I was unable to jump anymore. Once I finished jumping I walked around – able to see, I saw remnants left behind by my ancestors. I asked myself about the necessity of the ritual in which I had just participated. As I was asking myself about the relevance, I began to finally understand that I had been ignoring what was right in my face, but blocking me from fair and accurate interpretation.

When NAS leaders teach children, it appears as though they are trying to help children understand certain facts so that they can regurgitate them, and when necessary use those facts for general life purposes. Kojo reminded us during NNN that, “From an African perspective, all knowledge is functional. It is never just knowledge for knowledge’s sake.” As I thought heavily about what I had experienced in the NAS classroom, what I had experienced during NNN, and the rituals in which I had participated, it was becoming clearer to me that I was ignorant to what was going on because of my own cultural lens. I was using an inappropriate lens to understand all of the phenomena around me. While participating in the fire-jumping ritual, I was able to think about the activity in which I was engaged in a much different way than before. I thought about what made me jump, and then

considered what I would have looked like to a group of spectators. But there were no spectators – everyone was jumping. I thought about what an analysis of my activity could/would say, and then I realized it was not an activity to be analyzed – it was a cultural ritual. Analyzing such a thing would require a deep understanding of the culture. I began to see that I was unable to analyze certain things because of my own ignorance about their deep meaning. But simultaneously, I began understanding that the Africentric educators I was jumping with were way ahead of me in terms of their levels of experience with attempting to find solutions to the challenges that Black children face. Their practice came to light as I was jumping. I realized that my analysis was about to be one big Eurocentric take on practices that are meant to be African.

I considered my central research questions:

What are the values of the school, and what is the values transmission process used by school leaders?

What does Africentric theory offer as a means for transmitting a sense of agency toward the goal of nationbuilding to Black students and communities?

In order to address these questions by examining the NAS environment, I had to become familiar with and get involved in an African cultural practice. Even my Africentric orientation was not enough to help me apply an appropriate lens for interpretation. I am able to see now how my participation in various events led me to an informed place where I was able to understand that I could not analyze and interpret any of what I saw unless I was able to culturally immerse myself. NNN was the vehicle for cultural immersion that opened the door for me to see that I had a

mental blocker, and that mental blocker was true ignorance of culture. After chipping away at the blocker, I was finally able to understand and clearly see what was going on in the school – nationbuilding in practice. Even my own personal background experiences with Africentric ideology were insufficient for understanding the scope of African cultural practice at NAS.

*The Cultural Example: Understanding NAS After Immersion*

While Akan is the cultural foundation of the school, it is only used as an example of how an African cultural tradition can/should be used to organize schools for Black youngsters. Not everyone in the core group, nor in the existing group of parents of NAS students sees Akan as the optimal cultural frame of reference for their particular family. Therefore, Kojo uses Akan to inform the cultural direction of the school; Akan is not “pushed” on parents or others as something that they “should” adopt. NAS does not advertise Akan as some cultural theme of the school.

The original goals of the NAS core group of leaders never included operating as a vehicle for the public. Most Africentric schools that developed in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s grew out of the Freedom Schools Movement, which was marked by Black young adults attempting to create adequate educational spaces for Black masses of Black children. However NAS developed from a group of Black college students with families who were interested in finding ways to educate their own offspring. One unifying theme adopted by all of the groups that were interested in African centered education was the notion that Black people should independently control all of the institutions in the Black community.

After immersing into the culture, I began to understand that school practice is based upon the cultural stance of NAS. I began to understand how CIBI works as an incubator for all of the different culturally themed African centered schools. Before my experience at NNN I thought the majority of the children at NAS attended the school because their parents wanted them to be exposed to the African theme and décor. Later I learned that most parents are attempting to send their children to a school where what is happening in the school matches better with their cultural practices at home. In other words, NAS is designed a place for which for adults who practice African cultures can send their children. The children see themselves as extensions of their families at NAS. Before NNN, I had difficulty understanding how the children saw themselves in their curricular experiences. After NNN, it became clear the most of the children did not need cues to understand the cultural prompts in the school. For example while teachers teach, the children are (as most observers would note) noisy. The noise seemed to me to be a distraction, but to the teachers it is the students grappling with the material. I noticed that some behaviors that would be considered outright belligerent in public school settings (e.g. talking about unrelated to topics to schoolmates) are allowed. What was interesting to me is that students did not need cues to return for side chatter and pay attention, they would always come back and respect mamas and babas. NAS leaders and teachers see student chatter and behavior as being natural to their growth and development. Students see themselves as being encircled by people who have as their first priority their education and protection. As one student said to his classmates, "...at my other [public] school, we couldn't play or have [any] fun." The cultural beliefs about what

children represent creates an environment where children appear as empowered, protected members of a close-knit community. NNN also helped me to understand that CIBI acts as a national entity for such culturally behaved schools.

*The Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI)*

Although, according to Kojo, NAS did not originate from CIBI, it is now one of CIBI's most consistent and popular institutions. CIBI's ideological groundings are found in the Black Power Movement. CIBI represents the modern day Black legacy of establishing independent schools. CIBI is a non-profit educational association with nearly 300 members who represent a diverse range of educational institutions. Member organizations include pre-schools, day care centers, and Saturday programs as well as full-fledged, accredited, private elementary, middle, and high schools. It is difficult to say how many accredited Africentric private schools exist because not all of them are registered with CIBI.

NAS' affiliation with CIBI came through an arm of CIBI called The National Black Parents Organization. Through this affiliation, NAS sent teachers to CIBI's teacher training institutes, and in 1981, NAS hosted the national CIBI conference. In 1988, the core NAS group developed a governing structure of African centered leaders called "NAS leaders." While NAS is considered to be a "general concept" open to any person wanting to reattach their children with African culture, the core group of "NAS leaders" is a much more restricted group. NAS leaders became a parallel stream of development that moved beyond the school itself in terms of organizational scope, and their stance became the focus of NAS' cultural/ideological development. Once NAS leaders' ideological beliefs were developed, NAS began

playing a more central role with CIBI in regard to teacher development and training. In 1991, NAS leaders published the sought after text called *Nationbuilding: Theory and Practice in African centered Education*, which contributed to a new direction for CIBI and NAS (See Appendix G).

By the early 1990's *Nationbuilding* became a cornerstone text for CIBI because it offered direction and focus toward an African cultural framework. While Akan culture is used as a guide throughout the text, the book is general enough that it has gained widespread appeal among African centered education leaders using various cultural motifs. That is, the appeal of *Nationbuilding* is that it transcends the differences between and among African centered leaders, and has acted as a "tie that binds" African centered education efforts. The mass appeal of *Nationbuilding* is one of the reasons that NAS became a most popular African centered school, and of course, is one of the reasons that NAS has taken such a prominent role in CIBI.

Since CIBI's inception in 1972, there have been five National Executive Officers (NEO's). CIBI's heads included:

1972-1976 – Kasisi Jitu Weusi

1976-1987 – Kofi Lomotey

1987-1990 – Naima Olugbala

1990-2000 – Mwalimu Shujaa

2000-present – (co-NEO's) Kalonji Niamke and Maya Akoto

In 1989, Kojo was encouraged to write a mission statement to run for CIBI NEO. In that same year, the popular Africentric educator and college professor Mwalimu Shujaa was also asked to submit a mission statement. Shujaa explains that

since Kojo supported him and vice versa, Kojo withdrew and he submitted the mission statement. When the ballot went out, only Shujaa's name appeared for the NEO position. While Kojo has never held the leadership post in CIBI, the work that has been produced by NAS leaders and the corresponding guidance that this work has offered to NAS and CIBI has propelled NAS to be recognized as being (according to Shujaa) in the forefront of Africentric schools as a model to emulate. Today, CIBI stands but in need of revitalization and redefinition.

While CIBI is a critical aspect of the emerging Africentric schools movement, I found that CIBI is not so important for understanding NAS – especially since NAS was created separate from CIBI. Kojo explains that it was not until after some years of operation that NAS joined CIBI. Several years into NAS' establishment, CIBI began to take direction from NAS as NAS refined its cultural focus.

