AFRICENTRIC LITERACY PEDAGOGY

Integrating Africentric Literacy Pedagogy into Mainstream Classrooms:

Inspirations from Africentric Teachers

By:

Natalie Ann Davis

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This study explores how two teachers enact Africentric literacy pedagogy as a means of engaging Black students typically disenfranchised by mainstream approaches to education. Through semi-structured interviews with these teachers, this qualitative research study uses the paradigms of Africentricity, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), and critical consciousness to explore their everyday classroom practices. Scholarly analyses related to the findings of this research are also presented. Within this study, I examine barriers confronting Black student literacy engagement, such as a lack of materials related to students’ identities and cultural deficit models of education. As the findings of this research elucidate, Africentric literacy pedagogy has the potential to heighten Black student literacy engagement through: CRRP-inspired literature and activities; the fostering of cultural, familial, and communal connections; spiritual, kinesthetic, and arts-based opportunities; and, the prioritization of passion, care, and love within teaching practices. Despite the promises offered by Africentric literacy pedagogy, however, limited recognition has been given to this pedagogical concept within academia and education. As such, my goal is to inspire and challenge readers of this study to seriously consider this pedagogy as a framework worthy of academic research and implementation within mainstream classrooms.

Key Words:

Africentric education, Afrocentric, literacy pedagogy, Black student engagement, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, critical consciousness, cultural deficit model, spirituality and hope in education, Nguzo Saba.
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Integrating Africentric Literacy Pedagogy into Mainstream Classrooms:

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

“Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, revelling in our differences; this is what brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.”

- hooks, b. Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (2003), p.197

1.1 Introduction to the Research Study

I open this paper with a quote from bell hooks. In this quote, hooks eloquently speaks to the battle of oppression. In this battle are two forces: dominator culture and those who fall outside of that culture. Translated into educational terms, these forces can be seen to represent the dynamics that exist within the classroom. The first force representing teachers, who tirelessly attempt to engage students through traditional approaches to pedagogy; the other force representing students, who year after year, generation after generation, continue to reject such pedagogy that does little to affirm their identities.

In this paper I will discuss this battle as it relates to Black students and mainstream approaches to literacy pedagogy. However, instead of focusing my discussion on the war of oppression, I will instead attempt to inform avenues for responding to it. The avenue I investigate in this study is the integration of Africentric literacy pedagogy into mainstream classrooms as a framework to engage Black students who have fallen behind.

According to literature cited from several authors, Africentric literacy pedagogy can be described as instructional strategies that use literature featuring Black characters or Black cultural experiences as a way of celebrating Black identity (Gilbert, Dorie,
Harvey, and Belgrave, 2009; Harris, 2009; Shockley, 2011). As well, the themes typically highlighted in this type of pedagogy are notions of interdependence, perseverance, spirituality, and hope—ideals which are all endemic in traditional African cultures.

As many authors have noted, this type of approach to education has long been treated as one that is exclusive to Africentric schools or Black teachers who share a common history with many of the students in question (Galabuzi, 2008; Shockley, 2011). However, when considering this topic as the basis of my research, several questions came to mind, which I believed challenge the notion that Africentricity is exclusive: what if Africentric literacy pedagogy was open to teachers from all racial backgrounds within mainstream schools? What would the teaching strategies used within this approach look like? Furthermore, how could mainstream teachers use these strategies to effectively engage Black students currently disenfranchised by Eurocentric/Judeo-Christian approaches to literacy in mainstream schools? (Neville, 2004; Shockley, 2011).

Though this idea may seem radical to some, especially considering many of the myths and misunderstandings surrounding Africentric education (Hampton, 2010; Galabuzi, 2008), it is one that I believed should be taken seriously, especially considering the enormous issues facing Black students in schools across the Canada and the US (TDSB Census Portrait, 2011; Neville, 2004).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how Africentric teachers use Africentric pedagogy as a means of engaging their students with literacy. As such, the goal was to inspire all teachers to adopt these strategies into mainstream curriculum as a way of connecting with Black students who statistically fall behind when it comes to literacy.
Based on extensive analysis from researchers, such as the aforementioned, it goes without saying that Black students across Canada and the US face a crisis when it comes to education (TDSB Census Portrait, 2011; Neville, 2004). This is especially true as it pertains to literacy—a subject in which students are often asked to relate their life experiences to what they learn in school. Although much attention has been given to the Black student achievement gap in the US, Black students in Canada face similar challenges: disengagement with literacy that does not reflect their cultural identities and realities; and, teachers who are culturally or racially disconnected from the Black student experience (Pino, 2004; Oslick, 2011). Based on my own analysis, much of the literature concerning the Black student achievement gap centres on problems within the Black community rather than solutions that will help these students rise academically (Hampton, 2010; Pino, 2004).

A scholarly search for “Black student achievement gap” yields endless results with statistical analysis exposing issues that, although startling, are apparent in classrooms across Canada and the US. According to the 2011 Toronto District School Board Census (TDSB Census Portrait, 2011), which profiles racialized groups within Toronto schools, Black students rank the lowest academically compared to the overall population: “Fewer Black students meet or exceed the provincial standard (Level 3) on Gr. 6 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests for Reading and Writing, and even fewer meet the standard on the EQAO Mathematics test; also, fewer pass the Gr. 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) (2011)” (TDSB, 2011, p.6). With this, it can be said that despite the efforts of researchers and educators alike, serious issues continue to plague Black students when it comes to academic achievement. However, instead of focusing on the problems facing these students, I chose to use the platform I am privileged to have—through academic research—as a means of offering
solutions. Though the task seemed daunting—especially considering many of the deeply-rooted and controversial issues that have surrounded the Black Diaspora for centuries (Gilbert et al. 2009, p.243), I believed it was a task worthy of the effort.

In the following research paper, I have focused on pedagogy that aims to make a difference; pedagogy that aims to solve the issues facing Black students and literacy rather than magnify them—essentially pedagogy, through Africentricism, that offers hope.

According to Webb (2012), hope is crucial for engaging students in the classroom: “A key role of the high-hope teacher is goal setting, working individually with each pupil to identify a specific objective of hope and then to support and guide the pupil in their endeavours to achieve this goal” (Webb, 2012, p.407). With this, Webb asserts that when teachers believe in the power of using hope in the classroom, they encourage students to set goals that will help foster academic success. Hooks (2003) also believes in using hope as a tool to help students feel validated by their education. As she asserts: “In the last twenty years, educators who have dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism, or class elitism have created a pedagogy of hope” (hooks, 2003, p.xiv). Here, it can be said that when teachers fail to recognize the immense power that hope plays in student achievement—particularly as it concerns students of colour—they also fail to connect with these students in ways that affirm their identities.

1.3 Research Questions

The following central question was used to frame my research:

1. How do Africentric teachers use Africentric literacy pedagogy as a means of engaging Black students?
I also generated three sub-questions, which addressed other key issues in my paper:

- What are the most challenging factors faced when engaging Black students with literacy?
- How, if at all, do notions of hope and/or spirituality factor in these teachers’ literacy pedagogy?
- How do Africentric teachers know that they are making inroads with their students when it comes to literacy?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

My journey towards this research topic actually happened over the course of my entire life—beginning with my experiences as a student in elementary school, which inadvertently inspired my quest to make a difference as a teacher.

As a Black student growing up in Toronto in the 1980s and 90s, I certainly experienced (and witnessed) many of the racial inequities that continue to persist within the Canadian education system today (Hampton, 2010, p.103). Although I was one of the strongest students in my class when it came to literacy, I remember feeling rather disconnected from the entire educational system. Adding to my feelings of disconnection, I also recall observing most of the Black students in my class being placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and being categorized as “slow learners.” As a result of the segregation that took place within the classroom, I also recall Black students participating much less in class than students from other races. Furthermore, I recall the book shelves in the school library as well as the classrooms being filled with stories of blonde-haired, blue-eyed princesses (Cinderella); tales of European settlers “heroically” conquering new lands (Christopher Columbus); and, fairytales that featured White children as central characters (Jack and the Beanstalk). What I do not recall, however,
were any stories that affirmed my identity as a Black female student; any characters who looked like me; or, any stories that made me feel like part of the “storyline.” I, along with my Black peers, were made to feel like outsiders in our classrooms—oftentimes without our teachers seeming to notice.

