

**INCORPORATING AFROCENTRIC CURRICULUM
FOR K-12 AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS**

By

Brett H Stewart

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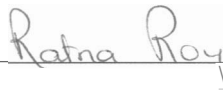
By

Brett H. Stewart

Has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

By

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ratna Roy". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Dr. Ratna Roy, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Therese Saliba". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Dr. Therese Saliba, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The historical legacy of racial discrimination in the United States points to the need for continued recognition of cultural diversity. DuBois (1935), Woodson (1933), Karenga (1980) and Asante (1987) pointed to the failure of the public school system and challenged African Americans to develop a new system for themselves. For many African American educators and parents, the Afrocentric multicultural curriculum has been a viable option.

A review of literature was conducted to answer the research question: "What is the feasibility of incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 public school systems, which provides instruction geared toward African American students' learning styles?"

As addressed in the study, an Afrocentric curriculum is viable if Afrocentric instructional materials are adopted that address African culture and history (Hilliard, 1990); the learning styles of African American students are considered to facilitate learning (Giddings, 2001); Constructivist and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches are adopted to facilitate intellectual development (Pasteur and Toldson, 1982); teacher training is given high priority (Irvine, 1992); a positive school culture exists (Fullan, 1990); and parents are involved (Smith-Maddox, 1999).

The premise of this study was that the curriculum of the school and the instructional materials should convey a message of equal educational opportunity and inclusion of all students. Training teachers to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum requires the exploration of new materials, ideas, and perspectives that recognize the culture of African American students. Asante predicts, "Future historians will write that no intellectual idea has been so maligned in the 20th century as Afrocentric theory, the idea that African people are agents and actors in history" (Asante, 1996, p. 31). Based on the findings in this study,

implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum is feasible and necessary because it assures greater success for African American Students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

African American culture has made enormous contributions to the cultures of the world. The impact is particularly significant in the American context because African American culture is a major component of what constitutes being American (Asante & Matson, 1991, p. vi).

The Recognition of Diversity: The Salad Bowl of the U.S.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, American society has undergone major social transformations, such as changing attitudes towards various ethnic groups and the strengthening of civil rights. Events related to these changes included the civil rights movement, the desegregation of schools, and the decline of the melting-pot ideology, which is the belief of relinquishing one's own cultural heritage and adopting a new American identity. Ethnocentrism, the belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group, is a phenomenon that exists across cultures and is by no means a problem limited to the United States or Western culture (Strouse, 1987). The United States increasingly recognized the diversity of ethnicity and cultures within its borders as reflected in various events in legislation, such as the establishment of the *Public Law 88-352, Title VI of 1964* and *Public Law 92-318, Title IX of 1972*. Both laws reflected the value of the heterogeneous composition of the nation and were enacted to eliminate racial discrimination. Americans began to broaden out of their Eurocentric perceptions. This broadening of perceptions was due in part to the large number of immigrants who resided in the United States but sought to be identified with their own culture. What was once referred to as melting pot was now referred to as a salad bowl where the ingredients were mixed, but not blended (Alba, 1990).

The school system is, however, still very much the product of a melting-pot

ideology. Very little allowance is provided for ethnic differences and individual needs of non-White student populations within desegregated schools stressing White monocultural pedagogy. This singular pedagogical approach often leads to misdiagnosed learning problems in minority learning populations. The aim of this study, therefore, which focuses upon African American students, is to seek an equitable remedy for leveling the playing field for Black students by investigating the possibility of an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 American schools.

Statement of the Research Question

Educators have conducted studies and investigated school systems to ascertain why certain instructional strategies are considered effective or ineffective in a given sociocultural context (Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). This paper addresses instructional strategies and educational research with regard to African American students by answering the question: What is the feasibility of incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 public school systems, which provides instruction geared toward African American students' learning styles? In order to address that feasibility, a rationale for an Afrocentric curriculum has been provided, which includes the following aspects required to implement an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 schools:

1. Afrocentric instructional materials must be adopted that address African and African American culture and history;
2. The learning styles of African American students must be considered to facilitate learning;
3. Constructivist and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches should be adopted to facilitate intellectual development;
4. Teacher training must be a high priority;

5. A positive school culture must exist. and
6. Parents must be involved to promote their children's positive academic outcomes.

Relevance/Importance of the Question

White (1991) expressed the idea that most White educators, psychologists, and social scientists accept the point of view that the experiential backgrounds and/or cognitive limitations of Blacks have deprived them psychologically and culturally. According to the theory, this deprivation has resulted in Black students' inferior preparation to perform effectively in the "White" educational system. The expressions of Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1992 and Shade, 1995, support this contention. There are few methods of teaching that address the learning needs of Black students; nor is there evidence of interest in developing methods for meeting the needs of these students. It is essential to restructure teaching methodology so that all students will have equal access to knowledge (Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1992; Shade, 1995). In order for African American students to have equal access to knowledge, their unique learning styles must be addressed. Part of what it means to address African American learning styles is putting Afrocentric pedagogy in place in classrooms. To combine these learning styles and pedagogy into an effective unit, one needs to consider the African roots of Black children. These learning styles, which are discussed in the Review of Literature, consist of unique and poetic vernacular, holistic categorization of ideas, and extrinsic, rhythmic expressions (Pasteur & Toldson, 1982; Shade, 1991). The ideology of Afrocentricity addresses the strong African heritage of African Americans and their cultural patterns and learning style. Afrocentricity is an ideology that dispels the myths about African Americans and provides a positive perspective for them. It defines African Americans in

terms of their history, social, economic and political organizations. lifestyles, health, creativity, values, practices, personality. and spirituality (Asante. 1987, 1988: Asante & Matson, 1991; Ascher, 1992).

White (1991) stated that White educational psychologists are so busy incorrectly analyzing the needs of Black children that they falsely diagnose methods of addressing these needs. There is a failure to recognize the strengths of Black children: these strengths are seen as weaknesses. According to Ascher (1992), "Given the harsh world that faces many African American young people and the fact that the schools have never served them well, any grass-roots movement to offer a creative solution should be allowed to flourish" (p. 782). This study's research question is relevant because it proposes a solution to the problems that African American students have faced in the U.S. school systems. There is the need to articulate a new conceptualization of the development and behavior styles of Black children. Black children need an educational system that recognizes their abilities, strengths, and culture and incorporates them into the teaching and learning process (Irvine. 1992; White. 1991). It is important to examine the feasibility of incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum into the public school systems, in an effort to reinterpret and reframe the educational system to better accommodate African American students: a system which speaks to their culture, and learning styles (Asante, 1988; Ladson-Billings. 1994; Shade, 1991 ; Willis, 1989).

Rationale

For ethnic minorities, researchers have found that ethnic solidarity and a strong sense of ethnic identity can actually make significant contributions to scholastic performance (Bankston, 1995; Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Similar to other studies that address the educational needs of African American

students, the rationale for conducting this review of the literature is to examine the efficacy of implementing an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 schools. If the United States government and people desire to move toward a commitment respecting diversity, we must be willing to commit to, and adopt, practices that implement strategies that provide African American students opportunities for academically excelling to their fullest potential. The social cost of ignoring the unique learning requirements of African American and other populations at risk in the monocultural school system extant in the United States is high and must be addressed.

This paper's purpose is to examine strategies for implementing programs that concern providing the unique instructional environments and curriculum for K-12 African American students. One strategy that Ladson-Billings (1994) espouses for addressing these unique requirements is culturally relevant teaching. Culturally relevant teaching encourages students to learn collaboratively. They are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other. It also requires that teachers help students develop necessary skills and view excellence as a complex standard that takes into account both student diversity and individual differences. She also posits that better teacher candidates are needed and that teacher education programs need to focus on not just adding multicultural or human relations courses, but that teacher preparation programs need to help prospective teacher candidates understand culture-their own and that of others-and the way these cultures function in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). These concepts go beyond just teaching students skills; they require students to take responsibility for their own education, giving students the opportunity to address their cultural uniqueness.

Public education still needs to make inroads to adequately address the culture and

learning styles and cultural uniqueness of African American students (Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1992; Shade, 1995). It is the responsibility of the public schools to make a meaningful difference in providing quality education for African American students. Therefore, concerned educators must assist in putting the conditions in place for all African American students and other minority students to be more successful in learning by eliminating the barriers that foster underachievement, by identifying the psychological, social, and cultural forces contributing to the problem of underachievement, and by applying a variety of methodological interventions to foster positive academic achievement for all students (Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1992; Shade, 1995).

This study addresses the need to offer a curriculum that provides African Americans with the tools necessary for positive academic achievement. The assumption is that by understanding the learning styles, culture, and the historical specificities of African American students, teachers can come to realize that an uncritical focus on methods makes invisible the historical role that schools and their personnel have played in discriminating against African American students (Irvine, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, 1991).

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

American Education History: A Eurocentric Legacy

The purpose of education in North American colonies during the seventeenth century was mainly to uphold and promote Protestant religious beliefs, as well as to ensure stability and obedience in society. “People were taught to read and write so that they could obey the laws of God and the state” (Spring, 2001, p. 9). Education was largely the result of the European influence, and more specifically of the English influence. The country and its education system were in their infancy, as can be seen from the pattern prevalent in the system at the time. Spring (2001), for example, mentions the fact that early education in the South is depicted as aristocratic. There were not many educational opportunities for the poor, whereas the wealthy enjoyed a much richer variety of quality education by means of private schools, as well as schooling in the mother country. Colonization policies with regard to Virginia also resulted in more direct influence from the mother country, and thus this colonization process represented most directly the English policy of education. In New York City, on the other hand, there was a system of private schools serving the needs of a more diverse community. Here English colonial policy made allowances for ethnic and religious differences to a greater degree. However, as a result of cultural fears, the English attempted to Anglicize the administration of the colony, while at the same time allowing diversity in other institutions such as schools (pp. 18-19).