#### *National Africentric School as a Model Africentric Institution*

One of the ways that NAS began to lead CIBI was through its refined cultural focus. I found that NAS' leadership believes that there are many different cultural frames from which people of African descent can choose in the process of reAfricanization. Kojo explains that, "ReAfricanization is a process of becoming reconnected with African cultural values and practices." While Africentric educators in this school practice Akan themselves, Maya explained that, "...we hold to the belief that there are other African cultural frameworks that can be applied for successful reAfricanization." For example, while Akan culture requires specified practices that distinguish it from other African cultures (e.g. Yoruba-which is largely

practiced in Nigeria), common beliefs and practices (such as high regard for ancestors and elders), and common rituals (such as shrine/temple visitation) occur. My observation of NAS staff members' Akan shrine activities in the U.S. was strikingly similar to my observation of Yoruba shrine activities in Nigeria. This finding aligns itself with Africentric educators stance that there is more in common between various African cultures than there is different, and their assertion that people of African descent must choose the best from African cultural practices and use them to advance themselves.

The common practices between African cultures (such as drum and dance communication, call and response, ancestor recognition) are seen as general African practices. They are general in the sense that most African cultural communities engage in very similar activities. This finding also aligns itself with Africentric research that points out that many African American habits and practices (such as cognitive styles) can be traced back to west Africa. The aforementioned makes it possible for NAS leaders to practice Akan themselves, but render the school a general Africentric institution. That is, they are Akan, but the school leaves out the specified things (such as mentioning the Onyame N'HyeEye paradigm, or Akan shrines - things that are particularly Akan) that would isolate or offend children and families in the school that do not practice Akan.

NAS leaders do not believe that Akan is the "right" culture for *all* people of African descent. Kojo explained that, "When the African ancestors call a person of African descent back to tradition, they guide the person onto the right cultural path, and when they call, we can either move towards total chaos by doing whatever we

want to do, or we can move towards Maat (peace and truth), but it is our choice.”

Kojo is referring to the African historical recurrent spirocycle (See Appendix H).

That path may be Akan, Ashanti, Fante, or any one of thousands of African cultural traditions – they believe that all of the African cultures are less problematic than the current (Eurocentric) cultural practices of most people of African descent.

Eurocentric practices are seen as practices that have their roots in Europe.

Eurocentricity is placing the needs and interests of Europeans (which, I found, refers to *all* ‘White’ people) – at the center of analyses. NAS leaders believe that African cultural practice (as opposed to Eurocentric practice) is the answer to many of the challenges of people of African descent.

The belief is that Africentric education practice must be able to educate and nurture Africans regardless of which cultural framework the African person is using. Makia stated that, “Students belonging to families using various African and non African cultural practices attend NAS.” Most of the children come from families where practice is best understood as general Africentric. That is, most of the parents have not adopted an African culture, and since the school’s cultural practice is general Africentric, there is no cultural tension in the school around which African culture would be “best” to practice. I found that it is inappropriate to ask what culture people practice. NAS uses Pan Africanist principles, such as the notion that all people of African descent are African, to promote African nationalism among its constituency. Kojo explained that “...those practicing some African culture such as Akan or Yoruba represent clans, and all of the clans together represent a nation,”– this is the sentiment of African (Black) nationalism as seen by NAS leaders.

NAS staff members do not advertise that they practice Akan, nor do they try to “sell” the Akan idea to parents. This practice is in keeping with their belief that the ancestors call people onto the right cultural track – not NAS staff members. Kojo and his staff do not believe in proselytizing; nor do they believe that they have “completed” their own group or individual reAfricanization processes; they believe that people of African descent are in a constant struggle to reattach with affirming cultures and identity.

NAS’ decision to adopt Akan, but use it only as a “cultural example”, while writing about nationbuilding, sovereignty, and the African centered schools movement, propelled it forward to become the nation’s premier African centered school by the early 1990’s. While leaders in the school have adopted Akan as their culture of practice, the school remains a “general Africentric” institution, guided by leaders who are aware of the importance of adopting an African cultural framework for life practice. A visitor to NAS would not witness that people are practicing Akan or any other specific African culture; however, a visitor could witness general Africentric practices.

The NAS staff’s commitment to the principles of their African cultural framework, the consistency they have shown throughout the years to CIBI and the African centered schools movement has made them an example for other Africentric schools to follow. Additionally, their publications (see Appendix I), and high institutional stability have made them a credible and reliable source in the Africentric education community. Finally, their ability to balance their personal (Akan) beliefs with general Africentric practice for the school, and the cultural training institutes that

they have established (such as NNN which will be discussed later), have all contributed to their current day “understood status” among those interested in and involved in Africentric education as being a “model” African centered school.

*National Africentric School “General Africentric” Practice*

The principle held by NAS is Pan Africanist because Pan Africanism involves behaving in ways that exemplify the notion that all people of African descent are African and should work toward the unification of Africa and African people. Since all people of African descent are African, and since all people of African descent are currently experiencing hardship, the specific culture (e.g. Akan) is politically less important and is de-emphasized when African people come together for some purpose (such as education). For example, the following pledge, which is recited at numerous functions such as the annual CIBI Science Fair, is Africentric (in that it centers Black children on themselves and their responsibilities), but it is seen as “general” in tone, tenor, and intention:

We are an African people, struggling for national liberation. We are preparing leaders and workers to bring about a positive change for our people. We stress the development of our bodies, minds, souls and consciousness. Our commitment is to the self-determination, self-respect and self-defense of our race.

Most of the time, the unifying Pan Africanist principle and general Africentric practices are in play, rather than intentionally selected cultural practice such as Akan. After the above pledge was recited during the 2002 CIBI Science Fair, the facilitator, a practitioner of Yoruba who had come to the conference from St. Louis’ Garvey

Africentric school stated that, “We are the same people and we say the same thing wherever we are from, right watoto?” The notion of being the “same people”, while at the same time practicing different African cultures, is an example of the fact that Pan Africanist sentiment and general Africentric practice supercede one’s particular cultural affiliation. Pan Africanism and general Africentric practice supercede individual practice because such principles and practices help to guard against the historical occurrence of Africans being attacked by those who choose to use the cultural differences to divide and conquer.

NAS leaders use general practice to strengthen the ties between and among various cultural practitioners. While Akan is the cultural example for NAS leaders, knowledge of Akan itself is actually unimportant for those wanting to understand NAS as an institution because the culture is not practiced in the school; NAS leaders wish to welcome all those wishing to reattach to African cosmology. African cosmology is “general” in the sense that “an African worldview” is created in much the same way as general Africentric practice. That is, African cosmology is a result of acknowledging the common overarching beliefs within African cultural practices, such as the African phenomenon of spirit within culture as opposed to the European phenomenon of culture and religion. NAS leader Baba Balihan explained that, “The African tradition includes a spiritual culture, see we didn’t need religion because the culture itself was already spiritual, [Europeans] need religion because their culture is a-spiritual.”

In the context of NAS, the principles and practices of African centered nationbuilding such as family building and adoption of an African cultural framework

become the central reasons for the existence of the school. Kojo continuously clarifies that the school is best understood as a cultural center where issues of nationbuilding are examined. It is not possible to understand the full scope of the NAS community by only examining the school because they view the school as an “open ground” for almost anyone. Consequently, they have established other programs (such as NNN) for those wishing to increase their commitment to African people. The school teaches students the importance of taking ownership and agency over their communities. “We are attempting to produce African children who have nationbuilding as their first priority,” according to Kojo and Makia. Regardless of the cultural frame used by any child at NAS, the approach to nationbuilding is applicable to all children of African descent.

Under the general Africentric approach, NAS’ approach to nationbuilding inculcates in children a sense of the importance of collective work and responsibility regardless of cultural affiliation. The Akan cultural affiliation is never even discussed in the school. Students are assigned to groups with “cultural names”. The groups are given African cultural names. Mama sends various groups to do tasks; she states very loudly, “First, Ethiopian Zulu’s go upstairs. Next, Fulani...line up and go upstairs. Then, Malinke, clean up the mess you made last period.” NAS leaders believe that, for example, even though Ethiopian Zulu, Fulani and Malinke exist in different parts of Africa, and even though they may have different specific cultural traditions, the need to work together for the common purpose of nationbuilding supercedes some need to stress that, for example Fulani, Zulu and Malinke have different specific cultural practices. Kojo expresses disdain for those entities who “for some reason,

love to point out Africa's diversity as though it is a virtue, and then will use Africa's diversity against Africans."

In the aforementioned sense, nationbuilding then includes a general understanding that separate communities (e.g. Bantu) are unable to nationbuild while standing by watching the others (e.g. Mandingo) remain unorganized. NAS leaders stress the importance of a Pan Africanist approach to nationbuilding that includes acknowledging one's personal community affiliation (such as Hutu), while understanding the need for collective control of the psychic and physical spaces that Africans call theirs, that is, the generalist tendency of NAS practice mandates that the common ties threading Africans together overtake the differences. (Examples of the methods of the NAS community's interpretation of nationbuilding are discussed in the next section).