When I decided to embark on a journey into teaching, I decided that I would make it my mission to have a positive impact on the lives of students of colour. In order to put this mission into action, I worked as a volunteer for an Africentric school called Hughes Academy (pseudonym) from 2010 to 2013 (prior to entering teacher education at the University of Toronto). Before volunteering at Hughes Academy, I, like many Torontonians, had biases about Africentric education. My biases centred on the belief that schools that cater specifically to racialized groups (especially in the 21st century), perpetuate segregation. My central question concerning this type of educational approach was: “What type of impact would Centric education have on Black students already marginalized in Canadian society?” I wondered how Hughes Academy would help their students become global citizens who would be able to relate to people from other races. I wondered if Black students who receive an Africentric education develop a greater sense of identity than Black students who attend mainstream schools. Based on the fact that I am a teacher, I also wondered how teachers in Africentric schools differed from mainstream teachers. Moreover, I questioned how I—having had limited exposure to Africentric literacy pedagogy—could actually make a difference in these children’s lives. In order to shape my thesis, I focused on three key observations that I made during my time at Hughes Academy:

1) A nearly 100% Black student/Black teacher ratio.

2) A wealth of Black children’s literature being used in the classrooms.
3) A strong and positive bond between teachers and students that seemed inspiring to me as an aspiring teacher.

Based on my two-year tenure as a volunteer at Hughes Academy, I was curious about how these factors impacted the teacher/student experience in the classroom. As well, the longer I observed the school dynamic, the clearer it became that what I was witnessing contradicted both my experiences as a Black student growing up in Toronto, as well as social assumptions I had encountered about Black student learning. Although at the time of my volunteer tenure I had no intentions of pursuing research work, I knew that what I was observing seemed different from what I had become accustomed to seeing in the media about the Black community. Firstly, I observed a much larger ratio of Black male teachers at Hughes Academy than I had ever seen in mainstream schools. As well, I noticed that the rapport these Black male teachers had with their students (especially Black boys), seemed genuine and positive. These teachers and students were often seen laughing and relating to each other in much the same way that I envisioned two brothers, or even a father and son relating.

In many ways, these relations dispelled what Cohen coined “moral panic” (Cohen, 1972, p.585) typically associated with Black men in popular culture: depictions of Black men as threatening; absentee fathers; controversies surrounding the Black male incarceration rate; and the lack of education amongst Black men; just to name a few (p.586). These contradictions were the very things that helped me realize that my observations could, perhaps, help dispel myths that have likely contributed to the continuum of the Black student achievement gap. Although I was in no way assuming that I could single-handedly close the achievement gap through my research, I believed that my efforts could make a difference in the lives of Black students who are typically disengaged in school.
When I was presented with the opportunity to conduct a Master’s research study in the area of teaching, the Africentric education model was a subject that immediately came to mind. However, instead of attempting to promote the benefits of Africentric institutions, I wanted to uncover ways that this type of educational model could be adopted by teachers everywhere. Through my observations, I witnessed positive dynamics between teachers and Black students that I believed could serve as a model for mainstream teachers—especially those struggling to build positive relationships with Black students. Moreover, as a new teacher, I found it inspiring that the teachers at Hughes Academy seemed to have made inroads with students who typically feel disconnected from the educational system.

Despite my observations, however, the purpose of my study was not so much to promote the benefits of Hughes Academy, nor was it an attempt to argue that Black teachers are the answer to solving issues that plague Black students when it comes to literacy. Instead, the purpose of my study was to explore the ways in which all teachers could adopt elements of Africentric literacy pedagogy as a means of engaging Black students.

It is through this very lens that I approached my research topic. A lens through which I dually embodied a Black student disenfranchised by the Canadian educational system, and a Black researcher enlightened to the promises offered through Africentric pedagogy. Ultimately, the goal of my research was two-fold: (1) to expose all teachers to the possibilities offered through Africentric pedagogy; and (2) to help demystify some of the myths surrounding Black student learning through the insight of Africentric teachers who have positively impacted the lives of Black students through their literacy pedagogy.
1.5 Overview

Chapter 2 of my paper contains a review of literature that looks at dynamics which exist between Black students and teachers across Canada and the US. In Chapter 3 I describe the research methodology and procedures used in this study, including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. In Chapter 4 I report the research findings. Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss these findings and their implications for me as a beginning teacher, and I make recommendations for teachers and scholars hoping to explore this topic further.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding the Black Student Experience

The *Black student experience* is a phenomenon that has been discussed by many authors to describe the unique experiences that Black students face in schools across the US and Canada (Gonsalves, 2002; Pino, 2004; Hampton, 2010). While some authors offer suggestions on how to make this experience more enriching for both teachers and students alike, many address the challenges faced by Black students when it comes to education (Gonsalves, 2002; Pino, 2004; Hampton, 2010).

Although much of the literature concerning the Black student experience addresses statistics pertaining to schools in the US, data stemming from Canada indicate similar issues in Canadian schools. As stated in Chapter 1, when compared to the overall academic achievement amongst Toronto students, Black students rank the lowest (TDSB, 2011, p.6). Based on these facts it can be said that Black students face immense challenges when it comes to successfully completing subjects necessary for graduation. Furthermore, it can be said that the statistics from the TDSB reveal that current strategies used by teachers and schools alike to engage Black students with literacy are simply not working.

Although Gonsalves (2002) explores the Black student experience in the US, her analysis points to similar issues discovered by the TDSB. In her analysis, Gonsalves looks at some of the factors that she believes contribute to the communication breakdown between White teachers and Black male students. As she explains, “The most supportive relationships that develop between Black students and White faculty grow out of genuine caring on the faculty members' part, rather than specific programs designed to bring Black students and White faculty together” (Gonsalves, 2002, p.437). By this, Gonsalves
believes that when White teachers take an active role in engaging Black students, they help encourage a deeper relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Gonsalves’s research also reveals that Black male students who interact frequently with White teachers have a lesser chance of feeling discriminated against than Black students who interact less frequently with White faculty (p.463).

Although Gonsalves (2002) analyzes college students in her research, I believe her findings can be applied to the overarching experiences of marginalization faced by many Black students of all ages. In other words, despite the fact that Gonsalves does not address the experiences of elementary school children (as my research does), I believe the issues of marginalization which she highlights are common to many Black students of all ages, especially when considering the statistics revealed by the TDSB census portrait. As Gonsalves points out, when White teachers are willing to initiate positive contact with Black male students, the relationship is enhanced two-fold. Firstly, teachers become more devoted to student learning and making a difference in students’ lives. Secondly, students become more receptive to allowing teachers to engage with them on a deeper level. With this, Gonsalves’s findings parallel Shockley’s (2011) analysis of the role that Afrocentric teachers play in engaging Black students.

In her article, Neville (2004) also examines the Black student experience by exploring the various race-related stressors that affect African American post-secondary students attending predominantly White institutions. According to Neville, “Black college students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs), on average, experience additional stress related to being a racial minority in a predominantly White setting (e.g., Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000) and that this additional stress affects their adjustment process (Anderson, 1988; Edmunds, 1984; Henderson, 1988; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989)” (Neville, 2004, p.601). Here, Neville explains how issues of
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racism that affect Blacks in everyday society parallel the experiences that these students have in the classroom. Furthermore, Neville’s findings reveal that Black students report greater levels of race-related stress (e.g. racial insensitivity by professors) (p.599) than do other minority students (p.600). Moreover, as Neville indicates, race-related stressors experienced by Black students “were significant predictors of psychological well-being (Smedley, 1988), and (c) perceived stressors and coping strategies predicted 1st-year GPA over and above SAT scores” (p.601).