After the American Revolution, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, America attempted to move away from its European origins. Through systems such as the common school movement (Spring, 2001, p. 104), several ethnically and culturally diverse students would attend the same school, being taught the same ideals and

philosophies. Here cultural diversity and uniqueness were ignored in favor of national unity and social order. The common school philosophy, however, still reflected the inherently European idea of ethnic and race superiority by ignoring and eradicating the diversity of other cultures and religions (p. 86). Shor (1992, p. 32) refers to the "Eurocentric canon," whereby a certain set of learning materials is upheld as "universal, excellent, and neutral" (p. 32). Through such standardization, all ethnic groups, with their own unique cultures, were made to feel that they were somehow substandard.

Of course, many suffered under such a unified system. Ethnic, gender, and religious minorities were discriminated against in a system that was still Eurocentric, despite any claims to the contrary. Women, for example, were long excluded from schools. Their duties were largely domestic with little opportunity for public service until after the American Revolution when teaching became an option (Spring, 2001, p. 135). Even then, women were primarily seen as either homemakers or teachers. They could not be both, nor could they be anything else. Religious groups suffered as well under the influence Protestants exercised over communities and schools. For example, the Protestants feared that the Catholics were a threat to the American dream (p. 87). These strong anti-Catholic feelings resulted in a common school system that was never really common. Eventually, Catholics started their own schools (p. 89).

The fear brought about by other ethnic groups residing in, and coming into, America, also resulted in contempt and segregation in schools. The Japanese, Chinese, Mexican-Americans, Indians, and Blacks are examples of such ethnic groups. For example, Mexican farm workers migrating to the United States in the early nineteenth century were exploited economically by placing their children into segregated schools that were created to assure that the members of that generation also would work the farms

(Spring, 2001, p. 215).

The same basic principle was at work in the South where Blacks were meant to continue doing the same tasks they had always done, educated or not. Of course, before the Civil War it was against the law to allow Blacks an education. Consequently, just 7 percent of Blacks in the United States, mostly in the North, were literate. After the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery Blacks fought for their education rights, and Black children were enrolled into schools.

In the early 1870s Black children were enrolled in school systems at percentages higher than those for whites, but by the 1800s [sic] the situation began to change as whites exerted greater control over the state political systems and passed discriminatory laws. (Spring, 2001, p. 220)

As Whites were able to regain their political influence, which had waned in the restructuring of the antebellum south, cases such as the 1895 Supreme Court Case *Plessy vs. Ferguson* were heard. The result of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was the "separate but equal doctrine" which established, among other things, a way in which schools and school systems could eventually be segregated. This segregation doctrine served to keep Blacks on sharecropping farms and in menial jobs in conditions not unlike that which Blacks suffered during slavery. Education for Blacks did, however, continue and "within a ninety-nine year period after emancipation the literacy rate jumped to 90 percent" (p. 220). It was during these years that the concept of African centered education emerged, which began with W. E. B. Du Bois's devotion to creating discontent among Blacks with the role that Whites had assigned them and to further provide Blacks with an education and a system that would give Blacks the tools to resist their given social position (pp. 226-227)

Cultural Pluralism: Multicultural Education

As a result of a change from the melting pot to a salad bowl theory, in the middle 1960s, the notion of cultural pluralism emerged. Pluralism was not considered a flattening process of assimilation, but a recognition of cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. Pluralism may or may not stress integration in cultural, social, or economic matters, but lies between total assimilation and strict separation of ethnic or racial groups. According to The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

endorse pluralism is to endorse the principle that there is no one model American ... and is to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among the nation's citizens" (p. 5). Progressive and liberal educators have embraced multicultural education as a means to develop a more inclusive pedagogy which embraces the concept of pluralism by addressing issues of race, gender, ethnicity, language, and class, which today occupy a marginal position in the curriculum. The following hypotheses are the major core assumptions of a multicultural program (Shade, 1995):

- * Multiculturalism incorporates diverse ways of knowing.
- * Multiculturalism must become the primary basis for curricular thought.
- * Multiculturalism provides a means for increasing student motivation.
- * Multiculturalism requires diversity in communication.
- * Multiculturalism is a source of different perspectives.
- * Multiculturalism defines and allows a wide variety of accepted patterns of social interactions in the classroom. (p. 381)

In spite of similarities, Multicultural Education differs from Afrocentrism. While multiculturalism does address the needs of African American students and does offer solutions to the disparity that they have experienced in the traditional public school

system, unlike multiculturalism, Afrocentrism rejects "the religion of science" and the systematic study of history because neither embraces the traditional African humanistic and spiritual viewpoint. Afrocentrism emphasizes that Black people be viewed as agents of history, not as marginal figures, and Afrocentrism seeks to build pan-African social movements, and calls for a return to traditional gods and traditional ways of knowing (Marable, 1990, pp. 14-15).

Forerunners of Afrocentricity

As mentioned before, African centered education emerged prior to Afrocentrism. W. E. B. Du Bois (1935) articulated the need for an educational system that addressed the history and culture of African Americans. In "Our Spiritual Strivings," the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois ascribes to the African American consciousness what he perceives to be a fundamental "two-ness." This "double-consciousness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body" (Washington, Du Bois, & Johnson, 1965, p. 3) is an effect of the contradictory positioning of African-American culture within the dominant social order of "White Americanism" (p. 4). This double consciousness consists of the difficulty of maintaining a separate social, psychological, and cultural presence in the face of attempts by the White world to define and control African American existence and image (Washington et al., 1965).

Du Bois' aim was not to replace White dominance in education with Black dominance, or as he stated, "to parallel the history of White folk with similar boasting about Black and brown folk" (W.E.B. Du Bois, 1935, p. 328). He prompted scholars toward an honest evaluation of human effort and accomplishment. His educational paradigm indicated that a teacher should start with experiences and knowledge central to

the students' culture, but expand to encompass all knowledge. His premise was that centering the knowledge in the students' culture would serve as a precursor to dialogue across differences. His efforts to promote African and African American culture in schools brought him into harmony with modern versions of African-centered education. African centered pedagogy in segregated schools represented the educational complement to economic organization along race lines in the 1930s. Both efforts required what Du Bois called race pride, which involves teaching African Americans that they had established an historical record of which they should be proud, "that their history in Africa and the world is a history of effort, success and trial, comparable with that of any other people" (W. E. B. Du Bois, 1996, p. 435). Du Bois understood that knowledge of one's culture was an essential aspect of a liberating education.

Like Du Bois (1935), Carter G. Woodson (1933) believed that African American's knowledge of their culture was fundamental for its preservation. The pedagogy of the Afrocentric curriculum stems from the writings of Woodson, known as the "Father of Black Studies." His preeminent book, *The Mis-Education a/the Negro* (1933) explains how the American educational system negatively influenced African American students. He stated, "The thought of inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (1933, p.1). He asserted that historically Blacks had been mis-educated and mis-guided by the American educational system. Woodson argued for an alternative educational program for Blacks that would empower them by teaching them the true facts of history. Like Du Bois (1935), he did not advocate completely discarding U.S. history. The call was for an incorporation of African American history into the curriculum, as he expressed:

We would not cease to pay tribute to Abraham Lincoln as the Savior of the

Country, but we would ascribe praise also to the one hundred and seventy-eight Negroes who had to be mustered into service of the Union before it could be preserved, and who by their heroism demonstrated that they were entitled to freedom and citizenship. (Woodson, 1933, pp. 101-102).

Woodson asserted that the traditional curriculum contributed to African American oppression in that it provided academic justification for segregation. The danger of the traditional curriculum was that it was constructed to bolster White supremacy; the curriculum included no mention of African contributions to human knowledge and civilization. Woodson (1933) denounced the omissions of African philosophy, science, literature, history and fine arts:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (Woodson, 1933, p. 267)

Woodson, arguably, had more influence on the teaching of African American history in U.S. schools than any other scholar. In addition to numerous writings on Black history, he published the *Negro History Bulletin* in 1937 to meet demands for materials in African American history. Woodson endeavored to build self-esteem among African Americans and lessen prejudice among White Americans, and to lay foundations for the sub-field of African American history. He initiated Negro History Week, which later became Black History Month now celebrated in the month of February (Goggin, 1993). The ongoing recovery of neglected aspects of African American history, literature, and culture owes much of its impetus to Woodson's efforts, and the emergence of African

American independent schools.

The Emergence of African American Independent Schools

Woodson's (1933) challenge to develop a new system for African Americans was answered in the wake of desegregation. Overturning the 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 357) that institutionalized segregation through the doctrine of "separate but equal," was the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* (394 U.S. 294). The Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, concluded: "In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (*Brown v. Board of Education* 394 U.S. 294). To a majority of African Americans, the Court's action provided a ray of promise. Prior to the decision, private Black schools thrived in the U.S. Now African Americans focused on attaining a "good" education for their children through the public school system (Ratteray, 1990). Integration became the primary means to obtain a quality education for urban African American youth. This quest "was never a battle to sit next to White children in a classroom. It was and still is a struggle for an equal and level playing field in all areas of human endeavor" (Madhubuti, 1994, p. 8).

The desegregation of schools won for Blacks limited access to educational opportunity. Even though Blacks could attend integrated public schools, the Civil Rights/Black Power era from 1955 to 1975 produced the development of many African American independent schools. These independent schools came into being "because of the need to provide outlets for the development of new political views and values" (Hoover, 1992). This era produced schools that addressed the issues of content and context based on the experiences of those involved in the independent school movement:

This movement grew out of the Black empowerment struggles and initiatives of

the 1960's and has developed African-centered schools around the country . . .

The great majority of persons involved in the first generation of this movement were products of the public school system. We know first-hand what type of school was not needed. (Madhubuti, 1994, p. 8).