Although I was concerned that it would be difficult to "observe" nationbuilding at NAS, understanding the difference between specific cultural practice and general Africentric practice made such observation possible. That is, the practices of the school are understood as "nationbuilding in progress", but such a revelation is made only by looking at the school the way NAS leaders look at the school. NAS leaders see the school as a general Africentric institution where families who are interested in returning to African traditions can be assured that their children will be accordingly (and properly) nurtured. Nurturance toward general Africentric practice most importantly includes transmitting to children the importance of taking agency over themselves and their communities – for NAS leaders such agency is, in part, nationbuilding in progress. The transmission process takes place by involving

the students in practices such as the CIBI Science Fair, certain elements of the Return and Retrieve it Conference and certain rituals. Transmission is cultural, so therefore it under girds everything that occurs at NAS; the transmission of culture occurs within the ways that people practice their cultures and interact with each other. There is no observable “deliberate” transmission, the values are a part of practice.

The general Africentric approach includes creating a certain presentation style in the school. The presentation style is call-and-response, direct interaction, constant involvement, and behaviors that are reminiscent of family interactions (closeness, definite familiarity). The school itself illustrates no indication of the cultural practice of school leaders. However, it does seem to exemplify the Kojo’s personality in the sense that he is interested in committed, consistent workers, not charming, charismatic people. Walking into the school is like walking into a world imagined by Kojo – no manner of grandiosity is present whatsoever. In other words, the school replicates Kojo’s belief that what matters is not style but substance.

Chapter V  
*Overview, Interpretations and Conclusions*

I have examined what Africentric education means and how it works for a group of African centered practitioners at NAS. This chapter begins with an overview of the study by providing a brief summary of the research problems, aims and questions. This section ends with interpretations of the findings and general conclusions.

*Overview*

Major educational challenges faced by Black children and communities have shaped the current interest in culturally centered education in the United States. The popular Black/African culturally centered movement has set the stage for a research study of this nature. Ideological and what seem to be irreconcilable differences between Africentric educators and those in the mainstream have polarized the two groups. Africentric educators use African cultures to advance Black children as a way to offer a match between what happens at school and at home. Although Africentric education is popular among many in the Black community, mainstream educators know very little about how Africentric education works. Furthermore, many mainstream educationists shun Africentricity – deeming it as anti-White and/or anti-American (Lefkowitz, 1999; Schlesinger, 1992). The tensions between Africentric educators and more mainstream educators have placed Africentric scholars, educators, and schools on the margins. While on the margins, little research has been conducted to investigate the offerings of Africentric schools.

In this study I provide an examination of a leading Africentric school. In attempting to address the problem of cultural mismatch for Black students, some

Black scholars who advance principles of African centeredness for Black people, promote schools that focus on culture first, and “the 3 R’s”, in the traditional U.S. sense, second. In other words, Africentric educationists are highly concerned about the educational progress of Black children, but they believe that educational progress must be placed in cultural context. Africentric education has been shown to have some positive effects on Black children and communities. For example, some evidence suggests that Black children in independent Black institutions perform above the norm academically (Lomotey, 1992). But more importantly for the community I examined, Africentric education is the major vehicle for returning Black people to an African cultural perspective. Africentric schools seek to promote student academic success in cultural context, yet the main goal is to reconnect, confirm, and affirm students’ cultural and communal identities and empower them to transformation society through true education. Although the research on Africentric education as a vehicle for the academic improvement for Black children is growing, the research on the cultural imperatives and motives of Africentric education is practically nonexistent. Moreover, even less is known about how or what Africentric educators may be able to offer to the struggling system of public education.

In the next section, the following central and sub research questions are addressed:

1. What are the values of the school, and what is the values transmission process used by school leaders?
2. What does Africentric theory offer as a means for transmitting a sense of agency toward the goal of nationbuilding to Black students and communities?

Sub Questions:

1. How do leaders of the school understand culture?
2. How is culture used and woven into the life of the school?

*Interpretations*

*Values transmission.* Value systems such as the Nguzo Saba are exemplars of African value systems. The value system within Akan culture is one that is best described as “ordered” by the paradigm of Onyame N’HyeEye /Own-yahme-ehh Shay-shay (ON). Within ON are a set of principles, values, and beliefs that are to be adhered to by all who practice Akan. An example of an ON belief is the notion that elders and children are to be respected and cared for with no excuses for lack of care or disrespect. Another example of a value system adhered to by Africentric educationists is the ancient Ta Merian system of Maat, which includes the following cardinal virtues: truth, justice, harmony, reciprocity, balance, order, and propriety. During my time at NAS, I never heard the values of the Nguzo Saba, ON or Maat discussed within the school. There is an overall expectation that people follow general Africentric principles, which include the values that “overarch” between all African systems.

The Pan Africanist principle of a “general Africentric” cultural practice refers to those common practices that tie African cultures together, and NAS leaders believe that such (general) practices are important in the African cultural reAfricanization process. Africentric educators believe that there is a common thread that runs through all African cultures that tie and bind them together. The principle here is

much like the practice of Christian Baptists sending their children to Catholic schools – generally, since Catholics have the same foundational beliefs as Baptists, and they share many of the same rituals (such as Sunday churchgoing), a Baptist student in a Catholic school can get what his/her Baptist parents want him/her to get from the school since there is more in common than there is different between the two Christian faiths. Since general Africentric practice is usually in play, there are no “values” conflicts between families.

Values are transmitted to students via adult modeling, chants, exercises, rituals, programs, and call-and-response routines. I asked CIBI NEO Kalonji Niamke why if he believed in the ON paradigm, why he would not go about sharing the precepts with other people of African descent. He very calmly and matter-of-factly indicated that when something is good and usable to the people, they will come to it. He said, “...if something were only good for me, will not the people stay away from it except for those like me?” I noticed a pattern of this sort of answering questions with questions among NAS leaders and other members of the NAS and NNN leadership cadre. I almost missed the value of answering a question with a question – here the value is on education. Both Na’im Akbar and Mwalimu Shujaa’s work on the value of education as opposed to schooling/training discuss the importance of “drawing out” that which is already deposited within the Black child. Their work indicates that true education is “knowledge of self.” In other words, they answer questions with questions because they believe that the answers already lie within the Black child...it is simply a matter of properly laying the question out so that the answer becomes evident. Outsiders might first view the “question-question”

technique as an avoidance mechanism as I did when I first encountered the group, which demonstrates again the importance of cultural immersion in order to understand Black phenomena.

Interestingly, values are also identified by their stance in comparison to the values of U.S. and European societies, which means that there is a reactionary component. Upon interacting with members of NAS and NNN, it becomes apparent that there is no virtue in individualistic behavior. U.S./European societies can largely be seen as hyper-individualistic, for example, personal successes (such as career advancements) are seen as great accomplishments. However, members of the NAS, NNN community are lauded only when they find ways to advance the group. Traditional career advancement is seen as an opportunity afforded to an individual because of the support they have received from the group. At times, the stance is more clearly definable because it is oppositional to the mainstream stance. For example, when two NAS leaders engaged in a disagreement, part of the resolution was figuring out which person's perspective was closest to being Eurocentric, and both parties agreed to stray from the perspective closest to Eurocentric thought/behavior. There is a value in attempting to be as close as possible to that which is perceived as African.

The values of the African centered school are constructed around general and specific African values. General African values can be understood in much the same way as the general Africentric. There are common values that emerge between various African cultural groups, which makes it easy for collections of cultural groups such as NNN to coexist. That is, there is no (observed) conflict between people

because of the different values between, say, the Swahili and the Ta Merian because the values are so close that they can be seen as “general” in nature; yet there are values that are specific to each group. Values educed from Swahili culture are found in the Nguzo Saba (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith). While the aforementioned values are specific to an excerpt from Swahili culture, the Ta Merian values of the Maatian system are in direct harmony with those of Swahili culture. Likewise, in some ways the value mandates of the ON paradigm of the Akan manifest aspects of both the Swahili, Ta Merian and other African systems. While the goal of NAS is to “become more African” by engaging in a host of activities that will serve to advance their knowledge of African values, they have not yet reached the point where they are fully non-reactionary because they are still in the process of self-definition.

NAS is challenged by the fact that educing values from African societies is more a political than a cultural necessity. Although the practice of searching traditional African culture for answers to modern challenges faced by people in the African Diaspora is both political and cultural, the essence of doing so is more a political answer to European hegemony. The practice is more political than cultural because African culture has not been “intentionally” developed, in the sense that Africans did not purposely develop, for example, Bantu culture. Bantu culture came about as a result of the daily needs and interactions among (Bantu) people.