Neville’s (2004) findings indicate that Black students typically face immense challenges when it comes to feeling validated by their education. Furthermore, the affect that these challenges have on Black students’ GPA scores shows that race-related stressors can place burdens on overall academic achievement. Although, like Gonsalves (2002), Neville’s article focuses on college students, her analysis also parallels data found in the TDSB census portrait. In this respect, Neville’s findings indicate two important factors related to the Black student experience: Firstly, they reveal the long-term effects that race-related stressors can have on Black students’ achievement throughout their lives; Secondly, they serve as a means of comparing stressors faced by Black college students and (particularly for my research) Black elementary school students.

In his research, Pino (2004) also looks at the ongoing debate concerning the Black/White student achievement gap in US schools. In his exploration of the Black student experience, Pino examines the “concept of academic ethic” (p.113), and states that “the academic ethic is learned behavior and those who possess it ‘place their studies above leisure activities; study on a daily basis or near-daily basis; and study in a disciplined, intense, and sober fashion’” (qtd. in Pino, 2004, p.116). By this, Pino asserts that teachers are integral to fostering the level of academic ethic that each student possesses. Furthermore, Pino believes that academic ethic “should lead to higher levels of
academic achievement” (p.117) for Black students. In other words, based on Pino’s (2004) analysis, it can be said that when teachers encourage Black students to develop a sense of academic ethics (i.e. pride in their work and a drive to succeed) (p.113), these students are more likely to rise to the expectations set forth for them.

Similar to Gonsalves (2002) and Neville (2004), Pino’s (2004) research offers statistical insight into the Black/White student achievement gap. For example, Pino states that “the poor quality of schooling delivered in many quarters of the Black community, particularly in the inner-cities, contributes to the poor performance of Blacks” (p.115). By this it can be said that current approaches used by mainstream teachers to engage Black students have proved mostly unsuccessful at narrowing the achievement gap. Pino’s research also parallels Oshodi’s (1999) article in that both authors highlight the need for alternative means of measuring success amongst Black students (OSCI test) (Oshodi, 1999) and the academic ethic concept (Pino, 2004). As such, Pino’s research reinforces the need for alternative approaches to education for Black students as a means of engaging them in school.

2.2 Africentricity: What is it?

Before beginning my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, Africentricity (spelled ‘Afri’ or ‘Afro’; also referred to as Africentricism or Centricity) was a term that I was not too familiar with. Although I had some knowledge of Black cultural movements from the late 20th century such as Negritude (Diagne, 2010, p.241) and Black Consciousness (De Wet, 2013, p.293), Africentricity was a term that seemed to cause confusion. I recall having conversations with people during my time at Hughes Academy who would assume that Africentricity was a radical movement that excluded Blacks from the mainstream—a movement, if you will, that had undertones of reverse discrimination (Noon, 2010,
Due to the lack of exposure that I had to Africentricity at that time, I had limited ability to counter these assumptions.

While volunteering at Hughes Academy, I developed a stronger understanding of the ideals of Africentricity—an understanding that worked to challenge common assumptions that many people had about this type of belief system. I witnessed positive student/teacher relationships, and an environment that encouraged students to have a sense of cultural pride. Furthermore, while conducting research for my thesis, I realized that many scholars offered rich definitions of Africentricity that coincided with what I had witnessed at Hughes Academy. My hope was that my research would inspire all teachers to draw on Africentric literacy pedagogy as a means of engaging Black students in school.

According to Galabuzi (2008) Africentricity can be defined as "an attempt to build a contending world view that puts the experiences of people of African descent at the center of world events—not to remove them from world events as some have suggested" (p.30). With this Galabuzi believes that Africentricity works to promote cultural pride for Blacks rather than exclude them from the mainstream. Here, Galabuzi promotes the idea that Africentricity helps reconnect Blacks to their cultural roots in ways that encourage pride in oneself. In his analysis, Adeleke (2005) refers to Africentricity as "Afrocentric consciousness" (2005, p.547) which describes "a consciousness of affinity to Africa sustained by...subscription to African cultural values, advocacy and invocation of African ideals and idiosyncrasies and the conception of existential realities within an African cosmological framework" (p.547). By this, Adeleke acknowledges Africentricity as an expression of the pride that some Blacks have towards their African roots, which manifests in a world view that positions Africa as a central and guiding force. However, where Adeleke differs from Galabuzi is that while Galabuzi sees
Africentricism as having authentic roots in Black culture and consciousness, Adeleke sees Africentricity as culturally flawed.

In order to prove this point, Adeleke (2005) highlights the links that Africentricity has with colonialism, which he believes serves as the basis for the movement: "It was the European slavers who referred to the transplanted Blacks collectively as Africans. It was the European colonial masters who referred to those in the landmass they forcibly appropriated and occupied from the 1880s on collectively as Africans" (p.548). With this, Adeleke believes that because of the roots that African Diasporic culture has with Eurocentric world views, any attempt for Black Diaspora to reclaim a sense of African pride lacks authenticity.

Although I respect the historical foundation from which Adeleke (2005) makes his arguments, based on my experience at Hughes Academy, I see Africentricity through a more positive lens. Furthermore, as a teacher, I see any attempt to help marginalized groups of children gain a sense of pride within their own culture as encouraging for the entire educational experience. This is especially true when considering statistics concerning the Black student experience (TDSB, 2011; Pino, 2004; Neville, 2004), which paints a mostly grim picture for Black students across Canada and the US.

In her research, Hampton (2010) also sees the push for Africentricity in schools as a positive step for Black students across Canada. Throughout her discussion, Hampton explores the benefits of community-based educational programs “that contextualise and inform their [Black students’] lived experiences and provide them with new ways of understanding and responding to the world around them” (p.104). As Hampton explains, while critics of Africentric education tout the model as a return to segregation (p.103), proponents of Africentric schools believe that they “will engage learners and their families who have been marginalised by the mainstream education system” (p.103). In
other words, Hampton sees African-centred education as a saving grace for Blacks who have fallen behind under traditional educational models.

In her analysis, Hampton (2010) also examines an educational approach known as “community-based education” (p.103) which describes “a philosophy of education that responds to the crisis in public school systems” (p.104). Here, Hampton points to the disengagement that many Black students have with mainstream education which can be attributed to the achievement gap that exists amongst Black and White students. As Hampton asserts, “A key reason for an Africentric alternative is the failure of the current public school systems and their Eurocentric curricula to engage many Black learners” (p.103). By this, Hampton believes that mainstream curriculum has proven unsuccessful at affirming the identities of Black students and as such, Africentric schools offer the potential to engage students in more effective ways.

Reflecting on my experiences as a Black student growing up in Toronto, I recall the same feelings of marginalization that Galabuzi (2008) and Hampton (2010) discuss in their aforementioned arguments. When I was in elementary school in the 1980s and ‘90s, I felt like an outsider in a school system that did little to affirm my identity as a Black student. When it came to literacy, the bulk of what I learned was centred on White male characters that I could not relate to. Furthermore, any discussions of history also used a Eurocentric approach, which sent the message that Black history was non-existent. Although my experiences took place many years ago, they coincide with Hampton’s argument relating to Black students’ feelings of “alienation and lack of support” (p.103) in mainstream schools today. Furthermore, my experiences as a Black student affirm Galbuzi's notion that Africentricity is essential to reconnecting Blacks to a lost sense of history and identity (p.29). In this sense Galbuzi and Hampton’s research shed light on
the benefits of world views like Africentricity that work to validate the identities of Black students.

