Afrocentric Pedagogy as a Transformative Educational Practice

by

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This study is respectfully dedicated to my lovely daughters, Nefeteria, Taliah, Eimon, and Khadeejah, for their love, patience, and understanding. You are my inspiration, pride, and joy, and I am truly blessed to have you in my life. Thank you for all of the countless hours of encouragement that you gave to me and for having faith in me to advocate and commit to continuing the legacy of education for the African American community.
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ABSTRACT

Afrocentricity as a Transformative Educational Practice

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Miranda L. Ra’oof

This mixed-methods study analyzed the effectiveness of the practices and attitudes of selected African American teachers who use culturally relevant and responsive Afrocentric pedagogies as the instructional foundation for improved academic outcomes with their African American students. The theory of Afrocentricity was used as the philosophical framework to study their pedagogy. Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and practice in which in African people are placed at the center of their own history and culture; engages them as subjects rather than objects; and approaches them with respect for their interests, values, and perspectives (Asante 1980, 2003). Concepts employed from this theoretical framework provided a lens for the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data collected and analyzed. The setting for this study was a private Afrocentric prekindergarten through 8th-grade school. The participants in this study were 3 African American teachers. Data collected and analyzed supported using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to produce improved academic outcomes for students of color (Boykin, 1984, 1994; Hale-Benson, 1986; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shujaa, 1995; Villegas, 1991).
Findings suggested that in selected academic settings improved academic performance occurred for African American students when teachers used culture relevant and responsive pedagogy. The following themes were embedded in the pedagogy: self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family/community empowerment. The findings implied a need for teachers and teacher-training institutions to re-examine, recommit, and re-institute culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that respects and addresses the culture, education, and social improvement for positive academic outcomes for all children.

*Keywords:* Afrocentricity, Afrocentric Pedagogy, achievement gap, culturally responsive pedagogy.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background of the Study

One of the most referenced and persistent educational challenges of our time is that African American students and other students of color are further behind academically than most White students, and too often fail to meet minimum national or state academic requirements (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007; National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2007; Taylor & Graham, 2007). This disparity in academic performance has been designated as “the achievement gap,” and refers to the differences in scores on national and state achievement tests among various demographic groups, such as African American, Latinos, and Whites (Anderson et al., 2007). Educators, scholars, and public schools have extensively debated and researched this issue in search of possible solutions. Tremendous financial resources have been spent on educational programs, and educational consultants and specialists have examined and discussed the persistence of this academic achievement gap. And yet, in spite of this attention, effort, and expertise, the achievement gap between African American and White students continues and, indeed, widens in spite of success stories in varied communities of learning (Taylor & Graham, 2007). The academic achievement gap is not limited to children from communities of color and low socioeconomic status; students of color from affluent backgrounds also experience this phenomenon (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Kozol, 2005).

A series of complex reasons account for this persistent problem, ranging from various negative attitudes and practices of the students, themselves, and their families, to deficiencies in schools, teachers, and the social conditions of race and class (Gay, 2000; Murrell, 2002; Pollard
The focus in this study, however, is on teacher practices, and the culturally relevant conditions for its effectiveness in creating an equitable and effective community of teaching and learning, especially for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2000; Lee, 1994, 2006, 2007).

This study grows out of a professional and scholarly interest in contributing significantly to efforts to envision and construct a better and more socially just, culturally responsive, and effective educational process and future for students of color, especially African American students. It takes as a central concern reducing and, ultimately, closing the achievement gap for African American students through a transformative educational practice rooted in Afrocentric pedagogy. Thus, the study places emphasis on the attitudes and practices of teachers in this transformative process and Afrocentricity as an effective theoretical framework for this initiative.

**Statement of the Problem**

The persistence of underachievement by African American students and other students of color is an ongoing critical issue in education and, therefore, has been addressed in various ways, leading to much literature on its context, causes, and possible solutions. Central to the current discourse is an emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy as an indispensable approach in any equitable and effective solution. There is, then, much literature on culturally responsive pedagogy as a *general* solution, but much less on Afrocentric pedagogy as a *specific* culturally responsive solution for African American students. This study seeks to address the need to expand and enrich the literature on Afrocentric pedagogy and its role as a culturally responsive and effective practice in reducing and ending underachievement and producing high academic performance among African American students. The study focuses on an Afrocentric school
with high student performance and examines the relationship of its Afrocentric pedagogy to that high student performance.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic process and high student performance in an African-centered independent school with focus on the role of teacher attitudes and practices in producing positive and enhanced outcomes. This study conducted this critical examination within the framework of Afrocentric theory and a developed conception of Afrocentric pedagogy, positing Afrocentric pedagogy as a useful transformative educational practice in the effort to reduce and end the underachievement of African American students. Finally, in a larger sense, this study seeks to contribute significantly to and expand the discourse on underachievement and the usefulness of culturally responsive academic practice to enhance and expand the educational project as a whole.

This study has its origins and meaning in an interrelated set of concerns, both academic and social. As an administrator and teacher, I am concerned with what is called the achievement gap between students of color and the urgent need to understand the reasons for it, as well as the corrective measures required to address it. It is, in fact, the central intellectual problem addressed by this study. However, situated within the African American educational tradition, the study is also rooted in related social concerns, which undergird and drive my intellectual and professional work.

The major educators who laid the philosophical and practical foundation of the African American educational tradition conceived of and approached education not only as an indispensable way to understand society and the world, but also as an essential and powerful
force for social change in the interest of human good (Bethune, 2008; Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1975). Furthermore, they taught that education is a practice of freedom, intellectually, psychologically, and socially. Given that this educational tradition developed during the slave era, in which enslaved Africans were denied the right to read or write, and that deculturalization was a requirement for domination, education was necessarily about more than knowledge acquisition and career pursuits. Even in the North, free Africans defined and pursued education as a critical empowerment in the struggle for freedom and social justice (Logan, 1999; Lowenberg & Bogin, 1993).

Therefore, the emancipatory character and promise of education and its link to the struggle for freedom and social justice are defining features of the African American educational tradition, and as such inform this study. Also, as an active and reflective educator, I am concerned with social justice in society, as well as with just practices in the educational process. There is necessarily, then, a constant concern for linking and integrating theory and practice so that both the academy and society evidence justice in real and measurable ways.

In the educational process, justice must include due respect for students, their culture, and their community, crafting and practicing pedagogy that makes teaching and learning more culturally responsive and relevant and applicable to their daily lives in the context of the culture and community. These basic concerns and concepts informed the intellectual questions and aims of this study and directed my efforts toward understanding the meaning and application of Afrocentric pedagogy as instructional practice. As mentioned above, the concern with identifying and applying an ethically grounded and effective response to the underachievement of African American students is the driving force of this study.
Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that it offers a critical presentation of Afrocentric pedagogy in practice as an important contribution to culturally responsive, equitable, and effective teaching and learning. Therefore it makes a contribution to both expanding the literature on and emphasizing a specific cultural approach to African American students—as distinct from the literature stressing general culturally responsive approaches.

Additionally, this study is significant in its emphasis on the special role assigned to African American teachers embracing Afrocentric pedagogy as an ethical as well as academic practice, validating and affirming African Americans’ and other students’ worth and capacity to learn and contribute meaningfully to the educational process. This study and the practices it illustrates, therefore, have real implications for creating the transformative educational process necessary to contribute to high academic achievement and to reducing and ending African American students’ underachievement.

Lastly, this study is significant as it addresses social justice issues using an Afrocentric lens to examine the right and responsibility of African Americans to thrive and determine their path of human development and survival as a people, and to examine possibilities for a good and just future. Therefore, this research is critical for African American students and teachers to understand how institutionalized racism and racist educational policies have kept them fragmented, disempowered, and discouraged from concentrating on building a solid educational foundation for the next African American generation of teachers, students, and scholars.
Research Questions

The research questions of this study were directed toward examining Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive, equitable, and effective initiative in enhancing the academic achievement of African American students. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study are

1. What teaching practices are used by African American teachers to contribute to high academic achievement by African American students at an Afrocentric middle school?

2. What are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Afrocentricity and the Afrocentric pedagogy derived from it (Asante, 1990, 1998, 2003, 2007, 2003; Karenga, 2010; Lee, 2006, 2007; Mazama, 2003). Afrocentric pedagogy was conceived as a culturally responsive pedagogy and, therefore, draws insights from the latter (Gay, 2000; Hollie, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000, 2001; Murrell, 2002; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). As defined by its founding theorist, Molefi Asante (2003), “Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values and perspectives dominate” (p. 2). Moreover, it “means literally placing African values at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” (p. 2). Afrocentricity requires “a radical critique of Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as universals in the fields of intercommunication, rhetoric, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, education, anthropology and history, as well as other disciplines of human knowledge” (p. 1). Likewise,
Asante insisted on a reordering of things so that Africans are subjects, not objects, of their lives and history. He has stressed a fundamental concept in Afrocentricity and Afrocentric pedagogy, which is agency: the potential and ability to think, know, and act independently in one’s own interest (2007). This concept is vital to all forms of culturally responsive pedagogy, for it speaks to the dignity and ability of students as human beings, and to the teacher’s respect for students’ capacity to learn and contribute meaningfully to the educational process. It also speaks to valuing how their cultures influence the way black students understand and assert themselves in the world (Karenga, 1995).

Therefore, Asante (2007) has called for a transformative practice, in which Africans are not extracted from their own culture or denied the concept and practice of their own agency; on the contrary, they are taught to be and act as agents of their own lives and education, and are affirmed and validated in their own culture (Hale-Benson, 1986; Hollie, 2012). In fact, their knowledge and culture are identified and used in the teaching and learning process as a source of rich and valuable resources. In this understanding, Assante (2007) has explained, “Afrocentricity is the process of locating a student within the context of his or her own cultural reference in order to be able to relate to other culture perspectives” in the most productive way, a notion that “applies to students from any culture” (p. 79). In fact, “the most productive method of teaching a student is to place the student within the context of knowledge” (p. 79).

Asante (2007) listed as “minimum characteristics” (p. 41) of the Afrocentric project: (a) psychological location, (b) subject—place, (c) defense of African cultural values, (d) lexical refinement, and (e) commitment to corrective practice. These defining features find parallels in general culturally responsive pedagogy and translate in Afrocentric pedagogy as engaging
students as thinking, feeling, subjects rooted in a definite culture; respecting, affirming and validating that culture; removing language that denies the dignity of the students and the values and value of their culture; and being open to learning the cultures of the students as a part of what it means to be an excellent and effective teacher in a multicultural context (Au, 2006; Banks, 1991, 1997, 2008). However, Asante (2007) also stressed that the special needs and interests of African American students—like other students of particular identities—should not be collapsed into a generalized approach in the interest of an amorphous multiculturalism. For “Multiculturalism, to be authentic, must consider the Afrocentric perspective which is the proper stepping stone from the African American culture to a true multiculturalism” (p. 7). This essential principle of Afrocentric pedagogy applies equally to other cultures, whose similarities and differences must be acknowledged, studied, and employed responsively and productively in an equitable and effective educational process.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This mixed-methodology research study design incorporated data triangulation, including observations, interviews, and environmental artifacts. The qualitative research was based on teacher interviews and classroom observations using the observation protocol developed by the researcher and pilot tested by experts in the field of African American studies called the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT). The qualitative portion of the study, as related to the teacher observations, was developed through Molefi Asante’s (2003, 1980) Afrocentricity theory, a theory of social change and transformation as a philosophical lens to observe and collect the data. The qualitative nature of this study utilized grounded theory as the methodology to expand the data collected, coded, and analyzed. The researcher made some
generalizations about the practices and perceptions of African American teacher at the private middle school in this study and determined which themes and patterns emerged from the interviews and classroom observations. Also, the author engaged the research as a study of Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive practice, specifically for African American students, but with implications for teaching and learning in a diverse context.

In the initial investigation, the researcher observed teachers’ practices as a participant observer of the primary teachers in grades 6-8 (middle school), including three teachers and a total of 15 students. Although the primary focus was on the middle school teachers, two other teachers for combined grades 2-3 and 4-5 and their students were also observed during the observation phase of this research. Using the grounded theory methodology, the researcher conducted interviews and collected data about teaching practices that contribute and motivate high academic achievement among African American students. The researcher surveyed African American teachers using a questionnaire designed to determine if there was a significant relationship between African American teacher expectations and African American student achievement, accepting McMillan and Schumacher’s (2006) suggestion that surveys are a means of obtaining a representative description of traits, beliefs, and attitudes of characteristics of the population. The researcher also collected and analyzed documents, such as student grade report cards, and a culturally relevant curriculum that focused on the positive and expansive self-concept and self-esteem of African American students.

As the research was developed, data collected, and analyzed, four themes evolved that framed this research project. The themes of self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family and community empowerment were revealed through the teachers’
instructional practices and beliefs in the Afrocentric middle school classrooms observed by the researcher.

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

A limitation was that although it has implications for creating transformative educational space in diverse classrooms, the study was specifically framed and carried out within Afrocentric pedagogical theory. In addition, the school site had already established a record of high achievement for African American students, thus inviting prior assumptions about the effectiveness of its Afrocentric pedagogy.

A delimitation of this study was its focus on data collected from one private Afrocentric middle school; thus the findings on nonprivate schools may have limited any generalizations that were made. Also, observations were specifically focused on classes in math and English over a specific time period.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Most terms were defined according to definitions commonly used in academic settings or by the individual’s experiences, but for the purpose of this study, the terms were defined through an Afrocentric lens. Terms such as African American, Black, Afrocentricity, academic achievement, achievement gap, culture, and culturally responsive pedagogy were used throughout this study and are defined as follows:

The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably, meaning any person of Black African ancestry residing in the United States of America.

*Afrocentricity* is defined as a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interest, values, and perspectives dominate, placing African (African

*Academic achievement* refers to measurements on standardized tests, grades subject matter courses, and academic performance outcomes used to determine what a student knows, does not know, and his/her academic success.

*Academic achievement gap* is defined as the disparities in student (African American and Latino) school performance tied to race, ethnicity, gender, and sometimes socioeconomic status that show up as different achievement levels in academic grades, dropout rates, standardized test scores, course selection, and college entrance requirements and completion.

*Culture* is defined as shared perceptions, attitudes, and predispositions that allow people to organize experiences in certain ways (Asante, 1990). Neito (1999) expanded the definition to include culture as a social construct that binds people together.

*Culturally responsive pedagogy* is defined as the acknowledgement of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups and teaching to the needs and experiences of students by using their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frame of reference, and performance styles to make learning relevant and effective for them.

*Afrocentric pedagogy* is principles, attitudes, and practices of teaching rooted in African culture. It is a culturally responsive pedagogy specifically designed for African Americans, but with implications for general culturally responsive approaches.
**Triangulation** is the attempt to obtain more valid results by using multiple sources of data about one aspect of performance, multiple methods of collecting data and/or multiple interpretations of the same data.

**Organization of the Study and Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic process and high student performance in an African-centered school, with focus on the role of teachers’ practices and attitudes; to conduct this examination within the framework of Afrocentric theory and its conception of pedagogy; and to posit Afrocentric pedagogy as a useful transformational practice to reduce and end the underachievement of African American students.

Chapter one began with a discussion of the statement of the problem of academic underachievement of African American students and the important role of teacher attitudes and instructional practices in producing improved student academic outcomes. It addressed the significance of this study to the scholarly community and posed two research questions grounded in an Afrocentric theoretical framework. The research design and methodology addressed both the qualitative and quantitative data collected and presented. A brief section about the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of this study was followed by the definition of the key terms, and the organization and findings of this study.

Chapter two provides a discussion of the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy in general and Afrocentric theory and pedagogy in particular. It presents Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive pedagogy and illustrates both its similarities and distinctions.
Chapter three presents the research design and methodology of the study. It includes a discussion of the research questions, data collection theory and strategies, observation procedures, the setting, the participants, and the researcher.

Chapter four presents and analyzes the data findings. It discusses these data in terms of four primary themes: self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family/community empowerment. These themes were congruent with Asante’s (2007) Afrocentric theoretical framework, which focuses specifically on the aspects of cultural consciousness, mastery of basic knowledge and skills, cultural awareness, respect/morality for the family and the community, and, finally, self-reflection.

Chapter five presents conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research. It reaffirms the value of culturally responsive pedagogy with emphasis on a culturally specific pedagogy for African American students; that is to say, Afrocentric pedagogy. It also reaffirms the central role of African American teachers in the transformational educational process of enhancing African American student performance, ending their underachievement, and opening the way toward a socially just future in a democratic multicultural society and world.
To summarize, the key findings were:

- African American teachers at an Afrocentric middle school used Afrocentric teaching practices, strategies, and methods that promoted and enhanced the self-determination and academic performance of their students.

- African American teachers at an Afrocentric middle school held high expectations and beliefs about their practices and the capacity of their students to learn and participate meaningfully in their education.

- The Afrocentric pedagogical practices and beliefs used by African American teachers at an Afrocentric middle school were central and significant in the use of Afrocentricity as a culturally relevant and responsive theoretical framework.

- African American children can learn and are empowered when teachers believe in and care for them; hold high expectations, allowing them to take risks and master basic skills; create a welcoming and reaffirming learning environment; and provide them learning materials that are culturally sensitive, relevant, and interesting.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature examines works that were essential to developing a theoretical framework for this study, including conceptualizing, grounding, and carrying it out in useful and fruitful ways. It begins with a discussion of historical background, focusing on obstacles that have been encountered and overcome. It continues by engaging with the pivotal concept of culturally responsive pedagogy. Also, it treats the issue of teachers’ attitudes and practices in relation to student achievement and underachievement. Finally, this review of literature offered a critical discussion of Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive pedagogy and an important initiative in the effort to reduce and end underachievement among African American students and to enhance the educational experience overall.

History of Educational Struggles for African Americans in America

A historical perspective of the challenges that African Americans have faced in their pursuit of literacy and education in America will provide a better understanding of the origins of the current academic achievement gap and possible paths to reduce and end it. Also, it will offer evidence of resiliency and resourcefulness, with which obstacles to freedom and achievement were overcome (Anderson, 1988). American history records the enslavement, racism, segregation, discrimination, denial, delay, and injustices that African Americans faced as they sought access to education and literacy in America. Since the arrival of enslaved Africans to the American shores in 1619, teaching them to read was illegal (Edwards, Thompson-McMillon, & Turner, 2010; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Petrie, 1991). The denial of reading, writing, and access to literacy are examples of the inhumane and immoral treatment of enslaved
African Americans, an enslavement that denied their humanity and brutally exploited the bodies, minds, and labor (Brown, 2008). It was generally felt that enslaved Africans only served an economic purpose and that teaching an enslaved African to read was dangerous for business, served no purpose, and would cause the enslaved African to question his enslavement and, eventually, to revolt. As Belgrave and Allison (2006) have stated, following the Nat Turner Revolt of 1831:

Many states enacted or began to more vigilantly enforce laws that made it illegal to teach African American to read and write. A fear among white slave masters was that an education for slaves and the ability to read abolitionist writing would support the activities of slave rebellion. (p. 89)

The example of Nat Turner’s revolt against enslavement and the brutal injustices and conditions that he and other African American experienced is just one example used by Whites and other African slave owners to restrict and deny literacy to them and to keep them uneducated as a vital part of that enslavement. Although some cases abolitionist-minded Christians and missionaries intentionally educated enslaved Africans with the intent of their Christian conversion or for their support in the abolition movement, this effort did not extend to granting social equality to African Americans (Edwards et al., 2010; Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). Rather, there was a general commitment to racial inequality as a socially and legally enforced practice and an equal commitment to deculturalized Africans as part of systematic attempts to dehumanize them, destroy their will to resist, and enact their social death (Karenga, 2010; Patterson, 1982). In spite of these systemic processes of deculturalization and dehumanization, Africans retained a strong sense of their humanity and grounding in a reconstructed culture that was deeply spiritual and profoundly committed to education as an emancipatory and empowering practice (Karenga, 2010. Therefore, in spite of these restrictions and denials, and the constant threat of punishment
and even the possibility of death, enslaved Africans cleared free space to learn to read and write. As Anderson (1988) has reported, “Despite the dangers and difficulties, thousands of (enslaved Africans) learned to read and write. By 1860 about 5 percent had learned to read and write” (p. 16). This resiliency and resourcefulness not only speaks to past achievement and overcoming barriers, but also points to a continuing practice and commitment to education among African Americans on which to build.

After enslavement, the African American commitment to education continued and expanded. Anderson (1998) noted, “Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability and learning to read and write” (p. 5). He stated that this belief was expressed in three basic ways:

in the pride with which they talked of other ex- (enslaved Africans) who learned to read or write in slavery . . . in the esteem in which they held literature Blacks . . . (and) . . . in the intensity and frequency of their anger at slavery for keeping them illiterate. (p. 5)

There was, thus, a striving and push for education among emancipated Africans as well as Africans in the South and North who had not been enslaved. They held dear principles of self-reliance, self-determination, and free education for all. Anderson (1998) further asserted:

External assistance notwithstanding, the postwar campaign for a free schooling was firmly rooted in the beliefs and behaviors of former [enslaved Africans]. W.E.B. DuBois was on the mark when he said: “Public education for all at public expense was, in the South a[n] [African American] idea.” (p. 6)

Following Anderson, Murrell (2002) reaffirmed African Americans’ commitment to free education and their important role in fighting for educational access in the midst of the American hypocrisy of promoting education for the “common man” and restricting African American access to it. He stated, “This contradiction between the drive for universal literacy for the
common man and the denial of literacy for African Americans sharply defined the legacy of literacy for freedom and freedom for literacy among African Americans” (p. 25)

However, Murrell diminished Anderson’s (2002) emphasis on the historical initiative of African Americans in their struggle and violated at least two of the central tenets of the Afrocentric pedagogy he called for in his interpretation of the impact of the framers of the Constitution formal support for “universal” literacy. Indeed, an Afrocentric interpretation of African American history requires respect for the agency of African Americans and their status as subjects of their own history (Asante, 1990). Murrell (2002) stated: “If the framers of the Constitution had not explicitly articulated the diffusion of literacy among the populace as a condition of democratic participation, the significance of literacy to the struggle for freedom would not have been as great” (p. 25). In fact, he continued, stating, “We would not have the reverence for education and the struggle to acquire literacy as a powerful fixture in the cultural heritage of African Americans” (p. 25).

The first problem with this contention is that it diminishes or denies the historical initiative, agency and subject-place of African Americans in their agreed-upon commitment to achievement in education against overwhelming odds. Secondly, it ignores that although the framers of the Constitution articulated a need for the common man to be educated to participate in democracy, this need did not extend to Black men—or to women as a whole—both of whom were not allowed to participate in the body politic. And thirdly, the respect for and commitment to education for African American—enslaved and free—was not generated or defined by Euro-American claims and pretensions, but by their own culturally grounded and historically shaped values. As stated above, education was both a path to freedom and a practice of freedom. It was
a liberating and empowering process and achievement and a mode of resistance to its denial and restriction by the dominant society in the enslaving South and the segregated and oppressive North.

Therefore, although acquiring an education in America was challenging for African Americans, their determination, perseverance, and assertion as free people claiming their humanity (Perry et al., 2003) led them to establish their own schools and postsecondary institutions, colleges, and universities. Before public schooling was offered to African Americans, they utilized their local church as the schoolhouse, which in most cases, was the only Black-owned building in the community. During Sunday school, the teacher actively used a curriculum that emphasized secular education literacy skills and Christian values (Edwards et al., 2010).

Particularly important is the educational commitment and practices of 19th-century women educators who argued for and conducted the education of girls and boys, women and men during the period of Reconstruction and afterwards; these women include Anna Julia Cooper (1892), Frances Watkins Harper, Charlotte Forten Grimke, Lucy Craft Laney, Frances Jackson Coppin, and many others (Logan, 1999; Lowenberg & Bogin, 1993). They, in conjunction with Black male educators, formed the foundation on which the African American educational tradition was built (Cooper, 1892; Giddings, 1984; Neverdon-Morton, 1998). They practiced a holistic pedagogy summed up in the phrase “educating the head, hand and heart” (Gyant, 1996, p. 3). In short, they advocated knowledge that was intellectually rigorous, socially oriented and useful, and grounded in ethics and moral sensitivity to others. Their concerns were
not only to prepare students to function successfully in the world, but also to cultivate in them a commitment to improving their conditions and the world.

Therefore, these educators stressed teaching for social engagement and responsibility as a primary tenet of this pedagogy—as reflected in the motto at the entrance of Bethune-Cookman College, founded by one of the great African American educators of the 20th century, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. It says, “Enter to learn; depart to serve” (Bethune, 2008, p. 27). Dr. Bethune stated:

The preparation of the whole person has long been my dream for our youth ‘the training of the hand, the head and the heart’ has been the aim of my own educational philosophy. All the skills are important and all are necessary to a well-rounded education—the manual, the mental and spiritual. (p. 27)

This contention reflects the interest in socially useful knowledge and skills for Black men and women working in a segregated environment and her commitment to a well-rounded education of the whole person. Her position was that “we must never lose our contact with the real world of very day tasks, no matter how advanced may be our professional or technical training” (p. 28).

Furthermore, Dr. Bethune (2008) reemphasized her commitment to the ethical and spiritual, saying “And we must never lose sight of our spiritual values” (p. 28). For the world needs not only those who have standard knowledge and skills, she explained:

It will be built by those who have human understanding, sympathetic knowledge, and good will toward others. It will be the result of those who have learned to work and to think, those who know the problems and have the feelings of the realities of life and have their eyes on its spiritual meanings. (p. 29)

And, finally, she reaffirmed her belief in the commitment to drawing from the best of African heritage and culture, to teach our children, and to build a free, just, and good world: “Our heritage has prepared us to make our own contribution to the structuring of a better world. Out
of our suffering and our sacrifice we may rise to assist in the righting of other wrongs” (p. 29). The role of education in fostering and struggling for justice in society and the world is clearly evidenced in Bethune’s educational commitments.