As noted by Madhubuti (1994), African Americans who were products of the public school system wanted something better for their children. The parents during this era sought to establish schools that offered their children an optimal education. Civil Rights Organizations, such as The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), sponsored some of the private schools that were established during this era. The SNCC organized "Freedom Schools" in Mississippi in 1963 because of the state's inferior public schools for Blacks. The curriculum included academic subjects, cultural expressions, leadership development, and the history of the Black liberation movement (Carson, 1981).

Other schools founded during this era included the Nairobi Day School in East Palo Alto, California, founded in 1966, which evolved into a school system educating African American children from preschool to college level (Hoover, 1992).

These schools were widely accepted and supported by African American parents who expected them to provide an opportunity for their children to achieve academically (Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987). Ratteray and Shujaa administered a survey to 399 parents at 40 independent Black schools. They found that parents expected their children to have high academic achievement and cultural affirmation. Some of the reasons the parents gave for rejecting public schools were that they felt their children would receive benefit from higher teacher expectations, individual attention, and an effective administration. The parents were concerned about the curriculum in the public schools and felt that the

Black schools would provide a more culturally relevant and challenging curriculum.

Lomotey and Brookins (1988) reported a study conducted by Brookins (1984 in Lomotey & Brookins, 1988), an expert in Black child development, on the ideology, pedagogy, philosophy and academic rigor of ten independent Black schools. The findings revealed positive student outcomes in academic achievement. Results of students' standardized tests indicated that the schools produced students who were academically prepared. Some of the positive student outcomes were: strong self-concept; self-confidence; ability to think critically, analytically and independently; self-determination; and a strong knowledge of African and African American life, history, and culture.

The teachers at these schools were culturally oriented and committed to the creation and continuation of African American institutions. The philosophy in these schools reflected the components of an African-centered curriculum that Woodson (1933) proposed: Family hood (family orientation and open expression of love and caring), Pan-African Nationalism (the relationship of African Americans to Africans worldwide), and a value system (positive humanistic values). These aspects represented a cultural foundation that promoted group solidarity and cohesion. This cultural foundation was viewed as important for African Americans. Woodson asserted that: "The program for the uplift of the Negro in this country must be based upon a scientific study of the Negro from within, to develop in him the power to do for himself what his oppressors will never do to elevate him to the level of others" (Woodson, 1933, p. 144).

The emergence of independent Black institutions during the tumultuous Civil Rights/Black Power era started the process toward Du Bois' (1935) and Woodson's (1933) call for African-centered education. This call was heard by Maulana Karenga, who developed an African American value system and movement to continue the legacy

of African American empowerment.

Development of an African American Value System

Woodson's (1933) call for a program that would teach African Americans the true facts of history was echoed in the work of Black Nationalist Maulana Karenga. During the mid-1960s, Karenga (1980) developed Kwanzaa, a doctrine that he asserted was used for African Americans. Karenga's view was that African Americans had been operating from a Eurocentric frame of reference for too long and needed to develop a value system beneficial to them. One widely used component of the doctrine that Karenga developed is the Nguzo Sabo or the Seven Principles of Blackness. These principles are the tenets of Kwanzaa (Swahili for "first fruits of the harvest"), a celebration of the principles, which occurs from December 26 to January 1 (Karenga, 2001). African Americans throughout the nation celebrate this Afrocentric holiday and instill these principles in their children, "The beauty and meaning of Kwanzaa rest in the hearts, minds and practice of African people, who wove it out of the rich, ancient and modern fabric of their own culture and lives and celebrate it, and their culture, as a unique way of being human in the world" (Karenga, 2001, p. 12). The principles of Kwanzaa are structured into the Afrocentric curriculum and form the basis for the value system that is a part of the curriculum's components. The following summary of the seven principles represents their salient concepts as they relate to children:

1. Umoja (unity) (oo-MOE-jah)-There is a striving for unity in the family, the community, nation, and race.

2. Kujichagulia (self-determination) (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah)-Children are encouraged to speak for themselves, name themselves, and not allow others to do so.

3. Ujima (collective work and responsibility) (oo-JEE-mah)-Children are

encouraged to work together to enable each of them to develop their skills for the common good.

4. Ujamaa (cooperative economics) (oo-JAH-ma)-Children are encouraged to do what they can to help each other economically in terms of the development of economic ventures.

5. Nia (Purpose) (nee-AH)-Children are encouraged to act with reason.

6. Kuumba (creativity) (koo-OOM-bah)-Children are encouraged to strive to do all that they can in the most creative way.

7. Imani- (faith) (ee-MAH-nee)-Children are encouraged to have faith in what they are doing, their people, their teachers, and their communities (Karenga 1980, 2001).

Like Woodson (1933) and Du Bois (1935), Karenga (1980) did not advocate an exclusive ideology of one's supremacy over others, but instead, an African American consciousness based on the common good for all (Karenga, 1980). To ensure that the culture and history of African Americans be preserved, and not lost, Karenga organized the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies, Los Angeles, and The Organization Us ("Anywhere we are, Us is"), a cultural and social change organization. The Organization Us, which means us Black people, is named to stress the community focus of the organization and its philosophy, Kawaida, which is an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world. Dr. Karenga and Us have had a profound effect on Black intellectual and political thought. Through the teaching and practice of Kawaida, "Us" emerged in the 60s as a vanguard organization and has played a role in shaping the Black Arts Movement, Black Studies, Black Student Union Movement, Afrocentricity, rites of passage programs, the study of ancient Egyptian culture, and the founding of the Association for the Study of Classical African

Civilizations, the independent school movement, African life-cycle ceremonies. the Simba Wachanga youth movement, and Black theological and ethical discourse culture (The Organization Us, <http://www.us-organization.org>). In his mission to infuse Afrocentricity into the curriculum, Karenga has published many scholarly works. including the *Introduction to Black Studies* (1993), the most widely used introductory text in Black Studies.

The Emergence of Afrocentricity

The work of Du Bois (1935), Woodson (1933), and Karenga (1980) came full circle with the emergence of Afrocentricity. Molefi Kete Asante (1987, 1988), the creator of Afrocentricity, was greatly influenced by the African-centered ideas of Du Bois, Woodson, and particularly Karenga. Asante, professor and chair of the department of African American Studies at Temple University, founded and advanced in literature and talks the Afrocentric approach to education. This Afrocentric approach to education emerged from identity rooted in a perceived commonality of oppression and from recognition of a convergence of political purpose and objectives. When forming his ideas that resulted in an Afrocentric curriculum, Asante borrowed from some of Karenga's (1980) work on Black Nationalism. Afrocentrism shares the same principles and goals of Black Nationalism, which consists of the political belief and practice of African Americans as a distinct people with a distinct historical personality who politically should develop structures to define, defend, and develop the interest of Blacks as a people. This belief entails a redefinition of reality in Black images and interests, providing a social corrective, by building institutions and organizational structures that house Black aspirations, and it provides a collective vocation of nation building among Black people as a political end. Asante gives a central role to Egypt and to African civilizations in the

history of humanity, making the link between regional and international, and interweaving sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors (Asante, 1987, 1988).

Asante realized the need to address the "one size fits all" approach to education; addressing this need gave birth to a different approach represented by an Afrocentric curriculum. Asante explains the rationale for this curriculum, "The task of the Afrocentric curriculum is finding patterns in African American history and culture that help the teacher place the child in the middle of the intellectual experience" (Asante & Matson, 1991, p. 46). According to Asante, an Afrocentric curriculum is necessary because the Eurocentric curriculum places African American students "outside the information being discussed" (Asante, 1991, p. 46). An extended discussion of the principles of Afrocentrism is presented in the Review of Literature.

Conclusion

Schools and teachers have traditionally failed to honor African American heritage and culture by not acknowledging multiple perspectives and diverse cultures in the curriculum and instruction (Woodson, 1933; Asante, 1987; 1988). This approach has often alienated students rather than supported them through validation of their cultural heritage. On the other hand, Caucasian students have experienced cultural validation over the years because European culture has been the traditional focus in American schools (Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1992). As indicated in the Historical Background, to correct this injustice, African American scholars and educators have devised many reforms to address the disparity of African American children in urban school systems, including Afrocentric curriculums (Asante, 1987; 1988), African-centered education (Du Bois, 1935; Karenga, 1980; Woodson, 1933), and independent Black schools (Karenga, 1980; Lee, 1992). The rationale for these schools and curriculum has been that African

Americans need effective education focused on the development of stable educational, social, and cultural institutions rooted within the Black communities. The focus on an Afrocentric curriculum has occurred because parents and educators are looking for new ways to improve the education of African American children (Asante, 1987, 1988).

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In American public schools, African American students often do not have the same academic success rate as their Caucasian counterparts because Eurocentric curriculum, throughout the elementary and secondary school years, considers Europe and Europeans central to world culture, history, and economics (Heath, 1983; Irvine, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lomotey, 1990). In public schools, the strengths, talents, and culture of inner city African American students are neither acknowledged in curriculum design and practice, nor validated in the evaluation of their schoolwork (Heath, 1983; Hilliard & Leonard, 1990). Acknowledging the disparity problems that African American students have experienced in the public schools system, and to offer a solution, the Review of Literature addresses the question: "What is the feasibility of incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 public school systems, which provides instruction geared toward African American students' learning styles?"

In addition to a presentation of the principles of Afrocentricity and the arguments for and against an Afrocentric curriculum, the review of literature addresses aspects that must be in place to incorporate an Afrocentric curriculum into a K-12 public school system. The six prerequisites discussed are: Afrocentric instructional materials; the knowledge of learning styles of African American students; constructivist and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches; teacher training; a positive school culture; and parental involvement.