2.3 Black Children's Literature: Strategies for Engagement

Although many authors have explored the challenges surrounding the Black student experience within mainstream schools (Gonsalves, 2004; Neville, 2002; Pino, 2004), other authors highlight opportunities to engage these children in ways that offer enriching experiences for both teachers and students. One strategy, which promises the opportunity to directly affirm the identities of Black students who feel marginalized within mainstream curriculum, is through the use of Black children's literature (see Appendix D for recommend book list).

According to Perini (1999), Black children's literature can be described as a set of texts featuring Black characters or storylines pertaining to Black culture that offer an alternative to more Eurocentric focused texts (p.136). As Perini explains: "The experiences and perspectives shared in multicultural and African American children's books helps readers become aware of and temporarily step out of the mainstream" (p.136). In her analysis, Perini looks at the ways that teachers can use Black children's literature as a means of engaging their students. As Perini states: "African American children's books have the potential to inform children and raise consciousness about cultural issues and perspectives that largely have been ignored in schools" (p.139). With this, Perini believes that using books that feature Black characters and storylines can work to foster a sense of identity for Black students.

Like Perini (1999), Oslick (2011) also believes that Black children’s literature is essential for affirming Black children’s senses of identity: “African-American students in particular need to be exposed to and interact with books that represent and validate their
culture because of their history in the US as nonimmigrants, or involuntary minorities” (p.40). With this, Oslick believes that because of the turbulent history of the Black Diaspora, Black children benefit immensely from seeing characters in books who look like them and share similar culture.

Okoye-Johnson (2011) also focuses on the benefits of Africentric education in schools. In order to explore the affects that multicultural curriculum has on racially marginalized students, she examines what she describes as Multicultural Education (ME). Quoting Nieto (1992), Okoye-Johnson defines ME as “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students [which] challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender) that students, their communities, and teachers represent” (p.1255). By this, Okoye-Johnson highlights the strong role that ME plays in affirming the identities of students who are otherwise marginalized within mainstream education.

Using a sample of 30 studies relating to ME, Okoye-Johnson (2011) concludes that this type of educational approach can have a positive effect on how students view their identities both inside and outside of school (p.1252). As she explains, ME “challenges all types of prejudice, endorses the unique cultures of all students, and is designed to ensure that all students receive equal educational access and opportunities” (p.1255). With this, it can be said that ME provides the opportunity for students from all backgrounds to learn on a more leveled playing field than that which is typically provided through mainstream education.

Although Okoye-Johnson (2011) does not specifically discuss the benefits of multicultural or Black children’s literature, her discussion on ME serves as a powerful support for my arguments concerning the benefits of Africentric literacy pedagogy. In
this sense, Okoye-Johnson’s endorsement of ME affirms my arguments concerning the benefits of integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy into mainstream classrooms. For example, the opportunities that ME provides for leveling the educational playing field for minority students parallels Perini (1999) and Oslick’s (2011) arguments concerning the benefits that Black children’s literature offers Black students in mainstream classrooms.

Although McNair (2012) recognizes the benefits of integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy into mainstream classrooms, she also notes the struggles that many teachers have in recognizing these benefits. As she asserts: “All children need literature to see themselves reflected and to learn about others’ cultures as well. However, research indicates that too often teachers, the majority of whom are White, middle class females, feel uncomfortable with or fail to read books that feature people of color” (McNair, 2012, p.195). Here, McNair believes that because of the cultural differences that exist between most teachers and Black students, these students are at a disadvantage when it comes to engaging with literacy that matters to them.

Based on McNair’s (2012) arguments, I believe that it is crucial for teachers to consider alternative ways of getting Black students excited about what they were reading. I believe that Africentric literacy pedagogy—which promises to engage students with texts that affirm their identities—can serve as a powerful means of breaking down cultural barriers that have long kept White teachers and Black students apart when it comes to classroom engagement. I also believe that McNair’s (2012) discussion, along with the aforementioned arguments from Perini (1999), Oslick (2011), and Okoye-Johnson (2011) can encourage teachers to understand the benefits of making their classrooms, and potentially their school communities, more inclusive.
2.3.1 Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

Beyond simply choosing literature with Black characters, the types of narratives present within literature, as well as the perspectives from which these narratives are told are crucial for affirming the identities of Black students. This approach to literacy pedagogy is known as Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) (Jordan Irvine, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2002). According to Jordan Irvine (2010), CRRP is a term that describes effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms, which requires teachers to attain knowledge of their students’ cultural and familial backgrounds, and in response, translate these experiences within classroom practices in ways that are relevant to students’ lives (p.59).

In order to enact CRRP in the classroom, Souto-Manning (2002) encourages teachers to ask themselves the following questions: “how can the methods I use tap into the culturally conscious themes of the literature?” (from a textual perspective); “how can the methods I use draw on my student’s community, home, culture, and history?” (from a cultural perspective); and, “how can the methods…create opportunities for students to link their personal lives to the literature?” (from a personal perspective) (p.233).

Based on the views and strategies shared by Jordan Irvine (2010) and Souto-Manning (2002), I believe that CRRP is an essential component to literacy pedagogy in that it helps teachers engage students on levels that go beyond the curriculum. Especially as this relates to Black students and literacy, CRRP provides opportunities for these students to see themselves reflected in ways that have strong connections to their lives outside of the classroom.
2.3.2 Critical Consciousness

When students have opportunities to engage with CRRP, they are in many ways empowered to critically analyze what they are learning in school. Especially as this relates to Black students and literacy, this type of “critical consciousness” (Mustakova-Possardt, 2004; Thomas, Gihane, Rowe-Johnson, Clawson, Brunner, Hewitt, Amber, Barrie, Rabiatu, 2014) gives students the autonomy to critique ideologies present within texts. Mustakova-Possardt (2004) defines critical consciousness as an “optimal consciousness, characterized by the integration of the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual aspects of a human being” (p.248). By this, Mustakova-Possardt believes that when a person develops the ability to see the world through a critically conscious lens, they develop a sense of “moral responsibility and agency” (p.266) which allows them to challenge oppression that exists throughout society.

As Thomas et al (2014) explain, through critical consciousness, children are able to evaluate situations, and as a result, take action against societal inequities (p.485). Using analysis from several authors, Thomas et al. describe critical consciousness in the following ways: “the awareness of inequity, oppression, and liberation (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999); a skill set to help individuals to deconstruct or “depersonalize” experiences of oppression; and as the ability to understand others’ perspectives or thoughts (ethnic social perspective-taking) (Quintana & SeguraHerrera, 2003)” (p.485).

Applying Thomas et al’s analysis to literacy pedagogy, it can be said that when Black students have the ability to be critically conscious, they are able to engage with texts in ways that promote social justice and thus, empower them on personal, social, and cultural levels.
2.3.3 The Cultural Deficit Model

Despite access to CRRP, and their abilities to be critically conscious, Black students still face an uphill battle when it comes to literacy engagement. A major factor in this disengagement is what is known as the “cultural deficit model” (Valencia, 1997, p.132). Valencia describes the cultural deficit model as involving systemic ways of thinking that position peoples of colour and peoples deemed to have lower socio-economic status as “inadequate” (p.133) and thus, incapable of success (p.135).

According to Valencia (1997), although the cultural deficit model dates back throughout history (p.13), it mostly took rise during the transatlantic slave trade in the early 17th century: “In America, the racial belief that Africans were not human beings and their enslavement was not against God’s will was a popular argument used to condone slavery…deficit thinking about the nature of Africans remained the orthodoxy” (p.16). As Valencia concludes, the legacy of this belief system has greatly influenced how Black children, their families, and their culture are seen in the present day: “The logical consequence of such a hypothesized family was a child saddled with deficits. These children were described…as irreparably intellectually impaired…as well as linguistically impaired. The culturally deprived child was also described as having…pathogenic personality characteristics…low self-esteem; poor impulse control; inability to distinguish right from wrong; [and] was anti-intellectual” (p.133-34).