NAS/NNN’s challenge is the desire to be traditional African in a modern context, yet responsive to European hegemony, and at the same time naturally emergent. The response to European hegemony has mandated the necessity of a political stance,

using aspects of African culture as a guide but also a weapon against European imperialism. The political element, which is reactionary, raises the question of whether or not cultural adoption is as authentic as it needs to be to ensure usability and survivability. The lingering question remains: can a politically charged cultural adoption process, and all of the issues within such a process, wield the changes necessary to advance toward nationbuilding?

*Agency and nationbuilding.* Hotep (2001) states that “CIBI looks like a tortoise, but it’s really a hare” (p. 1). Much the same is true for NAS and NNN. What is most striking about NAS is its appearance as being quite unassuming. A walk through the humble hallways of the school does not immediately call to mind the main goal of Africentric nationbuilding. In fact, one could easily be led to believe that not too much goes on at NAS. Before my epiphany, and after several classroom observations I was preparing to write about NAS as basically a public school with African décor and language. Had I not participated in many extracurricular activities offered at the school and other places, I would have been misled to believe that NAS was a tortoise. To protect NAS’ integrity, I will not explicate the great influence that such institutions have on the community; however, I will discuss the various ways that they are literally in an inexorable process of nationbuilding.

NAS leaders stress African independence and self-sufficiency, which they model through NNN. After purchasing the land where NNN takes place, NAS leaders began building living quarters on the land. Akoto (1992) defines Africentric nationbuilding as a process of Africans owning and developing the psychic and physical spaces that they call theirs. NNN stands as a vehicle for small-scale

ownership and development of a physical space that Africans call theirs. The psychic space is “owned” as members are expected to adhere to certain African principles and values.

The requirement for certain senior NNN participants to have executed business proposals speaks to NAS/NNN’s seriousness about institution building and nationbuilding. The NNN experience requires participants to engage in basic living where only the necessities are available, and in order to have even those necessities, one must literally create them. When NNN participants needed cabins some years ago, they built the cabins using wood from the land. Most of the materials used were manufactured by NNN. The practice of seeing oneself as an agent for one’s own survival is part and parcel to building a sense of agency in participants. NNN is a small-scale version of what NAS leaders wish for Black people on a larger scale. NNN does not allow Black people to rely upon outside forces to supply things that Blacks can supply for themselves. A sense of agency is transmitted through the requirement to act as personal agent and supplier for self and community.

It is not easy to understand at first glance how NAS embeds its student constituency with a sense of agency toward nationbuilding. A closer, more informed look at teacher-student interaction illustrates teachers who are constantly trying to get students to understand that they already have deposited within them the knowledge they need to control the psychic and physical spaces around them. Students are reasoned with in relation to the espoused values in the cultural system. Behavior modification is usually handled by asking students a series of questions. In the questioning, students are asked whom they hurt by acting a certain way, and, as

African values are interspersed into the conversation about behavior, students become more familiar with the African “way.” As students become older, the expectation that they work with and teach people younger than them about the African way demonstrates the agency transmission process. While the behavior modeling for students in the school could be overlooked as an unimportant aspect of the school’s operations, it is evident that students are taught how to “be” by following adult cues, and then living up to the expectation that they themselves become agents of the NAS “way.” The progression includes instilling a sense of agency in Black children first, and as a result of that they will be prepared for their roles and responsibilities in the nationbuilding process.

Akoto’s (1992) discussion of Africentric nationbuilding further explains the need for a more holistic approach for attending to the educational (and communal) needs of Blacks. Akoto defines nationbuilding as:

The conscious and focused application of our people’s collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. It involves the development of behaviors, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture, concretize and protect the present, and insure the future identity and independence of the nation.

Nationbuilding is the deliberate, keenly directed, focused, and energetic projection of the national culture, and the collective identity. (p. 3)

Akoto focuses on African cultural adoption as an empowerment tool for Blacks.

Nationbuilding is the foremost critical imperative for Blacks, and includes a process

of reAfricanization. Akoto describes the model for nationbuilding as largely a process of reAfricanization (p. 32). This means that nationbuilding is a process of re-connecting Blacks with who they are culturally, which also defines for them their personal and communal purposes. He states, “Nationbuilding [involves] the systematic and sustained effort to reconstruct the national culture in all of its dimensions” (p. 32). The nationbuilding/reAfricanization process involves three broad overlapping stages: (1) rediscovery/historical recovery, (2) redefinition/cultural reaffirmation, and (3) revitalization/national liberation (p. 32).

The process of historical rediscovery emphasizes the need to correct the African historical record. This stage involves historical reconstruction of African history from antiquity (dynasties 0-25) to contemporary times. Such reconstruction leads to the revitalization of some core values of African antiquity, and the recovery of core values of surviving traditional societies. The reconstruction of African history must include the recovery of African artifacts as “represented in the sacred works, philosophy, language and other symbolic forms...and reestablishing physical linkages, and restoring traditional values and cultural formations” (Akoto, p. 32). Historical rediscovery and reconstruction are transitions to redefining reality and cultural reaffirmation. The overlap between the two stages is an “African centered identification and evaluation of positive values and behaviors in the contemporary national experience...” (p. 34). Akoto explains that, “The evaluation of contemporary behaviors and values [implies] that some acquired behaviors and values must be abandoned” (p. 35). In other words, African culture is not static, some values

and behaviors must be kept and others abandoned “in preparation for” cultural reaffirmation.

The redefinition/cultural reaffirmation stage calls for the development of an African world ideology and the selective adaptation of non-African technology. The African world ideology that is referred to is a “Pan Africanist/nationalist institutional infrastructure that includes education, defense, and industrial development” (p. 34).

An important aspect of this infrastructure is the rehabilitation of the family.

“Independent community based institutions must see themselves as extensions of the family. Effective parenting within a viable family, which family is also supported within a supportive network of families, is a central requirement for the perpetuation of [new] African centered values” (Akoto, p. 35). The selective adaptation of non-African technology, “...includes the abandonment of certain culturally alienating behaviors and institutions such as non African philosophies, religions, methods, and languages” (p. 34). Selective adaptation requires fusion of traditional and technological exigencies of modernity. Selective adaptation means that there must sometimes be some fusion between the traditional African “way” and some of the advanced technological and political offerings of (for example) the current westernized society. The discussion of such fusion is directly connected to education because Africentric educationists do not operate with a notion that education is separated from other aspects of societal life. That is, these “fusions” are to be brought into the process of educating Black children and preparing Black communities for revitalization.

The educational and communal imperative calls for fusion of tradition and modernity, but as Akoto explains, such fusion "...must reflect the values fundamental to the African historical continuum and at the same time possess the capacity to function effectively in the modern international arena" (p. 35). The above stages lead to Black educational and communal revitalization and liberation (p. 34). Without nationbuilding as the primary concern, Africentric education is an exercise in futility according to historian John Henrick Clark and leading Africentric educator Kwame Akoto. Nationbuilding should be understood as building the nation, with individual families as the most important units within the nation, but the final destination of the nationbuilding endeavor is Black people practicing African culture.

#### *Weaving and Understanding Culture*

The NAS "way" is set by NAS leaders who weave culture into the life of the school by making themselves familiar with African cultures, and then using those cultures (e.g. Akan) to inform the direction of the school while employing general Africentric practice. NAS leaders understand African culture to be the traditional principles and practices of African people on the continent of Africa that have kept them humanistically and spiritually grounded. Culture is not a nebulous and escapable 'notion' to NAS leaders. They see traditional African cultural practices as the force that has sustained African life. The belief is that the only way African people can ensure their own survival is for them to return to practicing one of the African cultures. The overarching belief is that we are all on a cultural path, and no one has completed his or her cultural transformation/reAfricanization process. By understanding general Africentric practice, while remaining informed by specific

African cultural practice, the young person becomes prepared for reAfricanization – the reAfricanization process is an example of nationbuilding in its primary stages.

African culture is woven into the school by engaging students in general African rituals, such as drumming and dancing, and chants such as *We Are an African People and Together We Will Win!* Culture is also weaved in as students are required to wear clothes with traditional African patterns on them such as Ta Merian, Gye Nyame, Kente or Senegalese Mud. Spending time at NAS encourages African dress and normalizes seeing people dressed in traditional African clothes, rather than seeing them dressed in modern style European clothing. Culture is weaved in by normalizing that which is African. As African languages such as Twi, Kiswahili and Ta Merian are used, culture is weaved into the life of the school – languages and cultural normalizing are examples of nationbuilding in a secondary stage.