Principles of Afrocentricity

According to Asante, "Afrocentricity means placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Asante, 1987, p. 6). The

concept of Afrocentricity is not attributable or designed for one particular race, it can be adopted by anyone because it " . . . is not, nor can it be based on biological determinism. Anyone willing to submit to the discipline of learning the concepts and methods may acquire the knowledge necessary for analysis" (Asante, 1990, p. 40). Asante's position is that Afrocentricity is not a replacement for any present educational system. Within its narrow perspective, focusing on the sociohistory of the Black race, it serves as a "radical critique of the Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as a universal view . . .", and thus provides "an alternative perspective on phenomena" (Asante, 1987, p. 3).

Asante uses the term, Africology, to represent the academic discipline that approaches the humanities and social sciences from a pan-African perspective.

Africology is comprised of several principles (Asante, 1990), which include:

1. Centricism, the groundedness of observation and behavior in one's own historical experiences . . . As a discipline, Africology is sustained by a commitment to centering the study of African phenomena and events in the particular cultural voice of the composite African people (p. 12);
2. [Establishment of] its place alongside other centric pluralisms without hierarchy and without seeking hegemony (p. 12);
3. [Specialization in the study] of social, communication, historical, cultural, political, economic, and psychological academic disciplines (p. 12);
4. [Commitment to the task to] make the world more meaningful to those who live in it and to create spaces for human understanding (p. 28);
5. [Avoidance of the belief that] one's traditional discipline contains all of the tools necessary for the analysis of phenomena . . . instead of an ethnic group being projected as all encompassing, all-knowing, universal, it is a particular

6. field of study that is so projected (pp. 151-152); and,
7. [Liberation from European domination, and emphasis on African American research that] proposes concrete actions that lead to the lessening of disharmony, suffering, misunderstanding, and dislocation (p. 193).

When Asante speaks of liberation from European domination he is offering a challenge to systematically displace European ways of thinking, speaking, and feeling, and replace them with ways that are specific to the African cultural experience. He explains that, "It is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field" (Asante & Matson, 1991, P. 172). Asante's main category of thought is culture, which he defines as "shared perceptions, attitudes, and pre-dispositions that allow people to organize experiences in certain ways" (Asante, 1990. p. 9).

With this focus on culture, Afrocentricity is likened to African Studies. According to Karenga (1988), "Any serious discussion of Afrocentricity must begin by placing it in the context of Africana or Black Studies" (Karenga, 1988, p. 4). The principles of Afrocentricity are complementary to the components of Africana/Black Studies, which cover social and psychological dynamics, literary, artistic and oratory expressions, languages, and history (Karenga, 1993). In order to legitimize the Afrocentric paradigm component of Africana/Black Studies, Asante developed the first Ph.D. program in Africological studies at Temple University in 1988 (Asante, 1991). The emergence and legitimization of Asante's educational paradigm has provided a viable base from which an Afrocentric curriculum can be developed, which includes textbooks that places African at the center of an African American's world, and stresses his/her right to practice and celebrate his/her own culture.

Afrocentric Textbooks

In order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum, instructional materials must be adopted that address African culture and history. The adoption of Afrocentric textbooks promotes learning among African American students by motivating them and giving them a sense of identity and pride. In addition, the role models in the texts inspire the students. Redd's study (1993), although conducted on the level of university education, supports the effectiveness of adopting Afrocentric texts. In order to investigate whether an Afrocentric text facilitated learning in a freshman composition class at Howard University, historically a prominent Black university, Redd chose 911 students who completed English 002. The students answered questions from a textbook of essays about Blacks.

The results confirmed that the texts were relevant to the students and facilitated learning: "(1) Black writers made 80% of the students feel more positive about writing; (2) 94% of the students said they had enjoyed reading about the issues in the textbook; (3) 64% of the students indicated that they had enjoyed writing about the issues; and (4) approximately 89% of the students agreed that reading the textbook had made them think more carefully about the Black Experience" (Redd, 1993). These results indicate that African American students are able to interpret a text and enjoy it by identifying the elements in it that reveal the author's personal identity that is similar to their own. African American children cannot divest themselves of their culture; they are either participating in their own historical culture or that of some other group. Implications of the findings are that some of the learning materials that are selected for African American students should contain issues that relate to the Black experience similar to those in the *African American Baseline Essays* (1990) .

Educational Psychologist Asa G. Hilliard from Georgia State University conceived and compiled a number of Afrocentric writings known as the *African-American Baseline Essays* (1990), which in 1982 were adopted by the Portland, Oregon schools. These essays were subsequently adopted by other school systems that implemented Afrocentric programs, such as in the cities of Atlanta, Indianapolis, Prince George's County (Md.), and Washington, D.C (Leo, 1990).

The *African American Baseline Essays* (1990) is a prominent text used in Afrocentric curriculum. In addition, other teacher-generated culturally relevant instructional materials are used. The Essays espouse as truths, the significance of Africa to the development of other civilizations and propose that great historical figures were Black, contrary to the history from a Eurocentric perspective. Some of the essays in the texts are:

- African-American Art Traditions and Developments, by Michael D. Harris
- African and African-American Traditions in Language Arts, by Joyce Braden Harris
- African and African-American Contributions to Mathematics, by Beatrice Lumpkin
- African and African-American Contributions to Science and Technology, by Hunter Havelin Adams III
- Social Science African-American Baseline Essay, by John Henrik Clarke
- African and African-American contributions to world music, by Charhee Lawrence-McIntyre (Hilliard & Leonard, 1990).

Some of the primary assertions of the Essays are that:

- Africa was "the world center of culture and learning in antiquity." Ancient Greece largely derived its culture from Blacks.
- Ramses and King Tut were Black. Aesop was probably Black. Cleopatra was partly Black, partly Greek.
- Africa has a rich history of mathematical, scientific, and literary accomplishment, mostly suppressed or stolen by Whites. Study at great African universities was "fairly common" among the ancestors of the slaves who were brought to America.
- The greatness of African science can be realized by deduction: "Since Africa is widely believed to be the birthplace of the human race, it follows that Africa was the birthplace of mathematics and science."
- The oral-aural tradition of Africa is lively and liberating, whereas the dependence of the West (and presumably of the East) on the written word can be debilitating (Leo, 1990, pp. 25-27).

One of the strongly voiced objections to Afrocentricity is that many of the materials being introduced and recommended embody an overly broad rejection of both the traditional curriculum and of existing efforts to make the school constructively multicultural. Leo (1990) argues that,

The attacks on Europeans and Western civilization begin on the very first page, in an introduction to African art, and continue throughout the text. It is possible that this tone of smoldering resentment might increase racial group solidarity and vent frustration, but it is hard to see how a curriculum based on it will help Black youngsters prepare for jobs or fit into the wider society (Leo, 1990, p. 26).

Another objection to the Afrocentric curriculum is that many of the

materials are historically inaccurate. Some materials are based on the conclusions that the culture and population of ancient Egypt were predominantly African and that ancient Greece derived much of its culture from Egypt. Leo reported that classical scholars believe these generalizations to be exaggerated (Leo, 1990). Leo has also disputed the historical claims presented as facts in the *African American Baseline Essays* (1990). He even attempted to get support for his refutations from experts.

At the heart of the Baseline Essays (1990) is an unlikely claim that consumes more than 35 percent of the curriculum's text: Ancient Egypt was a Black nation. To gloss over Black success, the *African American Baseline Essays* (1990) maintain, Europeans "invented the theory of 'white' Egyptians who were merely browned by the sun." Experts do not seem to support this view. I phoned seven Egyptologists at random around the country, and all seven said it is completely untrue, then asked that their names not be used (Leo, 1990, p. 25).

In his article, "How Valid are the Portland Baseline Essays?," Martel (1992) cites evidence that disputes some of the historical claims. For example, in response to the assertion that Ancient Egypt was a Black nation and that queen Cleopatra VII was of mixed African and Greek heritage, Martel counters that,

All of the above assertions are problematic. "Black" and "White" are hard to define. Ancient Egyptian and Greek views of skin color, unlike 20th century views, were not the products of a legacy of discrimination. (Martel, 1992, p. 21).

Although Martel has objections, he does concede that there are facts in the essays. His main concern is that if the Essays are proposed as valuable learning materials, they must be thoroughly researched. He feels that teachers, parents, and students are justified in desiring multicultural texts and admits that traditional texts do contain a bias. He

suggests that history scholars and educators make an effort to develop multicultural curriculums that are well researched and provide authentic information (Martel, 1992).

Despite the previous objections to the *African American Baseline Essays (1990)*, they are widely accepted by proponents of an Afrocentric curriculum:

Although some of the information in the Portland essays and other Afrocentric curricula is unchallenged, other "facts" remain the subject of lively scholarly debate. For example, many anthropologists say that ancient Egypt was not a Black culture in the way we understand such distinctions today, but rather a multiethnic society. However, the authors of the Portland essays state unequivocally that Egypt was Black and make it clear that in matters of controversy, "African scholars are the final authority on Africa" (Kantrowitz, 1991, pp. 45-49).

Arguments For and Against an Afrocentric Curriculum

According to Ascher (1992), African American school programs, in particular, can counter the cultural alienation of Black males. "An Afrocentric curriculum that is interesting, relevant, and historically accurate is also thought to increase motivation and improve performance" (p. 780) Leake and Leake (1992) endorse the concept of separate African American immersion schools to "eliminate the institutional and attitudinal influences that impede the academic success of African-American students" (p. 785). In addition, African American educators have posited that assuming Black children benefit academically by mixing with White children is to believe that "Blacks are inherently inferior" (Holmes, 1995, p. 1). Historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. makes it clear that insisting upon an Afrocentric curriculum does not indicate a complete rejection of the curriculum that involves study of other cultures (Clarke & Tifft, 1991),

Now, I wouldn't want to get rid of anything in that tradition. I think the Western

tradition has been a marvelous, wonderful tradition. But it's not the only tradition full of great ideas. And I'm not talking about any diminishment of standards. Even by the most conservative notion of what is good and bad, we will find excellence in other cultures, like the great Indian cultures, the great Chinese cultures, the great African cultures (p. 16).