Harry and Klinger (2007), concur with the Valencia’s (1997) view of the cultural deficit model, and go on to explain that this belief system actually works to pathologize victims of institutional oppression for their failures while ignoring systemic causes of oppression (Harry and Klinger, 2007, p.8). Relating Harry and Klinger’s argument to education, it can be said that when Black students struggle with literacy, their struggles are often linked to systemic beliefs that work to reinforce their failures. However, rather
than challenging systemic oppression, the cultural deficit model works to further suppress and demonize the oppressed (which in this case, are Black students).

The cultural deficit model offers tremendous insight into the inequities facing Black students as it relates to literacy. As such, it can be said that because this belief system has existed on systemic levels for centuries, Black students face great disadvantages when it comes to academic success. These disadvantages can be linked to beliefs that some teachers have (whether consciously or unconsciously) about Black students’ abilities to attain success. Based on these factors, I believe that implementing literacy pedagogy that promotes CRRP as well as critical consciousness becomes a powerful vehicle through which cultural deficit models and ways of thinking can be exposed and challenged.

2.4 The Role of Mentorship

Considering the complex histories of the Black Diaspora (Hampton, 2010; Adeleke, 2005), as well as the challenges that Blacks continue to face today as it relates to systemic oppression (Gonsalves, 2002; Neville, 2002; Pino, 2004; Valencia, 1997), it is no wonder that many authors have also explored the strong role that mentorship plays in the lives of Black children. One such author is Harris (1999), who examines the benefits of teachers as mentors in the classroom, as well as the development of mentoring strategies that use Africentric perspectives. As Harris explains, over the past 15 years, mentorship programs have attempted to engage Black students as a way of enabling them to achieve academic and social successes (p.229).

A mentoring strategy that has much significance within Africentricity is the African principal of Nguzo Saba (Harris, 1999) (seven guiding African spiritual principals). As table detailing the Nguzo Saba principles is included in Appendix C.
Considering the various areas of Nguzo Saba, it becomes apparent that these principles serve as a means to not only engage, but to empower Black students in the classroom. For example, the principle of Self-Determination gives students the autonomy to “define” and “speak” for themselves. Moreover, the principle of Faith encourages Black students to respect the roles that their elders (parents, community leaders, and teachers) have played in overcoming the struggles faced by the Black community throughout history. Not only do these principles provide students with a stronger voice within the classroom, but I believe they also help foster the bond that exists between teachers and students (recognizing the importance of community within the struggle).

As Harris (1999) states, through Nguzo Saba, students are provided “cognitive, affective and psychosocial support [as well as] a sociocultural foundation in which to be successful academically, develop positive self/ethnic images and empower themselves to achieve in college and beyond” (p.231). By this, Harris believes that Africentric mentorship initiatives offer students a platform from which they can attain success both academically and in their everyday lives.

Harris’s (1999) research strongly correlates with my own experience with Africentric education; particularly through her focus on Nguzo Saba. During my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I had the opportunity to observe morning assemblies in which students would recite Nguzo Saba principles, all while being coached and mentored by teachers. During these assemblies, students were encouraged to project their voices while reading the principles aloud in order to emphasize the significance of the words. During Nguzo Saba read-alouds students also played African drums with the guidance of a music mentor. This mentor/student collaboration seemed to further emphasize cultural pride and celebration. During these read-alouds, students
exhibited a level of passion and excitement which I believe revealed the engagement they felt towards not only their culture, but their education as well.

Shockley (2011) also looks at the notion of Black mentorship by exploring the life of an Afrocentric teacher (Brother Ture) who has dedicated his career to transforming the lives of children in his community. As Shockley explains, because Brother Ture brings “immense amounts of passion, energy, African cultural knowledge, and diverse teaching styles to the classroom” (p.1031), his students have achieved levels of success that defy stereotypes concerning Black student underachievement (p.1031). As Shockley states: “Students report learning more from his class than from all their other classes put together…they pay very close attention to what he is saying while he teaches them, they cooperate with him in every way imaginable, and they call him by phone late in the evening and early in the morning to discuss things that are happening in their lives” (p.1031). Based on this, it can be said that Brother Ture goes above-and beyond educating students on a curricular level, and is instead, focused on forming connections with them on an emotional level.

At the heart of Shockley’s (2011) findings, he reveals the need for schools to “focus on teacher transformation as opposed to students simply learning the Three Rs” (p.1027). By this, it can be said that Brother Ture’s engagement with his students points to the importance of mentorship, and the significant impact it can have on the lives of students—especially those who are the most marginalized within education.

As Shockley (2011) explains, the types of connections that Brother Ture builds with his students are indicative of the significance of Africentric education: “Most Afrocentric teachers are impassioned and desperate, and they mix those emotions together with their deep passion for African history and their knowledge of the reality of the global situation in which Africans now find themselves” (p.1031). In other words,
because Brother Ture is able to reach his students in ways that align with both their educational and cultural needs, he has been successful at making a marked difference in their lives. As Shockley explains, this marked difference is signified by the fact that through Afrocentric education, Black students learn more about themselves and issues that are relevant to their lives.

Although Shockley’s (2011) focus on more general connections between Afrocentric teachers and students differs from my analysis of literacy pedagogy, his work serves as a testament to the significance of Africentric education. Moreover, both Shockley and Harris’s (1999) research highlights the benefits of integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy in classrooms as a way of affirming the identities of, and connecting with, Black students.

2.5 Africentric Concepts of Achievement: Spirituality and Hope in Education

Through my research I perused extensive analyses pertaining to strategies and techniques that can be used to make a difference in the lives of Black students. While I found these discussions beneficial, no literature inspired me more than those pertaining to notions of spirituality and hope. Perhaps this was because of the personal connections that I had with this subject; as a researcher reflecting on my own experience as a student of colour “hoping” to find my way within an educational system that never seemed to affirm my identity. It is for those reasons that within my research, I also included analyses from several scholars who highlight the powerful impact that spirituality and hope can have on the lives of students who feel ostracized by mainstream education.

One such author is Oshodi (1999) who explores what is known as the “need for achievement” model. This model measures Black students’ drive to succeed based on Africentric concepts of achievement. As Oshodi explains, “The continued use of
Eurocentric theory, concepts, and frameworks in the conceptualization and evaluation of achievement motives in African American Blacks deeply undermines the spiritual, communal, nonmaterial, and wholistic traits that form the basis of achievement motivation in African descendants” (p.216). With this, Oshodi believes that current methods used by teachers to determine a Black student’s drive to succeed are typically out-of-sync with the spiritual concepts of success inherent in African American culture.

In order to better understand the importance of considering Africentric value concepts within education, Oshodi developed a test known as the Oshodi Sentence Completion Index (OSCI), which focuses on various aspects of the African worldview (Oshodi, 1999). According to Oshodi, the African worldview is a belief system that places African values at the centre of one’s life (p.219). As Oshodi states: “The sentence completion test is known for its use in specific situations and its usefulness in evoking cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually meaningful responses to word stimuli” (p.216). Here, Oshodi highlights the main objective of the test which is to draw upon values that Black students can relate to their own lives. For example, factors that determine success in the OSCI test include “the unyielding and deep-seated need to aspire, endure obstacles, spiritually persist in the face of manmade risk, and acknowledge the need for communality” (Oshodi, 1999, p.216). In this sense, it can be said that the OSCI test strives to challenge Eurocentric modes of testing which have historically contributed to the Black/White student achievement gap. In other words, when Black students are measured within this type of testing framework, they are more likely to succeed because the criteria correlate with values that are meaningful to their everyday lives.