Family building is a necessary component of the nationbuilding endeavor. Africentric educators are interested in exposing Black children to the important notion of family as the first and most important institution in the Black community. From the Fafanto through the Nyansapow levels, Africentric educators stress that without family building, nationbuilding does not exist. In the aforementioned way, Africentric educators call for Black men and women to take on the responsibility of getting married, having children, and practicing an African culture. This represents nationbuilding at a more deliberate and mature level.

### *Personal Conclusions*

In describing practice at NAS it is important to first admit NAS' complexity. The school is open to the general public – anyone wishing to reconnect their children

with African culture. However the school is led by “NAS leaders,” a more restricted group which is only accessible via invitation. They offer NNN, which is a less exclusive version of NAS leaders, and NNN is partially open to the public. These three components (NAS, NAS leaders, and NNN) demonstrate the complexity of the institution, but since most people would only recognize NAS as an unassuming Black institution upon visitation (since there is little evidence of a leadership cadre, and no evidence of NNN), a visit to the school is deceptively unrepresentative of the seriousness of the totality of the enterprise. The totality of the enterprise includes bringing African culture to Black children as a way to align their educational experiences with who they are in order to eventually advance the Black community toward nationbuilding.

When this research project began, I believed I was entering into an institution that would be likened to experiencing a Black history experience all year round. The virtually unknown imperatives of Africentric education, I believed, were merely the symbols of advanced rhetoric. I thought it was advanced rhetoric because as a public school teacher, I certainly witness bulletin boards, other displays, and value/mission statements that have little meaning in public schools, and especially little utility for the people within the schools. During the introspection process, I found that I was mentally preparing to deploy the same kind of assumptions toward NAS that I have experienced as relevant and verifiable assumptions to make of public school systems. It was difficult to undo the mental barrier of making the assumption that NAS would be likened to other schools/school systems in that way. I have worked within four very large metropolitan school districts in different parts of the U.S., and I have

always found that the stated purposes, goals, and missions of these districts and schools are decoupled and irrelevant for the children I have worked with and taught within the schools.

Because my lens was initially hazed by prior experience with schools and school systems, I went into NAS expecting to see decoupled, fragmented, and “forced” evidence of the imperatives of Africentric education. I expected to see teachers dealing with the identity question by telling children that they are African by saying things like, “repeat after me...we are African people!” and then seeing that repeated by the children. I expected the transmission process to be, in some ways, forced. I believed I would witness adults trying to help children understand that all people of African descent are African by showing like pictures of people of African descent throughout the globe. After reading the scholarship on the importance of using Black culture for Black children, my initial thought was that the dress and décor of the people and the edifice was their way of protesting against the Eurocentric system, while trying to replace the hegemonic and racially problematic Eurocentric system with an African system of similar likeness but oppositional disposition. In other words, I believed that I was going to witness a type of legitimized Black supremacy; legitimized because it was responding to the existing White supremacist structures. Black nationalism and nationbuilding, I assumed, would be taught to children by explanation, definition, and then charge. That is, I assumed that children would be expected to be able to explicate Black nationalism, and that teachers would then give assignments relevant to taking agency over their lives and the institutions in their communities.

Africentric education literature does not capture the degree to which the school operates as a cultural center. One reason that my initial concepts about practice at NAS were disconfirmed is that the literature only provides a surface glimpse of what could be described as one of the most comprehensive attempts to salvage that which Black people lost from the period of enslavement to today. The literature has major limitations, for example: (1) there is not enough Africentric education literature, (2) the literature that exists must be expanded, advanced, and critiqued by those within the discipline, (3) much of it is written within the framework of the dominant research canons, which do not fit the needs, goals, and purposes of Africentric ideology and education, and (4) not enough of the literature is based upon the happenings within Africentric schools.

Unfortunately, the lack of Africentric education literature is aggravated by the fact that many who would conduct Africentric education research studies are (reportedly) discouraged from conducting such research. In my discussions with graduate students who had conducted Africentric education research for their Master's theses (at institutions in the Midwest, East Coast, and the West), they report hostility coming from their advisors. For instance, one student coming out of Cornell University's College of Education stated the following, "My advisor said I should choose a dissertation topic that was less controversial." In other discussions with her advisor, she recounts numerous times when Africentric education scholarship was referred to as "Opinion, with no reliable research from which we can draw upon." Those reporting such unfortunate discouragement have revealed that often advisors state untrue, demeaning and belittling reasons for their protest, such as a doctoral

student at Columbia University who states that one of his committee members referred to the “ineptitude and incompetence” of Africentric scholars; the “hatred and out-datedness” of the claims within the scholarship, the “lack of evidence of rigor” a student will be able to show for examining Africentricity, and the “singular focus” of Africentric scholarship, (as though research on Blacks is ‘not enough’ to advance knowledge). Surely, those making the unfounded aforementioned claims are unaware of the wide breadth and depth that is made known by studying Africentric phenomena as present in the literature review and findings of this dissertation. Considering the massiveness of the Africentric enterprise, certainly we would find a lack of personal knowledge of Black people in general, of Africentric scholarship in particular, and discomfort surrounding many of the discussions offered by Africentrics to be the ostensible reasons for most of the discomfort and discouragement. This dissertation provides examples of empirical studies that have been conducted in the burgeoning field of Africentric education.

One of the biggest problems in U.S. society in general, and in the field of education in particular, is the silencing of voices. Voices that sound the most like mainstream voices are heard most clearly and abundantly, but the farther away from the mainstream one traverses, the more muffled and unheard the voice becomes. In the process of conducting this research on Africentric education, I was constantly struck with unbelievable angst that almost all of what is being offered by the scholars and practitioners within Africentric circles is either being ignored or shunned by mainstream educationists. I comprehend why voices such as Shujaa and Madhubuti’s are being ignored, but I remain in angst because answers and solutions to many of the

circularly pressing challenges faced by Black children and communities may lie within the literature and practice of a group that is silenced and ignored because they speak about important issues in ways that may fatally challenge the dominant canon. I am struck that little is known about the imperatives of Africentric education – that after nearly a decade of studying in the field of education as a student, I have never been exposed to the offerings of the scholars mentioned in the literature review. At a minimum, these scholars offer responses to the plethora of challenges faced by Black children and communities, and further, what they have to say may be germane to other communities of people. And at the least, these scholars offer rhetoric that can be advanced by critics and then refined and made into something usable for the larger education community. It is strikingly curious that an entire group of scholars with scores of knowledge about a group of children (and people) are not aggressively sought after for their expertise on Black cultural offerings.

Both the NCES (1999) and Kunjufu (1995) reported that a disproportionate number of Black males face discipline problems in school. The work of scholars such as Hale-Benson (1982) could provide some insight into alternative ways to interpret and understand young Black male behavior. Coupling Hale-Benson with Akoto (1992) could shed light on the cultural factors as well as introducing appropriate methods that could be used for redirecting some children's disturbing behaviors, and also offer methods for turning challenging behavior into productive activity. Shujaa's (1993) work on the difference between education and schooling for Black children could help those working with Black children to becoming more

knowledgeable about ways to refrain from indoctrinating Black children away from their own cultural and educational needs.

While conducting this study I learned of Black people who have written extensively on cultural and educational issues; however their books are not circulating throughout educational arenas. They travel back and forth to Africa learning about the culture, folkways, mores, and spiritual systems used by African people for the purpose of reAfricanizing Black children in the U.S. They study the teaching and learning styles of African children, and use scholarship to expand upon what they have learned. They study traditional African art, healing systems, value systems, and music – doing all of this to figure out ways to advance the learning and experiences of Black children in (mainly) the U.S. Meanwhile the mainstream education system in the U.S. continuously asks questions about how to improve education for Black students, without consulting with these Africentric educators. Considering the extent to which Africentric educators work in order to find ways to reach Black children and communities, the mainstream’s decision to minimize and marginalize them, in the face of daunting educational challenges suffered by Black children, is tortuous to witness.