Mary McLeod Bethune (2008), W. E. B. DuBois (1975), Carter G. Woodson (1933), and Booker T. Washington (1901/2000) were among the prominent educators who shaped the philosophical practice of African American education during the so-called Jim Crow era or era of segregation. The founding legal bases for this system of segregation was the Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), which lasted until Brown v. Board of Education (1954). The task of these educators was to create a system of education that emphasized excellence, was effective, and paid due attention to the racist conditions under which they worked. Whites, especially in the South and during the period of segregation, still resisted equality for African Americans in every area of social life, and used laws, violence, and the allocation process to deny African Americans equality and limit their progress.

Racist scholarship and ideologies provided the theoretical and social justification for racist practices and policies that kept African Americans segregated, subservient, and excluded from White-dominant schools, colleges, and universities (Banks, 1997). Among African American scholars, historical discourse on the educational needs of African Americans provoked tensions that created a forum for Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to discuss their philosophies regarding the kind of education African Americans should receive. These two Black men formed an essential discourse within the numerous research studies, scholarly essays, and books about how to educate African Americans in the United States of America.
In his fight for racial equality and education in America, in 1881, Booker T. Washington founded the Tuskegee Normal Institute, an all-Black college that taught African Americans vocational trades and academics. Washington’s emphasis was on providing African Americans with an education to make a living, to provide services to their community and society, and to avoid openly challenging the established order of things (Washington, 2000). Shaped by his experience as a slave and his knowledge of the ways that Whites in power limited the education of Black people, he opted for a vocational education for internal development—versus a liberal education—to interact successfully in various social spheres.

Renowned scholar, activist, and advocate for African American people, W. E. B. DuBois authored numerous books and hundreds of essays and articles describing racial discrimination and the issue of education for African Americans in the United States. DuBois (1903/2008) was Washington’s foremost critic and wrote a critical essay challenging the idea of an education isolated from the political and social conditions in which African Americans were embedded. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/2008), he criticized Washington’s apolitical adjustment to the times and argued against what he saw as “a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost complete to overshadow the higher aims of life” (p. 41). What he advocated in *The Education of Black People* (1975) was an education not only designed “to earn a decent living, [but also] to establish a reasonable life” (p. 96). Moreover, in his pedagogy, DuBois advocated an education grounded in the daily life experience of students, one that “roots itself in the group life, and afterward applies its knowledge and culture to actual living” (p. 96). For DuBois Black culture must be seen as a resource in the educational process.
The seminal work of Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (2009), laid a valuable foundation for understanding the use and misuse of education—and inspired this dissertation. Woodson wrote that many African Americans are “educated” or trained to have contempt for their own people (Africans) and admiration for other ethnic groups and cultures, and therefore learn not to value their own history, tradition and culture. This *miseducation* causes and perpetuates a crisis in consciousness, education, and life.

Woodson, however, argued for an emancipatory and empowering education and educational process. He stated, “Only by careful study of the (African American) himself and the life which he is forced to lead can we arrive at the proper procedure in this crisis” (p. 19-20). Also, Woodson’s pedagogy defines education as more than knowledge exchange; it involves teaching and encouraging critical thinking, agency, and self-determination. He stated, “The mere imparting of information is not education. Above all things, the effort must result in making a man think for himself and do for himself” (p. 20). Like Bethune and DuBois, Woodson advocated for an education located in the culture and life conditions of students. He said, “The education of any people must begin with the people themselves. History does not furnish a case of the elevation of a people by ignoring the thoughts and aspirations of the people” (p. 36)

In their emphasis on cultural grounding, social location, academic excellence, and social engagement and responsibility, these fundamental tenets and related ones form core principles for the practice of an Afrocentric pedagogy. Essential also—as demonstrated above—is a commitment to using knowledge in the interest of human freedom and agency, social justice and the creation of a just and good world.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent and important educational initiatives for addressing the underachievement of African American and other students of color and to achieve academic excellence is culturally responsive pedagogy (Boykin, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 1995, 2006). As argued above, the concept of culturally responsive teaching practices has a long history in the African American educational tradition (Bethune, 2008; Du Bois, 1975). Also, it can be argued that the more recent origin of the culturally focused educational initiative occurred in the 1960s with Black Studies and other ethnic studies pedagogies (Hare, 1969, 1972; Karenga, 2010). It also has roots in multicultural discourse emerging in the 1970s (Abrahams & Troike, 1972; Banks, 1973; Bowser, Jones, & Auletta-Youn Chun-Hoon, 1973; Karenga, 1995). However, the specific language of culturally responsive teaching emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Banks, 1997; Boykin, 1994; Hale-Benson, 1986; King, 1991; Lee, 1994; Shujaa, 1995; Villegas, 1991); indeed, Ladson-Billings (1994) attributed the emergence of culturally responsive teaching to “increased interest in looking at ways to improve the academic performance of students who are culturally, ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse” (p. 15).

Given the wide range of literature and discourse on this pivotal concept in initiatives to enhance academic performance, there are numerous variations in the name of the pedagogy as well as in its definitions and applications. Although there are many contributors to this critical conversation, the work understood by many to represent a definitive point of departure is Gloria Ladson-Billings’s (1994) The Dreamkeepers. Among the many culturally focused terms “used to analyze ways in which schools can be made more accessible to culturally diverse learners,”
she cited concepts of *culturally responsiveness; culturally congruent; cultural appropriateness; cultural compatibility; cultural synchronization*; and her choice, *cultural relevance*.

Ladson-Billings (1994) opted for cultural relevance and culturally relevant teaching that “uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture,” which may come from several sources: the absence or distortion of the students’ “history, culture or background in the textbook or curriculum,” racially exclusive staffing patterns or “the tracking of African American students into the lowest level classes” (pp. 19-20). She further asserted, “Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes” (pp. 17-18).

Building on Ladson-Billings’s work, Geneva Gay’s (2000) similarly pivotal book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, is a key contribution to deepening and expanding the discourse. She stated, “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). Moreover, “It teaches to and through the strengths of these students” (p. 31) and is culturally *validating and affirming*. This definition is placed under one of the five defining characteristics that it is *validating*.” In addition, “Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive,” involving the development of “intellectual, social, emotional and political learning” (p. 30).

Thirdly, “culturally responsive teaching is *multidimensional*,” encompassing “curriculum, content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional
techniques, and performance assessments” (p. 31), enabling “students to be better human beings and more successful learners” (p. 32). Also, it is transformative in its respect for “the culture and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino and Asian American students, its use and enhancement of other strengths and accomplishments” (p. 33). Finally, culturally responsive teaching is “emancipatory,” that is to say, “liberating in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing” (p. 35).

Gay tends to stress intellectual aspects of the transformative and emancipatory effects of culturally responsive pedagogy even while considering cultural, community, and social factors. However, Ladson-Billings (1992) and Afrocentric scholars have argued more fervently for a culturally relevant pedagogy that prepares students for their role as self-conscious agents in transforming themselves and society. It is this transformative thrust that I have embraced and used as the central emphasis of this study. I pose Afrocentric pedagogy as a transformative educational practice in terms of its impact on students, the educational process, and the communities and society in which the students live and learn.

Sharroky Hollie (2012) has observed, “Unfortunately, the term culturally responsive teaching has become a cliché, buried in the grave of educational terms that are cast about like ghosts in books, state mandates, district initiatives and conferences themes” (p. 18). Moreover, following Gay (2000), he called attention to the multiple names and definitions that have been used to indicate the practice, for example, culturally responsive, compatible, relevant, connected, matched, and proficient and appropriate teaching. He further noted that this proliferation has “contributed to its cliché use that has diluted its meaning” and “led to obscure attempts at
implementation” in various forms and settings. However, he still found it useful, stating that “the authenticity and relevance of the term is actually steeped in transforming instructional practices to make the difference for improving relationships between students and educators and increasing student achievement” (p. 18).

Hollie suggested using the phrase “culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy” (CLR) for three reasons: (a) to avoid “conflating culture and race”; (b) “to emphasize the language aspect of culture and give proper focus to it”; and (c) to stress “the specific use of pedagogy versus teaching and learning” (p. 20) and its centrality to the concept and practice of culturally responsive initiatives. He defined CLR as “going to where the students are culturally and linguistically, for the aim of bringing them where they need to be academically” (p. 23). Two key concepts in the framework of this pedagogy are validation, defined as “the intentional and purposeful legitimization of the home culture and language of the student” and affirmation, understood as “the intentional and purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes of non-mainstream cultures and languages portrayed in historical perspective” (p. 23). Interrelated with these are the concepts and practices of “building and bridging that will enable the students to function within the language of school” (p. 39). It is important to note his stress on the linguistic aspect of culturally responsive teaching for African Americans given that language difference factors strongly contribute to the miseducation of African American students and other students of color (Lee, 2006, 2007; Neito, 1999; Perry et al., 2003; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Shujaa, 1995; Villegas and Lucas, 2007).
Teacher Attitudes and High Expectations

Murrell (2002) has cogently argued, “Culturally responsive pedagogy in diverse settings is more than what is expressed in the mantra of what a teacher ‘knows and is able to do’” (p. 117). It also requires a certain pedagogical disposition, “that of regarding the classroom of African American children as you would any other community that you value and participate in by choice” (p. 117). In this assertion, Murrell correctly called attention to the vital role teacher attitudes play in shaping and guiding their practices, not only in teaching African Americans—the chief concern here—but also students of color as a whole. In agreement with Murrell and other scholars on this point, I argue similarly in this study that teachers’ attitudes and expectations aid in shaping and guiding students’ conception of themselves and their capacity to learn.

Research shows that positive teacher attitudes and high expectations for African American students contribute positively to their self-identity and academic success, and to positive social change in society, thus helping them define their place in society (Boykin, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005). Successful teachers of African American and other students of color build relationships with them and provide learning environments that are personal—similar to an extended family in which high expectations for all are met with an accountability for self and others (Delpit, 1995/2006; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1997, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Murrell, 1993). Teachers communicate their expectations, perspectives, values, and attitudes toward ethnic groups, making it is important for them to examine their curriculum, methods, values, and perspectives to determine the extent to which they promote equity and justice for all students Banks (1997). Thompson’s (2004) post in-service questionnaire results
regarding negative teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about teaching African American students demonstrate that the negative attitudes and beliefs that teachers held regarding African American students were difficult to change; but teachers were willing to try instructional strategies that might yield positive results for African American students in the classroom.

Research conducted by Oates (2003) further confirmed that teacher perceptions matter. In identification of correlates of positive and negative achievement for African American students, White and Parham (1990) identified several consistent factors as contributing to or inhibiting African American students’ academic achievement. These factors included self-concept, value orientation, teacher expectation, and family composition (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000). Results of experiments conducted by researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in their classic study and other subsequent studies surrounding this topic demonstrated that if teachers are attentive, encouraging, patient, and tolerant with students expected to show intellectual promise, then those students will do well; the reverse is true for students perceived to be less intellectually gifted (Parham et al., 2000).

Some major voices in the discussion on race, social class, and teacher expectations revealed that even in the elementary school context, social stratification of knowledge is evident, as are indicators for students of color to achieve at a lower rate (Anyon, 1980; Brophy, 1983; Clark, 1965; Edwards et al., 2010; Rist, 1970). Often, class and race stratification undergirds a “hidden curriculum” and related assumptions, which negatively impact the teaching and learning process. Edwards et al. (2010) have discussed Rist’s (1970) article, “Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education,” in which the kindergarten teacher places students in a reading group based on the social class composition of
the class, and this class stratification persists with students throughout the elementary school experience. Research showed that at a very young age, children discover that they are not getting all of what they need from their teachers and that their teachers treat them different from the other children in the class. This discovery is possible even at the level of kindergarteners, who are able to perceive what their teachers expect of and from them. Therefore, teacher perceptions and high expectations are significant for both student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

**Cultural Responsiveness and Effective Teaching**

There is widespread agreement that knowledge of their students’ cultures and ethnicities is essential to teacher effectiveness as a framework for inquiry (Au, 2006; Gay, 2000). Effective teachers use culturally responsive activities, resources, and strategies to organize and implement instruction (Au, 2006; Gay, 2000). As important as teachers knowing their students’ cultures and ethnic traditions is that teachers have knowledge of their own history and culture, and that they are able to discuss race, culture, and social injustices in a safe environment with their students. In her study of effective teaching for African Americans, Ladson-Billings (2000) asserted, “Teachers who practice culturally relevant methods can be identified by the way that they see themselves and others” (p. 25). Effective teachers are in touch with how their students experience community, social issues, knowledge base, curriculum distortions, and the historical injustices as enforced by the dominant culture. Thus, effective teachers for any marginalized racial group must acknowledge and understand their own racial biases and the biases that permeate society and negatively impact their diverse student populations.
At the 2008 Phi Delta Kappa Summit, Erin Young, managing editor of web and publications for Phi Delta Kappa recorded the ideas from education panelists and keynote speaker Thomas Guskey, professor at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky, who addressed the topic, *What Makes a Great Teacher?* In his address, Guskey stated, “In all of our research on effective teachers, it’s been very difficult for us to come up with any set of personality characteristics that defines a highly effective teacher” (Cited in Young, 2009, p. 438). The article continued with Guskey stating, “Teachers who are effective in rural schools fail when they’re put into urban schools, even though they’re doing the same things they did in the rural schools and vice versa” (Cited in Young, 2009, p. 438). Guskey’s final point to the audience aims at how colleges should prepare teacher candidates to be familiar with a variety of students and how to be effective with them. He stated:

> Maybe best practices depend on where you are, the kinds of students you’re teaching, the kinds of communities in which they live, the cultural background they bring to school. Those things really need to be built in, because . . . what’s effective depends on the kind of students who are in front of you, (Young, 2009)

Banks (1991) and Ladson-Billings (1995) have agreed upon key characteristics of an effective teacher in a multicultural society. Banks (1991) included the following categories as the basics for effective teaching: knowledge, clarified cultural identification, positive intergroup and racial attitudes, and pedagogical skills. Teachers can become effective with diverse learning populations through professional development that addresses teacher beliefs and sensitizes them to students’ individual learning differences (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2008). Others stressed content knowledge and believe that teachers’ depth and breath of content, paired with specific learning objectives, affords students a chance to learn content subject matter (Shulman, 2004). But as discussed earlier, it is not enough for teachers to have knowledge competency alone; they
must possess and understand their students’ cultures and develop relationships with them to be effective (Au, 2006; Banks, 2008; Boykin, 1994; Delpit, 1995/2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Krueger, 2005; Perry et al., 2003; Young, 2009).

Thea Abu El-Haj (2006) discussed cultural responsiveness in the context of social justice concerns, illuminating three critical social justice concerns. One key concern of her research is that the philosophy and practices of multicultural education commit to broadening educational perspective, and be inclusive of traditionally marginalized groups in schools. Educational inequities and the “problem of difference” continue to exist in schools (p. 10). While conducting an ethnographic study of two schools, El-Haj argued for developing a relational view and model of difference in the work in schools, stating, “In this model, differences such as gender, race, or disability are not viewed as the property of individuals or groups; rather they indicate relationships that are constructed and reconstructed in specific institutional contexts” (p. 16).

Recognizing that building positive relationships is a challenging societal issue, El-Haj suggested that educators confront and examine how certain educational practices result in inequalities for particular children and groups, simultaneously providing privilege to others groups. For some students, forging relationships and recognizing students’ diversity and differences are essential to acknowledging their existence in society; for African American students, these efforts are essential to their academic success in school.

**Teacher Effectiveness with African Americans**

In a 1988 study of successful teachers of African American students, Gloria Ladson-Billings made the distinction between excellent teaching and excellent teachers. She expanded her study in her groundbreaking book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African*
American Students (1994), in which, as discussed above, she examined effective teaching for African American students and how culturally relevant teaching helped them achieve academic success and maintain a positive self-identity as African Americans. According to other African American scholars in education, the methodology used by teachers to teach African American students profoundly effects their self-concept, learning, and academic achievement (Asante, 2003; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1988; Tatum, 2005).

Research shows that African American students learn better when the teacher is genuinely interested in them and builds a positive relationship with them; that is, the teacher knows them by their names and is aware of the makeup of their family members and circumstances. In Delpit’s (2006) essay on cross-cultural assessments, she counters Shulman’s (1987) mainstream argument that good teaching begins with teachers’ awareness of an ability to transfer knowledge. Delpit (2006) explained that through a series of interviews and personal experiences with teachers from communities of color, many individuals she interviewed believed that teaching begins with establishing relationships with students. Teachers who establish a connection with students and their community win their students’ trust, which facilitates an effective learning process.

An effective teacher with African American students knows and understands the history and culture of the African American student and is able to make historical connections that tie the student into a critical and acceptable place in modern society. In his discussion of Black adolescent males and the achievement gap, Tatum (2005) reiterated Ladson-Billings’s (1995) argument for using a culturally responsive teaching approach as an effective practice for teaching African American male students. He expressed the importance of teachers using the
students’ culture as an important source of the students’ education. Building on Ladson-Billings’s (1995) argument, he stressed that teachers should use the “culturally responsive approach for helping students who have not been served well by our nation’s public schools,” and asserted that “teachers create conditions for effective learning when they recognize the importance of culture and make use of the students’ culture in certain activities” (p. 74).

In their work, Edwards et al. (2010) listed other culturally relevant and effective teaching strategies and best teaching practices for teaching African American students. They include the use of (a) specialized literacy strategies for teaching African American males to read and to write (Tatum, 2005) and similar programs for Black females (Salomone, 2003); (b) music and hip-hop (Morrell, 2004); (c) informational text (Duke, 2000a, 2000b); (d) narratives (Juzwik, 2004, 2006a, 2006b); (e) cultural modeling (Lee, 2007); and (f) cognitive flexibility (Spiro, 1991).

The common theme in each of these culturally relevant and culturally responsive practices above is their inclusion of a traditional African cultural aspect to which the African American student can relate. For example, Tatum’s (2009) research on best practices for teaching African American males to read suggested that reading materials for African American males should engage them culturally, socially, and emotionally with culturally relevant text, characters, and curriculum that empowers and resonates with them.

Edwards et al. (2010), in discussing Morrell’s (2004) use of hip-hop as a best practice for teaching African American youth literacy, have stated that historical Black musical genres such as spirituals, gospel, blues, jazz, funk, and hip-hop themes such as coping with the strife of social inequality and the constant presence of racism, political organization, self-(re)definition, and subversion are commonplace. Similar to Tatum’s (2005) use of gender-specific, culturally
relevant, and specific text related to the lives of adolescent African American males to get them to read and to write, Morrell (2004) has used hip-hop related to students’ daily lives to make parallels with classic novels. According to Edwards et al. (2010), “Students are taught to conceptualize, critique, and respond to tests from popular culture, and they are taught how to utilize the same skills to understand canonical literature and to answer questions on standardized exams” (p. 81).

Duke’s (2000a, 2000b) research offers another example of using culturally relevant and responsive best teaching practices for African American students. Duke researched the use of informational testing in the classrooms of first-grade teachers. He found differences and disparities in the print environments of low socioeconomic children versus high socioeconomic children, and concluded that the achievement scores of many African American students could be blamed on inadequate funding and classroom materials at the school—not solely on the home literacy environment. Duke concluded by stating that by exposing children to informational text at early ages, teachers could identify their interests early, improve their literacy and critical thinking skills, and motivate them to want to read and to write.

The use of cultural narratives is another methodology and best teaching practice used by African American and other culturally aware teachers to teach African American students. Juzwik (2006a, 2006b) recommended using a rhetorical framework to get students to talk about sensitive and difficult issues, such as the Holocaust, slavery, and race. Clark and Medina (2000) and Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp (2004) are other advocates of narrative-based pedagogies, including reading stories about culturally diverse people and assigning diverse students to write their family stories to get them motivated to actively participate in their learning.
Carol D. Lee (2007), a strong advocate of teaching an African-centered pedagogy to African American children, advanced a theory of cultural modeling as a best teaching practice for African American students. According to Lee, cultural modeling is a way of designing instruction that explicitly connects content and literacy goals to and knowledge and experiences students share with family, community, and peers. In their research, Edwards et al. (2010) and Delpit (1988) expressed similar ideas for explicitly teaching African American students the rule of power. Lee (2007) stated that students must be explicitly taught the patterns of various text and comprehension strategies that scaffold the learning process for understanding.

Rand Spiro (1991) has taught effective teaching practices through the use of cognitive flexibility using technology to elevate teaching practices. According to Spiro, teachers improve their teaching practices by watching several videotapes of themselves from multiple perspectives to become aware of their students’ perspectives. By seeing themselves as facilitators of learning, teachers can observe their execution of effective or the lack of effective teaching practices. Teachers who use multiple perspectives to understand student learning and effective teaching practices can help students engage in academics and culturally relevant learning activities using a variety of practices.

**Assessment and Effective Teaching Practices**

Educators have come also to recognize the important role of assessment in instruction, student learning, and successful teacher practice (Danielson, 1996). Assessment is considered a viable component of the learning process and effective teaching (Danielson, 1996, 2007; Gallavan, 2009). According to Gallavan (2009), almost all effective assessments are performance-based and could include students demonstrating outcomes such as reading aloud,
calculating a math problem, conducting a science experiment, giving a speech, turning a cartwheel, responding to discussion questions, completing a worksheet, or taking a written test. Assessing students could mean much more than just giving them a test. Every time teachers check for understanding, they are conducting an assessment (Gallavan, 2009). Assessment drives learning, teaching, and schooling, as teachers develop their curriculum and design their instruction.

Noted distinctions have been made between summative and formative assessments (Gallavan, 2009; Heritage, 2010; Marzano, 2006; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Stiggins, 2008). Summative assessments are tests on the chapters, projects, presentations, and portfolios whereby the student produce a product that the teacher can see, hear, and read; there are three ways to assess a summative assessment: watch, listen, and read (Gallavan, 2009). Summative assessment occurs when the student produces a product that the teacher can build on their teaching skills scaffolding, spiraling, compacting, and integrating learning across the curriculum based on the students’ end product. Whereas, in formative assessment, “teachers collect data while learning is taking place, it is a continuous process during the course of teaching and learning to provide teachers and students with feedback to close the learning gap between current learning and desired goals” (Heritage, 2010, p. 28). Marzano (2006) has suggested that formative assessments encourage students to improve their own learning, and offered three techniques associated with helping students to accomplish this goal. The first involves students tracking their progress on specific measurement topics using graphs. The second engages students in different forms of self-reflection regarding their progress on measurement topics. The third addresses estimating students’ true scores at the end of a grading period (Marzano, 2006).
Thompson’s (2010) research about how to assess and improve tests scores for African American students began with a survey of educators, examining their views about standardized tests. The results indicated that many teachers worry about testing students, feel pressure related to producing high scores, and are concerned about job security based upon test results. According to Thompson’s (2010) survey with educators on test-taking strategies, three of the most important strategies for test-taking reported by the educators as the least likely to be used were: “assessing students at the beginning of the year, devoting enough time to test preparation, and helping students deal with test anxiety” (p. 121). She suggested that these strategies are critical to preparing African American students for standardized and other tests. She recommended that teachers “don’t give mixed messages” to students about likes or dislikes around the assessment or testing process. She explained, “If you don’t like giving the tests (and who really does), you can unknowingly convey that message to students, and impact their performance” (p. 122).

While conducting a workshop on how educators feel about standardized tests, Thompson (2010) asked 100 participants to identify the best and the least effective standardized test preparation strategies they use. From their responses, she identified five of the most frequently cited test preparation strategies they recommended to prepare their students for standardize tests and nine of the least recommended test preparation strategies. The five most frequently cited strategies were as follows:

• model test-taking strategies (60%);
• administer practice tests (48%);
• tie the curriculum to the information on which the student will be tested (37%);
• teach students how to read test questions (33%); and
• teach students how to select the best choices (22%)

Thompson (2010) noted, “The least-cited recommendations from the workshop participants as interesting and troubling especially when it came to preparing African American students for standardized tests” (p. 121). They were as follows:

• cover test objectives (6%);
• assess students at the beginning of the year (6%);
• devote enough time to test preparation (6%);
• use mnemonic devices (5%);
• give examples and sample questions (5%);
• teach students how to pace themselves (5%);
• help students deal with test anxiety (3%);
• encourage students to get enough sleep (3%); and
• encourage students to eat breakfast (3%).

Thompson (2010) posited the importance of teachers administering assessments early to their students to uncover students strength and weaknesses and to become familiar with the qualities of becoming an effective teacher of African American students. She cited synthesized research on teacher effectiveness conducted by researchers at the North Central Educational Laboratory in her recent book and resource for educators, *The Power of One: How You Can Help or Harm African American Students* (2010), whose central themes include increasing efficacy with African American students and identifying the personal benefits of becoming more effective educators of African American students.
According to Thompson (2010), The North Central Educational researchers listed effective teacher practices as follows:

- have good classroom management skills and an orderly class environment so that students can learn;
- review important subject matter on a daily basis;
- use diverse teaching strategies;
- work with small groups;
- give feedback about their progress on a regular basis;
- stay in touch with parents;
- adjust difficulty level of the material to student ability;
- pace the amount of information presented to the class; and
- check student progress continually by asking questions of all students, and relate new learning to prior learning.

Thompson’s (2007) research on low-performing schools in California was not only an opportunity to examine standardized tests scores for African American students. She expanded her research and collected data through questionnaire and focus groups that included student attitudes and concerns regarding race, discipline, and the desire for interesting and culturally relevant education, parental involvement, school and classroom environment, and college. Thompson’s book *Up Where We Belong* (2007), in which African American students were respectively overrepresented featured students’ voices for their teachers, counselors, and administrators to hear them ask for challenging classes and high teacher expectations, and for positive stories about Black people and Black history. In her book, Thompson (2007) further
explored the definition of what makes teachers effective, asserting that they must know and understand their students’ community, must be familiar with their personal interests, beliefs, and concerns. According to Thompson (2007, 2010), these teacher practices are essential requirements for teachers working with African American students.