Like Oshodi, Gilbert, Harvey, and Belgrave (2009) look at the ways that Africentric theories and principles can benefit mainstream attitudes towards Black culture. As Gilbert et al explain, Africentrism is beneficial to Blacks because of the ways
in which it affirms Black culture and history: “Africentric approaches address the totality of African Americans’ worldview and existence, including their experiences of collective disenfranchisement and historical trauma as a result of slavery and persistent racial disparities” (p.243). Here, Gilbert et al acknowledge that histories of oppression have contributed to current challenges facing Blacks in education as well as in everyday life. According to Gilbert et al, “‘Afrocentric,’ ‘Africentric,’ or ‘African-centered,’ interventions are based on the principle of reinstilling traditional African and African American cultural values in people of African descent” (p.243). With this, Gilbert et al believe that African-centred principles can work to engage Blacks with principles that are at the core of Black culture. As Gilbert et al assert, African-centred principles are also aligned with the value systems under which Africans have centred their lives throughout history (p.243). As the authors conclude: “African Americans, for the most part, survived historically because of values such as interdependence, collectivism, transformation, and spirituality that can be traced to African principles for living” (Gilbert et al, 2009, p.243). With this, it can be said that African-centred theory is cognizant of the unique history of Blacks, and as such, considers value-based achievements as the most authentic measures of success for Black students.

Like Oshodi (1999), Gilbert et al’s (2009) research provides a foundation for understanding the roots of African-centred principles. Although Gilbert et al do not specifically address Africentric education, (their discussion centres on social work and research), their arguments reinforce the positive aspects of Africentric principles. In this sense, Gilbert et al highlight the influence that Africentricity can have on mainstream views of Black achievement, and moreover, the sense of pride that Black students can attain when their identities are affirmed through education.
Furthermore, Gilbert et al’s (2009) arguments coincide with Oshodi’s (1999) analysis of the African worldview in that these authors reinforce the importance of affirming African spiritual principles within professional spheres (i.e. education and/or social work). Discussions from these scholars work in tandem to help make the argument that Africentricity can be effective for engaging Black students through literacy pedagogy. As this pertains to my research, I believe that all teachers can highlight Africentric principles when presenting Black children’s literature in mainstream classrooms in order to connect with Black students.

Although the notion of spirituality in the classroom is often met with controversy, many authors believe that it can actually enhance the connection that students have towards their education. One such author, considered by many scholars (Brosi, 2012; Davidson, 2009; Valdivia, 2002) to be the authority on spiritual discussions concerning race and identity, is bell hooks. In her book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), hooks looks at the role that spirituality plays in fostering a more holistic classroom dynamic between teachers and students. At the core of her thesis, hooks believes that when students are able to draw empowerment from things outside of themselves (as is the case with spirituality), they are more inclined to feel that what they are learning in school is affirming to their identities. As hooks shares: “‘Sacredness is not understood within a particular religious framework but instead as growing out of two basic qualities of our experience: awareness and wholeness’” (qtd. in hooks, 2003, p.180). Here, hooks asserts that when teachers foster cultural and spiritual awareness in the classroom, they help students develop a deeper connection to their education, as well as the world around them.

Hooks’s (2003) analysis reinforces my arguments concerning the benefits of integrating Africentric spiritual teachings into literacy pedagogy. Furthermore, hooks
arguments correlate with Harris’s (1999) discussions on teachers’ roles as mentors. Both authors highlight the role that spirituality plays in enhancing the relationship that students have with both their teachers and their education.

Coinciding with the concept of spirituality in education is the notion of hope, which many authors (Webb, 2012; hooks, 2003; Oshodi, 1999) believe is the foundation for engaging all students. As hooks states: “When we only name the problem, when we state complaint without a constructive focus or resolution, we take hope away” (p.xiv). Based on hooks’s analysis, it can be said that when teachers fail to see hope as an essential component for helping students succeed academically, students are likely to feel disconnected from the entire educational experience.

In his article, Webb (2012) also examines the role that hope plays in the classroom. As he explains, although hope is a notion that often seems whimsical and indefinable, it is in fact endemic to being human: “Hoping is an integral part of what it is to be human, and its significance for education has been widely noted” (Webb, 2012, p.397). Here, Webb believes that hope is an essential aspect of engaging students in the classroom. Both hooks (2003) and Webb’s arguments connect in that they deem spirituality and hope as basic human needs.

Especially as it concerns students in the classroom (and likely more so for Black students), many academics (hooks, 2003; Webb, 2012; Oshodi, 1999) agree that elements of hope and spirituality are essential for student success. Particularly as it relates to Africentric literacy pedagogy, it can be said that the integration of hope and spirituality can enhance Black students’ experiences with literacy that they would have otherwise felt disconnected from. As such, because African culture is rooted in ideals of sacredness and community (Gilbert et al, 2009; Oshodi, 1999; Harris, 1999), exposing Black children to
literacy pedagogy that allows them to see themselves through literature can have a powerful effect on their lives as students.

Shin (2011) also examines the affects that Africentric values can have on students’ concepts of achievement. Shin looks at the influence that Africentric values can have on what he calls the “academic self-efficacy” (p.218) of Black students. Shin describes academic self-efficacy as “an individual’s beliefs about his or her ability to generate or maintain the effort needed to achieve a goal (p.218), and adds that “the observed relationship between Africentric values and academic self-efficacy is also consistent with the notion that African American children who adhere to traditional cultural values are somewhat protected from the negative messages they receive on a daily basis” (p.221). Here, Shin believes that Africentricity can help Black students understand the roots of their culture in ways that help foster a sense of pride. Moreover, Shin also believes that when teachers integrate culturally relevant Black children’s books in their classrooms they provide students a powerful alternative from Eurocentric literature that often has little relevance to their identities.

The aforementioned scholarly analysis has reviewed literature focusing on teacher/Black student relationships at both Africentric and mainstream schools throughout Canada and the US. Furthermore, this chapter has explored literature that looks at how notions of hope and spirituality can positively affect the relationships that teachers have with their students. Analyses from these scholars correlate with the genesis of my research study which explores how Africentric literacy pedagogy can positively impact the Black student experience (Shockley, 2011; Harris, 1999).

Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter one, my overarching goal with this research is to demonstrate how mainstream teachers can adopt strategies used in Africentric literacy pedagogy as a means of engaging Black students in the classroom.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Procedure

For my research paper, I conducted a qualitative study that drew on characteristics of ethnography (for example: an examination of groups of people and cultural phenomena) (Creswell, 2013), and explored how Africentric teachers use literacy pedagogy to engage Black students. Through my research I am hoping to inspire mainstream teachers to use these strategies in their classrooms in order to engage Black students through literacy.

For this study, I interviewed two teachers who have enacted Africentric literacy pedagogy within their classroom practices. I sampled these teachers for several reasons including the following: (1) During my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I observed a wealth of Black children’s literature being used in the classrooms; (2) Hughes Academy has a nearly 100% Black student population which represents the racial group that my study is focused on; (3) During my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I observed a positive and genuine connection between teachers and students which inspired me as an aspiring teacher. For my study, I sampled for teachers who met the following criteria:

• One male and one female teacher

• Demonstrated commitment to using CRRP Black children's literature, or literacy pedagogy that is intended to engage Black students in the classroom.

• Teachers with at least five years experience in Africentric education. I chose teachers with several years experience because I imagined that these teachers would be in a position to offer greater insight into the pedagogy than teachers with less experience.

The Interviews were structured in a face-to-face format, and took place in either the participants’ places of work, or their homes (both at the choosing of the participants).
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In order to compile data for my study, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

3.3 Participants

For this study, I interviewed two participants who have experience enacting Africentric literacy pedagogy in both Africentric and mainstream schools. I sampled these participants because during my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I had the opportunity to witness many of the literacy practices that these teachers used in their classrooms. Based on my two-year-long informal observations of these teachers, I witnessed connections that seemed to indicate deep Black student engagement: constant student laughter; high participation rates in classes; and several kinesthetic, cross-curricular activities that the students (and teachers) seemed to enjoy. Although at the time I was not observing for the sake of conducting research, I could not help but be struck by the ability these teachers had to engage students—Black students—who typically seem disengaged in school.