Gates underscores the contention of Asante (1988) that the curriculum is not designed to replace the existing curricula, but serves as an addition to them. Because historically, African Americans have not been significantly present in the academic texts, the need for their stories to be told is vital to the mission of multicultural education. In her article, "Infusion of Afrocentric Content into the School Curriculum," Giddings (2001) argues that efforts to add an Afrocentric curriculum in some school systems have been met with opposition, "Efforts to reform the Philadelphia School District's curriculum typifies the struggle for Afrocentric content infusion. The story of this school district and curriculum reform is one of mass struggle" (Giddings, 2001, p. 470). Although some school systems are resistant to this reform, Giddings argues that it is possible to infuse a viable Afrocentric curriculum in a school system that can:

1. "Assist students in developing the necessary intellectual, moral, and emotional
2. skills for accomplishing a productive, affirming life in this society."
3. "Provide educational instruction as to deconstruct established hegemonic pillars and to safeguard against the construction of new ones."
4. "Provide students of African descent with educational instruction that uses techniques that are in accord with their learning styles."
5. "Assist students of African descent in maintaining a positive self-concept, with the goal of achieving a sense of collective accountability."

6. "Serve as a model for Banks (1988) "Transformation" and "Social Action" approaches to multicultural education". (Giddings. 2001, p. 463).

The resistance to an Afrocentric curriculum that Giddings wrote about is often voiced by educators who see the curriculum as one that needs to be monitored to ensure its validity. One of the most outspoken opponents of the Afrocentric curriculum is Wellesley professor Mary Lefkowitz. She argues her points in her book *Not Out of Africa* (1996) and refers to some Afrocentrists as extreme and implies that they may be teaching a curriculum that should be monitored but is not: "In American universities today, not everyone knows what extreme Afrocentrists are doing in their classrooms. Or even if they do know, they choose not to ask questions" (p.1).

Other objections to Afrocentricity that Lefkowitz and other opponents have is that: the Afrocentric viewpoints are not representative of the diversity of opinions that exist within the minds of all African Americans; and that emphasis on minority culture and history sometimes is being pursued as a substitute for the difficult actions required to improve minority students' academic performance (Lefkowitz, 1996; Leo, 1990).

Lefkowitz's contention that all African Americans do not embrace Afrocentricity, such as prominent African American scholars, was addressed by Cornel West, who asserts that,

"The distrust and suspicion of the Black intellectual stem not simply from the usually arrogant and haughty disposition of intellectuals toward ordinary folk, but, more importantly, from the widespread refusal of Black intellectuals, to remain in some way, organically lined with Afro-American cultural life" (West, 1986, p. 112).

West contends that Afrocentric scholars, like himself, challenged the traditional methods of Western scholarship and were motivated to explore areas of knowledge and research

ignored or neglected by more traditional White male scholars. The major goal of Afrocentric scholars is to empower the subjects of their studies rather than to denigrate them, as so much of the older scholarship has done (West, 1986).

Asante categorically dismisses Lefkowitz's and other opponents' assertions and remains confident in his defense of the Afrocentric ideal and the claims in its texts.

The fanfare given "Not Out of Africa" demonstrates a glee, although misinformed, of those who feel some sense of relief that a white scholar has taken on the Afrocentrists—a kind of "white hope" idea (Asante, 1996, p. 31).

Asante takes a defensive stance when addressing his opponents and often provides very little defense of his ideology. His opponents have often been the ones to provide solutions to the discrepancies they see in his approach. Like Martel (1992), Singer (1994) offers a solution to the presentation of historical facts to be memorized, which is a part of the Afrocentric approach:

As educators, I believe that we are responsible for the confusion between what Afrocentrists do and the study of history. We teach history as a collection of isolated and seemingly random facts to be memorized. The Afrocentrists' response to the traditional curriculum is to ask, "Why your 'facts' and not mine?" If we want students to understand the differences between multicultural history and Afrocentrism, we are going to have to abandon our reliance on lectures and allow students to discover patterns and create connections through their own thinking and research (p. 285).

Singer does not see the presentation and memorization of facts as anything different from the traditional curriculum. His contention is that the important focus should be on providing a student-centered curriculum (Singer, 1994).

Singer (1994) states that there is no one method that is superior to another and that Afrocentrism is not the magic answer to those students who need assistance in achieving academically. As indicated in this Review of Literature, in order to implement an Afrocentric curriculum, many components should be in place. The discussion of the feasibility of the Baseline Texts indicates that there are still concerns about its value as an authentic set of instructional materials.

African American Learning Styles

In order to implement an Afrocentric curriculum, teachers must be flexible and willing to assess the abilities and learning styles of African American students in order to deliver instruction in the most effective manner (Fatt, 1998). According to Irvine (1992), the typical student for whom educators' pedagogy and prescriptions are designed is an endangered species. Highly motivated, achievement-oriented, White middle-class students from two parent families are becoming scarce in most school systems (p. 79). Gearing curriculum toward students' learning styles is a necessity if school systems hope to guarantee that all students are being served. According to Willis (1989):

Learning styles play a critical role in the teaching/learning process. A cursory understanding of learning styles is needed to inform professors about culturally relevant teaching methods. This, in turn, may assist instructors in aligning their pedagogical techniques to the learning styles of their students. Although there are many definitions, "learning style [generally] can be defined as a way of perceiving, conceptualizing, and problem solving. [It] is a preference for the way of interacting with and responding to the environment. (p. 48).

According to Shaughnessy (1998), a person's learning style is the way that he or she concentrates on, processes, internalizes, and remembers new and difficult academic

information or skills. Styles often vary with age, achievement level, culture, global versus analytic processing preference, and gender. Between 1980 and 1990, a metaanalysis of 42 experimental studies was conducted. Thirteen different institutions of higher education participated. The studies provided information about students' learning styles. The findings revealed that when students' characteristics were accommodated by educational interventions responsive to their learning styles, those students usually achieved 75% of a standard deviation higher than students whose learning styles were not accommodated (Shaughnessy, 1998).

Dunn and Dunn (1992; 1993) described learning style as related to individual reactions to 23 elements in five basic strands that included each student's emotional, environmental, psychological, physiological, and sociological processing preferences. It was found that human beings process information differently; information processing is only 1 of 23 elements in the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Model.

According to Hale-Benson (1986), not only are Black children educated ineffectively, but they are also being "miseducated." White middle-class children who have poor reading achievement are not considered to be unable to learn and any deficit is not recognized as being within the child. Psychologists usually attribute the problem to the method of instruction or incorrect matches between the developmental level and the curriculum content. When Black children exhibit poor reading achievement, it is attributed to the children having inferior cognitive capacities.

Hale-Benson (1986) suggested the need to articulate a new conceptualization of the development and behavior styles of Black children. Black children need an educational system that recognizes their abilities, strengths, and culture and incorporates them into the teaching and learning process. Scholars have demonstrated that Black

children use complex thinking skills in everyday life. It is necessary to transfer these skills to the classroom, combining ethnography and experimental psychology in developing an understanding of the relationship between culture and thinking.

Hale-Benson (1986) contended that the African American culture has its roots in West Africa, and that African American children have distinctive learning styles that can be observed in the behavior they exhibit while playing. It is thought that information about how Black children learn can be obtained by observing play behavior amongst African American children as well as by observing child rearing practices within African American families. Knowledge about learning styles can be used to provide continuity between the behavior of the parents of Black children and the behavior of their teachers, thus building a connection between the natural learning styles that exist in the family and the novel styles of learning introduced in the schools. "Our research suggests that by obtaining information about the ways in which Black children teach themselves in early childhood and later in life, through play, we can identify and strengthen any natural learning styles they possess" (p. 6).

The assertions of Pasteur and Toldson (1982) regarding Black expressive behavior has strong implications for meeting the learning needs of African American students. Rhythm, as seen in music, dance, poetry, sculpture, and other expressive forms in the Black community, is at the base of Black expressive behavior. "The emotional, excitatory processes of the body are related to the rhythmic excitations of nature" (p. 61). This natural rhythm of man is in harmony with the natural rhythm, the vital forces of the universe. Pasteur and Toldson (1982) contended that as the individual converges with all things in nature, so do individuals interact closely with those around them, forming collective relationships in daily activities as well as in structured learning. The

interdependency of collective activity generates emotional power that motivates individuals to achieve. This interdependency and the emotional power this group collaboration produces suggests that student achievement would be increased if a collective process were used instead of the individualized method that is practiced in western society. Shade (1991) also found that social interaction among Black children leads to increased achievement. In Africa, "the individual unites with the family, the family with the clan, the clan with the tribe, and the tribe with nature" (Pasteur & Toldson, 1982, p. 67). Shade (1991) supported the previous contention, stating that Blacks attend to the world around them, preferring action and involvement with others, rather than the internal world of ideas. This social learning process and attention to the world around them results in African Americans being superior to Euro-Americans in the ability to elaborate, embellish, and develop ideas. African Americans also tend to categorize objects and ideas more holistically rather than analytically or according to detail.

Shade (1991) documented that African Americans follow rhythms and exhibit spontaneity in movement much better than Euro-Americans. These ways of thinking and behaving help to establish the learning styles of Black children. The contention of Pasteur and Toldson (1982) was that Africans rely on the interaction of the major aspects of personality for learning. These include the intellect, the emotions, and the psychomotor. Although movement is devalued, and even penalized, in Western culture, it is through movement that children construct the world as a whole. For African children, the affective experience is especially strong during the early years.