Therefore, research shows that some teachers’ practices can improve and that African America students’ learning could be enhanced if teachers use traditional African educational strategies to obtain and reinforce literacy. The role of the teacher is to understand these strategies and to appeal to the intellect, the humanity, and the spirituality of his or her African American students (Hilliard, 1998). According to Hilliard, however, too few professional educators understand African culture. “Few have studied African culture even though cultural knowledge is the foundation of respect for the group” (p. 73). This reality poses a problem not only for effective teaching, but also for student learning. Asante (2003) stated, “Culture is at the base of all values . . . A people without an appreciation of the value of historical experiences will always create chaos” (p. 1). Therefore, for teachers who teach African American students, knowledge of African and African American history and culture is essential in understanding their historical and cultural circumstances in American and throughout the world. For most teachers, having knowledge of the African American experience in America helps them develop understanding and compassion, and supports building trusting relationships with their students, which benefits the successful engagement of the learning process and academic success.

**Theoretical Framework: Afrocentric Pedagogy**

As noted above, the theoretical framework for this study is Afrocentricity, a theory of social change and cultural focus authored and developed by Molefi Asante (1980, 1990, 1998,
2007; Mazama, 2003). This theory has had an important impact in the field of education, especially as it relates to the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Murrell, 2002; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Shujaa, 1995). Afrocentricity is defined by Molefi Asante (1998) as “literally placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” (p. 2)—that is to say, African people. Centering and centeredness is at the heart of this theory, and applies here to Africans, but also to other people in terms of their own cultures. Asante (1990) defined centeredness as “the groundedness of observation in one’s own historical experience” (p. 12).

Central to Asante’s concept of Afrocentricity, then, and therefore to Afrocentric pedagogy, is the concept of location or centering a person or student in his/her own culture. In a multicultural educational context, Asante (2007) stated, “Centricity is the process of locating a student within the context of his or her own cultural reference in order to be able to relate to other cultural perspectives” (p. 79). In other words, students begin to learn by valuing and using their own culture as a worthy resource for making meaning, constructing knowledge, and engaging other ideas, cultures, and peoples. Furthermore, “Afrocentricity seeks to place African students in the center of their own history,” to reaffirm the value of their own person and culture as a ground for knowing and learning (Asante & Mazama, 2010, p. 4). Therefore, “It is essentially a theory of African agency and cultural connectedness” (p. 4). Emphasizing the nonexclusive character of this practice and its usefulness for educating any students, Asante and Mazama (2010) asserted, “This idea applies to students of any culture” (p. 4). In fact, to be a serious and effective Afrocentric pedagogy, Asante said, “Centricity must be practiced in such a way that students from various cultures see themselves as participating in the flow of information
and knowledge” (p. 4). That is to say, they self-consciously contribute to the teaching and learning process in which knowledge is constantly being constructed and engaged.

This assertion, in turn, raises Asante’s (2007) concept of agency: the ability to act independently in one’s own best interest and the notion that persons and students are subjects in their own history and culture. In short, agency refers to respect for students’ capacity to learn and contribute to their own education in real and meaningful ways. Asante has argued that teachers must also teach the truth of the African contribution to history and society, which “means we do not marginalize children by placing them in positions that cause them to question their own self-worth because their cultural narrative is not told,” or is told in distorted and diminished ways (p. 80). In fact, if African history and culture are taught accurately and fully, this narrative serves as a necessary important corrective “against marginalizing African American children, Latino children, Asian American (and) Native American children” (p. 82). For it will not only include critical interaction and relations among these groups, but will also offer a centric model for the groups in moving toward the center of their own history and culture. In addition, he (2003) contended, “Because all content areas are adaptable to an Afrocentric approach, African Americans can be made to see themselves as centered in the reality of any discipline” (p. 79). And other cultural groups can do likewise from their own cultural vantage point.

At this point, Asante’s stress on the moral imperative of this cultural-centered process is foregrounded. For it refers back to the concept of respect for the dignity, ability, and potential of each human person, each student, and the promise such respect offers for enhanced educational achievement (Asante, 1998, 2007). Finally, Asante (2007) spoke of the emancipatory aspect of
Afrocentricity in its seeking “to obliterate the mental, physical, cultural and economic dislocation of African people by thrusting Africans as centered, healthy human beings in the context of African thought (and practice)” (p. 120, 121). It would be, he argued, a revolutionary and emancipatory movement from margin to center—away from all hegemonic forms of education and social life.

Building on these fundamental concepts of Afrocentricity, numerous educators have explored the usefulness of them for developing Afrocentric pedagogy. In her classic work on successful teachers of African American children, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) stated that Afrocentricity is not simply data about Africans and Africa. It represents “the building of a new scholarly tradition” (p. 146). She explained that she embraces an Afrocentric research methodology because it offers “an approach to scholarly inquiry that is consistent with the ways in which people of African descent see and experience the world.” Also, she points out that in her Afrocentric research “the African child and community were the subjects not the objects” (p. 181). This approach expresses a genuine respect for them and for their strengths and potential. Therefore, she “worked with the assumption that African American students and their parents demonstrate normative behavior and that they act rationally making decisions that make sense” (p. 181). Moreover, she explained, “Nowhere in our deliberation did we cast students’ or parents’ behaviors in the language of pathology” (p. 181).

Ladson-Billings’s presentation of essential pedagogical concepts and practices, which define Afrocentric pedagogy, is important to reaffirming key concepts and approaches for this study. First, it is important to understand Afrocentricity and the Afrocentric pedagogy that emerges from it as an intellectual and educational tradition, not simply a mode of collecting and
delivering data about Africans and Africa. It is a research and teaching methodology, which, Asante (2007) has stated, engages African American students and their community as subjects, not objects. Engaging African American students and community as subjects opens the way to appreciating their agency, that is to say, approaching each student or person as “a human being who is capable of acting independently in his or her own interest” (p. 40). This method also requires recognizing the students and community as primary resources in their own education and in the educational process. The stress on agency for Ladson-Billings involves recognizing the rational meaning making that Africans engage in, and using this cultural practice as a pedagogical resource rather than making assumptions that diminish and marginalize the students’ and community’s value and role in the educational project. It also means, as she has pointed out, that one moves away from both pathological conceptions and language by engaging the students and their community.

Geneva Gay (2000) found three “common pedagogical characteristics of African-centered schools” (p. 17): a three-part instructional agenda; the use of the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles); and “a pledge, motto, school song and identification signals” (p. 17). She stated first that “Regardless of geographic location, school level (elementary or middle), type (entire school or classes within schools), or targeted population (male, female or co-educational, African American-centered programs have a three-part instructional agenda” (p. 175). These three overarching aims are to

1. Improve the academic achievement in basic literacy (reading, writing, and math) and intellectual (critical thinking, problem solving) skills;
2. Contribute to the cultural socialization of students by teaching African and African American history, heritage and culture; and
3. Facilitate individual development through improved self-concepts, self-expression, self-reliance and self-confidence. (p. 208)
Moreover, she observed, “A climate for learning is created in which students are validated, held in high esteem, expected to achieve high performance and supported in meeting expectations” (p. 208).

A second common feature of African-centered schools, as Gay has stated, is teaching the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles). These principles—most often identified as The Seven Principles of *Kwanzaa*—are also The Seven Principles of *Kawaida* philosophy, from which both Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba were created (Karenga, 1998). Maulana Karenga (1998), who created Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba and is the author of Kawaida philosophy, defined Kawaida as “a communitarian African philosophy which is an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world” (p. 35). He stated, “Kawaida is further defined by its central focus on views and values and its commitment to an ongoing dialog with African culture which involves using it as a resource rather than a reference” (pp. 35-36).

This emphasis on culture and the views and values that it contains expresses itself in the development of the Nguzo Saba as a cultural value system at the heart of Kawaida philosophy and, as Gay has pointed out, is a central element in the educational practice of African-centered programs. Gay (2002) noted that the Nguzo Saba “is used as guidelines for designing and implementing instructional programs, as standards of personal conduct and as criteria for creating a community climate in the entire school” (p. 176).

These principles are, as she observed, translated into various versions for pedagogical practice. However, the original and standard version in Swahili and English, is:

- *Umoja* (Unity) – to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race;
• *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) – to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves;
• *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) – to build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together;
• *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) – to build and maintain our stores, shops and other business and to profit from them together;
• *Nia* (Purpose) – to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness;
• *Kuumba* (Creativity) – to do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it; and
• *Imani* (Faith) – to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory our struggle. (Karenga, 1998, pp. 43)

Finally, Gay (2000) stated, “These principles and related learning activities usually unfold within a milieu of collaborative efforts signaled by students working together for collective betterment, ceremonies and rituals of bonding, celebrations of success, and community service within and outside school” (p. 176).

A third feature identified by Gay (2000), as common to all African-centered schools, is the important role of “some kind of pledge, motto, school song, and identification signals through which students are taught community values, codes of conduct and institutional allegiance” (p. 177). These symbols and rituals of reinforcement are rooted in and derived from African culture, both continental African and African American. They reflect and teach cultural views and values and offer students an opportunity to understand and express themselves in collective, collaborative, and expanded ways. Moreover, they build a sense of solidarity central to the cooperative learning process these programs value and promote.
Carol Lee (1995) has argued that in addressing the issue of quality education and “in meeting the educational imperatives facing African American people and their cultural life,” there is a need for an African-centered pedagogy (p. 296). She stated more specifically that:

African-centered pedagogy is needed: to support a line of resistance to the imposition of Eurocentric biases . . . to produce an education that contributes to achieving pride, equity, power, wealth and cultural continuity for Africans in America and elsewhere . . . (and); to foster an ethical character development grounded upon social practice within the African community. (p. 296)

Lee (1995) asserted that when she speaks of African culture, she is not claiming a monolithic and static culture, but that recognizing change and variation points to what she calls “ontological foundations,” which are central and enduring to African culture and, therefore, to Afrocentric pedagogy. Borrowing from Maulana Karenga’s (1990) work on ancient Egyptian Maatian ethics and social thought and African culture as a whole, Lee (1995) cited several core values essential to grounding in Afrocentric pedagogy. These fundamental values, which represent an ethical conception of the human person and, therefore, are essential to the approach to students are: “divine image of humans; perfectibility of humans; the teachability of humans; the free will of humans; and the essentiality of moral social practice in human development” (as cited in Karenga, 1990, p. 26).

A summary of Karenga’s (1990) interpretation of these concepts is as follows. The first value—humans as images of the divine—requires profound respect for the human person. This attitude, of course, would include respect for all persons in all their various cultural identities. The second concept—the perfectibility of humans—affirms the agency of the person or student, that is, his or her ability to grow and reach his or her inherent potential and to act in his or her own personal and shared interests. The third concept—the teachability of humans—understands
the human person or student as malleable, capable of intellectual and moral cultivation in the interest of him or herself and others. The fourth concept of free will reaffirms the human agency of students and the capacity for choice and action this concept implies. At this point, Maatian ethics also stresses moral conscience and considerate thought about learning and the issues of life. The fifth core value, which emphasizes the essentiality of moral social practice, “is rooted in the assumption that self-actualization of humans is best achieved in morally grounded relations with others” (Karenga, 1990, p. 32). This approach is meant to have relevance in all sites of exchange, namely in school, community, society, and the world.

From this point, Lee (1995) has posited seven characteristics and tasks of an effective African-centered pedagogy. She stated that an effective African-centered pedagogy

1. legitimizes African stores of knowledge;
2. positively exploits and scaffolds productive community and cultural practices;
3. extends and builds upon the indigenous language;
4. reinforces community ties and idealizes service to one’s family, community, nation, race and world;
5. promotes positive social relations;
6. imparts a worldview that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one’s people without denying self-worth and the right to self-determination of others; and
7. supports cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness.

She proposed that those who undertake the development and practice of the African-centered pedagogy with these attributes do so “in ways that are culturally accurate, politically viable, developmentally appropriate and subject-matter sensitive” (p. 298). Lee has recognized
similarities in all pedagogies, but reasons that “certain pedagogical practices, however, require cultural specificity” (p. 297). At the same time, the diverse context in which African-centered pedagogy is developed and practiced requires that its scholars and teachers “address the question of how an African-centered pedagogy reinforces intraethnic solidarity and enhances academic excellence without contributing to interethnic conflict, academic isolation or social antagonism” (p. 309). Her sixth proposition, which emphasizes “impart(ing) a worldview that idealize a positive self-sufficient future for one’s people without denying self-worth and right to self-determination of others” (p. 297), elucidates a key way forward in developing and practicing an Afrocentric pedagogy.

Peter C. Murrell (2002) has made a strong point by stating that the problematic of achieving excellence in education for African American students and other less achieving students “cannot be justly or fairly laid at the feet of teachers” (p. xxiv); although, as argued above, they play a key role in the educational progress. He argued, “The forces destructive to African American achievement are embedded in the way we do schooling in America” (p. xxiv). He continued:

as much as we would like to believe in American public schools as the great equalizer, it is not reasonable to expect public schools to transform social injustices because they are cut from the same social fabric of American society that has generated practices of oppression and inequality in its institutions throughout our history. (p. xxiv)

Therefore, for him, “proposing interventions to ‘close the gap’, especially without a pedagogy—with a theory that makes explicit core cultural practices and social inventions—is certain to simply reproduce long-standing unequal social, class and racial relations that exist in America” (p. ?). Numerous educators, as noted above, have posed this need of Afrocentric pedagogy, as
the definitive pedagogy for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Murrell, 2002; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Shujaa, 1995).

Murrell (2002) has further stated, “A pedagogy is an interpretative framework and a generative framework” (p. 60). Therefore, “the interpretive framework of African-centered pedagogy helps the teacher to incorporate the cultural patterns of African American children and construct learning experiences that provide developmental scaffolding for them.” Likewise, “the generative framework of the African-centered pedagogy will help the teacher ensure that he or she organizes learners’ experience in a familiar and supporting cultural and social fabric.” He further explained pedagogy as “an instructional theory that is realized as a system of practice.” And, therefore, “it is a theory of teaching-in-practice” (p. 59).

Murrell’s (2002) Afrocentric pedagogy posits five essential kinds of practices. The first is “engagement and participation practices which are actions and arrangements that encourage and promote the interest, engagement and participation of students with each other and with the learning activity” (pp. 52-53). These “aim to provide sustained effort and commitment with respect to learning activities and sustained interpersonal engagements with the community of learners.” Secondly, there are “identity development practices . . . that encourage and elicit productive self-exploration and self-definition in the context of meaningful rich inquiry about the world” (pp. 52-53).

Thirdly, community integrity practices are posited as necessary “for organizing the intellectual and social life of a community of learners.” These “incorporate cultural features . . . and knowledge traditions of African American heritage.” Fourthly, “meaning-making practices” are required “for making explicit cultural models (especially sign and symbol structures) and
cultural patterns to amplify the interpretive frameworks of learners.” And, finally, essential practices of an African-centered pedagogy, Murrell (2002) has stated, include “practices of inquiry which are for critically interrogating the use and consumption on of signs, symbols and other symbolic representations” (pp. 52-53).

**Conclusion**

The literature addresses a wide range of issues in the African American educational tradition; among them are culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, teacher attitudes and effectiveness, and Afrocentric pedagogy. One of the most important issues found throughout the literature was the complexity of dealing with specific cultural realities within the context of the urgent push for commonalities in the educational project. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges of a culturally relevant pedagogy is to balance the universal and particular; that is to say, to recognize and respect difference without denying or diminishing commonalities. It also means not attempting to deny cultural difference in order to fashion a classroom focused on convenient commonalities. As Ladson-Billings (1995) has observed, “If teachers pretend not to see students’ racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs” (p. 33). Likewise, Villegas (1991) has observed:

> A culturally responsive pedagogy builds on the promise that how people are expected to go about learning many differences across cultures. In order to maximize learning opportunities, teachers must gain knowledge of cultures represented in their classrooms, then translate this knowledge into instructional practice. (p. 13)

In fact, these expectations about learning **do** differ across cultures, and require a steadfast foundation, as the literature reveals tendencies to diminish the particularity of African Americans students’ culture and educational needs, as Ladson-Billings has noted. Thus, Murrell (2002)
seems to have suggested such a tendency when he wrote, “African-centered pedagogy is a connected pedagogy that happens to focus on African American children in public school” (p. xxxiii). Although other educators might not be so explicit in this culturally effacing statement, the literature shows implicit tendencies toward this thinking.

Perhaps, it is important to note that Murrell (2002) and others who have made similar qualifications do not consider themselves less culturally committed or less culturally responsive in doing so. In fact, much of this discourse comes from the ongoing need—real or perceived—to convince others that the Afrocentric initiative is not a “separatist” one. But to claim Afrocentric pedagogy is a pedagogy that just “happens to focus on African American children in public school” is to deny the particularity of the cultural responsiveness necessary to meet the educational needs of African American students. Moreover, such claims tend to undermine the rationale and stated intention of African-centered pedagogy, which is to draw from and build on the strengths and modes of learning culturally specific to African American students.

Afrocentricity as theoretical framework requires an intentional African-centered pedagogy. It does not seek or advocate an “accidental” focus on African American students in public or private school. On the contrary, it insists on the student and community being self-consciously engaged as subjects, their culture used as an indispensable resource, and their modes of learning being respected as equally valuable ways of grasping and applying knowledge and skills. This study was conducted within this Afrocentric theoretical framework, which also provides the grounding for the educational project of the school under study here.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research design and questions of this study were directed toward documenting and analyzing the pedagogical practices and attitudes of teachers, which were contributive to the students’ high academic achievement at an Afrocentric Middle School (ACMS). Moreover, the study used an Afrocentric theory as a culturally responsive conceptual framework and grounded theory in a mixed-methods approach to analyze, code, and illuminate the educational pedagogy, which the teachers studied employed to achieve these positive academic outcomes. In addition, this study used teacher and student observations and informal teacher interviews, and analyzed environmental artifacts to support data triangulation.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were

1. What teaching practices are used by African American teachers to contribute to high academic achievement by African American students at an Afrocentric middle school?
2. What are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students?

Methodology and Data Collection

These questions offered a framework for a critical examination of Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, these questions provided an opportunity to identify and analyze specific culturally responsive practices, which contributed to ACMS’s
academic achievement levels and to suggest the transformative value and possibilities of Afrocentric pedagogy.

Moreover, the African American community in South Los Angeles, where ACMS was located, provided students and teachers with cultural artifacts, Afrocentric shops, and other resources that were significant when analyzing the classroom teacher’s conversations, discussions, and perceptions about the neighborhood and other observations during the teacher’s interview. Second, the researcher observed and analyzed teacher’s directed lessons, pedagogical practices, and teacher-student interactions in the classroom, which were coded and from which themes were drawn later in the study. Moreover, the second research question was engaged by listening to teachers as they interacted and planned lessons with their colleagues. Their perceptions were further revealed through a survey about teacher perceptions, which included comments about their teaching philosophy, environment, location, and roles as teachers in the community. Additionally, the researcher logged and documented the frequency and location of environmental artifacts in the classroom and in other parts of the school that reflected and reinforced perceived student achievement and teacher beliefs that African American students can achieve academically and that influenced positive academic outcomes.

Data collected in this mixed-methods study included coding ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), and interpreting raw and mean statistical data, described as the frequency and occurrence of Afrocentric teacher practices, and by making constant comparisons between the observed teacher practices using the ATPOT (see Appendix A), an observation tool developed and field tested, and the Afrocentric theoretical framework (Asante, 2003). Grounded theory methods were also employed to specify analytic strategies for analyzing and coding data.
(Charmaz, 2000). As data were collected, themes emerged that shaped the researcher’s analysis of the teachers’ interview responses, teachers’ observations, and photographed artifacts collection. These qualitative and quantitative data were reported from an emic perspective, that is, as an experienced professional educator and a member of the culture group that is familiar with culturally relevant and responsive curriculum content and teaching methodology.

These data were analyzed through an Afrocentric theoretical framework and lens, examining and observing teaching practices used by African American teachers that were perceived to contribute to high academic performance among African American students at ACMS. Also during the collection and transcription of the teacher interview data, four common teacher practices emerged that were congruent with the Afrocentric theoretical framework and the literature presented in Chapter two. These common teacher practices focused on self-determination, cultural awareness, and mastery of basic academic skills, and teacher-family-community connections interactions and reflections. And finally, the study site, namely ACMS, reflected the kind of culturally relevant atmosphere—as described in the literature review in Chapter two—that is essential for African American teachers to teach in and explore instructional practices and for African American students to learn cultural awareness, self-respect, ethics, morality, and to develop an Afrocentric consciousness that produces successful academic achievement.

**Operational Definition of Afrocentricity**

From an operational definition of Afrocentricity, the researcher was able to describe the research setting, provide clarity as related to the student and teacher observations, conduct interviews, and analyze the environmental artifacts and findings at ACMS. An operational
definition of Afrocentricity includes any concept, category, description, or contribution made by Africans, African Americans, and Black people that centers them toward positive historical facts and features an uplifted, unified, and facilitated appreciation and understanding of the rich and varied complexity of African life and culture (Asante, 1998, 2007). Culture included, but was not limited to, artifacts, languages, scholarship, pedagogical theory, and practice (Asante & Mazama, 2010; Murrell, 2002).

Pedagogical practices that reflected Afrocentric ideals in culturally responsive ways were (Asante, 2003; Irvine, 1990)

- psychological location (signs, symbols, motifs, and rituals);
- sociocultural location (political, economic, and social themes);
- historical location (religious, architectural, and literacy data);
- celebrations (National holidays: Kwanzaa and Black History Month; and
- moral location (ideas and concepts that promote ethical behavior and justice for all humans).

Irvine (1990) has defined the process of identifying and using culturally responsive pedagogical practice as representing “cultural synchronization” (p. 468). Furthermore, Cooper (2000) noted the Afrocentric approach as “the concept of synchronization based on anthropological and historical research that advance the finding that African American students’ language, non-verbal clues, physical movement, learning styles, cognitive approaches and worldview” (p. 206).
Afrocentricity and Grounded Theory

The data (teacher interviews, teacher observations, and environmental artifacts) gathered and themes produced that used this paradigm included descriptions and analysis of teacher practices and attitudes that undergirded the perceived academic achievement and success of African American students. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze and inform descriptions of behaviors patterns that the researcher and the participants used to make sense of their environmental and social surroundings and daily activities.

Informed generalizations were induced from a systematic analysis of the data that took the form of searching for patterns of cultural relevancy; and—when potential patterns were discovered—the deductive processes were used to verify and strengthen patterns found in the overall data set. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the archetypical product used in this inquiry (Hatch, 2002). Thus, the qualitative portion of this study explored divergent ideas and focused on stressing Afrocentric ideas and categories in the collection, refinement, and analysis of the data.

The primary rationale for using grounded theory as an approach in this study was that it provided a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derived a general abstract theory from the process, action, and interaction grounded in the views of the participants (Creswell, 2009). And this study’s critical junctures were grounded in discovering specific teacher practices, examining cultural artifacts, and analyzing the perceptions of identified African American teachers and how they influenced the overall perceived successful academic achievement and attainment of literacy for African American students at an Afrocentric middle school.
Student and Neighborhood Demographics

Afrocentric Middle School (ACMS) was located in the heart of South Los Angeles and embodied the rich diversity of the neighborhood. The ACMS students came from diverse social and economic backgrounds and, for the most part, attended ACMS for its strong academic and rich cultural programs. Most students enrolled at ACMS completed eighth grade and continued on to the surrounding high schools and/or the local community colleges.

ACMS featured a pre-kindergarten through grade-eight curriculum; its enrollment of 95 students at the time of this study reflected the composition of an historically African American community. The enrollment ranged from 50-150 students with 0.0% in the enrollment change. The 2012-2013 student enrollment per race/ethnicity consisted of 94 African American and one Latino, and of this percentage 36 (40%) were female and 54 (60%) were male students.

ACMS was a private African American school unencumbered by state restrictions. For example, ACMS did not administer the California State Standards Test to its students. Instead all students entered at grade level and began instruction at the primary level for one year until the student displayed readiness for the advanced levels of work. The following student demographics applied:

- N/A special education
- N/A gifted/talented
- N/A economically disadvantaged
- N/A English learners
- N/A standard English learner
- N/A migrant
At the time of this study, teachers at ACMS had taught for an average of 16 years, with a median of 9.5 years.

According to 2010 census statistics the neighborhood that surrounded ACMS was comprised of the following social and economic demographic characteristics:

- 72% African Americans
- 14% Latino or others
- 4% Mixed races
- 8% Whites
- 1% Asian

The breakdown for this population consisted of 46% male and 54% female, with an average income of $36,774 during the 2004 tax year and salary/wages of $35,423, not exceeding $50,220 for the 2010 tax year. The level of education reported for the population in the community consisted of most people graduating high school.

**Setting**

The site selected to conduct this research was an Afrocentric middle school located in South Los Angeles in the heart of the Crenshaw District. Throughout this study, the school is referred to as Afrocentric Middle School (ACMS), a pseudonym for the actual name of the school where the research was conducted. The 3 teacher participants were also given pseudonyms so as to not reveal their identities: Fatima—sixth- through eighth-grade teacher and curriculum director; Nia—fourth- and fifth-grade teacher; and Akila—fourth- and fifth-grade teacher and the executive director at the school.
ACMS was a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade nonsectarian private school with a significant African American student and teacher population. Founded in 1975, ACMS focused on the students learning math, English, social studies, science, and physical fitness in an Afrocentric learning environment. The hallway walls, offices, and classroom bulletin boards were vibrantly decorated with colorful African signs, symbols, art, cultural figures, and pictures of African American heroes and heroines, and student work.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Kindergarten</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2/Grade 3 Combined</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4/Grade 5 Combined</td>
<td>5/7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Enrollment</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 6, 7 &amp; 8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Enrollment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment/Teachers</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shown in Table 1 numerically are the student-teacher population and class size ratios. The middle school grades—sixth, seventh, and eighth grade—had a one to 15 student-teacher ratio per class. The low teacher-student class size was appropriate for individualized instruction at ACMS. The maximum number of students was 12 per class, according to the state law for the classrooms in the ACMS building. The children were split in grade levels as evenly as possible and according to their ages. The middle school totaled 15 students and one teacher. Enrollment at ACMS was approximately 95 students.