It is not only the responsibility of mainstream educators to seek counsel from Africentric educators, Africentric educators themselves must be more vigilant about making their offerings known to the larger society. When I considered the aforementioned challenge to Africentric educators during the earlier stages of my research, I asked informal interview questions to the Africentric educators about why they do not make themselves more readily available to the larger society. The answer

was silencing and frightening. I was told on more than one occasion that in the early 1990's when NAS and other independent Black schools started a campaign to answer the calls coming from Black parents for relevant education for their children, Africentric schools answered by buying radio, television, and newspaper advertisements. Parents responded to the advertisements. Africentric schools began to become extremely popular. Studies (such as Ratteray's) began to show how Africentric schools were transforming Black children. But just as soon as progress was being made, a backlash was experienced. Full-page ads were purchased in major newspapers across the country where some education scholars were denouncing Africentric education, calling it anti American. Education scholars wrote articles against Africentric education without conducting studies on the matter. Right wing radio television hosts found oppositionists who leveled unfounded charges against Africentric education. And worst of all, some Africentric education leaders reveal that their activities were under government surveillance; some even believe that they have been under surveillance since they began their institutions in the late 1960's or 1970's. It is excruciating to think that an approach to teaching and reaching Black students could generate such negative attention. It is the responsibility of all members of the education community to find ways to help demystify Africentric education, especially since some of the offerings may be helpful to a wide range of young people.

As a leading Africentric education institution, NAS has a responsibility to increase the education community's awareness of its offerings. I understand their notion that once a person is ready they will be led onto the right cultural path.

However, the majority of children (in public schools) will never be exposed to the offerings of NAS; they will never come into contact with the precepts of Africentric education. Obviously, parents who are able to pay tuition to send their children to NAS have access to monetary resources – unlike the parents of many public school children. Parents with extra monetary resources are obviously much more able to venture out and explore the under explored terrain of Africentric ideology and education. Furthermore, Blacks in the United States have more luxuries than Blacks in, say, Africa. If NAS' cultural and educational offerings are as African universalistic as they purport them to be, considering that they have borrowed from African cultural cosmologies, they must be able and willing to understand that the ability to advance culture by philosophizing and refining ideology is much more possible when basic needs are more guaranteed. Simply put, Africentric educators in the U.S., and at NAS in particular, must use the knowledge they have gained about Black people worldwide to realize that physical and spiritual participation in new cultural realities is in some large measure dictated by one's ability to have his/her basic needs met. To have acquired and developed such an extensive array of offerings, NAS must find ways to avail itself to the more underprivileged within the rank-and-file of Black people.

#### *Implications for Policy, Practice and Theory*

The policies that govern most Black children and families in the U.S. are the policies of public school systems. The policies that govern Black children and families are the same policies that govern all children and families. An important question follows: is it necessarily beneficial to have what are purported as universal

policies when children come from vastly different cultural (and economic) realities? Mayhem is imagined when one uses the mainstream lens for answering this question. The first question that arises for those of us who are trained in the traditional and Eurocentric schoolhouses is likely “what are we supposed to do, have a million different policies for our millions of different children’s cultural backgrounds?” Using an alternative non either-or lens, that is, a lens that does not advance notions such as: “either we have one policy in place for all students on matters, or we have millions of policies for individual students”, we are able to explore unexplored policy options. Writers such as Hale-Benson, Lomotey, Shujaa, Hilliard, Asante, Akoto, Kunjufu, Ridley, Frederick, and even Banks and Banks, and Ladson-Billings have all discussed the notion of different cultural relevancies and standpoints among the various groups of people. Although the research of the aforementioned scholars is important to the non-mainstream, education policy remains singularly focused on the needs of one group. Education policy should reflect the need for local policymakers, administrators, and teachers to become culturally conscious of the groups over which they administer. Regardless of how daunting such a task is, there is no “general culture” to which education leaders can refer. That is, there is no basic or general “American” culture that is sufficient for education policy to advance as it seems to now.

Multicultural education in classrooms is a starting point because the principles within it recognize the pluralism within U.S. society; multicultural education also gives reason for teachers to focus on cultural items and topics. The overwhelming problems with multicultural education for Black children are three-fold: (1) the long

history of excluding Black people and the lack of recognition of Black cultural offerings in education textbooks and policymaking processes has made cultural multiple perspectives analysis a weak answer to a problem with a deep and troubling history (it is not enough), (2) in order for pedagogy and policy to actually be multicultural, those engaged in creation must, themselves, be culturally literate (not superficially ‘understanding’), and (3) multicultural education perspectives and culturally centered perspectives are still seen as ‘debatable’ among many educationists.

Many people see Africentric ideology and education as being hostile towards White people. But imagine a White teacher who works with Black students becoming familiar with the true offerings of Africentric education by engaging in some of the African activities and rituals over a period of time (as discussed in the findings section); her ability to positively impact her Black students would be enhanced colossally, rather than if she superficially engaged in multicultural education practice. What about other cultural groups? The same kinds of policy and practice implications exist for other groups. Study, practice, engagement, and understanding are the key components for making multicultural education non-superficial. Teachers and policymakers should be required to become culturally literate to work with their population constituencies. The U.S. Census (2000) reveals that the U.S. is hyper-segregated along racial lines, so there is no excuse that the task of becoming truly culturally competent is overwhelming. Africentric educationists are the best prepared for training all teachers how to offer something of meaning to Black students. It is not a matter of hostility toward any particular group, and it is not

a matter of disrespecting non Africentric Black teachers; it is a matter of doing what is necessary to teach and reach Black children so that they are prepared for what Akoto (1992) and others have identified as the main goal of education for Black children, which is advancement toward the goal of nationbuilding in the Black community.

### *Relevance and Contribution*

This is a relevant study because it represents an attempt to illustrate an approach to address the mitigating challenges that Black children and people face in education and society. The Africentric approach to education is becoming more popular among Blacks (Akoto, 1992) because they are losing confidence in the circle of ineffective “solutions” being offered by the mainstream. It is understandable why an unpopular approach to educating children, such as Africentric education, does not get the attention it deserves in roundtable discussions, at national conferences, and within other scholarly activity. The reason that Africentric ideology makes many people uncomfortable is because proponents of the theory appear aggressively and unapologetically singly interested in the advancement of Black children. Also the precepts of the ideology are in direct opposition to mainstream thinking. Many who do not agree with the precepts of Africentric education are still interested in the advancement of Black children and communities. Research studies such as this one offer insights into Africentric education that allows those interested in reform to learn about ways they can advance their understanding of cultural issues faced by Black children in education, which should positively impact their efforts.

This research is relevant because it explores what underlies Africentric education. That is, while many believe that Africentric educationists attempt to make Black children academically competitive, this research reveals that the main goal of Africentric education is to align academics and culture. This research de-mystifies the beliefs and practices of Africentric education, which should promote understanding between and among those who are interested in improving the educational experiences of Black children. Those interested in understanding interplays between culture and education are informed by this research because it explicitly discusses culture as the major means for reshaping the education of Black children. This research should untangle some of the webs of confusion and misunderstanding between Africentric educationists and more traditional U.S. educationists including reformists.

Even though it is likely that Africentric education will continue to be seen as a means too hostile for mainstream consideration for some time, what is most important is that the group of learners called “Black school age children” are offered every possible opportunity to improve their status. The conditions of Black children as discussed and reported by offices such as the NCES, the National Education Association (NEA), the American Council on Education (ACE), and as researched by scholars such as Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Asa Hilliard, Jonathan Kozol, Jawanza Kunjufu, and Mwalimu Shujaa and others, indicate that many different tools and mechanisms must be considered in the gargantuan challenge of improving the educational conditions of Black children and improving conditions in the Black community overall. The advancement that this research could offer the Black

community also gives it a special place among those who are trying daily to find ways to resolve some of the challenges in the Black community.

### *Future Research*

In the future, education researchers should use this study as a vehicle for qualifying and/or quantifying the consequences of the educational system's decision not to use African centered education as a potential corrective for some of the major educational challenges faced by Black children. A study examining such consequences would be crucial because the challenges faced by Black children are recurring, and all possible correctives should be employed or at least investigated by leading education researchers. Access issues are mediated by the fact that there are Africentric charter schools all over the country, and Asante has offered Africological research methods to assist with access preparation.

Future research can also explore what aspects of practice at NAS can be used for public school education. Although public education is not able to be singular in focus, many large metropolitan public school districts have large Black populations. Such districts are positioned to consider some of the offerings of Africentric educators. For example, a study might focus on how two or three of the imperatives would work if they were employed in the public arena. Africentric charter schools, such as Roots Public Charter in Washington, DC, are starting points for conducting such research.

Another direction for future researchers is to investigate academic achievement as seen by those in the mainstream. That is, students involved in studies of higher education may compare NAS graduates' educational attainment to public or

other private school students' educational attainment. An offshoot from that could be an investigation of the important factors that play a role in the educational achievement of Black college students because an important question remains about the mismatch between the culture of the academy and the needs and cultures of Black collegians.