Pasteur and Toldson (1982) asserted that the African American's harmony with nature is expressed in movement. Movement is a part of the African American; it is not

something added. Europeans view nature as apart from themselves and move in dance as though the body is a separate entity. Dance has historically been a means of fostering education in Africa. Dance is used in Africa to teach information, role differentiation, and acceptable methods of achieving goals. Dance teaches responsibility, restraint, group cooperation and harmony, and other concepts (Pasteur & Toldson, 1982). Europeans use words and numbers to teach (communicative modalities of the left brain), while Africans achieve the same goal by embodying words and numbers in dance, music, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, and similar expressive outlets, affecting a marriage between the two brain systems. The former [European teaching methodology] enlightens with stoicism. the latter [African teaching methodology] enlightens with vitalism (pp. 27-28).

Pasteur and Toldson (1982) explained that Black vernacular is poetic and prosaic. Language expressed with words comes from the left side of the brain while imagistic language comes from the right side. Black vernacular brings the language systems of the two sides together, fostering a creativity that is not found in White vernacular. Utilization of increased interaction between the two hemispheres would bring the language in the educational system closer to the flavor of Black vernacular. Pasteur and Toldson (1982) suggested that the influence of the left hemisphere of the brain causes the vernacular of Whites to be marked by a fixation on rules and standards. This theory explains why Blacks have problems learning what is called Standard English. The prevalence of the left-brain in the American language system causes learning conditions that preclude the natural tendency of Blacks to include stimuli from the right side of the brain. Pasteur and Toldson (1982) suggested that it would be wise for educators to recognize and utilize teaching methodologies that focus on collaboration between the two sides of the brain.

Heath (1989) notes that traditional rural and small-town Black communities have

a rich linguistic tradition, one that emphasizes negotiation, flexible role playing, verbal wit, nuances of meaning, striking metaphors, rapid-fire dialogue, and unexpected analogies. In this tradition, adults ask children many questions, but only questions to which the adults do not know the answers. Adults expect children to show what they know rather than tell what they know. Schools, however, do not take advantage of Black children's strengths. Instead, says Heath (1989), they typically train children to give the "right" answers, and they treat literacy as a set of mechanistic operations. Intelligence, then, cannot be evaluated apart from the context in which it occurs. Some children will seem to be academically inept if they must maneuver in an environment that they know little about or that does not capitalize on what they already know (Heath, 1989; Pasteur and Toldson, 1982).

As Heath (1989) and Pasteur and Toldson (1982) have shown, educators need to capitalize on what students already know. Matthews and Hamby's (1995) study focused on the recognition of the characteristics of African Americans that can be considered and capitalized on by teachers. This was the first study to investigate the comparison of learning style preferences among high school and college students. The high school population consisted of 1,174 African American males (20 percent), 1,422 African American females (24 percent), 1,678 Caucasian American males (29 percent), and 1,580 Caucasian American females (27 percent). The population of undergraduate college consisted of 405 African American males (33 percent), 611 African American females (20 percent), 368 Caucasian American males (24 percent), and 431 Caucasian American females (23 percent). The researchers used the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb and Smith 1986, cited in Matthews & Hamby 1995) to identify specific learning styles named as Converger, Diverger, Assimilator, and Accommodator, each having a set of

characteristics. For example, "The Converger's" dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. This person does best using data where there is only one correct answer to a problem. In "The Diverger" primary abilities are Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation. This person's strength is the ability to generate ideas, see concrete situations from many perspectives, and work with people. "The Assimilator's" abilities are Abstract Conceptualization and Reflective Observation. This person is proficient in inductive reasoning and assimilating different observations, theories, and models into integrated explanations. The "Accommodator's" primary abilities are Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation. This person relies on other people for information rather than on his or her own analytic ability to obtain information (Matthews & Hamby, 1995).

The results of Matthews and Hamby's (1995) study revealed that with regard to the Diverger, Converger, and Accommodator styles, high school African Americans were more likely than Caucasian Americans to choose the Diverger style. However, college Caucasian Americans were more likely to choose The Diverger style than their African American counterparts. This result has implications for high school educators in that they need to be aware that high school African American students may view learning tasks from different perspectives and would be more successful when completing tasks when working with others. The researchers found that high school African American students were more likely than their high school Caucasian American counterparts to choose the Converger style. The implication of this finding is that high school African Americans may be more successful when completing assignments that require one right answer. With respect to the Accommodator style, high school African American males preferred this style more often than did high school Caucasian students. The implication of this

finding is that high school African American males, in particular, may need to have additional resources other than their own to successfully complete learning tasks.

As indicated by the research in this section, African Americans possess a distinct learning style, and it is important for educators to be aware of their characteristics in order to provide them with an equal opportunity to obtain an optimal education.

Pedagogical Approaches for Facilitating Intellectual Development

Proponents of Afrocentricity recommend no one pedagogical approach (Asante & Matson, 1991; Hilliard & Leonard, 1990). However, in this section, research is presented, which suggests that in order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum, constructivist and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches should be adopted to stimulate intellectual development. These methods are deemed appropriate for African American students because it motivates them to achieve (Fatt, 1998; Loiacano, 1996; Lord, 1998).

Constructivist Pedagogy

Vygotsky (1990) addressed the idea of how students learn by examining the methods through which meaning is constructed. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory contributed to the development of constructivism. The contention was that social experience shapes the ways in which individuals think and interpret the world. Constructivism is acknowledged as the appropriate methodology for facilitating the intellectual development of students. Piaget's constructivist approach focused on the invariant logic of growth in humans. His theory provided a means of analyzing children's methods of explaining and of justifying their explanations (Bruner, 1997).

Piaget (1959) noted that gaining knowledge is a process of building, creating, or making mental structures; it is not just absorbing or reproducing existing information. Influences presented in the learning environment "do not imprint themselves upon the

child, as on a photographic plate; they are 'assimilated,' i.e., deformed by the living being who comes under their sway, and they are incorporated into his own substance" (p. 256). In other words, the context in the learning environment and the student's reactions to it agitate the mental processes and lead to construction (Piaget, 1959).

Constructivist pedagogy has been confirmed to increase student achievement (Fatt, 1998; Loiacano, 1996; Lord, 1998). Most students will benefit from constructivist instruction, including boys, girls, higher achievers, lower achievers, and students of some learning style preferences. Loiacano (1996) found in her study of students of mixed races that constructivist instruction greatly enhanced the achievement of students in heterogeneously grouped classes. Although students' perceptions were examined in various categories, the purpose of the study was to determine if perceptions differed. This information was attained to ascertain whether constructivist pedagogy is effective for all categories of students. This study was not conducted with the intention to justify teaching students differently in the various categories. It was to determine a more effective method of teaching all students. Goodlad (1984) asserted in an interview with Stone (1999) that the purpose of schools needs to change. Schools must begin to help students think critically and construct meaning for themselves. Students no longer need help in accessing information. The body of existing information is already available to students. It is no longer necessary for schools to provide it. Constructivist pedagogy provides teaching strategies, active student involvement, and student interaction that lead to increased achievement as students construct their own understandings (Dewey, 1986; Piaget, 1959; Prawat, 2000).

Constructivist pedagogy has significant implications for facilitating an Afrocentric curriculum. Loiacano (1996) found that constructivist pedagogy is effective

for all categories of students. Based on the findings of Pasteur and Toldson (1982), constructivist theory is closely related to African philosophy, including the conception of the interdependency of all things. A comparison of constructivist theory with African philosophy reveals a solid relationship between the two. Constructivism is a holistic approach to learning that involves students in building, or constructing, their own understanding. Students are engaged in democratic, critical, learning as they develop meaning through inquiry and imagination rather than through unquestioned acceptance of prevailing ideas (Anderson, 1988; Dewey, 1986; Vygotsky, 1990).

Pasteur and Toldson (1982) revealed countless instances in African culture in which a holistic approach is used to develop meaning. Holism is expressed through the interaction of the intellect, emotions, and psychomotor skills when learning. This holistic approach continues through the individual's connection with nature, including unity with all other beings, objects, animals, and plants. The individual is united with others through the family, the clan, the tribe, and with nature. Emotional power is produced through this interdependency of action. It triggers the imagination, motivating individuals to achieve (Pasteur & Toldson, 1982).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy is characterized as teaching that empowers students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This teaching helps minority students to develop a relevant cultural identity that encourages them to strive for academic excellence. Teachers adopt instructional methodologies that target students' strengths and provide them with the opportunity to view topics from the perspective of the minority group to which they belong. Curriculum materials manifest

cultural sensitivity, varying perspectives, and authenticity; controversial topics are addressed proactively, and teachers clarify any biases in the materials (Irvine. 1992). Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers capable of making effective judgments and providing refined solutions to cultural and real social problems.

Culturally responsive educators recognize that minority or diverse students have many strengths that are not measured on achievement or intelligence tests. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), many teachers report that achievement tests do not test what children really know, and that all students can be successful at something. Culturally responsive teachers use a variety of assessments to provide opportunities for their students to demonstrate their understanding and learning in different ways. Students create projects (i.e., songs, poems, books, and plays) to reflect their learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

An Afrocentric approach to education adheres to the characteristics of a culturally relevant pedagogy as espoused by Ladson-Billings (1994). An effective African centered pedagogy includes seven components, as outlined by Lee, Lomotey, and Shujaa (1990),

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

7. supports cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness (Lee, Lomotey, and Shujaa, 1990, p. 50).

Students deserve the opportunity to learn in the manner that is most effective for them. Constructivist and culturally relevant teaching methodologies allow African American students to determine how they will learn, which allows them to use their preferred learning styles to accomplish tasks that have been assigned. Constructivist and culturally relevant instruction gives students a voice in deciding what they will learn, thereby giving them more control in determining the learning style they will apply to accomplish a task.