This site was selected for this study because of its record of reported successful academic achievement with African American students and use of teaching methodology and practices that
are culturally relevant and responsive (Gay, 2000; Murrell, 2002). Therefore, this study was designed to discover the pedagogical practice, rationale, and teacher beliefs of the ACMS teachers that led to perceived high academic achievement and success for their African American student population.

Participants

This study included three African American teachers, one middle school teacher, and two elementary teachers for the combined second and third grades and combined fourth and fifth grades identified at ACMS. These teachers had taught at ACMS for 16 years collectively where a significant population of African American students attended. The teachers selected in this study were chosen according to the grade level taught at ACMS that matched the middle school curriculum in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at a traditional middle school. In addition, the school and all participants were selected based on availability and their membership in the ACMS classroom, school, and/or community, as it was the only private African American school populated predominantly with African American students and African American teachers in the Greater South Los Angeles area.

Role of Researcher

The researcher’s role in this study was to discover and build relationships with willing participants (teachers and students) at the ACMS in their learning environment and to collect data that provided a greater understanding about perceived successful teaching practices for African American students. The researcher collected the data through 12 classroom observations, teacher interviews, and examination of cultural artifacts at the school. At the conclusion of this research, the researcher’s goal was to present analyzed data that may assist
other teachers to understand better how to use Afrocentric teaching practices as a culturally relevant teaching methodology to transform poor and mediocre learning experiences for African American students into rich and great learning experiences that promote achievement and academic excellence (Hollie, 2012; Irvine, 1990 Lee, 1995).

Research Design

![Diagram showing triangulation model illustrating the mixed-method analysis.]

**Figure 1.** Triangulation model illustrating the mixed-method analysis.

This qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods research utilized Afrocentricity (Asante, 2003) and grounded theories (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as strategies and as a lens of inquiry to observe, interview, and analyze the teaching practices of African American teachers at an Afrocentric middle school. Throughout the research, classroom observation data, interview data, and classroom/environmental artifacts and documents were employed to answer the research questions. Figure 1 shows an illustration of the mixed-methods design. The concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009) was used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data.

The design of this research focused on African American teachers, their lesson content, their pedagogical and teaching practices, their classroom culture, their modeling of proactive
behaviors for their students, and how they responded to racial and countercultural issues at an Afrocentric middle school.

**Procedures**

**Selection of Participants**

The plan to conduct the research began by contacting and meeting with the school’s director to re-enter ACMS, to explain the purpose of my research, to review the teacher interview questions (see Appendix B) and consent form (see Appendix C), and to obtain approval and consent to proceed with the study at the site. After formally gaining entry to ACMS site and upon introductions to the three teachers selected and their students, I scheduled time with the teachers to observe all three of them in their classrooms, and their 35 combined students. These three teachers were selected because they taught the middle school students and/or the middle school curriculum suited for this study and the study site.

**Instrumentation**

In preparation for this study, the researcher pilot tested the validity (Creswell, 2009) of the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT) among 10 content experts. The researcher created the ATPOT observation protocol to measure evidence of Afrocentric teacher practices observed at the study site. These expert participants were members of the African American Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The researcher was also a member of this community institution and was able to enter, engage, and assist in the pilot testing of the instrument. Two members of this group of expert participants were college professors of African American Studies; one was the chair of the Department of Africana Studies at a local university, and had led the African American Cultural Center for 46 years. The other participants included four
African American teachers, one African American school administrator, one Afro-Latina substitute teacher, one African American school nurse, and one school volunteer. They all self-identified as African American advocates for social justice and activist/intellectuals and were familiar with and advocated Afrocentric and culturally responsive educational teaching practices. They responded to the following question: How representative is each indicator of the ATPOT? They were instructed to rate the tool using levels of agreement for Afrocentric teacher practices. The content categories of ATPOT were rated using a Likert scale ranging in ascending to descending order of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1) to measure teacher practices, and a Likert Scale ranging from Clearly Evident (5), Somewhat Evident (4), Vague (3), Unable to Determine (2), Not Evident (1) to measure frequency of assumed Afrocentric teacher instructional practices. The content expert responses consisted more of Strongly Agree and Agree, and agreed that the ATPOT satisfactorily captured and conveyed the ideas and criteria central to Afrocentric teacher practices and beliefs as expressed in Asante’s theory of Afrocentricity (1980, 1990, 2007).

Observation Procedures

The teacher observations consisted of visiting and observing each teacher four times for a total of 12 observations. The duration of the observations lasted for 45 minutes to one hour and was conducted during the months of February 2012 thru March 2012. The observations and visitations were conducted during the school day with a concentration on two core subjects, English and math, and with less time given to observing teacher practices in science and social studies classes. The classrooms observed were those in which teachers taught grades and
curriculum for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from observations in these teachers’ classrooms.

This study used the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT) (Appendix A), a creation based upon Asante’s (2003) Afrocentric theoretical framework and supported by the literature in this research. The researcher took ethnographic notes on teacher practices in the three classroom environments, documented student-teacher conversations and environmental artifacts, and examined lesson content, curriculum, and assignments. The rubric from the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT) (Appendix A) was used to rate teachers’ practices in the categories listed. The rubric was used to rate, reference, and compare the classroom observation and interview notes, artifacts, and documents. The rating for teacher practices and behaviors ranged from clear evidence of the described behavior and practice to no observable evidence of the teacher using Afrocentric teacher practices.

**Interview Procedures**

The next stage of the study consisted of face-to-face confidential interviews following completed teacher consent forms. Each classroom teacher answered the teacher interview questionnaire (Appendix B) adopted from Gloria Ladson-Billings’s interview protocol (1994). The teacher interview questions for this study were specifically designed by Ladson-Billings (1994) as a tentative interview protocol to have a good conversation with teachers about their effective teaching practices. These same questions were used in this study to interview African American teachers about their beliefs and practices about teaching African American students. The researcher wrote and tape-recorded the teachers’ interviews using an audio tape recorder. The teachers were asked to respond verbally to all questions, to answer them to the best of their
ability, and to expand on their answers when they perceived it was appropriate. The teachers’ recorded answers from interviews and ethnographic notes were analyzed using an Afrocentric lens and grounded theory strategies. These ethnographic notes were triangulated along with other data collected.

Throughout the study, the researcher took ethnographic notes and elicited comments and statements from the teachers regarding their perceptions, interactions, references, behaviors, and teaching strategies for teaching African American children. The data gathered from these formal and informal interviews were compared and coded for connections and patterns that related their answers and experiences to the four themes of Afrocentricity.

Artifacts and Documents

The final stage of this research procedure was to record and collect classroom data, artifacts, and documents that were perceived as Afrocentric and culturally relevant. These artifacts included student drawing, pictures of famous Africans and African Americans, art, cultural symbols, Afrocentric educational materials, and various other visual aids (Asante, 2003; Karenga, 2010; Kifano, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 2005, 2009). After the artifacts and documents were collected, they were analyzed and coded using the Afrocentric framework as the lens to develop patterns and connections to understand these data. All fieldnotes from the observations, tape recordings, interviews data, and documents collected were only accessible to the researcher; they were secured, locked in digital files, and stored in a locked file cabinet.

Content Areas of the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool

As noted above, to conduct the teacher observations, the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT) was used with the three teachers. The ATPOT has five content areas
that were scored using a Likert Scale ranging from 1 through 5. On the scale, the number 5 represented clear evidence of teacher behaviors that closely matched the descriptors for each category; the number 4 represented teacher behaviors that were *Somewhat Evident*; number 3 represented *Vague* and unclear evidence about what the teacher behaviors were; number 2 represented *Unable to Determine*; and number 1 represented that the teacher behaviors were *Not Evident* from the observation. The content areas were listed from the preparation and lesson content of the teachers and included planning, design, and student engagement. The second section of the protocol described the teacher pedagogy, which included the teacher’s knowledge level of the content, how the lesson was assessed, the methodology, and how teachers facilitated the learning. The last three sections of the ATPOT focused on the Afrocentric aspect of the teacher’s behavior and practices. These categories included classroom culture, models of proactive behavior, and the teacher’s response to racial references.

The rubric from the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool (ATPOT) was used both quantitatively and qualitatively to rate the teachers’ practices and behaviors. It should be noted that data collected using this research tool informed the research design and direction.

**Limitations**

Although this study yielded informative and useful data on the teachers and school site studied, the generalizability of the results was a limitation due to the small number of teacher participants observed and the specialized school sampled. Conducting research on a small number of participants made it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population and posed a problem of low external validity (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). However, the mixed-methods design of the study sought to strengthen its external validity by use of pilot testing using the
ATPOT with Afrocentric teacher practice content experts and teacher interview questions with teacher participants modeled on prior Afrocentric research conducted by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994).

The small number of teacher participants also posed threats to the internal validity of the study in terms of the lack of range of inclusion and, therefore, limited generalizability. But also there were a limited number of middle school teachers at ACMS, which prohibits the best-case practice of random selection of participants. However, the depth of discussions during the teacher interviews provided additional insight into the teachers’ pedagogical perspectives, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, acknowledging the small number of teacher participants or the limitation of having one school in this study diminishes neither the research relevance of the specific population of teachers and their instructional practices, nor that the students achieve academically from their teaching practices, for they nonetheless pose an instructive model of an Afrocentric culturally responsive educational initiative.

Data Collection Theory

The data collection methods involved grounded theory inquiry strategy, which required constant comparison through which the researcher engaged and shaped additional questions, data collection, data analysis, and the final narrative (Hatch, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this research study, using grounded theory was the most appropriate qualitative strategy through which the researcher was able to derive a general theory of the teaching process, teaching action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants in this study examining the data through an Afrocentric lens (Asante & Mazama, 2010; Creswell, 2009).
The development of grounded theory as a qualitative methodology, as suggested by Moore (2009), originated with Glaser and Strauss (1967). As researchers, they experienced methodological restrictions that consistently led to deductive theoretical verification of social science research. Their discovery of grounded theory added interactive and theoretical components to research, whereby theory was induced rather than deduced. This development in grounded theory as a qualitative research method provided researchers the flexibility to justify what makes a thing count as knowledge, in this case using Afrocentric teaching and beliefs as transformative educational practices in the attainment of high academic achievement for African American students.

**Data Collection**

The data collection consisted of; first, interviewing the teachers; second, observing the teachers in the class; and third, taking ethnographic notes on their instructional practices and their interactions with students. In addition, it involved collecting artifact data that included the *ACMS Parent Teacher Handbook and Contract*; student report card; report of student progress form; grade averaging chart; *Middle School Curriculum Guide*; course content documents; classroom teaching and learning materials such as math squares/manipulative, classroom art, textbooks, bulletin boards, local community newspaper articles, computer generated exams and assessments, formative English and math assessments, letters of recognition and appreciation, letters sent home by the school to parents, and other documents that provided students and parents communication from the school in a respectable manner regarding teachers’ expectations of their students.
The researcher collected the qualitative data from an emic perspective that was from the insider’s point of view of reality as central to Afrocentric and other culturally responsive research and pedagogical practice (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Murrell, 2002; Shujaa, 1995). The researcher’s intentions were to treat the participants as subjects rather than objects and as partners in the discovery and construction of knowledge (Asante & Mazama, 2010; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billing, 2000, 2001). This perspective helped the researcher to better collect, analyze, and understand the data and the observations from multiple realities. The structured interviews consisted of teacher interview questions, constructed to gather the teachers’ perspectives and teaching experiences, and what it meant to teach at ACMS. These open-ended questions also allowed the researcher to interact with the teachers and to understand their culture of teaching and beliefs about their teaching practice. The teacher interviews were scheduled and conducted after school for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Observations were also scheduled with each teacher and conducted during the school day for a period of 4 weeks totaling 12 teacher observations for the same amount of time. Teachers were observed primarily during their math and English classes. The data collected were compared using the grounded theory strategy of comparison of teacher interviews and observations. Also during the scheduled visits, the researcher noted teacher and student interactions, assessing them later within the Afrocentric framework (Asante, 1988, 2003). This deliberation assisted the researcher in understanding the relationship between the students and the teachers and to discover what Afrocentric teacher practices motivated and transformed academic achievement for African American students at ACMS.
The last stage of the data collection procedures was the collection of artifacts from the classroom. During this process, the researcher took pictures of the classroom that excluded the students, but included bulletin boards, textbooks, pictures of famous African Americans, and other documents of importance as stated in Asante’s (1998) and Asante and Mazama’s (2010) Afrocentricity pedagogy. These cultural and heritage symbols and artistic and educational materials were, as Gay (2000) has stated, a fundamental part of the Afrocentric pedagogical initiative designed to “contribute to the cultural socialization of students teaching African American history, heritage and culture” (p. 175) through various learning modalities. These symbols were also considered a part of facilitating “improved self-concepts” for the students about what it meant to be a member of the African people and culture, and pointed to their continued possibilities of excellence and achievement (Lee, 2006, 2007; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000).

Data Analysis Procedures

The approach used to gather and analyze the data was primarily through researcher’s fieldnotes of teacher observations, teacher interviews, and artifact analysis. These observations, interviews, and artifact analysis were conducted at the ACMS site in the classrooms of teacher participants. The teacher observations were analyzed to describe activities and teaching practices from the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool used to collect field notes and make comments concerning the observations.

Quantitative Data Analysis Plan

The Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Rubric was used to analyze classroom observations and to rate the teacher practices and activities observed. Descriptive statistics were
used to report quantitative results from the ATPOT and to survey the Afrocentric teacher activities and practices. The observation data were categorized based on the evidence of Afrocentric teaching practices, teacher behaviors, lesson content, classroom culture, models of moral statements, and teacher responses to racial references that showed evidence of Afrocentric pedagogy—the foundational component of the data analysis in this study.

The ATPOT was divided into five areas of interest for analysis: lesson content, pedagogical practices, classroom culture, self-conception, and culturally responsive and relevant to effective teaching practices. Each area was coded based on a rating system the rubric scaled from 1 through 5, with 1 representing no evidence of teacher practices or activities listed in the Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool. The first two categories on the ATPOT were analyzed based on the level of curricular difficulty and teacher preparation, materials, knowledge base, and student comprehension. The last three categories in this analysis were analyzed and coded by observing teacher interactions with the students around culture, moral issues, and racial references. The ATPOT for classroom observation allowed for analysis of teacher instructional practices and of student engagement in high levels of critical thinking skills and culturally relevant and responsive resources. It also allowed the researcher to make connections between the teacher practices and students’ high level of academic achievement.

**Qualitative Data Analysis Plan**

The ethnographic field notes were open coded (Emerson et al., 1995). The researcher took notes and described classroom activities and teacher practices that closely resembled Afrocentric themes and patterns, as described and outlined in Asante’s theory of Afrocentricity (2007). The ethnographic notes of teacher observations were coded and categorized as themes
and patterns emerged. The data collection and the analysis were done sequentially (Creswell, 2009). The goal of this qualitative analysis was to tie the data to teaching attitudes and behaviors that closely corresponded to the theory of Afrocentricity and its realization in Afrocentric pedagogy.

The teacher interviews were coded for connections to the Afrocentric literature, themes, culturally relevant, and responsive teacher practices. The teacher interviews were analyzed through the lens of grounded theory, through which the classroom teachers’ instructional practices were assessed to determine Afrocentric teaching strategies and assess the environment to establish how it was culturally relevant and responsive to the students’ cultural and academic needs. The audiotaped interviews were open ended for teachers to liberally discuss their experiences. Ethnographic note were written and transcribed at the end of the observations. The researcher looked for key words and phrases, similarity across teachers’ educational experiences, and themes in their approach to their instructional pedagogy. For example, as the data were collected, the researcher looked for patterns that emerged and models of culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices, especially any that appeared to influence and connect to Afrocentric culture, values, and practices.

**Grounded Theory Approach to Identify Patterns and Themes**

Further analysis of the data consisted of using a grounded theory approach to systematically make comparisons. This step meant comparing an incident in the data to one recalled from experience or from the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In an attempt to make sense of the data collected using the ATPOT and the rubric and constant comparisons, the systematic comparison technique was employed as themes and patterns emerged. With the
Afrocentric pedagogical theory as a guide to analyze the actual data, evidence of effective teacher practices began to emerge from the observations, interview questions, recorded ethnographic notes, and classroom artifacts.

**Conclusion and Significance**

This research study analyzed data through an Afrocentric pedagogical framework and lens. It sought to answer two significant research questions proposed in this study using a mixed-methods approach to analyze effective teacher practices and teacher behaviors that transformed the learning experiences for African American students and that led to high academic achievement. The data were analyzed qualitatively, and systematically coded using classroom observations of teacher practices and teacher interviews. Classroom artifacts were also photographed and analyzed qualitatively. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed, and interviews, classroom observation, and artifacts were qualitatively coded for patterns and frequency of effective teacher practices. This research study was designed to contribute to the body of literature that provides African American and other teachers with a transformative model of Afrocentric teaching practices that enhance and promote equitable, effective, and enjoyable learning experiences for African American students in their classroom. In this way, it was also a contribution to assisting teachers in aiding students in the culturally responsive and shared quest for high academic achievement and educational excellence in the most expansive sense.
Figure 2. Triangulation of topics in relation to data collection.

Figure 2 shows a diagram of the triangulation of the data. It was a proposed analysis of the data in qualitative and quantitative forms. The teacher observations and raw data were collected and analyzed quantitatively, and the teacher interviews and artifacts data were collected and analyzed qualitatively. Grounded theory was used to analyze the participants’ teaching and learning activities, progress reporting documents, and classroom environment data from the participant...
perspectives. As data were collected and coded, themes evolved from the teacher and classroom observations, teacher interviews, and documents analysis and was compared to the categories from the ATPOT, which were based upon Asante’s (2007) theory of Afrocentricity.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DATA COLLECTED AND ANALYZED

Introduction

This chapter is a description of the data collection, analyses, and findings from the research study of qualitative and quantitative data of Afrocentric teaching practices and perceptions held by three African American teachers discussed in four sections. Each section in this chapter provides evidence that supports the research questions.

Research Questions

This research study proposed to answer two research questions:

1. What teaching practices are used by African American teachers to contribute to high academic achievement by African American students at an Afrocentric middle school?

2. What are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students?

In Chapter two, scholars selected for the literature review for this research suggested that culturally relevant teaching methods affect the self-concept, learning, and academic achievement of African American students (Asante, 2003; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1988; Tatum, 2005). The purpose of this study was to examine Afrocentric teaching practices and beliefs held by African American teachers at ACMS through a culturally relevant Afrocentric theoretical framework and lens (Asante, 2003). Asante (2003) suggested using this framework because Afrocentricity is a culturally relevant and positive ideology of consciousness. Using Asante’s (2003) theoretical framework of Afrocentricity, the researcher identified four
themes from the data collected and analyzed through teacher interviews, school artifacts, and classroom observations. They were

- Self-Determination
- Academic Empowerment
- Cultural Empowerment
- Family/Community Empowerment

These four themes framed the topics for the data discussed. Throughout, the data collection process, classroom observation notes, and teacher interviews provided a cache of teacher data relating to their Afrocentric instructional practice. This mixed-methods study was conducted by triangulating data, and the research questions were addressed by collecting information in teacher interviews (see Appendix B), classroom observations and photographing school artifacts.

**Answering the Research Questions**

The research questions in this study were answered by data collected and analyzed, such as teacher interviews, classroom observations, and school artifacts through an Afrocentric lens and theoretical framework. The research questions were derived from the premise that there are models of best instructional and teaching practices for improving the academic achievement of African American students. To identify these teaching practices the ATPOT observation tool was designed by the researcher and used to record and identify Afrocentric teaching practices and perceptions held by three teachers at ACMS. Answering the research questions involved identifying categories from the ATPOT and giving numerical scores. Teaching practice observed by the researcher involved the use of a Likert Scale, ranged from 1 through 5, with 5 the highest numerical score attained as clear evidence of teachers’ practices and behaviors.
implemented in the classrooms. One, the lowest numerical score, indicated low and or no evidence of identified Afrocentric teacher practices and behaviors. The ATPOT was used to identify Afrocentric teacher practices and perceptions, and to answer the interview questions in the following categories: Lesson Content, Pedagogy and Practice, Classroom Culture, Models of Proactive Self and Responds to Racial References; content experts in Afrocentric teaching practices and methodology authenticated these categories as legitimate and as required categories of study for examining culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices.

The qualitative and quantitative portions of the two research questions were addressed by collecting data from the three teacher interviews, classroom observations, and school artifacts. Research question number one was more of a quantitative question whereby teacher behaviors could be observed, identified, and numerically tallied using raw scores and means data from the ATPOT. Research question number two was more of a qualitative question whereby the researcher identified school artifacts, photographs, and documents and used them as evidence of Afrocentric teacher beliefs and perceptions about African American student achievement.

Significant to this study were Afrocentric teaching practices and teachers’ perceptions among teachers at ACMS for instructing African American students. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), “Colleges and universities should require beginning teacher candidates to have prolonged immersion in the African American culture,” she continued, “without greater exposure to the students’ culture teachers lack the tools with which to make sense of much that transpire in the classroom” (p. 134).
Study Site Curriculum

ACMS was established in 1975 as an alternative to the public school and instructional program in the South Los Angeles neighborhood. At ACMS, every subject is taught from an Afrocentric perspective. At the time of this research, ACMS was a nonprofit and nonsectarian private school with an enrollment of 95 students, ranging from pre-school through eighth grade. The faculty at ACMS consisted of eight women teachers, ranging in age from 25 to 55 years. The administrative staff consisted of an executive director with 31 years at the school site, an assistant director, and a nutritionist who prepared meals for the students and the staff. Students culminating from ACMS matriculated into the local high school or into a community college with an ACMS Letter of Transition for Middle School Students (see Appendix D) that explained the assessment and grading practices for academic placement. According to the executive director, the curriculum at ACMS was three to five grade levels above the traditional public schools and most of the private schools in the surrounding area. The curriculum identified its academic levels as primary, intermediate, and advanced, and the teachers worked hard to advance students above the normal traditional academic levels found at similar schools in the neighborhood. Specifically, at ACMS in the middle school, all incoming sixth through eighth grades students were assigned to the primary level. The primary level at ACMS signified that the newly enrolled student was considered at or below grade level. The student at grade level was assigned the intermediate curriculum level and was monitored by the ACMS grade-level teacher for a minimum of 1 year. The academically advanced student who demonstrated the ability to advance to high level and college course curriculum was given above grade level assignments. Advanced middle school students at ACMS were considered advanced or proficient according to
current California State Standards and could handle advanced level mathematics, such as algebra 2, and college English. To become an advanced student at ACMS required an accelerated instructional program, which could begin for students in grades six through eight. Middle school subjects were taught in grades four and five, and high school courses were taught in grades six through eight. As shown in Table 2, the middle school curriculum consisted of primary subjects, the foundational core content subject matter that anchored students in the basis content of a subject taught five days a week: mathematics (algebra I, algebra II, & geometry), science (physical & chemistry), reading comprehension/literature, language/English writing, and spelling/vocabulary. The secondary subjects were supplemental content taught 2 days a week and enhanced the primary subjects: penmanship, health (biology), beginning Spanish, geography/world geography, African/African American history, United States history/world history, and introduction to computers.

Teachers at ACMS used high school level textbooks to teach middle school students. According to the teachers, their primary instructional focus was to prepare their students for high school using content mastery strategies and study skills. The teachers emphasized how to study and how to take tests. ACMS had drawn politicians, celebrities, high-ranking officials, and visitors from all over the nation for its reputation of success and academic accomplishment with African American children taught by noncredentialed teachers.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Subjects</th>
<th>Secondary Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mathematics (Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2)</td>
<td>1. Penmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Science (Physical and Chemistry)</td>
<td>2. Health (Biology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading Comprehension, Literature</td>
<td>3. Beginning Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Language / English writing</td>
<td>4. Geography/ World Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Spelling / Vocabulary</td>
<td>5. African / African American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Introduction to Computers</td>
<td>7. Introduction to Computers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted for the ACMS Curriculum Guide 2012

Data Collection Procedures

The interviews conducted for this study involved three African American women teachers. (see Appendix B) The executive director, also a woman, was interviewed because at the inception of the study she taught the grades four, five, and six until another teacher was hired. All ACMS teachers graduated from college, but none of them held teaching credentials. They all stated that they were “committed to teaching African American students.” Their teaching experiences ranged between 31, 12, and eight years. The interviews were conducted during the weekdays in the teachers’ classrooms and in the office of the executive director. The interviews were conducted and recorded on two consecutive days during the month of March 2012. Each teacher interview varied between 19 and 24 minutes in length. During the interviews, the teachers were audio recorded, and ethnographic note were written for clarity and transcribed one day later. Also, during the interviews, the teachers were asked to liberally respond and comment on all of the questions. The teachers were given pseudonyms to remain anonymous during the study. The names that they were given were: Fatima, the eighth-grade teacher; Nia, the sixth-and seventh-grade teacher; and Akila, the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher. The students referred to the teachers as Sister Fatima, Sister Nia, and Sister Akila. At the time of the study, the middle
school student population at ACMS consisted of nine boys and one girl, for grades seven and eight, and five boys and seven girls in grades five and six.