Perhaps the most important future study growing from this one could be an ethnographic and longitudinal look at the experiences of a student in NAS and the study of the same kind of a public school student. A study of this sort could begin to compare experiences in such a way that could inform Africentric and traditional educationists and might offer some ways to “marry” certain ideas and practices for the advancement of Black children.

## Endnotes

### *Intergroup Relation Theories*

Many theorists have attempted to describe the relationships that exist between and among groups. Many of these “intergroup relation theories” relate to the problems of oppression and the notions of resistance and group identification. Taylor and Moghddam (1994) outline the major intergroup theories, which include: the Freudian legacy, realistic conflict theory, social identity theory, equity theory, and relative deprivation theory. Regarding group relations, the Freudian legacy holds that, “hostility toward out-groups is one inevitable outcome of in-group cohesion” (p. 32). Freud suggests that as opposed to changing the material conditions of out-groups, channels should be forged for allowing them to exert their aggression.

Realistic conflict theory (RCT) is based upon three assumptions: (1) people are selfish and will try to maximize their own rewards, (2) conflict is the outcome of incompatible group interests, and (3) sometimes the social psychological aspects of intergroup behavior are not determinants of, but are determined by the compatibility or incompatibility of group interests (p. 35). RCT is based upon a belief that disadvantaged and oppressed groups have “real conflicts of interest” with oppressing groups.

Social identity theory is based upon the belief that human beings desire to be identified with worthwhile and laudable groups. Tajfel (1978a) explains that, “[This] theory assumes that individuals are motivated to achieve a positive “social identity,” defined as “the part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group”” (in Taylor & Mogghdan, 1994, p. 63). Social

identity theory focuses on the social psychological aspects of behavior as a means for understanding and explaining group behavior.

Equity theories are comprised of ideas about how groups desire to acquire justice. A central concept in the equity theory paradigm is the notion of people grappling with whether or not what they “got” is fair and just. “Essentially, equity theory deals with two questions: (1) What do people think is fair and equitable, and (2) How do they respond when they are getting far more or far less from their relationship than they deserve” (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978, p. vii). Equity theories focus on how groups deal with issues of the “equality of justice.” That is, how do groups grapple with their equal rights and protections?

Relative deprivation theories focus on how members of disadvantaged groups perceive their status based upon the fact that they are disadvantaged. To clarify, Taylor and Moghhdan explain that, “The fundamental idea is that it is a person’s relative status that determines his or her sense of satisfaction, not the objective situation” (1994, p. 119). For example, Blacks’ satisfaction is not based upon the individual situations where they may find themselves, but is instead based upon their status as an oppressed “minority” group. Relative deprivation theory offers insight into two important questions: (1) Why do well-off groups feel dissatisfied, and (2) Why do oppressed groups accept their oppressed position? (p. 138)

Certain tenets of each theory are partly applicable to Africentric ideology, but Africentric ideology is best couched in the social identity theory. While most social reform and civil rights propositions seek redress, Africentric education does not, and is therefore more located along the lines of social identity theory. In social identity

theory, “the knowledge that one belongs to certain groups and the value attached to group membership, in positive and negative terms, represent the individual’s social identity” (p. 78). Africentric ideology’s thrust that people of African descent are, in fact, African evidences its location as closer to social identity theory than the others presented above; however, Africentric ideology is not a social identity theory.

Social identity theory falls short of addressing the unique position of Blacks in American society. That is, while groups such as Native Americans may claim that they are “owed” something because America *took* the land of their ancestors, and Latino’s may make similar claims because their land was overtaken by the Spaniards and the English, Blacks have a different position. The Africentric ideologist notes that Blacks were brought by force to America, and have built the nation via three hundred years of free labor, and over one hundred more years of underpaid labor. This means that Blacks are in large part responsible for the wealth of America because work was done at no cost (Anderson, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995). Whereas social identity and equity theories address the problems of unfairness, oppression, and the need for definite identity recognition, they unfortunately fall short of explicating the unique socio-psychological particulars that are pertinent for Blacks. Africentric ideology more holistically addresses the issues and challenges that Blacks face; however, the Africentric theory has raised questions for some scholars who disagree with its precepts.

#### *Reading and Researching Africentric Education*

The literature on Africentric education is sparse. One obvious reason for the dearth of literature on Africentric education is that it is perceived by some as a

negative threat to the United States. My attempt to compile literature was an exhaustive exercise that led to the eventual surprising revelation of the lack of literature. Asante's (1990) assertion about becoming familiar with Black culture and customs before beginning a research endeavor has been most important. My familiarity with Africentric ideology began ten years ago when I attended the Indiana Black Exposition. While there, I heard Black community leaders who inspired me to begin reading books by Black people. The literature that I reviewed inspired me toward the Africentric intellectual genre. I engaged in a reading frenzy for years. Most of the books and articles I read concentrated on Africentric ideology, which laid a strong foundation for me as I continued my formal studies in education and was inspired to begin reading Africentric education authors such as Lisa Delpit and Asa Hilliard.

After spending years reading the work of scholars such as Delpit, Hilliard, Ladson-Billings, and Hoover, I began a formal inquiry into Africentric education that was supported by years of studying the general Africentric perspective of authors such as Asante, Akbar, and Maulana Karenga. I emphasize the importance of first becoming familiar with the Africentric ideological perspective before examining Africentric education literature because Africentric educationists do not write from rudimentary levels. Much of what they espouse in their work assumes foreground knowledge of general Africentric ideology; therefore, once I began the literature search that produced this review, I began as an informed consumer of the Africentric landscape. Hence, this review began ten years ago in Indianapolis, Indiana.

My formal search for Africentric education literature as pertains to this review began with emails and phone calls to prominent Africentric educationists such as Drs. Kofi Lomotey, Mwalimu Shujaa, Asa Hilliard, and Bernida Thompson. Lomotey and Shujaa responded by sending bibliographies. Hilliard responded by requesting that I review an extensive list of sources in the back of one of his books. Thompson responded by recommending that I review her Africentric guide to teaching science. I took the advice of all of the scholars. The process of reviewing their sources led me to other sources. For instance, I was led to some dissertations on Africentric education, such as the work of Brookins (1984), Doughty (1973), and Ridley (1971). I found that not very many dissertations have been written on Africentric education. In fact, I found eight dissertations and five theses that concentrated solely on Africentric education. Most of the studies that have been written concentrate on three things: (1) historical issues that led to the need for Africentric education, (2) investigations of Africentric education leaders and (3) classroom strategies used by educators for teaching Black children. A recent dissertation by Bernard Reese (2001) who examines issues of class, where Reese posits that Africentric educators often leave class issues out of their analyses and propositions. Shawn Ginwright's (1999) dissertation examines the economic, community and political forces, which have prompted Africentric education efforts. Marlene Archie's (1997) dissertation investigates how the precepts of Africentric education were used within public school curricula in Social Studies classes at schools in Philadelphia and New Jersey. Donald McNeely's (1996) dissertation examines the teaching-learning process as it relates to the conceptual learning style of Black students. McNeely sought to investigate the

match between what is offered to Black students in schools as compared to their cognitive styles. While McNeely's comes close, I found no studies that outlined the essential claims of Africentric education scholars, and then examined Africentric schools to understand how Africentric education works in practice as relates to culture. The literature I reviewed speaks to the imperatives of Africentric education.

A list of references was provided to me by Kofi Lomotey to begin a search for articles on Africentric education. I attended conferences such as the annual CIBI Conference, the annual National Alliance of Black School Educators Conference (NABSE), the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization Conference (ASCAC), I searched the ERIC database, the internet, and digital dissertations to find sources on Africentric education. After compiling the articles, I read and re-read them trying to figure out if there were major differences and/or similarities among authors. To check my perceptions, I re-read the articles and the few books and began sorting the major concepts in the literature. After finding the imperative constructs in the literature, I was interested in knowing what the range of thought was within the literature. Africentric education research literature generally concentrates on what happens in classrooms (Murrell, 1993; Perry & Fraser, 1993; Shujaa, 1995). Most Africentric education articles feature arguments made by scholars advancing the enactment of the goals of Africentric education. Much of the post 1995 dissertation research literature focuses in some way on Africentric education as a means for making Black children more competitive in schools.