Angelique (pseudonym) has been working as an Africentric elementary teacher for six years. Before working at the elementary level, Angelique worked for several years as an early childhood educator (ECE) in daycares, which she says inspired her to become a teacher. Angelique obtained her Bachelor of Education degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), at the University of Toronto, where she specialized in the institute’s (now defunct) Inner-City Option; a program focused on social-justice in education. During her practicum placements, Angelique had the opportunity to work in several inner city schools including a private Africentric school in
Rexdale, Ontario, which she says inspired her journey to Centric education. After graduating, she began working as an Africentric teacher at Hughes Academy—making her one of the first teachers to work at the school since its inception.

Samuel (pseudonym) has been working as an elementary teacher for seven years—five of which were spent as a classroom teacher at Hughes Academy. Samuel obtained his Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Windsor, where he specialized in the school’s Urban Education Partnership. Like OISE’s former Inner-City Option, this program focuses on promoting diversity in the classroom. Samuel’s interest in Africentric education began during his teacher education studies where he met a professor who was instrumental in writing the curriculum for Hughes Academy. As Samuel admits, although he was skeptical of Centric education at first, after discussing the benefits of such a model with his professor, he was enticed to work at the school. Like Angelique, Samuel became one of the first teachers to work at Hughes Academy since its opening. In 2013, Samuel began working for a mainstream inner city school, although he says that he continues to enact Africentric pedagogy within his classroom practice.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

During the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, I collected data via recorder (iPad and Blackberry smartphone). These interviews were approximately one-hour long each. Directly following the interviews I also transcribed and coded notes to compile for my database. These codes were then organized into categories which I differentiated through a colour-coding system that I created (via Microsoft Word). These colour-coded categories were used to generate a list of overarching themes related to my research questions. Overarching themes were further segmented into a list of corresponding sub-
themes. The themes and sub-themes became the framework for my research findings (Ch. 4) as well as my discussion related to the findings (Ch. 5).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

For my research paper, I followed the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program at The University of Toronto, OISE. The participants who I interviewed for this research were provided with letters of consent before the interviews were conducted. Participants were also required to read and sign these letters before the interview process began (See Appendix A). Two copies of this consent form were made: one for the interviewees and another was retained for this study’s records. Additionally, I retained an electronic copy of the consent form template, also for this study’s records.

Interviews that took place face-to-face were conducted at times and locations agreed upon by both interviewees. Participants in this research were given applicable information relating to content, consent, and confidentiality. Every effort was also made to ensure the interviewees’ willingness and comfort to participate in the interviews. Interviewees were also provided with the opportunity to review the transcripts.

Before beginning each interview, the topic of the research was communicated and reviewed with the participants. Participants also had the option of changing their minds about the use of data at any point in the research process, and they were also made aware that they would receive a copy of the research paper for their records once complete. Interviews in this study were conducted in a semi-structured, face-to-face format and recorded for transcription purposes.

All procedures were conducted as communicated and specified to the participants in the consent forms that they signed. No alterations were made to those procedures throughout my research and writing process. All information that could compromise the
anonymity of a participant has been adapted using pseudonyms for individuals and institutions. Any data that identified participants has been omitted as deemed necessary to protect the anonymity of each participant. Careful review of the data and adherence to ensuring anonymity means that participants are protected from any kind of harm, whether personal or professional.

3.6 Limitations

Abundance of US data; Lack of Canadian statistics:

Firstly, the fact that most of the literature pertaining to my area of study concerned students and teachers in the US, it may, or may not directly apply to the Black student experience in Canada. As such, I included as much research as possible pertaining to Canadian schools. I have also used my own past experiences as a student, as well as informal observations in Canadian schools as reflective pieces (only) to coincide with the analysis.

Number of interviewees allowed in study:

Since ethnographic research typically involves extended time in the field (Creswell, 2013), and the time provided to conduct interviews was rather limited (less than one year), this study drew on characteristics of ethnography, but does not represent an ethnographic account. Neither should it be interpreted as intended to speak for all Africentric teachers. Instead, my goal was to learn strategies of engagement used by some Africentric teachers. However, I believe that using a male and a female participant helped to make my data more well-rounded.
**Strengths**

*Prior experience volunteering with Hughes Academy*

Although I make no claims of being an expert in Africentric pedagogy, my previous volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy gives me an advantage over a researcher who may analyze this type of education from an outside perspective. Based on my experience with Hughes Academy, I have the privilege of reflecting on my exposure to Africentric literacy pedagogy as it related to the authors I cited in my paper. As well, my previous experience with Hughes Academy provided me greater access to sourcing participants for my research as I previously forged relationships with teachers in the school.

*Reflexivity as a researcher:*

One of the areas of contribution that I bring to this study is that as a Black student growing up in Toronto, I faced and witnessed many of the inequities that my research discusses. As such, my position as a Black researcher reflecting on my experiences as a Black student in the Toronto school system enables me to be highly reflexive with my analysis of my thesis. I use the term “highly” is because I embody the students who I examine in my research, I am able to offer a first-hand account of the Black student experience. In this sense, my experiences work to both reinforce and counter the arguments offered by the authors I cite in my paper. As such, my reflexivity towards this topic includes beliefs as an aspiring teacher hoping to make a difference, as well as my reflection as a Black student hoping to see these differences come to fruition.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the research findings from the interviews that I conducted with two teachers on the topic of Africentric literacy pedagogy and the Black student experience. In this chapter, I identify seven overarching themes, as well as several sub-themes within the findings. These include: 1) Teachers identified a range of barriers confronting Black student engagement, including a lack of materials responsive to their identities in mainstream classrooms, and the prevalence of cultural deficit models in schools and society; 2) Teachers created kinesthetic and arts-based opportunities for literacy learning to engage Black students; 3) Teachers created opportunities for students to see themselves in and as material for learning as a component of their literacy pedagogy; 4) Teachers prioritized personal, cultural, and community connections as a component of their literacy pedagogy to engage Black students; 5) Teachers literacy pedagogy prioritized passion, care, and love; 6) Teachers valued the role to be played by spirituality and they integrated it in their literacy pedagogy, though they recognized the challenges that accompany this work; and 7) A central component of these teachers’ literacy practices involved developing students’ critical consciousness and complex thinking in order to re-tell history and counter oppression.

The sub-themes work to streamline the focus of the findings and enable variances within participant responses to be distinguished. Participants are identified through the use of pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.
4.1 Teachers identified a range of barriers confronting Black student engagement, including a lack of materials responsive to their identities in mainstream classrooms, and the prevalence of cultural deficit models in schools and society.

Within this theme, participants indicated the various factors that they believed contributed to Black student disengagement within mainstream education. A general lack of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as well as cultural deficit models are two contributing factors that both participants identified.

4.1.1 Participating teachers identified the lack of materials responsive to Black student identities as a key barrier to Black student engagement

According to the participants in this study, one of the greatest barriers to Black student engagement is the lack of materials within mainstream classrooms that affirm their identities. From Samuel’s perspective, when students feel disconnected from what they are learning in the classroom, it becomes difficult for them to believe in their own success. Angelique also linked Black student disengagement to an overall lack of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in mainstream classrooms.

In order to explain this further, both participants reflected on their own experiences within the Canadian educational system. As Angelique explained: “There were maybe a few kids who looked like me, but there were never any teachers or staff who reflected me…never any learning materials that reflected me; any books; dolls. So, I really didn't see myself within the classroom.” Samuel also shared similar experiences stating that: “I didn't ever see representations of myself in books, or things like that, I don't recall that. I think it's significant because the more that you see yourself or your interests…the more interested you’ll be in being engaged.”
Here Angelique and Samuel asserted that when the classroom environment is unaligned with its student body— their interests, their experiences, and their cultures— students, are, as a result, more likely to feel disengaged with what they are learning.