**Observations**

Another area of the data collection was teacher observations; using the ATPOT, the researcher observed the three teachers selected for this research a total of four times each, and the observations lasted 45 to 60 minutes in length for each visit. The ATPOT scale of 1 to 5 was used to determine a score for the evidence of teachers’ practices and beliefs in the listed middle school curriculum activities. A collection of the raw observation data revealed that the three teachers in this study demonstrated moderate to high level of Afrocentric teacher practices, or modeled Afrocentric activities listed in the ATPOT. The specific findings for the frequency of observed occurrences of the activities listed in the ATPOT in the three observed teachers’ practices are provided in Tables 3 through Table 11. Examples of each teacher’s score are shown in Tables 3 and Table 4 for teacher Akila. Table 3 shows mean summary data for Akila, who demonstrated a high level of evidence of Afrocentric teacher practices in the category: pedagogy/practice. Akila demonstrated a moderate (4.0–3.0 mean) level of evidence for the teacher practices or activities listed on the ATPOT in the categories observed: lesson content and models proactive self. Akila demonstrated a low (2.9–0 mean) level of evidence of the teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT in categories: classroom culture and responds to race references.
Table 3

**Mean Observation Data Summary: Sister Akila**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Lesson Content 1-20</th>
<th>Pedagogy/Practice 1-35</th>
<th>Classroom Culture 1-25</th>
<th>Models Proactive Self 1-35</th>
<th>Responds to Race Ref. 1-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit 1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit 4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Category Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.75</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.43</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.43</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.94</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.36</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.70</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.86</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.80</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 is a summary of the raw and mean data for Akila’s Afrocentric teaching practice. Akila’s mean data ranged from 3.94 (moderate and somewhat evident) to 2.70 (low and vague), and raw score data ranged from 1 to 5, which was attributed to the content of the lesson observed for that day and the number of instances in which the researcher observed an Afrocentric teacher practice.

Table 4

**Raw and Mean Observation Data for Sister Akila**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE 1-5</th>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 2</th>
<th>Visit 3</th>
<th>Visit 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Lesson Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Materials</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student Engagement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lesson Design</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Content Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Content Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.75</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.75</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.75</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Mean)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Content Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.94</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCALE 1-5</td>
<td>Visit 1</td>
<td>Visit 2</td>
<td>Visit 3</td>
<td>Visit 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Pedagogy/Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Objective (Present)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Methodology (Models)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Resources (Use of)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Pedagogical knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intellectual engagement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Facilitation (learning)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assessment of skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Subtotal( Mean)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Mean</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Classroom Culture (Afrocentric)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological motifs visible</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social and cultural themes discussed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cultural context defined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural examples given</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Notable cultural figures/holidays referenced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Subtotal (Mean)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Mean</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**D. Models Proactive Self**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 2</th>
<th>Visit 3</th>
<th>Visit 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gives examples of morals, values, ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gives examples of famous moral &amp; ethical figures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shares cultural values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Encourages students to take risks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knows students’ names, families, story, etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Coaches and facilitates instruction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

86
Teacher observations data were collected and interpreted from an emic (insider) perspective. The emic perspective means that as a former teacher, researcher, and member of the African American community, the researcher was able to easily identify, understand, and access ACMS’s learning environment, cultural, and professional views of the teachers.

Teacher classroom observations were recorded using the ATPOT; each teacher was observed four times each over a 4-week period during the months of February and March 2012, totaling 12 classroom observations. Each observation lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The classroom observations were recorded and marked using the rubric from the ATPOT. The rubric contained a scale from 1 through 5, with indicators for evidence of observable Afrocentric teacher practices ranging from 5-Clearly Evident, 4-Somewhat Evident, 3-Vague, 2-Unable to Determine, and 1-
Not Evident. The observations were used to document what teachers did that contributed to academic achievement for African American students.

Each teacher’s mean summary data charts triangulated the data in this research. This data provided evidence of quantitative data for the research. Table 3 shows teacher mean data scores given during the research observations. Raw scores were given to each teacher by the researcher during the five observations of evidence practices (referred to as categories on the ATPOT). They were

- Lesson content
- Pedagogy/practice
- Classroom culture
- Models proactive self
- Responses to race references.

The average score for each of the five categories was evaluated for each teacher by adding the total scores of the subsections (during all four visits) under each topic and dividing the sum by the total number of subsections. The four teacher visits and observations were divided by the subtotal. For example, the total number of points given to the category lesson content was divided by the number of subcategories for this topic (4), which was then divided by the number of observations. (See Table 11, Teachers’ Score Totals - Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tools for the categories and subcategories.) The final scores were evaluated as

- High (mean scores of 5.0-4.1) - high or substantial level of evidence of teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT;
• **Moderate** (mean scores of 4.0-3.0) – moderate level of evidence of teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT; and

• **Low** (mean scores of 2.9-0) - no or limited evidence of teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT.

Four themes evolved from data collected that supported the relevance and importance of using Afrocentric pedagogy and strategies as transformational teaching practices to teach African American students. The four themes were (a) self-determination, (b) academic empowerment, (c) cultural empowerment, and (d) family and community empowerment. Evidence that supports the themes is presented in the following pages.

**Theme One: Self-Determination (The Principle of Kujichagulia): Afrocentric Pedagogy Empowers Teachers and Students to be Risk Takers, to Define, and to Create in their own Instructional Space**

Instructional interactions and the learning activities at ACMS between African American students and their teachers were unique. For example, teachers and students collaboratively decided what learning activities supported the content knowledge and instructional program that strengthened the classroom learning, teaching practices, and interactions. Teachers and students collaboratively selected an instructional program that empowered students to take risks, and define, defend, create, and develop learning activities that centered on African and African American interests. Collaboratively, they decided on the learning activity, its value to the instructional program, and the investment of time and level of engagement.
Research question one examined teaching practices (learning/activities) teachers at ACMS used with their students that encouraged them to take risks and empowered them to define and create learning in their own instructional space.

**Teaching and Learning at ACMS**

Through interviews with each teacher for 19 to 24 minutes in their classroom, the researcher developed an understanding and appreciation for the ACMS teachers and the teaching strategies they used to support culturally relevant and responsive instruction for African American students. The teachers’ classrooms were surrounded and decorated with positive Afrocentric images and artifacts that reinforced the Afrocentric ideal of self-determination, as defined by Dr. Maulana Karenga (1997). The teacher interview questions were based upon an interview protocol developed by Ladson-Billings (1994). Teachers were interviewed using an audio tape recorder and informal ethnographic notes to ensure response and comment clarity and to document the researchers impressions of the teachers’ responses and comments without interrupting them during the interview process.

The teacher interviews revealed the theme and teacher practice of empowerment through self-determination as both a commitment and a practice to teach the students to shape learning in the image and interest in themselves and other Africans and African Americans (Karenga, 1998). The teacher interview questions protocol focused on questions about what teachers did to facilitate instruction, teacher training, and specialized classroom and teaching practices they used with African American students to supported academic achievement. The theme of self-determination as an empowering Afrocentric teaching practice was further explored by the teachers’ responses to teacher interview questions regarding their beliefs about the school
administrations’ flexibility and support for teaching the schools’ curriculum. In a similar study, Ball (2000) wrote that the everyday African American teacher discourse and pedagogies empower students and teachers. Teachers at ACMS empowered and encouraged students to challenge life’s discourses, to become critical thinkers and risk takers, considering life’s possibilities and determining their own instructional goals.

**Self-Determination: Teacher Interviews**

Teachers’ interview responses revealed important information about their empowering pedagogies and discourses about their teaching practices and beliefs and how what they taught was deemed appropriate and acceptable by the administration. They responded as follows:

Fatima: That is a good question, what I teach and what I have to teach. Yes, there is a difference and the difference would be what I have to teach is in the textbook and the materials in the classroom, but what I end up teaching is life experience as it relates to the book you know while I am doing a geography lesson, you know, I actually teach more than what they tell me to teach.

Akila: Yes, there is a difference for our school over all, there is a difference. We are totally open to our children receiving as much African American history as we can give them throughout our curriculum, for example ancient African history, we do not want them to believe that our history begin with slavery, we go back to ancient history, the pyramids, Imhotep, all of that so that they can see how we all begin as a race of people and the teachers are comfortable with having the opportunity to teach in a way that we allow them to teach, there are no limitations within the classroom because of a child’s age as to what he or she can be taught, if that child is reading above everyone else in that classroom we go find a book from that grade level and bring it in for that child to read. If that child is working above the other children in the class at another math level, and if that child’s parents do not think that their child is emotionally ready to be skipped to another grade level, we bring advance work to the child in the classroom. We have a certain academic freedom for teaching here at [ACMS], we are not held to the California State Standards based upon children ages. As a matter of fact, our curriculum is set in a fashion, 3-5 grade levels ahead, but at the same time we have supplemental basic materials in all the classrooms that we constantly review to address the basic needs of our children, so they do not forget or lose that basic foundation. So, no limitations is our model for teaching here . . . no limitations on what a teacher can teach outside of religion.
Nia: I think that what is in the curriculum is good, and it is what I want to teach because we stick to the basics, which are the building blocks that the next teacher would build upon and that is what I believe they should know, I totally agree with this method. (Teacher interviews, March 2012).

The Afrocentric ideal of self-determination was accomplished through the autonomy teachers were granted to teach curriculum that demonstrated an Afrocentric awareness that modeled examples of respect and morality. The teachers stressed the idea of modeling positive behavior as critical for student learning and successful teacher practice.

The teacher interview question about discipline with African American students asked if there was a difference in the way that African American students behaved or the way that they should be treated as a result of the presumed difference? The teachers stated that there was no difference in how African American students should be disciplined. The teacher interviews revealed that the teachers felt that their students and teachers at ACMS expected and modeled behavior that reinforced learning and the moral ideals of Afrocentricity, which was practicing devotion to actions and behaviors that were in the best interest of African consciousness and at the heart of ethical behavior (Asante, 2003). The teachers believed that the system of discipline at the school and in the classroom management they practiced was what was best for all children, especially African American children. They responded as followed:

Fatima: We try to work it out in the classroom before we just give up.

Akila: Our disciple comes with how the teacher presents him or herself from day one. We ask our teachers to be loving but firm with our children. We ask our teachers to leave time in the classroom for joyful expression.

Nia: I think that the way this school disciplines is a lot nicer than the other kinds of discipline I have been around. Other schools that I’ve worked at they had time out and that did not work, and then I have been in high school classes where kids were just given a referral and told to get out and that does not really do anything either, this place and the point systems is good because they stay in their seat, they know when they are in trouble, but
they are still sitting in their seat doing work, and it not like they are standing in the corner not doing work or, out of the room not doing the work. I think this system actually would work for any kid. I think that it is great and I am impressed by it. (Teacher interviews, March 2012)

Teacher observation data provided further evidence for the theme of self-determination as an Afrocentric pedagogy for transformational teaching practices.

**Self-Determination: Teacher Observations**

In the first teacher observation at ACMS, teachers and their students were practicing the theme of self-determination, as defined by Karenga (1997), which is to define yourself, name yourself, create for yourself, and speak for yourself. The teachers had students practice self-determination by speaking for themselves, explaining and defending algebraic solutions, and creating instructional space through discussion. During an algebra II lesson about polynomials, the teacher engaged the students in a discussion about providing proof for the correct solutions to problems. The teacher encouraged a young male student to go to the white board and to write out a solution to the Algebra II problem. Reluctantly, the student approached the white board and began to write out the solution to the problem. The teacher encouraged and challenged the other students in the classroom to “be brave,” and prepare to help their classmate solve the problem and be ready to also show and explain their solutions to their classmates. This observation was notable; rarely has the researcher observed African American students eager to participate in their instructional program or accept an instructional challenge in this manner—and especially to accept it in the presence of an unknown visitor. Particularly, because of the teacher’s control of the instructional environment and encouragement, students took risks and accepted the teacher’s challenge. Students responded positively to an opportunity to provide the solution to the algebra II problems (Fatima, teacher observation, February 2012).
Students responded positively to familiar self-validating and self-affirming verbal cultural cues from the teacher.

**Call and Response**

Hamlet (1980) has discussed the pattern of call and response as a traditional and participatory style of communication found in African American religious and secular settings that combine rhythm and language to create a dialogue between the speaker and the audience. The teachers at ACMS used this Afrocentric communication style to elicit positive and affirming responses from their students as they read, reviewed, and recited their lessons. This teaching practice was also a way for teachers to assess students learning of the content examples as the call and response was observed during a reading lesson. For example, the teacher would say (call) a word and the students simultaneously responded and repeated the reading passage (Fatima, teacher observation, March 2012).

During the teacher observations, the researcher observed that all teachers used a “call-and-response” method that allowed students to engage and participate in the learning process. As if on cue, the students would repeat a word or phrase that the teacher called out. As stated earlier, this practice is traditionally found in African American and Black churches. At ACMS, teachers employed this method regularly to teach content and to practice memorization skills (Hamlet, 1980). An example of “call-and-response” occurred during a physical science lesson in teacher Nia’s classroom. She asked students, “What skills do scientists use to learn about the world?” The students repeated, “What skills do scientist use to learn about the world?” She repeated the question, and the students repeated the question. She then asked, “Who can tell me what skills scientist use to learn about the world?” and all of the students in the entire classroom
eagerly raised their hands to give an answer. Nia called on all of students to give their answers to this question. After each student had given their answer, she said, “Now, let’s take out our textbooks and read about what the book says about the skills that scientist use to learn about the world.” She instructed the students to open their books to the page (Nia, classroom observation, March 2012).

Grounded in Afrocentric values, teachers attributed their students’ academic success to their daily teacher practice of self-reflection. Teachers at ACMS reflected daily on their lesson objectives and outcomes for their students’ academic success.

**Teacher Reflection is an Essential Teacher Practice for Student Learning**

During the teacher interviews, the teachers described daily reflection as an integral part of their routine for evaluation and assessment of lesson study, student success, and academic challenges. Daily lesson reflection was regarded as a teaching practice each teacher held as sacred to her success in the classroom. Teachers regarded daily reflection as an essential teacher practice for student learning and teacher development. The teachers’ responses included a discussion about their beliefs regarding daily reflecting on acceptance of their responsibility and hope for the future for the African American students at their school and in their community.

Teachers responded to the following teacher interview question: How do you think the school experience of the students you teach differs from that of White students in middle class communities? This question caused teachers to reflect upon their daily teaching practices and to consider the school experiences of their students in comparison to those of White students. They shared their beliefs about their responsibilities to their students and the importance of
maintaining a unique identity and commitment to the needs of the school and the African American students who attended.

Teachers responded:

Fatima: What we teach here is different just in the way that we are predominately an African American schools most of the students here are African American and because they are African American we cater to those types of cultural ideas. I have never actually had the experience of teaching multicultural classes or even in an all white school or class. I was bussed to the Valley, I was in a class of all white students and from that experience in comparison to this one, I would say that they stick more to the book and the examples in the book in those type of classrooms, they rarely go off on the side and have a side issue, or use a side example. They are pretty much cut and dry, what is in the book is what they are going to do. Teaching the African American student, if for some reason they did not get a certain part of the lecture, and I find that out on the test, that everyone got number ten wrong, I will throw out number ten because I did not get it across to the students. After serious reflection, I would feel like it was my fault that everyone got that particular problem wrong, either I or they were not listening, or I did not get it into their brain to remember it, . . . and they (administration) let us do that around here.

Akila: I would say, because I have not been apart of that particular surrounding. I would say, that this environments is set up to address children’s needs for feeling safe, for feeling loved, and for feeling inspired, constantly, in our school, and I am sure you see it in a White school. Because I doubt if you walked into a white school in a middle class community and see a lot of Black art on the walls, so, I think that what we are doing is probably what they do for their children, and I’m sure that they do everything to hold them to their highest levels academically, socially, politically, all of that, so that’s what were doing here in our community for our children. We strive to give our children the best and what we want to do is expand within this community right here.

Nia: Oh, I was thinking about this yesterday when I first read the question, and I thought that it was really a good question because this experience, it is pretty much all basic subjects that these kids should know, aside from that it is building their African American pride. And, I was thinking about America and society and how there is a White culture but nobody wants to say there is White culture. (Pause) But, in White culture they have White pride and that is fine and why in mix classes they are still discussing, things like being proud of yourself as a White American, because Americans are supposedly only White. We have to distinguish ourselves as African American and for them to, when we say you know we’re proud to be an American that is just saying that we are proud to be White. And when I say I am proud to be an American, I have to say I am an African American. And, so, here in this school we are pretty much teaching the same way they are teaching, we are talking about African pride, we are talking about our real history, we are not forgetting the facts, and we are opening our minds to how life really is. (Pause)
So, this school is just like going to a Jewish school where they teach about their own history, they read from the torah, and they instill in their kids pride for their culture, this is the same. I do not understand why there are not more, and I think it is great that African American teachers can teach African American kids. (Pause) Why not, it only makes sense? (Teacher interviews, March 2012)


**Teacher Means Summary Data**

An example of the Mean Summary Data assessment is shown in Table 6. The Mean Summary Data for teacher Nia’s second and third observation demonstrated a high level of evidence of Afrocentric teacher practices in the category: Models Proactive Self. In Table 5, teacher Nia’s first through fourth observations demonstrated evidence of a moderate level of engagement for teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT in the following observation categories: lesson content, pedagogy/practice, and classroom culture. Nia demonstrated a low level of evidence of the teacher practices or activities listed in the ATPOT into the following observation category: Responds to Race References.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Point Range</th>
<th>Lesson Content 1-20</th>
<th>Pedagogy/Practice 1-35</th>
<th>Classroom Culture 1-25</th>
<th>Models Proactive Self 1-35</th>
<th>Responds to Race Ref. 1-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit 3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit 4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Category Scores</td>
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<td>111</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal (Mean)</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.86</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>16.43</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Mean</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Raw data in Table 6 shows the number of classroom visits for Nia; raw scores were calculated during the observations, and a total score was given in each category. The number of Afrocentric teacher practices observed were on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 represented Clearly Evident on the ATPOT. A mean for each category was calculated, and an overall mean score was given for each category. Teacher Nia’s means ranged from a high $M = 4.11$ for Models Proactive Self to a low $M = 2.75$ in Responds to Racial References, which could be contributed to the content of the lesson taught during the classroom observations.

Table 6

**Raw and Mean Observation Data for Sister Nia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 2</th>
<th>Visit 3</th>
<th>Visit 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Lesson Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Materials</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student Engagement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lesson Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Content Total</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Methodology (Models)</td>
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<td>3. Resources (Use of)</td>
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**C. Classroom Culture (Afrocentric)**

1. Psychological motifs visible 5 5 5 5
2. Social and cultural themes discussed 1 1 5 5
3. Cultural context defined 1 1 5 5
4. Cultural examples given 1 1 5 5
5. Notable cultural figures/holidays referenced 1 1 4 5

Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Total 9 9 24 25
Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Subtotal (Mean) 1.8 1.8 4.8 5
Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Mean 3.35

**D. Models Proactive Self**

1. Gives examples of morals, values, ethics 1 5 5 1
2. Gives examples of famous moral & ethical figures 1 1 5 1
3. Shares cultural values 1 5 5 5
4. Encourages students to take risks 5 5 4 5
5. Knows students’ names, families, story, etc. 5 5 5 5
6. Coaches and facilitates instruction 5 5 5 5
7. Models and provides a climate of respect & collaboration 5 5 5 5

Models Proactive Self Total 23 31 34 27
Models Proactive Self-Subtotal (Mean) 3.29 4.43 4.86 3.86
Models Proactive Self Mean 4.11

**E. Responds to racial references**
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<tr>
<td>1. Understands culture of being BLK/AA</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Discusses, defines &amp; suggests (counter narrative)</td>
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<td>3. Explains successes and challenges</td>
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<td>4. Uses culturally relevant resources</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>5. Discusses capacity to learn</td>
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**Models Proactive Self**

The Means Summary Data for Modeling a Proactive Self for all teachers were as follows: Fatima, $M = 4.36$, Nia, $M = 4.11$, and Akila, $M = 3.86$. In this category, teachers could receive a score of 35, which is the highest raw data score possible. During the observations, the highest scores received by the teachers in this category were 35, 34, and 31. Each teacher had developed a style of her own for modeling pro-active behavior for her students. However, collectively they modeled:

- Respectful and collaborative Afrocentric moral and ethical cultural values;
- Self-correction and self-discipline through the use of shared values and acceptable behavior in community spaces;
- Facilitation of student-centered lesson in a nurturing learning environment.
An example of respectful and collaborative behavior was shown in how the teachers, students, and the parents greeted and addressed one another. Teachers addressed students by their name or as “sister” or “brother.” Students addressed teachers and adults as “sister” or as “brother.” These familiar interactions and exchanges between the teachers and the students can be linked to Afrocentric value of a common understanding about culture and family found in African American communities. During the interviews with the teachers, when asked the question, is there a difference in the way that African American students behave or the way that they should be treated as a result of the presumed difference? Their responses indicated that they collaborated with one another to provide students a model of how to work out challenges together in a harmonious manner, which is customary when using a culturally relevant Afrocentric framework.

Another example of teachers practicing and modeling a proactive self was demonstrated during the students’ lunchtime. Teachers and students eat meals communally in the lunchroom, and during these meals teachers compliment the Sister responsible for cooking and preparing the meal. In the lunchroom, the teachers modeled to the students how to sit and eat together family style. Fatima stated, “We are just like a family in how we behave and show respect to one another during lunch time, respect is a shared value at this school.” Thus, teachers model ethical behavior, self-correction, and self-discipline daily with all students throughout the school day. The teachers expect students to behave in the classroom, lunchroom, playground, and in the restrooms. The students are polite and address one another by name as they ask for permission to enter lunch lines, restrooms, and other shared spaces in the school. For the teachers to model moral and ethical values to their students during their lessons, they referenced models of
morality and ethics established by historical African American figures for example Marcus Garvey and Benjamin Banneker (Fatima, teacher observation, March 2012).

To facilitate student-centered lessons in a nurturing learning environment, the teacher encouraged students to

- Take academic risks, to speak out, and lead their fellow students in discussion; and
- Challenge existing subject matter content through inquiry.

The teachers coached and facilitated students through challenging instruction and subject matter by challenging the students to collaborate with other students in the class and to come up with a solution. Although, ACMS teachers provided students with challenging instruction, they had the freedom and responsibility to evaluate students with fidelity.

**Assessments**

According to the executive and curriculum directors, students were not given traditional placement tests upon entry to ACMS. Students were accepted to the school on a trial basis for one month and were expected to follow the school’s rules and come to school daily ready to receive instruction. Parents were welcome to have their child privately assessed. Fatima, the curriculum director stated, “We are effective here at ACMS because we have the freedom to teach our own way, that is an Afrocentric way, and in every subject we give examples of African Americans that have contributed to the subject.” She continued:

And teachers have been here at ACMS a long time and we are inspired by others to continue because of our success with students; we are an exception to the rule, over the years we have received letters of commendation and awards from non-traditional sources, for example the local newspapers including: the Los Angeles Sentinel (1992), UCLA Daily Bruin, Our Times, and Orange County Register (1993); recognition letters from Presidents George W. Bush (1999) and Civil Rights Leader Jessie Jackson (1988); and visits from First Lady Laura Bush (2000).
Teachers assessed students formally and informally during observations. Formal assessment of students’ skills was by test, quiz, and written examination, which the researcher observed during four teacher observations; they were as follows:

- Fatima’s United States History Chapter Review examination in the computer lab (March, 2012)
- Fatima’s math quiz on polynomials (March, 2012)
- Nia’s physical science written examination using key vocabulary words (March 2012)
- Akila’s English writing, English grammar, vocabulary, and penmanship assignments (March, 2012).

Teachers informally assessed student’s content comprehension daily by checking for understanding by asking critical questions, leading class discussions, prompting choral recitation, requesting impromptu presentations, and correcting students’ homework assignments. A second interview was held in June 2012 with Fatima, the curriculum director and the grade-eight teacher, to better understand what criteria were used to assess students; the researcher asked:

How often do teachers at ACMS assess or test their students?

Fatima: Students are tested weekly in every subject, and sometimes twice a week. There are fourteen subjects at each level from the primary, intermediate, to the advanced; and teachers use a grading scale to grade their students. Students take at least one quiz during the week and one test for memory; and the students are motivated to do well because they want to be in the advanced group. We do not use standardized test here at ACMS, and if a parent wants to have their child tested they have to have it done privately.

The second question was: How can teachers tell if students are making academic progress?

Fatima: First of all the students are three to five grade levels above the average student in the surrounding public schools. And we use textbooks that are above the students’ grade level. We use high school textbook for the middle school students. In one month the parents can tell the difference with their child, they are eager to learn, we believe that if they are respectful and following the rules, then they are ready to receive instruction and
to do well. And we monitor students progress with Report Cards sent home twice a year issued in February and June, that is one in the fall and one in the spring, and Progress Report Cards sent home every 8 weeks and sent out twice each semester, and finally the Homework/Behavior Sheet sent home with students weekly, so that parents can also monitor their child’s academic progress. (Fatima, teacher interview, June 2012)

**Artifacts**

The school’s cultural artifacts served a dual purpose. They reinforced the teacher practices and beliefs about the concept of self-determination and about using an Afrocentric framework to teach African American students. According to Dr. Maulana Karenga (1997), the principle and practice of self-determination expresses and supports the concept and practice of Afrocentricity. Teachers decorated their classrooms with Afrocentric posters, signs, and messages that represented cultural anchors, reaffirming and encouraging students to understand the contributions of famous African Americans and to, one day, make their contribution to the world. As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, classroom bulletin boards were decorated, and displayed messages that celebrated Black History Month and acknowledged the contributions of famous African American inventors.

![Afrocentric posters celebrating achievement on classroom walls.](image)

*Figure 3. Afrocentric posters celebrating achievement on classroom walls.*
A classroom bulletin board and wall decorated with a banner and posters celebrating Black History and African American inventors.

![Image of a classroom bulletin board](image)

**Figure 4.** Student class project decorates the walls.

Student projects of famous African Americans in California were displayed in the hallway. The walls were decorated with student work and class projects that included pictures of famous African American civil rights advocates.

A welcome sign hung on the classroom door that reminded and reinforced a proactive and a positive self-image for students. This decorative door poster was used to welcome and encourage students to feel comfortable in their learning environment (Teacher interview, March 2012).

As shown in Figure 5, classroom posters and decoration reinforced Afrocentric cultural ideals and placed African American students at the center of the learning process. Various posters, signs, and decorations at ACMS pronounced, “Welcome African American Achievers,”
and displays featured black, red, and green, colors significant to the African American flag: black for the people, red for the blood, and green for the land (Martin, 1976), and in 1960, black for the people, red for the struggle, and green for hope for the future (Karenga, 1998). The results of self-determination at ACMS were academic empowerment for the students.

Figure 5. Afrocentric welcome sign on the classroom door.