I found seven cultural imperatives upon which all Africentric writers explicate, and with my background knowledge in Africentric ideology, I was able to

understand the dimensions of the imperatives. Although it appears that the imperatives and their dimensions are the “building blocks” of Africentric education literature, Africentric education practice must be examined in relationship to these imperatives. Africentric educationists seem to be making a claim that when the imperatives are in place, Black people are in a process of nationbuilding. The imperatives read as essential elements for helping to create a new reality for Blacks through the vehicle of education, yet independent Africentric schools demonstrate unique translations of the meanings of the imperatives.

APPENDIX A

Nyansa Nana Nom

Contact Author for Illustration, NNN Defined, and Retreat Aspects

## APPENDIX B

## Data Collection Schedule

<u>Event</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Times</u>
CIBI National Conference	Trenton, New Jersey	Nov. 23-24, 2001	8am-5pm both days
General Observation	NAS	January 21 and 23, 2002	11am-1pm
General Observation	NAS	January 28 and 30	11am-1pm
General Observation	NAS	February 5, 6, 7	11am-1pm
General Observation	NAS	February 19, 21	11am-1pm
General Observation	NAS	March 12, 13, 19, 20	9am-2pm
General Observation	NAS	March 26, 27	3pm-6pm+
Classroom Observation	NAS	March 5	9:15am 11:15am*
Classroom Observation	NAS	March 7	3:50pm-4:50pm
Classroom Observation	NAS	March 12	9:15am 11:15am*
Classroom Observation	NAS	March 25	10:15am-11:15am
Classroom Observation	NAS	April 16	9:25am 10:25am*
Classroom Observation	NAS	April 18	9:20am 10:20am
Classroom Observation	NAS	April 23	9:20am 11:20am*
Classroom Observation	NAS	April 30	9:20am 10:20am*
Classroom Observation	NAS	May 8	9:15am 11:15am
Classroom Observation	NAS	May 14	9:30am 10:30am
Classroom Observation	NAS	May 15	12:05pm-1:05pm**+
Return/Retrieve Conference	NAS	April 4, 5	9am-10pm+
CIBI Science Fair	St. Louis, MO	April 25, 26	8am-3pm both days**
Meeting with CIBI NEO	DC	May 3	1:30pm-2:45pm
NAS Staff Meeting	NAS	May 3	5pm-9pm
African Cultural Immersion	NNN	June29-July 6	7am-12 Midnight daily*
Return/Retrieve Conference days**+	NAS	April 4, 5 2003	9am-10pm both

\*Included interview sessions

\*\*Included CIBI executive meeting

+Included NAS Faculty/Staff Meetings

## APPENDIX C

## Lead-off interview questions posed to Kojo

What kind of school is this?

What do you offer the students here?

Tell me about the background of the school?

Tell me about your personal background?

How many children do you have?

Are your children students in the school?

I saw your book called *Nationbuliding*, what is that book about?

How does your school abide by what you say the book is about?

How is it decided if an applicant is granted admission into NAS?

How does governance work at this school?

Who are NAS leaders?

What do NAS leaders do any different from, say, a leadership cadre in a private school that doesn't deem itself to be Africentric?

What is NNN?

Who goes to NNN?

Can anyone go to NNN?

How do you want people to act in this school and at NNN?

Why do you want people at NAS and NNN to act a certain way?

Why do the people in this school wear the clothes they wear?

What kind of practices should Black people be engaging in their daily lives?

Molefi Asante talks about African agency, do you use that phrase?

## APPENDIX D

## Data Analysis Program



The Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows™ PCs is a versatile computer program designed to make the analysis of data collected during qualitative research easier, more efficient, and more effective.

It imports text-based qualitative data typed up in any word processor, straight into the program. The Ethnograph helps search and also note segments of interest within data, marks them with code words, and runs analyses which can be retrieved for inclusion in reports or for further analysis.

The Ethnograph is one of the first programs to pioneer computer assisted qualitative data analysis. The Ethnograph has continued to be developed by qualitative data analysts for qualitative data analysts such as social scientists, historians, literary critics, health researchers, business and market analysts, legal researchers and others.

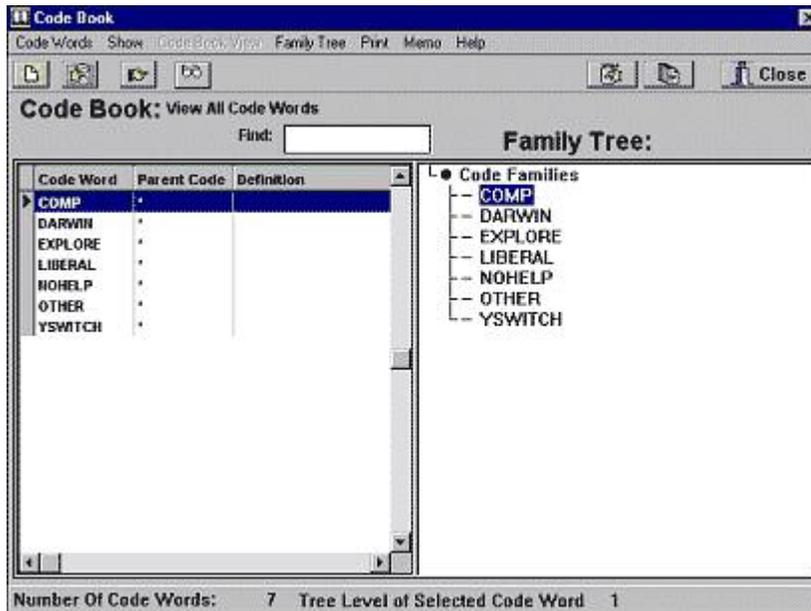
The Ethnograph will handles project data files and documents regardless of if data comes in the form of interview transcripts, field notes, open-ended survey responses, or other text-based documents.

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## APPENDIX E

## Data Coding

The Ethnograph computer software program allowed me to code data to find relationships between data and codes.



- I selectively displayed and printed the Code Family Tree or the Master Code list.
- As I compiled data, the Master code list was automatically created, and code words were added to the Code Book where I attached definitions of my codes.
- The pop up Master Code List kept track of all the code words I used, and helped select codes to be entered for the code sets and quick code procedures.
- I was able to organize code words into Code Families in the Code Family Tree.
- Code Families remained independent.
- I selectively displayed and printed the Code Book with the Code Family Tree.

The Ethnograph  
© Sage Publications

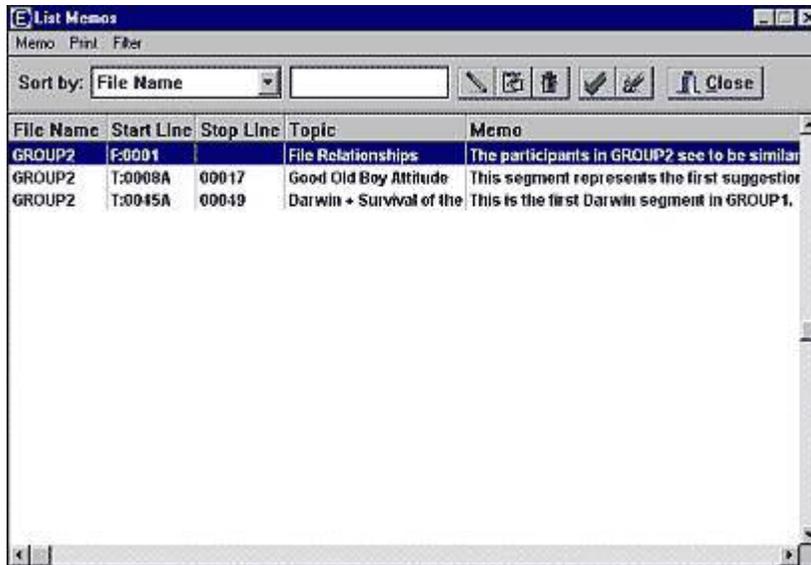
Contact Author for examples of coding

## APPENDIX F

## Memo Writing

The Ethnograph computer software program allowed me to keep information stored in

the memorandum function.



-I was able to attach memos to specific lines in a data file.

-I attached memos to specific lines in certain data files, and placed information directly to

the data file, which helped keep the background information, ideas or data sources close

by for easy reference.

- Memos attached to specific lines were flagged on the screen. I used this function to help me remember certain specific details about certain data.

- I copied some memos into the dissertation when able or necessary.

The Ethnograph  
© Scolari

Contact Author for an example of Memo Writing

APPENDIX G

Contact Author for the illustration of the Nationbuilding seminal text

Contact Author for writing examples from the Nationbuilding seminal text

## APPENDIX H

Contact Author for illustrations of the historical spirocycle

## APPENDIX I

Contact Author for examples of school publications and conference materials

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