Teacher Development and Training

In order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum, Bunting (1999) and Fullan (1996) supported the notion that teacher empowerment is essential in order for reform to bring about maximum student achievement. Teacher development that prepares teachers to relinquish the role of expert transmitter of knowledge, but instead to become a facilitator, moves towards helping students to begin to construct their own knowledge. Teachers can become better facilitators when they work with one another in a positive school culture (Bunting, 1999; Michael G. Fullan, 1990).

In order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum that addresses African American students' learning styles, teacher training schools must prepare teachers to view themselves as learners. Irvine (1992) asserted that in order for a teacher education program to foster diversity, future teachers must be provided with a basic understanding of the best method to restructure teaching so that all students have equal access to knowledge. Irvine stressed that if teacher-training programs do not make major reforms to meet the needs of diverse student populations, the future of public education will not

be promising. Major reforms require context oriented instruction and teaching materials, reflection and critical inquiry in teaching, redefinition of the teachers' role, experiences that facilitate immersion of teachers into the cultures of students of color, and training to develop interpersonal skills.

Shade (1995) also noted the need to implement a teacher education program organized around a multicultural paradigm. Shade contended that this organizing concept requires a transformation of the curriculum and pedagogical strategies, and must ultimately induce a different manner of perceiving and functioning by the faculty and students. The need to address the multicultural paradigm is especially important in a predominantly White school and demands a prototypical shift that affords a social, intellectual, and emotional challenge for everyone. For the purpose of this study, the same principles could apply to the Afrocentric paradigm.

Hendricks-Lee et al. (1995) contended that whatever the reform is, it will not be successful unless teacher learning is a primary component. They held that learning for students and teachers is the primary purpose of schooling. The contention was that teachers must see themselves as learners in order to create the intellectual environment necessary for learning. The findings of Hendricks-Lee et al. (1995) revealed that when teachers view themselves as learners, they are willing to examine the knowledge base and misconceptions of students in order to use information gained to determine appropriate instructional activities. In addition, universities must begin to teach the importance of this reflection and encourage decreasing the distance between colleges of education and public schools, thereby promoting collaboration and treating teachers and students as partners (Hendricks-Lee, Soled, & Yinger, 1995). The workshop designed for professional educators should have six basic objectives:

1. to promote awareness of African American student characteristics and learning needs,
2. to increase positive attitudes toward African American students and their uniqueness,
3. to expand teachers' backgrounds in content areas appropriate for African American student learning,
4. to provide information about types of differentiated programs and build teaching strategies appropriate for African American students,
5. to enhance skills for working effectively with African American students,
6. to generate enthusiasm for programs that provide differentiated learning opportunities for a wide range of African American student abilities and needs. (Hendricks-Lee et al., 1995; Irvine, 1992).

African American students, in particular, are often not inspired by teachers who are not sensitive to and/or identify with their culture (Boateng, 1990). When educators fail to appreciate these differences, these children are restricted in achieving their full educational potential (Boateng, 1990). Lopez' (1995) study investigated the relationship between how students' learning styles, attributes, educational requirements and teacher skills, abilities, and knowledge affect student performance. The teacher's ethnicity and gender, class size, and pupil per classroom were analyzed to determine what student diversity/teacher capacity affected classroom student performance for kindergarten through sixth grade students. The findings that were significant with regard to race and learning styles were that African American and Hispanic teachers are able to maximize student performance in classrooms where the teacher's ethnicity was the same as the students. This result indicates that young African American students have a positive

school experience when they have teachers with whom they identify.

In addition to the possibility that African American students may be affected by having teachers with whom they identify, teachers' placement of students in low-ability groups also indicates the need for teachers to be sensitive to African Americans' feelings of self-worth, which may affect their ability to obtain an optimal education. Smith-Maddox's (Smith-Maddox, 1999) study used cross-sectional data from 3,009 African American eighth graders who participated in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, a National Center for Education Statistics large-scale, nationally representative, longitudinal study. It was designed to collect data on the experiences of eighth graders as they made the transition from middle or junior high school to high school. Teachers were asked. "Which of the following best describes the achievement level of the eighth graders in this class compared with the average eighth-grade student in this school? (higher, average, lower, and heterogeneous classes with widely differing achievement levels)." Results indicated that placement in low-ability groups is related to lower educational aspirations for African American eighth graders. The researchers indicate that it may be that placement in low-ability groups heightens educational inequalities by the unequal distribution of academic resources. In addition, this finding draws attention to the influence of the teacher in determining access to learning resources. These results indicate that that ability-group placement may have an effect on the African American eighth-grade students' educational aspirations and thus affect their ability to have an optimal learning experience.

Positive School Culture

In order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum, a positive school culture must exist, and key factors should exist to facilitate school change. Fullan (1990) acceded to

the need for and detailed a procedure for building a school culture that facilitates maximum student achievement. Finnán and Hopfenberg (1997) asserted that four key factors facilitated school change. The factors were: acknowledgment of the role played by the school's existing culture in shaping reform, involvement of the total school community in decisions and implementation of change, clear philosophy, and systematic process for training to achieve desired change. Finnán and Hopfenberg (1997) conducted an ethnographic study of a middle school in the first year of participation in the Accelerated Schools Project, a comprehensive approach to school change, presenting a philosophy about academic acceleration and offering a specific process for achieving it. The urban school studied served a mixed student population of African Americans, Whites, and Hispanics. The purpose was to examine factors that influenced the implementation of the project and to determine the extent to which it became integrated into the school. The researchers found that any previous efforts to reform the school had to be considered. They also found that if reform were not incorporated into the culture of the school, it would be resisted. Likewise, when reform was incorporated into the existing culture, students, teachers, administrators, and parents functioned as a team. Teachers were enthusiastic and concerned about students, while empowering the members of the school community permitted changes to grow within the existing school culture. Incorporating reform into the existing culture gave teachers, administrators, students, and parents ownership, thereby advancing commitment to its development.

In Fullan's (1990) model, positive school culture is developed through ongoing staff development that is related to institutional development. Institutional development facilitates changes in the school, increases capacity and performance, and leads to continuous improvement. A school with a positive culture is an effective one, and

effectiveness is determined by the academic achievement of the students (Michael G. Fullan, 1990).

Huffard (Hufford, 1998), in her study, attempted to ascertain which factors are present in effective schools. Hufford compared the perceptions of low and high achieving students in low achieving middle schools with the perceptions of low and high achieving students from high achieving middle schools, regarding seven specific factors generally found in effective schools: teacher expectations, discipline, communication, curriculum, teacher/student relationships, motivation, and sense of community in school. The purpose was to determine if students in high and low achieving middle schools had the same perceptions of their learning environment.

The findings revealed that although high achieving and low achieving students viewed the various school factors very differently, students in lower achieving schools had a lower level of expectancy in all seven areas than did students in higher achieving schools. These results support the position of Fullan (1990), who expressed a need for positive school culture.

Parental Involvement

In order to implement an Afrocentric curriculum and ensure that the students benefit from the learning environment, parental involvement is necessary. Research indicates that African American parents are concerned about their children's plight in the public school system, which further warrants their involvement (Smith-Maddox, 1999). According to Madhubuti (1994), some African American parents believe that the public school system poses a threat to the future survival of the African American race:

In America, people of African descent are caught between a hurricane and a volcano when it comes to the acquisition of life-giving and life-sustaining

knowledge. Too many of our children are trapped in urban school systems that have been programmed for failure; and, all too often, the answer to what is to be done to correct this injustice is left in the very hands of those most responsible for the problem. (Madhubuti, 1994, p. 7)

Instead of leaving the solution to what should be done for the children in the hands of those most responsible, as indicated by Madhubuti (1994), African American parents have become involved, and the students have benefited. Smith-Maddox's (1999) study investigated African American parents' involvement with their eighth-grade children's school-related activities. The results indicate that the greater the parental involvement in school-related activities, the higher their children's aspirations. The students indicated that their parents' involvement consisted of attending a school meeting, speaking to teacher or counselor, visiting classes, and attending a school event. This finding indicates that African American eighth-grade students whose parents participate in school-related activities are benefited, as the children expressed that they had high aspirations for themselves. The results also indicate that involved parents are more informed and more influential regarding retention, promotion, course/track placement, and getting their children into specialized programs. These findings are significant because they confirm that regardless of social class, strong ties with parents are critical to the formation of educational aspirations of African American eighth graders.

In addition to African American students benefiting from immediate family involvement in school-related activities, the family's management practices in the home are influential. Taylor's (1996) study examined 135 African American adolescents 14 to 19 years old to determine the relations among kinship support, family management, and adolescent adjustment. In addition to investigating the extent of the family's organized

home environment, the extent to which the student's parents were involved in their school-related activities were considered. Results indicated that the more the home is organized, and the more the parents are involved in school related activities, the better students did in school. Parental involvement manifested itself in less problem behavior, more self-reliance, and higher grades. These results are significant because they confirm the value of parental involvement, as indicated by this study's report of psychological distress for adolescents who perceive that their families are not reliable for support, a factor that can impede the students' ability to obtain an optimal education (Taylor, 1996).

As with school involvement and family organization, an authoritative parenting style affects students' success. Blair's (1997) study examined the demographic and family characteristics of 116 academically successful, low-income African American adolescents. The study investigated the students' perceptions of their parents' role in their success, and whether parents used an authoritative parenting style. Results indicated that African American adolescents whose parents used an authoritative parenting style score higher on measures of psychosocial development and mental health. Students reported that they experienced high level of emotional closeness with their parents. The results also indicate that low income adolescents are able to succeed academically and should not be expected to do otherwise just because of the socioeconomic status (Blair, 1997).