Theme Two: Academic Empowerment: Afrocentric Teaching Practices Enabled Teachers to Support Student Academic Achievement with Congruency Through Learning Goals

Teachers at ACMS felt that they were supported and permitted to freely engage students in learning activities that enhanced their instructional lessons. They challenged their students, and achieved the administration’s learning goals as related to high levels of curriculum and academic expectations, a culture of achievement, skills mastery, teacher reflection, and high academic challenges. Teachers achieved these goals by integrating academics and culture. Teachers responded to research question number one and discussed their feelings about meeting
the learning goals of the school and how they believed they contributed to high academic achievement with their students. In their classrooms, teachers demonstrated how they met and contributed to meeting the learning goals for their students. In their responses (below), they stated that they incorporated supplemental materials that enhanced their content lessons, attended cultural events in the community, and reviewed lessons that required students to master high level content curriculum.

**High Level Curriculum and Academic Expectation**

They responded in this manner:

Fatima: Ok, I would say, pretty much, anytime I have extra materials, say a DVD that I would like to show, or a field trip that I would like to go on that would help with, what is going on in the classroom, I hardly ever get a no (from administration). So, what I believe I need to add to the material usually gets approved, if it gets denied, it is probably because we did not have a bus that day or some logistics but never because of what I want to do. For example, two weeks ago we went to the Space X Center right off of the Crenshaw and 105 freeway and we were doing some experiments in classroom with crane lifting and different little small experiments. And one of the parents said, “you guys should go to the Space X Center” and sure enough we made up trip slips and we went to the Sister Director and asked her if we could go to the Space X Center, it was last minute, and we went that same week. The idea is as long as there is a way for us to go she always I would say 99% of the times she says yes. I would say we line up pretty good with the learning goals and curricular trips.

Akila: Because of our high standards, teachers who come in here have to come up to those standards. If they are coming from a system where they are accustom to teaching where kindergarteners are only expected to learn according to California State Standards they have to be ready to put forth that challenge to our children. Because teachers can limit children because they are limited in their way of thinking, our way of thinking is different. You know, we challenge the child to his or her fullest potential.

Nia: No, I do not think there is any difference between what I want to teach and what Sister Director have given me to teach. All of the subjects will help the next teacher build upon those new topics, and I talk to the seventh and eighth grade teachers. I want them (students) to be prepared once they come in here and to be disciplined, and we (teachers) really need to work hand and hand, and I think that everything we do here is good.

(Teacher interviews, March 2012)
A classroom observation of an English and writing lesson provided an example of the teacher’s emphasis on academic congruency and high expectations whereby the teacher required each student to bring his/her writing assignment to her while she sat at her desk and corrected grammar, penmanship, and the contents of their papers (Akila, classroom observation, March 2012).

Teachers interview responses were analyzed through the opening coding method (Emerson et al., 1995) and comparisons were constantly made (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) between Asante’s (2003) ideas about Afrocentricity and how teachers responded to the teacher interview questions regarding the source of academic success with their students. Five subtopics connected and synchronized the interview data to the cultural ideals of Afrocentricity. They were grounded in these characteristics:

- An Afrocentric consciousness that encouraged and engaged African American students to advance academically through self-determination and to extract from the lesson content what they needed that restored and strengthened them academically, socially, and politically;
- An Afrocentric cultural awareness that strengthened and empowered students to achieve academically and that enabled teachers to expand freely students’ cultural and historical experience beyond the classroom;
- Mastery of the basic literacy and study skills that prepared students to meet the demand and challenge of high academic expectations and success;
• Daily teacher reflections focused and emphasized an Afrocentric lesson content, lesson delivery, academic rigor, teacher competency, student outcomes and accomplishments;

• The essential nature of the African American family and community that celebrated and supported student academic achievement and success.

Teachers believed these common teacher practices supported their pedagogy for student achievement. When categorized, these five common subtopics were culturally congruent and grounded in an Afrocentric theoretical framework.

Asante’s Afrocentric themes (1998, 2003) were identified at ACMS during the observation phase of this study, as shown in Table 7, below. These data were compared with—and connections were made to—the Afrocentric theoretical framework. The teachers responded to the interview questions with conviction that was personal and beyond what was required, for example when teacher Akila responded to a question concerning her beliefs about African American students and their school experiences and needs compared to those of White students in a middle class community.

Akila: What they do have, I am sure of in the middle class communities is that they are able to offer their children more amenities, the science building, gymnasium, baseball diamond and all of that, we do not have all of that, but we are able to provide that for our children by taking our children to those places. It would be just wonderful, if we did in the beginning purchase more property right here in the neighborhood and provide science, art, and technology centers for our children. I envision that, you know, right here in our community, do you know what I am saying? (Teacher interviews, March 2012)
Further analyzed, the teacher interview response data revealed teachers perceptions about teaching practices, beliefs, and their perceived responsibilities related to African American students at ACMS. They responded similarly to research question number two, and their responses were synchronized to the indicator on the ATPOT.

**A Culture of Achievement**

During the interviews, teachers discussed the teaching practices that they believed contributed to academic success and a culture of high academic achievement and challenges at ACMS. Teachers discussed feeling confident and inspired to teach the students at ACMS. They
discussed what they did in the classroom to facilitate academic success with their African American students; they responded:

Fatima: Well, the students are successful at Afrocentric Middle School, because the teachers are constantly bringing in outside information to support the academic program. For example, the Pan African Film Festival where we participated in three days at the Pan African Film Festival, saw different movies, I believe the whole school went. Our class saw Kareem Abdul Jabbar’s, movie Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, they came back to class and we related his story with our African American history textbook . . . and so we related that experience of African American history, I mean, Pan African Film Festival with the textbook so we always try to go out into the community, hands on is most important you always have to have a way to connect to the book, the textbook . . . have examples, or working examples in the classroom, something to connect their experience in the community with the book.

Akila: We challenge children above the standard grade level we do not put great emphasis on it. The fact that they are learning three to five grade levels ahead and above most children in our community it is considered friendly competition.

Nia: I think some things that I have done are, take one kid aside and let the class do a worksheet, and then take another kid aside and go through each problem and tell them why it is wrong and let them do it again and then check back on them usually not letting anything slip by, making sure they are going back, double checking, and using critical thinking, until that they get it.

Researcher: And do you think that contributes to academic success, right?

Nia: Yes, I worked in public school and this is private school and things slipped by all the time and if they (students) get an F, oh we will just work on something new next week but, at this school I have the freedom to go back and work with them for two weeks, three weeks, its about mastery and that is what I totally believe in… just the basics, because they are only learning the basics at this level, it not like you can let it slip by, but if you don’t get it now, you are going to really be behind you know when you get into six, seven, eight, and then into high school these kids really have to get it in their early grades. (Teacher interviews, March 2012)

Teachers discussed the importance of mastery of basic skills by their students. They believed that through the mastery of basic literacy and study skills, such as grammar, students build a strong literacy foundation that would enable them to pursue great academic challenges.
Mastery of the Basic Skills are Critical to Student Learning and Academic Success

During interviews, the teachers discussed their teaching practices that included having the students master the subject matter content through study skills techniques, such as “call-and-respond” drills. Teachers challenged students three to five grade levels above where they were to get them to high academic achievement. As the school’s executive director stated, “It is the teachers’ job to challenge the children.”

Teachers responded to teacher interview questions about their teaching philosophy and what they believed worked for teaching African American students. They discussed mastery of study skills as important to student success. They responded:

Fatima: So, I believe teaching study skills, note taking, how to do homework, how to take a test those are more valuable than teaching to the test.

Akila: Students lead drills, they review and review, even the kindergarteners lead the drills, we like to do “call and respond” its’ a bit of our African Ancestry . . . because of our high standards teachers who come in here to teach have to come up to those standards. We purposely selected our textbook three to five grade levels ahead, so the forth and the fifth graders are handling a middle school curriculum.

Nia: I think that mastery is important and I believe that if you give the kid a chance to go over that topic repeatedly then there is no way some parts of that lesson will not go in…it is about mastery and that what I totally believe in, not letting just the basics go because they are only learning the basics at this level. (Teacher interviews, March 2012)

During the interviews, teachers revealed their educational background and, although all three teachers held multiple college degrees that ranged from associate of arts, bachelor of arts, and other certificates, none of them held teaching credentials or had formal teacher training; the one thing they held in common was a philosophy of education, teaching, and learning that centered around a passion for teaching African American children.
During February and March 2012, teachers were observed in their classrooms using a variety of teaching methodologies and practices such as communal discussion and collaborative small groups. The classroom observation and the interviews provided another aspect to the data triangulated for this study and for the data that supported using Afrocentric teacher practices and methodologies with African American students. Based on evidence gathered from teacher interviews, the researcher could conclude that ACMS teaching practices and beliefs synchronized with Asante’s (2003) Framework for Afrocentricty. These observations answered research question number one regarding what teachers did that contributed to academic success with their students, and research question two regarding what perceptions teachers held about the academic achievement of African American students. Early analysis of the classroom observations revealed that in addition supporting the mastery of basic study skills, teachers at ACMS used the following teaching methods:

- Repetition (oral chorale, written)
- Incorporate multiple learning modalities
- Facilitate instruction and learning
- Incorporate culture
- Provide students with immediate feedback in the classroom and on homework assignments
- Maintain classroom environment of respect and cooperation
- Daily reflection and evaluation of teaching practice.
On a daily basis, teachers reinforced academic empowerment through different routine instructional practices and beliefs that enabled them to challenge and engage students in their learning.

During the observations, the teachers’ instructional methodology consisted of chorale drills, written and oral repetition, and constant assessment of the students’ comprehension of the content materials. In each classroom, the teachers wrote an agenda on the whiteboard with the schedule subjects to be covered for the day. Middle school teachers at ACMS taught 15 subjects. For the students in grades six, seven, and eight, the subjects taught consist of six primary subjects that included mathematics, science, reading/literature, English grammar/English writing, phonics/spelling/vocabulary, and penmanship. The secondary subjects were health, beginning Kiswahili, beginning Spanish, geography/world geography, African/African American history, introduction to computers, citizenship, and physical education.

**Multiple Learning Modalities**

The teachers at ACMS used multiple learning modalities with their students. Best practices for teaching African American students were varied and can be implemented by teachers who are aware and sensitive to students’ cultural needs (Edwards et al., 2010). The teachers at ACMS incorporated into their daily lessons oral presentation, lecture, discussion, dance, song, storytelling, and Cornell note taking. They believed this material provided their students relevant and culturally congruent learning models that enhanced their teaching practice and student learning.

During a second observation in Fatima’s classroom, the students and teacher were engaged in a discussion about geography (Fatima, teacher observation, March 2012). This
lesson seemed multifocused, and the classroom dynamics seemed intense; through further observation, the teacher reminded the students that they could use the Cornell notes that they had written the prior day during a reading assignment. To prepare students for writing assignments, teachers used this discussion method regularly. The teacher lectured and discussed with students ways to write a paper during an assignment about the Great Lakes. Observed in each classroom was the teaching practice of lesson review of prior information, lectures, discussion, note taking, and reflection with students (Fatima, classroom observation, March 2012). Summarized mean data for teachers depicted the high and low scores documented as evidence of Afrocentric Teacher Practice and Beliefs.

The mean score data teacher Fatima scored—as shown in Table 8—represented the total number points in raw score for the four observations (visits) and categories observed using the ATPOT. The mean data represent teacher scores that fall into high 5.0 to 4.1 mean to medium 4.0 to 3.0 mean range using a 5-point scale.
Table 8

Mean Observation Summary Data for Sister Fatima

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Lesson Content 1-20</th>
<th>Pedagogy/Practice 1-35</th>
<th>Classroom Culture 1-25</th>
<th>Models Proactive Self 1-35</th>
<th>Responds to Race Ref. 1-25</th>
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</table>

The mean (average) scores assigned to Fatima during the site observations displayed high to moderate mean scores that ranged from 4.50 to 3.10. See the level of evidence for teacher practices and activities listed in the ATPOT that also signify the level at which the teacher incorporated culturally relevant references into the observation categories of classroom culture and responses to race references.

Facilitated Instruction and Learning

During the classroom observations, all three teachers facilitated student learning by prompting students with leading questions and encouraging them to further explore the subject matter. An example of this teacher practice was especially noticeable in classrooms of senior teachers Fatima and Nia. These teachers’ raw scores on the ATPOT were 5s, with the exception of teacher Akila, who scored a 4 during observation number three. An example of a high teacher score is shown in Table 9, a summary chart of the mean data for Fatima’s raw scores calculated during the four classroom observations.
Table 10 shows the separate categories on the ATPOT, and the total of number points, and a mean score in each category, which provided an overall score for that observation. In Table 9, teacher Fatima scored 5s during the observations in most categories on the ATPOT, with 5 being the highest score on the scale. Using the ATPOT, a high raw data and mean data score indicated that Afrocentric teacher practices were *Clearly Evident* in Fatima’s classroom.

Table 9

*Raw and Mean Observation Data for Sister Fatima*

<table>
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<td>1. Materials</td>
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<td>2. Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student Engagement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lesson Design</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Content Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Content Subtotal (Mean)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Content Mean</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Pedagogy/Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Objective (Present)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Methodology (Models)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Resources (Use of)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pedagogical knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intellectual engagement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Facilitation (learning)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assessment of skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Subtotal (Mean)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice Mean</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Classroom Culture (Afrocentric)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological motifs visible</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social and cultural themes discussed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cultural context defined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCALE 1-5</td>
<td>Visit 1</td>
<td>Visit 2</td>
<td>Visit 3</td>
<td>Visit 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Notable cultural figures/holidays referenced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture (Afrocentric)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture (Afrocentric) Subtotal (Mean)</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**D. Models Proactive Self**

1. Gives examples of morals, values, ethics | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
2. Gives examples of famous moral & ethical figures | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
3. Shares cultural values | 5 | N/A | 5 | 5 |
4. Encourages students to take risks | 5 | 5 | 5 | N/A |
5. Knows students’ names, families, story, etc. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
6. Coaches and facilitates instruction | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
7. Models and provides a climate of respect & collaboration | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

**Models Proactive Self Total** | 27 | 30 | 35 | 30 |
**Models Proactive Self Subtotal (Mean)** | 3.86 | 4.29 | 5 | 4.29 |
**Models Proactive Self Mean** | 4.36 |

**E. Responds to racial references**

1. Understands culture of being BLK/AA | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
2. Discusses, defines & suggests (counter narrative) | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
3. Explains successes and challenges | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
4. Uses culturally relevant resources | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
5. Discusses capacity to learn | 4 | 4 | 5 | 1 |

**Responds to racial references Total** | 8 | 24 | 25 | 5 |
**Responds to racial references Subtotal (Mean)** | 1.6 | 4.8 | 5 | 1 |
**Responds to racial references Mean** | 3.10 |
In the category Facilitation of Learning scale was 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 the highest score in showing clear evidence of the teacher practice on the ATPOT (Teachers observations, February-March, 2012).

Teachers’ raw data scores from the ATPOP in the Facilitation of Learning category was substantially high, Fatima scored 20 points and Akila scored 19 points; during a total of 12 observations, the researcher observed 11 occurrences of teacher-facilitated learning for students. Teachers’ scores ranged from 5 - Clearly Evident to 1 - Not Evident. Teachers’ scores were based on the following observable data rated by the researchers as teacher’s facilitating and assisting student learning by

- Carefully listening to student during responses and class discussion
- Providing immediate positive feedback, i.e. “Are you sure about that answer?”
- Eliciting students to explain, think, and analyze their response or issue
- Meeting the needs of all students by clearly explaining assignments
- Establishing high expectations for all students

(Teacher Observations, March 2012)

In an interview with the ACMS Executive Director, she stated, “Both students and teachers can teach the lesson,” and “We like to say around here each one teach one.” Facilitation of instruction is a main ingredient for teacher practices at ACMS (ACMS Executive Director Interview, March 2012).

All classroom observations revealed teacher practices of facilitation of learning. The teachers worked with students in a cooperative manner and questioned them to think, remember, and consult with their textbooks and classmates for answers to complex problems and seeking
solutions. According to the executive director, facilitation of learning affirms and builds the confidence level of the teacher and the student by making the student responsible for seeking his or her own knowledge and solutions, as reinforced with by the theme of self-determination.

Another example of this dynamic was observed during an algebra lesson in teacher Nia’s classroom when the students were asked to complete their algebra problem on paper and, once finished with the algebra problem, go to the board and show how they arrived at their answers. As the student went to board, one student commented, “I probably got an ‘A’,” as another student commented, “I know what to do, it’s pretty simple.” Nia continued to walk around the classroom and ask the other students to “Pay close attention your work.” She paused to pose a question to a small cluster of students, kneeling down next to them and saying, “If you change it from an Improper Fraction, what will happen next?” The students looked at her as she spoke; as she got up from kneeling, she said, “Continue to work with Malcolm and Martin (pseudonyms) to figure it out” (Nia, teacher observation, February 2012).

**Immediate Feedback**

The teacher practices at ACMS included providing students with immediate feedback on their class work and homework assignments. Daily, the teachers would give and receive homework and correct class assignments, and provide students with a grade or points that demonstrated satisfactory completion of an assignment. Students enthusiastically turned in their homework assignments and reminded the teachers to give them their homework for the day (Teacher Observation, March 2012).

During the interviews, all teachers discussed the importance of immediately correcting student homework and in-class assignments. During an unexpected visit to the classrooms of
teachers Fatima and Nia, the teachers were observed quietly sitting at their desks correcting daily assignments and preparing homework packages for the next day (Fatima and Nia, teacher observation, March 2012). Teachers and the school’s executive director attributed this teacher practice to high teacher expectation and the students’ desire to excel academically. Immediate feedback on assignments, teachers believed contributed to student achievement and teacher success.

**Maintain Classroom Environment of Respect and Cooperation**

The teachers at ACMS attributed some of their academic success with their students to maintaining a classroom environment in which students feel safe and respected, and cooperation is expected. Teachers answered the following research question: How do these practices contributed to high academic achievement of African American students? They discussed the use of class standards, rules, and modeling high expectations and behaviors and how these practices contributed positively to a disciplined learning environment at ACMS. Teachers practiced Afrocentric ideals associated with moral location—ideas and concepts that promote ethical behavior and justice for all humans (Asante 2003). These teacher practices were central to classroom discipline, management, and positive teacher-students relationships.

At ACMS, teachers and the students addressed one another by the first name of the person and by placing in front of the person’s name a salutation of *Brother* or *Sister*. Students greeted teachers and adults by addressing them as brother or sister, a way of showing respect to the teacher and to other adults at the school. All teachers and adults at the school were considered moral vanguards and were expected to model respect to each other and to all students. Throughout the day students could be heard calling out “Sister! Sister!” Teachers and students
were aware that by addressing each other as sister or brother, they were not family, but were using a greeting common to African American culture (Teacher observation, March 2012). Both teachers and students in the classroom, the hallways, on the schoolyard during recess, and at lunch, modeled another example of the expectation of respect and cooperation. I observed teachers and students exchanging greeting, of “Excuse me,” “I’m sorry,” and “I apologize.” Teachers reinforced positive behavior with positive behavior and unwelcomed behaviors with immediate correction.

While conducting research at ACMS, the researcher did not note a single instance in which a teacher said to a student “Be quiet” or “Shut up,” and not once was a student heard putting another student down, or using the “N” word, or profanity to express themselves. These words are regularly heard on other school playgrounds. During an interview with the executive director, the researcher mentioned student behavior; she responded “Oh, no! The children that have been here knows better, and those that have been here for a long time, that is not even in their mindset. The ‘N’ word oh, that is horrible” (Executive director interview, March 2012).

**Reflect Daily and Evaluate Student Learning**

The teachers at ACMS were expected by the students, parents, and school executive director to provide students immediate feedback on all assignments. This practice triggered teachers to reflect daily on their teaching practice and to evaluate their lessons. During the interviews, teachers remarked that if a majority of the students did not do well on a problem, they adjusted their lesson. For example, if a majority of the students got a math problem wrong, teacher Fatima stated that she would think that “either the students did not listen,” or that she
“did not teach the lesson well,” and therefore she would throw the problem out, and reteach the lesson (Fatima, teacher interview March 2012).

**Afrocentric Teacher Practices Numerical Data**

Teachers received high to moderate scores in most of categories on the ATPOT. High teacher scores on the ATPOT provided evidence of Afrocentric teacher practices and beliefs, which were observed and recorded by the researcher. Table 10 shows overall teacher mean summary data compared by category for observable evidence of Afrocentric teacher practices. Mean totals are listed in each category from the ATPOT for each teacher. High mean scores also indicate more evidence of Afrocentric teacher practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Teacher</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Nia</th>
<th>Akila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Content</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Practice</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Proactive Self</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to Race Ref.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key: M = Mean totals for 12 observations (At 4 observations in each category)*

Mean totals were collected from raw data from the 12 teacher observations; each teacher was observed a total of four times; and the numerical scores were averaged, from which a mean total resulted. The mean totals from the 12 teacher observations indicated a high, moderate, or low number of observable occurrences of Afrocentric Teacher practices on the ATPOT; categories were labeled, *Clearly Evident, Somewhat Evident, Vague, Unable to Determine, Not Evident.* Table 11 shows raw numbers of occurrences when the researcher observed Afrocentric
teacher practices as *Clearly Evident*, which was a score of 5 in Teacher’s Lesson Content, Pedagogical Practices, and Models Proactive Self, and Low, and *Not Evident*, which was number 1 or no occurrences of Afrocentric teaching practices in the learning environment from the ATPOT.

Table 11

*Teachers’ Score Totals - Afrocentric Teacher Practice Observation Tool*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores Scale/Evidence</th>
<th>5 - Clearly Evident</th>
<th>4 - Somewhat Evident</th>
<th>3 - Vague</th>
<th>2 - Unable to Determine</th>
<th>1 - Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lesson Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Materials</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Levels of Bloom’s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Student Engagement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Lesson Design</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pedagogy/Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Objective (Present)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Methodology (Models)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Resources (Use of)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Pedagogical knowledge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Intellectual engagement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Facilitation (learning)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Assessment of skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Classroom Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Psychological motifs visible</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Social and cultural themes dis.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Cultural context defined</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Cultural examples given</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Notable cultural figures/holidays</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Models Proactive Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Gives ex. morals, values, &amp; ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Example of famous moral &amp; ethical figures</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Shares cultural values</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores Scale/Evidence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Clearly Evident</td>
<td>Somewhat Evident</td>
<td>Vague</td>
<td>Unable to Determine</td>
<td>Not Evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Models a climate of respect &amp; collaboration</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Responds to racial references</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Understands culture of being BLK/AA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Discusses, defines &amp; suggests</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Explains successes and challenges</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Uses culturally relevant resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Discusses capacity to learn</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson Content Category (ATPOT)**

Examples of teacher observation data were found in the Lesson Content category on the ATPOT, which presented the following Mean (M) scores based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest number that supported Clear Evidence of the Afrocentric teacher activity observed in the classroom. The M score for the category Lesson Content Data ranged for each teacher, from Fatima, $M = 4.31$, Nia, $M = 3.88$, and Akila, $M = 3.94$. The teacher mean scores showed evidence to support that teachers engaged in lesson preparation and designed lessons that met the learning needs of their students. Teachers used a variety of instructional materials to teach a lesson. For example, if the lesson was physical science, then corresponding and appropriate text, handouts, and materials were used to teach the lesson. In all teachers’ classrooms the researcher noted country maps, world globes, supplemental teaching materials, and textbooks for biology, physical science, English, African American history, California history, algebra I, and algebra II (Teacher observations, February 2012).
Each teacher had students of different academic levels, ranging from primary and intermediate to advanced learning. The teachers instructed their students using differentiated and multiple instructional learning levels; for example, some students were identified at grade level, that is eighth grade, and some students were identified above grade level, that is, 10th grade or higher, as stated in the teacher interviews, March 2012. A second interview with the school’s executive director revealed that all teachers at ACMS were expected to teach a range of grade levels, including fifth through eighth, and primary, intermediate, and advance learning levels using multiple learning modalities to deliver instruction. During interviews, two teachers stated that the reason for having all three learning levels in the classroom together was to motivate the primary and intermediate students to physically observe and understand what was required of them to move to advanced levels of learning. According to the teachers, “The students’ goal was to reach the advanced level of learning” (Teacher interview, March 2012).

**Bloom’s Taxonomy Category (ATPOT)**

The second area in the lesson content category was the Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), on which the teachers scored more in the numerical ranges of 4s and 5s. The teacher practices that aligned with Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy were clearly evident or somewhat evident during these observations. Teachers engaged their students in creating, evaluating, and analyzing subject matter by using questioning methods that compelled students to think critically about their responses. For example, during the initial observation of each teacher, the researcher adjusted to the teacher’s tone of voice and style of questioning students to identify the level of Bloom’s Taxonomy used during instructional delivery. During subsequent observations, the researcher found it easier to recognize the level of Bloom’s
Taxonomy each teacher used during instructional delivery and checking for understanding. For example, during a third observation, Fatima’s classroom taught a lesson about Jim Crow, asking each student to respond individually to the following series of guided-thinking questions and directions:

   Fatima: Describe the picture and tell me what you think about it. 
   Why do you think that a teacher’s educational materials and lesson website would use this particular picture during Black History Month?
   What else does this picture tell you about the issues surrounding race in America during that time?
   How about now?
   Has much changed in America regarding this issue, if so what has changed?
   You can use you Cornell notes to help present your answers. (Fatima, teacher observation, March 2012)

In this example, the teacher gave each student time to complete his or her thoughts and to answer the questions. The researcher observed other students in the classroom sitting and listened to their classmate and waiting for their turn to respond to the teacher questions. At ACMS, teachers regularly incorporated into their instructional delivery, lesson planning, project development, and assessment, questions that engaged students to reflect and think deeply about the content and subject matter presented; and to demonstrate written or oral project presentation results. Students were encouraged to analyze and evaluate supplemental teacher material and to create meaning from what they observed. Teachers explicitly told their students to focus, think, and respond in a critical and organized manner (Teacher observation, February 2012). Further investigation of this teaching practice revealed the teachers’ belief that teaching students how to think critically developed a deeper understanding of the subject matter, simplified complex issues, and strengthened learning skills necessary for African American students to navigate a rigorous academic program (Teacher interview, March 2012).
Teachers guided students through the learning process of restating, summarizing, creating, and analyzing the information presented (Teacher observation, March 2012). The teacher scores were 5s for most observations; the one exception was a teacher score of 4 during a site visit. The teachers’ lesson designs were not always evident through observations; therefore, sometimes the teachers’ raw scores offered less evidence of designing their lessons. Teacher interviews, classroom observation, and artifact analysis further supported the data that all three teachers planned and designed lessons weekly and that students were assessed daily about what was learned (Teacher observations, 2012).

Afrocentric teacher practices were evident through teacher observations conducted in March 2012 in the category Pedagogy and Practice. The means data showed that teachers engaged students to participate in class by having them present lessons, lead discussions, or make presentations (Nia, teacher observation, March 2012).

**Pedagogy and Practice Category (ATPOT)**

The means data for the teacher’s pedagogy and practice category were as follows: Fatima $M = 4.50$, Nia $M = 3.96$, and Akila, $M = 4.36$. Each teacher received a high score on the ATPOT, and their M scores were close to 5.0 respectively. During eight of the 12 observations, the teachers’ m scores indicated *Clear* or *Somewhat Clear* evidence of observable teaching practices that tied their teaching pedagogy to their practice. According to the school’s executive director, the teachers’ practice and pedagogy hinged on every subject taught from an Afrocentric point of view. Teachers made all subjects culturally relevant to the lifestyle and interests of their students (Teacher observations, March 2012). The teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and practice of culturally relevant and responsive curriculum enhanced students learning experiences.
by expanding and increasing their ability to provide students with culturally relevant examples and models of African, African American scholars, and African origins of subject matter, such as mathematics and chemistry (Teacher observation and teacher interview, March 2012).

Teacher observations in March 2012 revealed that teachers used the whiteboard daily to write the agenda and to display student work. All teachers encouraged their students to go to the whiteboard to work out solutions to algebra I and algebra II problems and to make corrections to their solutions in front of and with collaborative assistance from their peers. Teachers and students constantly used the whiteboard to display lessons, convey ideas, and to solve problems. Lessons were presented and discussed orally and solved in front of the class (Teacher observations, March 2012).

According to the ACMS Parent and Student Handbook: Teacher Accountability, teachers are responsible, expected, and held accountable by school administrations and the parents “to build and or enhance the confidence levels of all students, both in and out of the classroom.” An interview with the school’s executive director indicated that methods of instruction at ACMS began with teachers maintaining an orderly classroom and exhibiting a level of mutual respect towards the student (Teacher interview, March 2012). The teacher accountability handbook continued, “Each teacher understands the importance of high expectation the classroom and is expected to teach the ACMS levels of challenge”: primary, intermediate, and advanced (ACMS Handbook, 2011).

Instructional resources at ACMS consisted of subject matter textbooks located on bookcases in each teacher’s classroom; they were easily accessible to the students. According to the teachers, there were enough textbooks for the students to have textbooks to take home. Other
classroom resources consisted of world and state maps, writing paper, pens, pencils, and colored markers and, on all but one occasion, the researcher found all students well prepared for school with their backpacks, notebooks, pencils, pens, and homework. During one observation, a student asked the teacher for a pencil, and the teacher gently reminded the student that students were asked to bring their own school supplies to school with them daily, then the teacher handed the student a pencil (Teacher observation, March 2012). Each classroom had a desktop computer for teachers to use for grading, lesson planning, and reporting student progress to parents electronically. Located down the hall, a few feet from the classroom, was a computer lab that contained 15 computer stations for student access built by the ACMS Science Club students (ACMS Handbook, 2011).

The researcher observed the teachers pedagogical knowledge as *Clearly Evident* during eight of the 12 observations, and *Somewhat Evident* twice, which accounts for initial visits to the classrooms. During the 12 observations, data indicated that the teachers demonstrated knowledge of the pedagogy by being prepared to teach their students. Weekly, the teachers planned and modified their lessons. They presented content knowledge in math, science, English, history, and geography. They began their lessons by reviewing the previous day lesson or homework, student question or input time, and then an introduction to the subjects’ topic for that day. Teachers used textbooks, computer-generated handouts, and the whiteboard to present subject matter lesson information to students. During the researcher’s second observation and visit, teacher Fatima began by reviewing a combined geography and English lesson. She had the students review and recall out loud information about the Great Lakes from their Cornell Notes taken the prior day. The students explained to teacher Fatima how the Great Lakes were formed,
and they volunteered to go to the whiteboard and used the pointer and presented the appropriate subject information. Teacher Fatima then asked the students to “correctly” write in their notebooks the “names of the Great Lakes.” During this lesson, all of the students in the classroom were engaged and participated fully in the lesson. Teacher Fatima continued the lesson by having the students read orally in unison a passage from the geography textbook, and she had them pause occasionally to check for understanding and to explain each new concept. At 3:00 p.m., the end of the school day, each teacher assigned her students homework, and then they would retire to the computer or to a subject matter textbook to modify or to prepare the content lesson for the next day based upon how well she felt the students had intellectually engaged in the lesson and retained the subject materials (Teacher observation, March 2012).

**Intellectual Engagement (ATPOT)**

Raw Data from the ATPOT in the category of Intellectual Engagement indicated that teacher Fatima’s raw score of 20 points was marginally the highest points received. Teachers Akila and Nia scored 19 points in the same category. The teachers’ high point value showed that during the observation, the researcher observed significant intellectual engagement between the teachers and their students. An example of high intellectual engagement was observed during an African history lesson, in which the teacher described the role and function of a Paramount Chief in present-day African society. All of the students in the classroom raised their hands in the air in excitement to answer the teachers’ questions and to participate in the discussion. One student asked the Teacher “Do African Kings and Queens still exist?” Another student wanted to discuss voting in Africa and asked, “How does the United Nations regulate voting in Africa?” (Akila and Nia, teacher observation, March 2012). The 12 teacher
observations yielded 10 occurrences of intellectual engagement among students and teachers’ marked as *Clearly Evident*. Other examples of intellectual engagement during the researcher’s observations were found when students identified with the subject matter and were encouraged by their teachers to “think deeper and justify responses” during the presentation of their work, during class discussions, and in essay writing. The students’ intellectual engagement was facilitated by respectful discussion, disciplined classroom environment, and an occasional reminder from the teachers that “everyone in the class will have a chance to participate in the discussion” and/or activity (Teacher observation, March 2012). During the teacher observations, the culturally relevant and responsive piece of the lessons was constantly present; teachers did not over emphasize cultural relevancy, they just naturally incorporated culture into their curriculum.

**Theme Three: Cultural Empowerment: Afrocentric Teaching Strategies Reinforces Cultural, Intellectual, and Psychological Knowledge of African American Students Which Allows Them to Feel Good about Themselves and Their Place in the World**

The teachers asserted that their instructional practices were rooted in the student’s primary culture, and they expressed an epistemological understanding of the students’ needs to identify, culturally, intellectually, and psychologically with African, African American, and Black culture beyond the traditional annual celebration of Black History Month and occasional media highlights of famous African Americans and Blacks on television. For example, a classroom observation, agenda, and discussion with Fatima revealed that the students study Black history twice a week; it was a part of the middle school curriculum of the secondary subjects that all teachers taught at ACMS. According to the executive director, cultural
awareness shaped what teachers practiced and what teachers believed in at ACMS (Interview, March 2012).

**An Afrocentric Consciousness Critical to Beliefs**

An Afrocentric consciousness was critical and essential to teachers at ACMS. They asserted that an Afrocentric cultural awareness was essential to their instructional program and contributed to high achievement among their African America students. During the interviews, they responded to research question number two about what teachers’ perceptions and beliefs were about African American students, and from the teacher interview questions (see Appendix B), they explained that African American culture was central to their instruction, classroom, and relationship with the students. Teachers used the word “culture” seven times to emphasize the importance of culture and characteristics of African American students and what they brought to the classroom that enhanced and contributed to their teaching practices. The teachers’ responses captured their sentiments and feelings about how critical cultural awareness is for teaching African American students. They responded:

Fatima: Well, African American students bring of course they bring their culture to the classroom you cannot separate their home environment from the classroom. So, as an African American teacher the interaction between African American students and myself is just easier to give examples in African American history they understand the examples that I give. For example, when I give the example in science that Imhotep is the father of science, and he was an Egyptian African.

Akila: They bring a certain level of enthusiasm and hunger for learning to the classroom and that is just the opposite of what is said about our African American children. They are hungry for information, they feel good about what they are learn about their own history, and that was why we incorporate that (history) as much as we can here at Afrocentric Middle School in every way we can. That is African American History through mathematics, science, health, geography, what ever we can do, we incorporate it, always making that connection to their African heritage because that makes a world of a difference in how a child feels and what he or she can accomplish when learning.
Nia: They bring a lot of creativity into the classroom every subject they take it on as their own and they try to figure it out in a way that they can learn from it. And, well, their reference points are different because of our people (Black people) they might be different, as in a writing prompt. Our students might talk about someone in the rap world where students of other nationality probably would not but they include their family and their culture into everything that they do.

The teachers expressed knowledge, respect, and appreciation for African and African American culture as key to their pedagogy and teaching practice. How the teachers responded to the interview questions either included culture or demonstrated a much deeper advocacy of their students’ cultural background. The teachers emphasized a sense of purpose and intensity related to the characteristics that African American students bring to the classroom environment and that the natural resource of African culture made it easy for them to excel in an academic setting like ACMS.

**Incorporation of Cultural Symbols (Artifacts)**

African, African American, and Black art and cultural symbols were prominently displayed and hung on wall throughout the entire school. ACMS was named after a famous African American, and his picture proudly hung on the wall at the entrance of the school. Likewise, African American culture was present throughout the school. At the entrance to ACMS, the symbolic African American colors of red, black, and green decorated the interior hallway walls. Throughout the school wall borders were trimmed with the symbolic colors red, black, and green, with red representing the blood that unites all people of Black African ancestry, and blood shed in the struggle for liberation, the color black representing Black people, and the color green representing the land and future hope of the people (Karenga, 1998).
Figure 6. Afrocentric design at hallway entrance to ACMS.

The learning environment was covered with bright African color patterns conducive for students learning and for teachers offering instruction about African culture. As shown in Figure 7, a picture of a famous African American and wood-carved African mask were aesthetic cultural decorations and artifacts symbolic of African culture African images. African cultural images reinforced cultural awareness. They served as constant reminders to students and teachers of the importance of culture and of culturally relevant and responsive teaching and learning in the lesson practice (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1988, 2000).
Additionally, the teachers integrated African American culture and history throughout their instruction, teaching students about African and African American accomplishments. As all teachers stated earlier during their interviews, it is essential that they relate, incorporate, and teach as much African, African American, and Black culture, history, and contributions appropriate in all subject matter and content areas. During two of the observations, teachers Fatima and Nia were observed actively teaching and engaging students in an African American history lesson (Fatima and Nia, teacher observation, March 2012). Fatima discussed current political events in Africa regarding a poster campaign hosted by the United Nations, the African country Uganda, President Obama, and Jim Crow laws. Nia engaged students in a reading assignment from an African American textbook entitled, *African American Experiences, 1992.* Each student took a turn reading a section in the textbook; the topic was “Expanding the Nation,”
and the teacher would ask the student a question about what he or she had just read. As one example: “Do you have a comment about what you just read?” and “Who was Benjamin Bannerker?” She stood next to the students as they responded (Teacher observations, March 2012).

**Afrocentric Classroom Culture Data (ATPOT)**

According to data collected from the ATPOT, teacher mean data in the (Afrocentric) Classroom Culture category were: Fatima, $M = 3.40$, Nia, $M = 3.35$, and Akila, $M = 2.70$. Teachers Fatima and Nia received scores considered moderate, which means that classroom observations revealed some evidence of an Afrocentric classroom culture. Akila’s mean score was lower than the other two teachers’ scores based upon the limited amount of Afrocentric evidence observed and displayed in her classroom, teacher-student discussions, cultural context defined, or cultural examples she used to conduct lessons. Akila’s classroom and bulletin boards were decorated with colorful pictures of children from many nationalities emphasizing multiculturalism and globalism. Using the ATPOT, she scored a 3 for classroom decoration and African and African American psychological motifs.

During observations in Fatima and Nia’s classrooms, a score of a 5 - *Clearly Evident* was recorded on the ATPOT of African and African American cultural items. These items represented an Afrocentric and culturally relevant psychological motif consisting of pictures of famous Africans and African Americans, maps of Africa, drawings, and projects hung prominently around the classroom and throughout the school, as shown in Figure 8.
During a third classroom observation in Fatima’s classroom (March 2012), she taught a lesson and facilitated a discussion about African American History to her students on social and cultural themes, including Ancient Africa—Kings and Queens, Segregation—Jim Crow Laws, and Voting Rights—President Barack Obama. This lesson included a writing assignment in which students critiqued an African American lesson selected from a teacher Internet resource, Cornell Notes, and an African History book. Fatima introduced the lesson by asking the students, “Who was Jim Crow?” According to the teacher, the objective of the lesson was for the students to “use critical thinking to understand the power and influence of discrimination and segregation through images.” Fatima allowed students 5 minutes to think about the question and to give an answer. Students answered, and she continued by asking them “to look at the picture, to describe, and to explain to the class what they thought about the picture of the Jim Crow
character on the ditto handout.” Fatima sat at her desk and listened to each student give an answer, asking them to “completely express their thoughts” and reminding them that “everyone in the classroom was going to get a chance to explain what they thought about the picture to the other students in the class.” In answering the question, a young man in the class stated that the picture was “racist,” and Fatima asked him to “explain what he “meant by that.” The student explained that the character looked “like a slave,” and that he “looks like a poor clown.” During the introduction of this lesson topic, Fatima asked the students a total of 11 questions. All students engaged in the lesson and answered her questions using complete sentences and giving details in their description of the picture. Fatima’s prompts included:

- “Describe what you see in the picture”
- “Explain why you think that is”
- “Think about your answer and tell me why?”

Fatima continued to question the students, asking them “to think and to explain clearly the cultural character and the implications of negative stereo-types about African Americans.” She explained to the students that negative images like Jim Crow were designed to make some people feel inferior and others to feel superior, and to enforce segregation and discrimination laws (Fatima, teacher observation, March 2012). Moreover, this example was significant because the teacher selected this countercultural educational resource to engage her students in a discussion about issues that caused them to critically think about how and why negative images are used to promote ideas about race. Throughout the lesson, the students sat in a circle creating a cooperative learning environment and community as in an Afrocentric Framework.
Another example of teachers engaging students in a cultural classroom occurred during a
discussion when Fatima turned the students’ attention to positive images of Africans and African
Americans. She did so by providing students with a personal example of the positive African
people she had met on a recent trip to Ghana, Africa. She described the African kings and
queens. She explained to the students that the African kings and queens (Paramount Chief) were
important figures and role models in Ghana, and that the people in the community look to then
for help making decisions about important issues in the community. These observations
provided evidence of the Afrocentric cultural context in which the teachers developed their
teaching practices and taught students.

The teachers acknowledged the accomplishments of notable cultural figures and
referenced Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey, and significant African American Holidays, for
example Kwanzaa. During the month of February, they decorated the school bulletin boards
with posters that reflected celebrating Black History Month. Student accomplishments were
recognized as part of the cultural content of the school—for example, a local newspaper article
was posted on a hallway bulletin board with the names of students receiving awards for
outstanding scholarship. Although culturally relevant Afrocentric models and signage were
visible and prominently displayed for students to identify and emulate, the harsh reality of racism
and racial reference was also an issue that teachers and students at ACMS had to face.

**Responds to Racial References (ATPOT)**

The teacher mean data for the ATPOT category responding to racial references were:
Fatima, $M = 3.10$, Nia, $M = 2.75$, and Akila, $M = 2.80$. Although each teacher responded
differently, they all responded in someway to negative racial references and stereotypes with positive affirmations about African and African American people. Thus, collectively, they

- Challenged stereotypes;
- Stressed positive achievement of African people, historically and currently;
- Engaged models of excellence to inform, inspire, and challenge cultural ideas.

During a Black history lesson, Nia engaged the students in a writing assignment and facilitated a discussion about Benjamin Banneker the first free African American Astronomer in America. The students listened to her as she described Banneker’s positive achievements, for example, authoring an almanac and surveying Washington, DC. The students asked questions about the Free African Society, and Nia explained the concept of African American Freeman (Nia, teacher observation, April 2012). This teacher practice of introducing a lesson from an Afrocentric perspective engaged students to learn more about the mathematical contributions of African Americans and challenged the cultural idea that African Americans cannot achieve in mathematics. This observation concluded with the teacher introducing the students to an algebra lesson.

The teachers’ lessons included culturally relevant content that emphasized the positive contributions of African Americans. Their practice methodology situated the students in African and African American history and gave them an Afrocentric perspective that was culturally relevant and responsive and provided a counternarrative of positive cultural achievements.

Teachers at ACMS incorporated Afrocentric educational materials into their daily instruction, including videos and music that explained and demonstrated success and challenges faced by African and African American people. Teachers’ discussion engaged and reminded
students about expanding their capacity to learn. During an interview, Fatima explained that she had two African American sons, and she understood how students feel when their race is portrayed negatively by media sources. She stated, “It is important for African American students and teachers to be able to understand their culture and to challenge negative racial references with scholarly information.” Students and teachers learned to intelligently deconstruct negative racial references in the classroom and learned how to build strong families that empower the African American community.

**Theme Four: Family and Community Empowerment**

The literature in Chapter two makes multiple references to the significance and importance of education to the African American community (Asante, 2003; Karenga, 1998; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000; Young, 2009). The concept of Afrocentricity locates Black people at the center of the framework for a good community; and, according to Asante (2003), the composition of family and the community are either positive or negative contributing factors to the academic success of African American students. The three teachers in this study concurred with the idea that family and community are essential to the successful academic achievement of African American students. The teacher interview questions posed the following: What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American students? And, how would you describe the relationships you’ve had with the parents of the students you've taught? They responded:

Fatima: I see my parent because we have small classes. The largest classes I’ve ever had here is around 18 students, right now I have 10 students, and because the class sizes is so small I am able to give my cell phone number out the parents, they are able to come to the classroom and sit in on the class. I have a very good relationship with each and every one of my students. I know them personally, they invite me to birthday parties and different things like that, because we do have such a close relationships and in the African
American community, Black children to their parents are their life. And for them to entrust me everyday with their precious children every day, they have to trust me, and if they don't trust me, then they have a problem with the teacher, you know, and the moment a parents have a problem with the teacher, is the moment you have problems in the classroom.

Akila: The parents of our African American students are very involved with their children’s education, they are very involved with the school because we have an open door policy they come into the school daily to pick up their children. They have access to the teachers and they are welcome to schedule appointments at any time. They are welcome to sit in the classroom to observe quietly at any time and it is just a very home like environment the school is set up that way to feel like home and the children are happy. I tell you what, the parents are very, very, comfortable with leaving their children with us…we all want the best, that is it’s important that our children understand that too because it makes a better connection between home and school.

Nia: In this school, I know that some parents that I’ve come into really impress me. They come in and they are asking questions, they want to know what they can do to help, and they are really involved. (Teacher interviews, March 2012)

The teachers in this research referenced and mentioned the word “community” numerous times throughout the interviews to describe and/or connect the importance of the community to their teaching practices and academic success with their students. Teachers stated that they supplemented and enriched their lesson content by including examples and events from the surrounding community. Fatima and Nia believed this alliance was important to the students’ academic and cultural knowledge. They responded:

Fatima: We always try to go out into the community . . . hands on is most important, you always have to have a way to connect to the book, that is the textbook, if you just read the book, students aren’t going to absorb it. So you always have to go in the community, or have examples, or working examples in the classroom, something to connect their experience in the community with the book.

Nia: I’m from L. A., and I live really close to here. I really like living around here. And it is an Afrocentric area, the whole area, but it is like more, like the area is, like people when you walk down the street in some areas the way they greet you, you know that they are Afrocentric and they are really trying to push unity, like just walking down the street. (Teacher interviews, March 2012)
The Afrocentric teaching practices, attitudes, and environment provided teachers the opportunity and the liberty to promote unity and to model harmonious family and community relationships, therefore transforming traditional teacher-students, student-student, and teacher-parent relationships. These transformative teacher practices:

- Engaged parents as partners in the teaching and learning process;
- Built relationships with students rooted in African family kinship and culture;
- Engaged positive models of collaboration, cooperation, and commitment in teaching community.

During the teacher interviews and observations, teachers referenced parents as an integral part of the students’ learning. Fatima stated that she was able to “meet with parents often to discuss their child’s academic progress,” and provided parents her cell phone number. Parents and students regarded her as family—as she stated, she was even “invited to family events, such as students’ birthday parties” (Fatima, teacher interview, March 2012).

In an interview, Akila stated that the school has an “open door policy and that parents at ACMS are very involved in their children’s education.” She said, “Daily, parents must come into the school to pick up their children and they have an opportunity to schedule an appointment, inquire about homework, and to sit in on a class and observe instruction.” Akila, continued:

Parents are welcome to come and quietly observe anytime, the school is like a home school environment and it is set up like this for the children to feel comfortable in their learning environment, and for the parents to feel comfortable leaving their children with the teachers. (Teacher interview, March 2012)

Parents were required to sign a contract to abide by the school’s rules and expectations, including reviewing their child’s homework assignments. The teachers gave students homework
daily, and parents were required to review assignments with their child and initial the homework. Sister Nia stated, “Parents are very involved at the school they want to know and help their children” (Nia, teacher interview, March 2012).

The teacher and the directors stated that “relationships between teachers their students and parents were like families.” Teachers and students were linked to each other through teaching and learning in an Afrocentric school, and parents were linked to teachers like an extended family with African roots. Teachers understood the importance and urgency of ensuring academic success for African American children, and they secured their relationships with students and parents by evoking familiar references such as sister and brother and including parents in student teaching and learning (Teacher observations, March 2012). Teachers made learning a community event by engaging parents and members of the surrounding community in the lessons, activities, and themes that enhanced the African tradition of cooperation and collaboration (Teacher observations, March 2012). During the teacher interviews (March 2012), the teachers agreed that the instructional setting and the community that surrounded the school enhanced their ability to teach lessons and conduct activities about African and African American history and culture. Teacher Nia stated, “This is an Afrocentric area and people in the neighbor and community try to push unity.”

The researcher observed teachers engaged in a model of positive collaboration, cooperation, and commitment with students, parents, and one another as a practice of working together by sharing teaching practices, expectations of students for the next grade level, and knowledge about students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. During the interview with teacher Nia regarding teacher practices that empowered the students, she explained the necessity
for teachers to collaborate with one another to build upon the basics and to establish “building blocks for the teacher in the next grade to build upon” (Teacher interview, March 2012). Teachers shared the responsibility, cooperated, and worked together in the lunchroom and on the playground by supervising one another’s students. This communal cooperation is similar to what you would find in a culturally familiar African or African American family setting. The teachers at ACMS were committed to teaching in a cooperative and collaborative community; according to teacher Akila, “Teachers want to teacher here, they are open and honest” and “loving and kind” (Teacher interview, March 2012). The teachers at ACMS were conscious of cultural methodology and practices that integrated African and African American collaboration focused on validating and encouraging students with self-appreciation and cultural pride in their community.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The data collected in this chapter facilitated the researcher in answering the two research questions by formulating a concurrent triangulation model that connected the teacher interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts data. The data in this study were organized into four themes of Afrocentric teacher pedagogy/practice and beliefs: self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family/community empowerment, which, in turn, enhanced and supported teacher practices. Additionally, these themes supported existing literature in the field and reinforced the need to use Afrocentric teaching practices and curriculum that are culturally relevant and responsive for affirming and contributing to the learning experiences of African American students at ACMS.
The themes presented in this chapter supported five reoccurring topics as evidence of teacher practice and beliefs as in the context of ideals of Afrocentricity throughout Chapter four. The combined artifact and classroom observations data produced a tangible qualitative and quantitative way to identify Afrocentric teaching practices. The five topics that materialized through interviews and observations provided supportive evidence that was integral to the four main themes that emerged from this research. The conclusions that supported the four themes were:

1. An Afrocentric consciousness and modeling examples of respect and morality is critical to student learning and teacher practice;
2. An Afrocentric cultural awareness is critical and essential to student learning and teacher practice (at an Afrocentric school);
3. Mastery of the basic skills and high expectations are a critical foundation for learning and academic success;
4. Teacher reflection is an essential critical teacher practice for teacher development and student learning; and
5. The Afrocentric community and family are primary and essential for building relationships that influence student learning and teacher practice.

For example, the Afrocentric theme of self-determination and cultural empowerment was closely linked to the topic idea of cultural consciousness. Through self-determination and responsive and relevant cultural awareness in the classroom, the teachers and students at ACMS presented an Afrocentric consciousness of unity and strength. As well, academic and cultural empowerment were linked to instructional practices such as mastery of basic skills and self-
awareness to produce academic success. Supported by family and community, teachers and their students demonstrated transformative teaching practices important to teaching African American students from an Afrocentric framework. These teaching practices were found to be effective at ACMS in enhancing the teachers’ freedom in using Afrocentric methodology that reinforced and strengthened students’ academic mastery of basic knowledge, skills, and communication.

In the area of teachers’ perceptions about the academic achievement of African American students, the teachers demonstrated through interviews and observations a clear respect for their students, parents, and one another. They consciously communicated these common ideas by emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness and community engagement that connected their teaching practices and perceptions. Their philosophy materialized in their commitment to collective work and responsibility for the students they taught and the community in which they worked.