Although research indicates that children who come from a dual-parent home have more positive effects from parental involvement than those who do not, other research indicates that children from single-parent households also benefit from parental involvement. Research that supports the belief that dual-parent families are more conducive to the child's academic success is contained in a study conducted by Brooks-Gunn, Guo, and Furstenberg (1993). This 20-year study of 250 African American

children in households consisting of teenage mothers found that the presence of the father in the household is a positive predictor of high school graduation.

Contrary to the results that indicate the benefits of dual-parental involvement, Ford's (1993) study of 148 9-14 year-old African American children indicated that family configuration has little or no affect on student achievement. Results showed that strong parental achievement orientation as perceived by children was significantly related to their achievement motivation. Family demographic variables contribute little to achievement orientation. Ford's (1993) findings confirmed previous research conducted by Dornbusch, Ritter and Steinberg (1991) and Brady, Tucker, Harris, & Tribble (1992). Brady, Tucker, Harris, & Tribble's (1992) study showed that family configuration was not important for African American students. Dornbusch, Ritter, and Steinberg's (1991) research that included 382 African American high school students from single households, found a consistent positive relationship between their one parent's involvement and their grades.

Except for one aspect, Battle's (1998) study confirmed the findings of Ford (1993), Dornbusch, Ritter, and Steinberg (1991) and Brady, Tucker, Harris, & Tribble (1992). Battle's (1998) study of African American middle-grade students demonstrated that the performance of students in single versus dual-parent families depends significantly on their socioeconomic status. The results indicate that lower levels of socioeconomic African American students in single-parent families score significantly higher than do those in dual-parent families. Battle found this result surprising and attributed it to more parental control in the absence of another supportive parent. One study confirms his conclusion. Brody et al.'s (1994) study of African American youth found that higher-level socioeconomic status families were less depressed and more

optimistic. Children in these families were found to be better able to control their behavior and achieve higher grades. Battle's study (1990) also revealed that at the mean socioeconomic status, there was no significant difference in scores between African American students in single and dual-parent families, and at higher and the highest level, African American students in dual-parent families significantly outscored their counterparts in single-parent families.

The above research confirms the importance of family involvement in their African American children's school related activities. In addition, the community has been shown to be just as important, which African Americans embrace when echoing the sentiments of the African saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." This sentiment was addressed in Hillary Clinton's best selling book, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (1996). According to Clinton (1996), "One of the most powerful truths about families is that they cannot be strong unless they are surrounded by a strong community" (p. 70). An extended network that includes family, teachers, peers, and church make up the American counterpart of the African village. Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, and Johnson (1990) found a positive relationship between the community cultural and social resources and the families of African American youth. Similarly, a major finding of research conducted by Bowser and Perkins (1991) indicated the positive influence of non-parental sources on African American youth.

In addition to community influence, friends and peers positively benefit African American youth. Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, and Royster (1991) found that among African American males, a strong friendship that entailed support had a positive effect on their academic achievement. Steinberg, Dornbush, and Brown's (1992) large-scale study found a positive relationship between academic achievement and peer academic support

for African American youth. **In** addition to peer involvement, Bowser and Perkins (1990) found that teacher involvement, which involved a personal mentoring relationship, correlated positively with academic achievement.

The research presented in this section overwhelmingly indicates that it takes more than the school environment to positively benefit and influence the African American child. A loving, nurturing family, supportive peers, strong community/church support, and teachers who are mentors are necessary to foster positive aspirations and academic achievement, and reinforce the assertion that "it takes a village to raise a child."

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

In summary, African American students are alienated when their heritage is not acknowledged or declared valueless, which has historically been the case in the United States. On the other hand, due to the Eurocentric approach, Caucasian students have experienced cultural validation. As Black empowerment became a national issue with the abolishment of slavery, Afrocentrism has gradually become an issue in education. Many attempts at reform have been made to accommodate African American students to remedy previous injustice. The needs of African American children have dictated that new ways should be found to improve their education experience. This improvement can only be accomplished through the integration of the education system and the community, to help all students adjust to an education system that would be more equal for all concerned.

Asante predicts, "Future historians will write that no intellectual idea has been so maligned in the 20th century as Afrocentric theory, the idea that African people are agents and actors in history" (Asante, 1996, p. 31). Whether or not this prediction comes true in the future, in today's world it is clear that an Afrocentric curriculum has many proponents and is viable in some school districts throughout the nation. The research question that guided this thesis, "What is the feasibility of incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum in K-12 public school systems, which provides instruction geared toward African American students' learning styles?" has been grappled with in the third chapter, and in doing so we find that implementing an Afrocentric curriculum is a necessity. The inferiority paradigm that Blacks have been forced to live with in public schools is no longer a viable option in a country renowned for its democratic ideology. Instead of being made to feel inferior, African American students, as well as other ethnic groups

sharing classes with them, should be made aware that it is right to take pride in one's culture, whatever that culture may be. Empowering African American students by validating their culture through teaching them their role as primary actors in world history will be helpful in raising consciousness not only in African American students, but also in those around them.

While it is unequivocally necessary to implement a system whereby African Americans can claim their own cultural pride at school, caution should, however, be exercised when incorporating an Afrocentric curriculum within the K-12 public school system. Several factors play a role in the success or failure of such an implementation. As the Review research shows, an Afrocentric curriculum is viable if Afrocentric instructional materials are adopted that address African culture and history (Redd, 1993), such as the text, *African American Baseline Essays*; knowledge of the learning styles of African American students that facilitate learning are considered (Dunn and Dunn 1992; 1993; Kolb and Smith 1986. cited in Matthews & Hamby 1995); Constructivist and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches are adopted to facilitate intellectual development (Loiacano, 1996); teacher training is given high priority (Lopez, 1995; Smith-Maddox, 1999); a positive school culture exists (Finnan and Hopfenberg 1997; Hufford, 1998); the need for parental involvement is addressed (Blair, 1997; Smith-Maddox, 1999; Taylor; 1996) . Failing to consider and implement all of these characteristics of a successful Afrocentric curriculum can lead to less desirable results (Hopkins, 1997).

The curriculum of the school and the instructional materials used to impart knowledge, skills, information, and experiences are powerful forces that control the kind of education children receive. Therefore, schools should convey a message of democracy

and inclusion of all students. It would, for example, defeat the very democracy that is sought if texts used in Afrocentric classes vent frustration by blaming the Europeans from all centuries past for fallacies in traditional history school texts. Cultural sensitivity is thus of prime import. It is vitally important to convey to all ethnic groups within a classroom the validity of all histories, and the facts as seen from various points of view. Thus, importance of conveying an Afrocentric message should not be done to the detriment of the European or, indeed, any other culture represented in the classroom or the school. As Asante states:

It does not take away from the universality of man to have a particular culture or history to stand as one's center since all cultures share certain universal traits; but, they do not necessarily resemble each other. [It's simply that] Afrocentricity resembles the black man, speaks to him, looks like, and wants for him what he wants for himself. (Asante, 1988, p vii)

Eurocentric or any ethnocentric based education, therefore, does not have to conflict with an Afrocentric educational philosophy. All centrist curriculums can peacefully coexist and be mutually beneficial for all students. It is the teacher's job to create balance and bring relevance to the curriculum. Here teacher training plays an important role.

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), there is a need for more and better scholarly investigations of the pedagogy of those teachers who are successful with African American learners and a need to develop a more extensive network for advocacy on behalf of African American learners. Acceptance of these core needs establishes the framework for content changes, but the demonstration and implementation of pedagogical and other curricular approaches depend upon the underlying attitudes of the faculty. "Herein lies the potential conflict and inhibitor of a complete paradigm shift, for

most teacher educators do not fully comprehend how to translate these ideas into their own teaching and practice because of their previous history and experience" (Shade, 1995, p. 379). Altering the faculty's perceptions to facilitate an Afrocentric orientation requires the exploration of new possibilities to strengthen the intellectual atmosphere of the classroom and should include new materials, ideas, perspectives, and a different knowledge base. **In** a wider sense, the school environment and atmosphere should be positive, flexible, and conducive to constructive change, which would benefit all involved parties. The implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum should receive support from all teaching staff in order to make it a success.

Therefore, in order to facilitate an Afrocentric curriculum, "Teacher education faculty must reexamine their definitions of accepted classroom behavior, the nature of intellectual work, the nature of school subjects, and how prospective teachers should be taught in order to promote better learning" (Shade, 1995, p. 379).

The historical legacy of racial discrimination in the United States points to the need for continued recognition of cultural diversity (Woodson, 1933). Du Bois (1935), Woodson (1933), Karenga (1980), and Asante (1987) pointed to the failure of the public school system and challenged African Americans to develop a new system for themselves. Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, many African American educators and parents have found the Afrocentric curriculum to be a viable option. The Constructivist teaching approach calls for the deconstruction of the view of a teacher as the expert transmitter of knowledge. Instead, the teacher, as facilitator, plays the role of partner in learning with the students. This approach has proven to be beneficial for all learning styles and curricula, and thus would be excellent for an Afrocentric school environment. Students and teachers can then work together in learning about the African

American culture in a situation where cultural sensitivity and support are optimized. This collaborative spirit eliminates the historical practice of grouping people of a race all together and identifying each individual with regard to the stereotypes of the whole group. Efforts toward the promotion of a respect for diversity offer an opportunity to engage in a historical reckoning with one's racial past and to imagine a different future.

This future could indeed be very exciting, if all concerned parties could respect each other's differences. In-depth studies should be conducted within the school system in order to effectively find ways to improve the entire system. Data also needs to be collected and studies need to be conducted on the sustainability of implementing, and feasibility of, an Afrocentric curriculum. Lastly, the development of multicultural curriculum as it relates to centric curricula development has not been discussed in this study. This relationship needs to be formulated. Doing so will assist students, teachers, and parents to work together on finding ways in which an equal respect can be cultivated among all the diverse groups in the school system.

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