Through interview data, teachers revealed their attitudes about the teaching practices they supported using culturally relevant content and methods to focus and ground students in the positive aspects of African American history and culture. The observations data revealed that based on the ATPOT—an expert-tested, Afrocentric, culturally relevant observation tool—teachers scored 5 – *Clearly Evident* or 4 – *Somewhat Evident* most of the time. The artifacts data consisted of photographs that were physical and visible cultural motifs that reaffirmed teachers responsively practicing in a learning environment for African American students; and report card and progress reports represented the multilevel and multidimensions on which the teacher assessed their students. These data and ideals contribute to the discussion of findings and recommendations based on the data collected and analyzed.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

One of the most important and persistent challenges in education today is the academic achievement gap between African American and other students of color and their White and Asian peers. Therefore, ongoing research projects are focused on addressing the issue and discovering new and improved ways to increase levels of academic performance among these students. One of the most widespread approaches to this challenge is culturally responsive pedagogy. This study was conducted within the conceptual framework of Afrocentricity and Afrocentric pedagogy, a culturally responsive pedagogy, which—although particular to African American students—has implications for students in general (Asante, 1998; Asante & Mazama, 2010; Gay 2000; Murrell, 2002). Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the relationship between the implementation of a particular culturally responsive pedagogy, that is, Afrocentric pedagogy, and increased academic performance among African American students as a general concern. This chapter will summarize the findings of this study and discuss the results from the data within the framework of the two research questions: What teaching practices used by African American teachers contribute to high academic achievement by African American students at an Afrocentric middle school? And, what are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students? This chapter will also present recommendations and implications for future studies and end with a conclusion.
Summary of Findings

The central goal of this study was to establish a correlation between the use by African American teachers of an Afrocentric pedagogy as a culturally responsive pedagogical strategy and the high academic performance of African American students. Specifically, the study examined the teaching practices and beliefs held by African American teachers at the secondary level in an Afrocentric private middle school that produced high academic achievement among its students, investigating whether this correlation existed in significant measure. The study revealed and affirmed contentions by researchers discussed in Chapter two concerning the importance and effectiveness of teachers who used culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in their delivery of instruction.

As a result of the data collected, analyzed, and discussed in Chapter four, the researcher determined that African American teachers at ACMC used a variety of culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices, strategies, and held beliefs about their practices and the capacity of their students to learn and participate meaningfully in their education. These pedagogical practices and beliefs counted as central to Afrocentric pedagogy and reaffirmed its status and its role as a culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Murrell, 2002; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). Among these central tenets are assumptions about the teacher’s role and responsibility in facilitating high academic performance. Therefore, it was held that African American children, as well as other culturally diverse students, can and will learn if teachers: hold high expectations of them; believe in them and care for them; take risks with them; create a welcoming and reaffirming learning space for them; and provide them with a learning environment and materials that are culturally sensitive, relevant, and interesting. Additionally,
the data suggested that teachers’ practices must be carefully and continually attentive to mastery of the basic skills as an indispensable focus for African American students to achieve academic success.

Also the data in Chapter four suggested that the teachers centered their teaching practices on respecting their students’ families and their culture as a fundamental principle of their Afrocentric pedagogy. The teachers at ACMS were dedicated to ensuring and including in their classrooms accurate information about the history and culture of African and African Americans in all subject matter and curriculum and were continuously attentive to the use of cultural knowledge, prior knowledge, and the experiences of the students as a way of learning. As Gay (2000), Murrell (2002), and others have stated, such culturally responsive pedagogy validates the students’ culture, builds on their strength, and increases their capacity to access and grasp the materials taught. The use of culture and cultural references is central to Afrocentric pedagogy, reinforcing its comprehensive pedagogical approach to teaching and learning and one and serving as sources of empowerment and emancipation for the students. This positionality and approach cultivates and builds on their strength and enhances their capacity to learn and participate meaningfully in their own education—thus increasing their capacity for high academic performance and achievement.

The study also suggested that the Afrocentric pedagogy used at ACMS empowered African American teachers to take risks with their students in defining and creating their own instructional spaces, ones where students were encouraged to participate in critical and creative thinking projects, cooperative learning exercises, and an educational experience guided by cultural and community-driven ideas. These Afrocentric teaching practices enabled teachers to
help their African American students achieve academically through congruency about learning goals. They also reinforced the cultural, intellectual, and psychological self-image of African American students. Finally, Afrocentric teaching practices enabled teachers to provide students with a model for a harmonious family and community, and build relationships that serve as a reference for self-validation, pride, and an appreciation for their culture and race.

**Discussion**

Utilizing a mixed-method examination centered in an Afrocentric theoretical framework at an Afrocentric middle school, this research sought to identify and analyze effective teaching practices and beliefs of selected African American teachers using the culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy—Afrocentricity, which impacted their teaching practices and beliefs. During the research teacher interviews, observations, and artifact study, four themes emerged that were central to using culturally relevant and responsive ideals of Afrocentricity, they were self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family and community empowerment. Five common subtopics discussed by the teachers and observed by the researcher throughout the research supported the use of teaching strategies grounded in Afrocentricity; they were the development of an Afrocentric consciousness, cultural awareness, mastery of basic literacy and study skills, daily reflecting, and family and community support.

An analysis of teachers’ instructional strategies, practices, beliefs, and artifacts grounded in an Afrocentric theoretical framework revealed how African American middle school teachers can effectively raise African American students’ academic awareness and encourage them to act upon their own academic achievement. The entire learning environment reinforced students’ culture. Students were immersed in Afrocentric cultural artifacts that reinforced the Afrocentric
ideals of centering students in an Afrocentric cultural environment that encouraged and supported positive self-concept, success, and academic achievement (Asante, 2003). At this private Afrocentric middle school, teachers were encouraged—and had the flexibility—to use specialized or advanced curriculum to teach students three to five grade levels above the standard grade levels, and to concentrate on including the students’ Afrocentric culture in the curriculum. Although there were limitations to the study in terms of the private character of the school and its greater flexibility, this study still offers useful data that stresses the importance of teachers’ culturally sensitive teaching practices and beliefs in improving academic achievement among African American students. Moreover, teachers from other cultures could use these transformative Afrocentric teaching practices with other students of color with appropriate adjustments for cultural diversity.

The literature review provided multiple culturally relevant and responsive teaching strategies that could be used to teach African American students (Edward et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Tatum, 2005). This study used Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework and suggested Afrocentric pedagogy teaching was a cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy for teachers working with African American students at the secondary grade levels. Afrocentricity as a conceptual and philosophical framework enabled the teachers to help their students in culturally specific ways to be successful academically by using a historical, social, cultural, and economic data to understand their communities and place in the world. It is not presumed that teachers from different cultural backgrounds can relate to African American students in ways African American teachers may, but it is plausible to believe that, if given an opportunity to better understand these conditions and issues, they can empathize and learn what they can do to
help to change learning conditions. This phenomenon is especially true if teachers can transform their teaching practices by using the tenets of Afrocentricity as a framework and developing an appreciation and respect for their students and their culture, family, and community.

The development of an Afrocentric perspective by teachers to deliver instruction would be a new concept and a challenge for most African American teachers and an even greater challenge for teachers with other cultural backgrounds. And yet the central value of Afrocentric pedagogy is that it is a particular culturally responsive pedagogy for a specific cultural community and people: African Americans. Both this study and others in the literature tend to suggest avoiding interpreting culturally sensitive pedagogy such that it denies or diminishes the importance of each particular culture. For although there are clearly common grounds for developing a culturally responsive pedagogy, there is always a need to recognize and respect cultural differences and respond accordingly in constructing and practicing culturally responsive pedagogy. Again, data from this study demonstrated the importance of using a specific culturally responsive and culturally specific pedagogy to teach African American students to be their best academically, culturally, socially, and psychologically. Thus, Afrocentricity as pedagogy and practice shows that teaching practices used by African American teachers can contribute to high academic achievement by African American students at an Afrocentric middle school—as suggested by research question number one.

By analyzing the raw data collected from the ATPOT on a scale of 1-5, and by using the means data, interviews, observations, and artifacts to support the findings, the researcher determined that the areas in which teachers received their highest scores were engaging through content materials and intellectual engagement, facilitating learning, assessing skills, offering
examples of values, morals, ethics, knowing students’ names, families, and coaches, facilitating instruction, and modeling self-awareness by providing a climate of respect and collaboration. Further condensation of these areas revealed the most critical ones to the teaching practices of the teachers in this study. The essential ingredients were using appropriate content and materials, intellectual engagement, facilitation of instruction (assessing skills), and modeling values, respect, and collaboration. These offered areas of attention and implementation for culturally responsive pedagogy:

1. Using Appropriate Content and Materials – Appropriate use of content material, supplemental materials, and the curriculum positively affirms the cultural values and self-concept of the student (Gay, 2000, Hollie, 2012). Teachers must take responsibility for instructional materials they present to their students that support a strong foundation for self-determination, academic empowerment, cultural empowerment, and family and community empowerment, as presented in Chapter four.

   • Learning materials that accurately and positively reflect the cultural contributions of Continental Africans and African Americans in the United States and throughout the world. As stated in Chapter two, these materials and curricula should add value to the self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image of African American students and their eagerness to engage in the educational process (Gay, 2000);

   • Afrocentric learning materials and curricula must be regularly included in the presentation of subject matter materials by the teacher in an informed way,
and from a knowledgeable basis that supports academic achievement and success;

- Curriculum materials about African Americans should be engaging, interesting, and build on the ideal of Afrocentricity, thereby centering the students in their own history and culture and promoting African agency.

2. Intellectual Engagement – The use of intellectual engagement of the African American students is based upon active dialogue and active participation (Gay, 2000; Hollie, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

- It is the teacher’s responsibility to intellectually engage and challenge students to think, design, and create a learning space for academic growth and development (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001);

- Intellectual engagement happens when the teacher prepares lessons that challenge students to take risks, empowering them academically;

- Intellectual engagement takes place when teachers use strategies that encourage and challenge students to work at or above grade level to achieve academically and to advance to academic excellence by appealing to their intellect, humanity and spirituality (Hilliard, 1998);

- Afrocentric intellectual engagement is not a linear way of knowing; it is holistic and expansive, directing the students’ intellectual knowledge and abilities beyond the textbook. It involves expanding and creating dance, art, song poetry, and other creative expressions of knowing;
• Teachers of African American students should recognize that they come to school ready to engage intellectually in learning activities that challenges them to learn more about their history and culture, and convey information that is positive, productive, and progressive especially about their history and culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005; Young, 2009).

3. Facilitation of Instruction – Students arrive at school possessing knowledge and multiple abilities that allow the teacher the flexibility to assist them in their learning in the role of teacher-facilitator.

• In some African American families, children are given household chores or family responsibilities that encourage them to demonstrate independence, and in some African American families children experience independence much more because of the family dynamic or socioeconomic circumstances (Abu El-Haj, 2006). For teachers, this independence can be an advantage in assigning classroom roles and responsibility that allow them to facilitate instruction;

• The teacher, as facilitator, encourages students to rely on themselves to find solutions to their class assignments and to seek the assistance of others to arrive at the correct solution to their problem;

• In the facilitation of learning, and when instructing the African American student, the Afrocentric teacher uses a style of asking questions that allows students to reflect, search, select, define, analyze, derive, create, and present information that is culturally, socially, economically, and morally considerate of the student.
4. Modeling Values, Respect, and Collaboration – In an Afrocentric learning community, teachers are physical manifestations and moral models of academic achievement, African American cultural values, respect, ethics, and collaboration, thus modeling and empowering the African American family and community.

- Because African American teachers and students spend so much time at school, relationships develop that resemble families, and familiar references such as “sister” and “brother” are commonly used as terms of endearment and respect that reinforce cultural and familiar bonds;
- Traditionally, teachers in the African American community are respected for their knowledge and academic achievement, and adults and children look up to and trust them as representative of moral values and ethics (Perry et al., 2003);
- Afrocentric pedagogy should center the teacher and student in a vibrant sociocultural, intellectual, and psychological environment that promotes collaboration in the educational process at various appropriate levels;
- The African American child is to be treated with respect and valued by teachers and others in an Afrocentric learning environment.

This study affirms that African American teachers are valuable resources to the African American community and are seen as such. Their own futures are linked in real ways to those of the students they teach and the communities in which they work. Thus, they are responsible and must be held accountable for students learning in their academic achievement. African American teachers in this study expressed such beliefs and possessed genuine care, concern, and
a passion for teaching African American children in their classrooms, transforming their instructional practices and ensuring that their students achieve academically and beyond grade level. The teachers, students, and parents expected academic success and the best from the children and held one another accountable, thus ensuring the successful achievement of their academic goals (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Lee, 1995).

In an African-centered school, teachers are empowered and encouraged to produce their best work; therefore, they focus their attention on delivering content, repetition, and skills mastery, which is key to their students’ academic achievement and success. However, none of this work would be possible without a cultural foundation that provides them a mode of thought and action that promotes an environment centered on African interests, values, perspectives, and agency—that is, a “sense of self-actualizing based upon the best interest of African, African American and Black people” (Asante, 2003, p. 1).

The need to convey the finding in this study to a broader audience is important because African American students will continue to be taught in public and private school that do not value them and their culture; thus issues of both educational excellence and social justice are at stake. It is imperative that teachers from other cultural backgrounds understand and use an Afrocentric theoretical framework with African American students as a way of increasing their academic achievement and closing the achievement gap. Equally important, Afrocentricity is a theory of social justice and social change that empowers teachers to develop a more global and holistic perspective on the meaning and use of education in securing a good life and creating a just and good society and world.
A final question in this study is, what are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students? Teacher perceptions cannot be measured using traditional research methods without researchers’ biases, limitations, and other restrictions that tend to cloud the data. However, the teachers in this study had no problem answering this question, and their perceptions were based upon their relationships, interactions, and successes with numerous students at ACMS. The data pointed to the importance of African American teachers adopting and incorporating culturally relevant and responsive ideals such as Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework and resource in their classrooms. The teachers studied felt empowered and a sense of responsibility toward teaching African American students, which motivated them toward academic excellence with their students. African American teachers who have sensitivity to their own culture and their people make a conscious and intelligent decision to be aware of the past and current social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions that continue to plague the African and African American community and limit their success with African American students (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000).

**Recommendations**

This study’s findings yielded several recommendations that offer promise in the effort to raise the level of academic achievement among African American students. They are

- Develop professional development and workshops that address the components of an Afrocentric pedagogy;
- Hire more African American teacher to work in schools that have significant African American student populations;
• Hire African American instructors and professors to teach at universities and colleges that offer teacher preparation and culturally relevant and responsive courses, and especially hire African Americans who are knowledgeable and sensitive to African Americans issues;
• Create multiple opportunities and venues for students, family members, and community involvement in the educational process and programs of African American children;
• Build and design more African American schools in African American communities.

Implications for Future Studies

This study is a contribution to the existing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy from an Afrocentric vantage point and its relationship to the academic performance of culturally diverse students, especially African American students. However, it also raises further questions and suggests other issues to engage and pursue. Also, a fundamental implication for teacher practice with African American children based on the findings in this research is the need to further explore successful teaching practices with African American students to achieve academic success. Future studies in the areas of Afrocentric pedagogy in the public schools may include: Afrocentric as transformative teaching practice, Afrocentric supplementary and after-school programs, Afrocentric teacher preparation, developing cultural consciousness, and the effects of an Afrocentric theoretical framework.

In terms of Afrocentric pedagogy in the public schools, findings of this study affirm the need to investigate the use of pedagogy that is culturally relevant and designed to address the specific cultural needs of African American students; for example Afrocentricity as relevant teacher practice and as a viable pedagogy that can be replicated in public schools.
Moreover, more research needs to be conducted on cultural frameworks teachers use in public school with students of other cultures that have successfully closed the academic achievement gap. There is also a need for further study of Afrocentric pedagogy as a transformative educational practice, not only for students, but also for teachers. In addition, further research is needed to study Afrocentric supplementary schools in terms of their support and enhancement of high academic achievement among African American students and the critical role they play in the cultural development of its students of interest. Further research should also be undertaken on the question of whether afterschool programs are essential for cultural development and academic support of students attending public and private schools (Kifano, 1996).

The need for Afrocentric teacher preparation raises the issue of further research on how to construct a culturally responsive model of Afrocentric pedagogy that aids diverse students and teachers in learning and teaching in a multicultural environment that recognizes differences and similarity and responds accordingly. Further research appears promising on developing critical cultural consciousness and the role of cultural images in creating a welcoming and validating environment that enhances the educational process and academic achievement. Finally, further research appears important in the expansion, refinement, and use of an Afrocentric theoretical framework and an Afrocentric teacher observation tool that measures and that validates best teaching practices, allowing teachers to observe one another and to reflect upon and improve their teaching practices.
Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the teaching practices and beliefs of African American teachers at a private Afrocentric middle school and their relationship to the high academic achievement of their students. In establishing a rationale for this study, a brief historical summary was presented with some of the challenges African Americans have faced in the United States of America in their attempt to secure access to an equitable and socially just education in the context of a racialized and racist social and educational context. The findings of this study suggest using Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework; the Afrocentric pedagogical practices at ACMS offered an important and effective way for teachers to address the huge academic discrepancies found in most schools that African American students attend and to facilitate high academic achievement among their students. Based on analysis of the data and within the limitation of this study, it can also be concluded that Afrocentric pedagogy is both a culturally responsive pedagogy and a transformative educational practice. Also, the findings suggested that teacher commitment and practice that are culturally responsive and relevant are essential—even indispensable—to high academic performance by students. Likewise, an instructional environment that validates and affirms students in their culture and through vital relationships with their community also proved to be essential.

Finally, the study leads to the conclusion that with appropriate modification according to cultural diversity, teachers and educators from other cultural backgrounds using principles of Afrocentric pedagogy could make similar progress in addressing the needs of students in multicultural classrooms, challenging their own teaching practices and beliefs, and eventually impacting the way that all children in the United States are educated.
## APPENDIX A

### AFROCENTRIC TEACHER PRACTICE OBSERVATION TOOL PART A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Scale (1-5)</th>
<th>Observation Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Lesson Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Levels of Blooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lesson Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Pedagogy/Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Objective (Present)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Methodology (Models)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Resource (Use of)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Pedagogical knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Intellectual engagement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Facilitates learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Assesses skills</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Classroom Culture (Afrocentric)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological motifs visible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discusses social and cultural themes</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Defines cultural context</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gives cultural examples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. References notable cultural figures &amp; holidays</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>D. Models Proactive Self</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Gives examples of morals, values, ethics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Gives examples of famous moral and ethical figures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Shares cultural values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Encourages students to take risks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knows student names, families, story, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Coaches and facilitates instruction</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Models and provides a climate of respect and collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Responds to racial references</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Understands culture of being BLK/AA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discusses, defines, and suggests (Counter narrative)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explains success and challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Uses culturally relevant resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Discusses capacity to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F. Overall interpretation of classroom environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>G. Overall interpretation of teacher practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A. Lesson Content

1. Materials
2. Levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy
3. Student Engagement
4. Lesson Design

### B. Pedagogy/Practice

1. Objective (Present)
2. Methodology (Models)
3. Resources (Use of)
4. Pedagogical knowledge
5. Intellectual engagement
6. Facilitation (learning)
7. Assessment of skills

### C. Classroom Culture

(Afrocentric)

1. Psychological motifs visible
2. Social and cultural themes discussed
3. Cultural context defined
4. Cultural examples given

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE 1 – 5</th>
<th>5 Clearly Evident</th>
<th>4 Somewhat Evident</th>
<th>3 Vague</th>
<th>2 Unable to Determine</th>
<th>1 Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Teacher ___________________________ Observation ___________ Date ___________ Time ___________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Notable cultural figures/holidays referenced</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>challenges</td>
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<td><strong>F. Overall interpretation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>of classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G. Overall interpretation of teacher practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS


INTERVIEW WITH: __________________________________________________________

SUBJECT: _________________________________________________________________

DATE: __________________________ TIME: ________________________________

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?

2. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe “works?”

3. Can you think of any characteristics that African American youngsters (students) as a group bring to the classroom?

4. What kinds of things have you done in the classroom that has facilitated the academic success of African American students?

5. How much of what you know about teaching African American children did you learn as a result of teacher training either pre-service or in service?
6. If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be more effective with African American students what changes would you make?

7. What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American students? How would you describe the relationships you’ve had with the parents of students you’ve taught?

8. How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of African American students should know about discipline?

9. Do you believe there are any differences between what you want to teach and what you have to teach?

10. Do you believe there is any differences between what you want to teach and what the administration (building principal or district superintendent) wants you to teach (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies)?

11. How do you think the school experience of the students you teach differs from that of white students in middle-class communities?
APPENDIX C

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Loyola Marymount University

Afrocentricity as Transformational Educational Practice: Focus on instructional practices African American teachers use to close the academic achievement gap and transforming the educational experience of their students

1) I hereby authorize Miranda L. Ra’oof, Ed.D. Candidate to include me in the following research study: Afrocentricity as Transformational Educational Practice.

2) The study will last from February 2012 to March 2012. I have been asked to participate on a research project, which is designed to examine the following questions:
   a. What teaching practices do African American teachers use at an Afrocentric middle school? And how do these practices contribute to high academic achievement of African American students?
   b. What are African American teachers’ perceptions of the academic achievement of African American students?

3) It has been explained to me that the purpose for my participation in this research project is that I am a person of interest with knowledge teach, employed, or have a relationship with students at the school/in classrooms and understand how the school is organized, and students are taught.

4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be interviewed about Afrocentric teaching practices, strategies, methodologies, artifacts, and procedures that are used in the classroom and the

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school setting and their influence on the instructional design and academic success and enhancement of the African American student. The interview contents in transcript form, in video form, and audio-recording form will be kept confidential in digital form archived in a locked file.

5) The researcher(s) will write a case study based on interviews with teachers, staff, and administrators, as well as research archives, artifacts, and use a questionnaire about the teaching practices and strategies at an Afrocentric Middle School in South Los Angeles. The study will be submitted as part of a dissertation in partial requirement for graduation in the Ed.D. Program at Loyola Marymount University.

6) Miranda L. Ra’oof, M.A., Ed.D. (Candidate) and primary researcher had explained these procedures to me.

7) I agree that interviews, audiotapes, and photographs shall be retained for research and/or teaching purposes for an indefinite time.

8) I understand that the study described may involve the following risk and/or discomforts:
   There is no physical or emotional risk from participation in this study.

9) I understand that I will not receive direct benefit from my participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to social justice education include a more thorough understanding of using Afrocentric teaching practices with African American students as academically enhancing, successful, and transformational practices for closing the academic achievement gap.

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10) I understand that Miranda L. Ra’oof, who can be reached at mlc2793@lausd.net or 310-578-2769, will answer any questions I may have at any time regarding details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

11) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained.

12) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

13) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

14) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

15) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

16) Some of the information with which I will be provided may be ambiguous, or inaccurate. However, I will be informed of any inaccuracies following my participation in this study.

17) I understand that I will receive no remuneration for my participation in this study.

18) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D., IRB Chair, Institutional Review Board Office, University Hall, Suite 1718, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659, (310) 338-4599, David.Hardy@lmu.edu.
19) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of this form.

________________________________      __

Signature                  Date
School: __________________________
Address: _________________________
City: ________________ State: _______

Afrocentric Middle School
1234 Central Street
Los Angeles, CA. XXXXX

Dear _____________________,

It is absolutely my pleasure to take this opportunity to recommend our 8th grade student, ____________________________, for the undertaking of high school coursework at _______________.
The student, ____________________________, has attended the Afrocentric Middle School for ________________ year(s).

The Afrocentric Middle School success rate is not measured by the California Academic Performance Index. Nor does the school participate in California standardize testing by administering such tests as the CAT/6, CAPA, or the CSTs. However, the students do receive exposure to Spectrum Standardize Test Prep throughout the school year. The textbooks that are used by our school are California State Standard books that have computer generated standardized testing resources which allow students to take tests both in the classroom and on line. A Student’s progress is measured beginning weekly, to monthly, to eight week grading periods, finalized by report card at the end of each 16 week grading period.

_________________________ has been introduced to a rigorous 13 subject high school curriculum that includes Algebra One and Algebra Two, Chemistry, Biology, and a middle school – high school English course, Spanish, PE, all of which were completed by the end of the school year. Please review the enclosed report card and the school’s high school curriculum.

Once again, I __________________ recommend ____________________________ for your program and I am positive that ________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Feel free to contact me if you have a need for further information at (XXX-XXX-XXXX).

Sincerely,

Sister Akila
Executive Director
# APPENDIX E

## SAMPLE REPORT CARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT'S NAME</th>
<th>TEACHER(S)</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>PRIMARY</th>
<th>INTERMEDIATE</th>
<th>ADVANCED</th>
<th>DATE: Feb 2013-June 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE = (-)</th>
<th>POSITIVE = (+)</th>
<th>NEEDS IMPROVEMENT = (+/-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+ = EXCELLENT</td>
<td>B+ = GOOD</td>
<td>C+ = SLIGHTLY ABOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A = VERY GOOD</td>
<td>B = GOOD</td>
<td>C = AVERAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A - = VERY GOOD</td>
<td>B - = GOOD</td>
<td>C- = SLIGHTLY BELOW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### READING
- Shows Interest
- Works Out New Words
- Reads Fluently With Understanding

### ENGLISH
- Shows Interest
- Uses Correct Grammar And Pronunciation
- Speaks Clearly And Distinctly

### SPELLING/VOCABULARY
- Shows Interest
- Learns Assigned Words
- Spells Well In Written Work

### AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN HIS.
- Shows Interest
- Acquires Knowledge In Subject

### BEGINNING KISWAHILI
- Shows Interest
- Speaks Clearly And Distinctly
- Reads With Understanding

### PEMANSHIP
- Shows Interest
- Forms Letters Correctly
- Produces New Work

### CITIZENSHIP
- Shows Interest In Good Conduct
- Follows Instructions
- Receives Permission Before Talking
- Respects Teacher
- Respects Peers

### GRADE PROMOTION:

### TEACHER’S COMMENTS:

### PARENT’S COMMENTS:

### TEACHER’S SIGNATURE:

### PARENT(S) SIGNATURE:

### SUPERVISOR’S SIGNATURE:
REFERENCES


Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 US 537, 1896.