4.1.2 Teachers believed that the prevalence of cultural deficit models posed serious barriers to Black student engagement

In their discussions, both participants acknowledged implications associated with cultural deficit models within the education system. As such, the participants linked this belief system to stereotypes plaguing many Black students in school. As Samuel shared: “I think the dominant narrative--and it's sad--and I've seen it basically at every school [is] that we're [Black students] not as bright, we're not as prepared, we're not as capable. We have so much potential but we are lazy; we're not interested in doing better.”

Both participants also believed that the views that many teachers have towards Black students’ lives outside of school can have a very negative impact on how they relate to their students in the classroom. In fact, Angelique went further to say that “some mainstream teachers’ attitudes and behaviours towards Black students are so abusive.” As Angelique explained, part of engaging Black students and validating their identities is recognizing the important role that their lives outside of school play in their successes within the classroom: “Don't use the cultural deficit model to say, ‘okay I can make this student successful if they forget everything at home; all the problems that are happening at home. Look at all the positive things and strengths that come from our [Black] homes and from our communities.” Here, both participants believed that because of deficit ways of thinking, many Black students are often positioned as incapable of success because of their racial and cultural, and social backgrounds. However, as Angelique iterated, when teachers challenge deficit models, and instead, view marginalized students’ cultural
backgrounds through positive lenses, these students are more likely to feel validated within the classroom.

4.2 Teachers created kinesthetic and arts-based opportunities for literacy learning to engage Black students

According to both participants in this study, Black students respond particularly well to instructional strategies that are kinesthetic and arts-based. As Angelique stated: “Our kids [Black students] are engaged a lot by music, and by bodily kinesthetic. This would not be true for every single student of African descent. But, through research, many students of African descent can benefit, or be engaged, or be successful using some of these methods.” Samuel also discussed the benefits of kinesthetic strategies adding that: “A part of the Africentric pedagogy…is the whole aspect of oral communication, call and response, and whole stories. Students—our students—in that model, they thrive through speaking, through talking, through action, through doing.”

Here Angelique and Samuel identified the benefits of integrating arts-based and kinesthetic learning such as music and oral communication activities within the classroom. Although Angelique is cognizant to note that these strategies may not work for all Black students, she maintains that based on her own experience and research, kinesthetic and arts integration can increase Black student engagement with literacy.
4.3 Teachers created opportunities for students to see themselves in and as material for learning as a component of their literacy pedagogy

As both participants explained, when teachers create literacy pedagogy that celebrates Black student identity—through literature and hands-on activities—students are more likely to feel affirmed in the classroom.

4.3.1 Perceptions of Racialized Self

According to both participants, because of the overall lack of affirmation within the classroom, many Black students develop negative attitudes about their identities. In response, Angelique described a lesson where she asked her students to look in mirrors and draw pictures of themselves. In the lesson, she asked students to remain conscious of their skin colour, facial features, and hair textures. One student, she explained, began to laugh because, as she stated, “no one had ever asked her to look at herself in the mirror before.” She added: “Sometimes because students are not used to seeing themselves reflected it will actually be a shock and they will actually laugh and feel uncomfortable, and that's really problematic.” Here, Angelique reveals the lack of self-confidence that many Black students express as a result of being underrepresented within pedagogy.

Samuel reflected on his own childhood experiences, stating that most teachers did little to affirm his identity. In fact, as he explained, this lack of seeing himself reflected within the classroom is what prompted him to become an Africentric educator. In his words: “My upbringing and the lack of resources; the lack of seeing myself…made me decide that I wanted to learn more. It's kind of sad that the learning started as an adult, not as a student.” While Angelique highlighted the implications of underrepresentation, Samuel credited it for inspiring him to become an Africentric educator committed to changing these realities.
4.3.2 Portrayals of Blacks in Texts

Participants in this study pointed to the significance of including materials within the classroom that not only represent, but celebrate the unique qualities of Black students. Samuel, for example, shared an experience where he read a book to his students about Remembrance Day featuring soldiers of various races. He explained that when he began to read the pages featuring Black soldiers, his students (who were mostly Black) began exhibiting deeper engagement. As such, his students drew connections between the Black soldiers and people in their own lives who fought in wars. He stressed the extent to which Black students feel engaged in school when what they are learning is relevant to their everyday lives: “It will make you [as a student] want to be more engaged when you're seeing…yourself. You're seeing your aunt, or your dad, or your mom, or whomever. It makes you want to be part [of the classroom] more when you know you’re part of the story.”

Angelique elaborated on the criteria that she used to select texts in her class featuring Black characters. For her, choosing texts did not stop at simply selecting literature with Black faces. Instead, the roles the characters play were the deciding factor. As such, Angelique applies the following criteria when choosing Black children’s literature:

- Are people of African descent reflected in the book?
- What roles are we [Black people] in?
- Who is the author?
- What is the perspective of the story?
- Will this story be engaging for my students?

She added: “It can't only be what I think is important in terms of Africentricity, it also has to be [based on] their interests and their realities.” She also explained how certain books
featuring Black characters can be damaging to the self-images of Black students: “Instead of Cinderella, it would be Keisharella, or something, and there would just be a Black character. But, to me, that is not [an] Africentric literacy program. [An Africentric literacy program is] not only having representations, but also looking at who we [Black people] are within the stories.” With this, Angelique outlined additional questions that teachers should ask when selecting books with Black characters:

- Do we [Black people] have loving families within these stories?
- Do we have powerful Black women within these stories?
- Are we many, many different jobs instead of just caretakers?
- Are we only portrayed in one way that's keeping us objectified?”

Through the aforementioned questions, Angelique identified key factors for teachers to consider when choosing literature that is responsive to Black student identity. As Angelique asserted, not only should these texts represent teacher-driven pedagogy, but they should also be inclusive of student interests.

4.4 Teachers prioritized personal, cultural, and communal connections as a component of their literacy pedagogy to engage Black students

In this section I report how participants addressed the various forms of personal, cultural, and communal engagements that they believed contribute to Africentric literacy pedagogy. Within these forms of engagement, both participants saw the roles of family and community as vital components to the pedagogy.

4.4.1 Role of Parents and Family

Both participants elaborated on the significant role that parents and families play in the lives of Black students, which they saw as integral to the principles in which Africentric
pedagogy is built (community and respect for elders). In fact, as Angelique explained, the level of involvement that parents have in their child’s education is usually indicative of how engaged their children feel in school. As such, Angelique posed the following questions that she asked herself when assessing levels of Black student engagement:

- Are parents coming into the school?
- Do parents feel comfortable within the school?
- Do they take on different initiatives?

She added: “Those could all be indicators of student engagement.” In fact, this emphasis on community and parental involvement, she says, is what inspired her to become an Africentric educator.

Samuel also recognized and respected the strong role that parents and family play in the lives of Black students. At the beginning of each year, he made it a point of calling parents of students who typically had behaviour issues in school in order to form positive connections. In his experience, these parents were often startled or defensive at first, but after talking to him, they typically expressed relief. In his words: “Their [behavioural students’], parents usually only get calls when they are doing something negative so it's changing the narrative… changing how it works.”

Here, both participants believed that parents and families are crucial to the connections that they form with Black students in the classroom. To this, Samuel encouraged reaching out to parents as a way of highlighting their children’s successes, and all the while, reinforcing parent/teacher relationships.

4.5 Teachers literacy pedagogy prioritized passion, care, and love

According to both participants, expressions of passion, care, and love are some of the most powerful ways that teachers can engage with Black students in the classroom. Their
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commitment to this was established as a result of having themselves experienced feelings of exclusion as Black students growing up. As Angelique shared: “My own experience in terms of feelings of…exclusion and shame…that I was taught in school, definitely, is part of my passion for education; the drive that I feel in terms of the spaces I try to create for my students.” Samuel similarly expressed the disappointment he felt with the lack of teacher engagement he experienced as a Black student: “It's kind of sad…I knew the difference between teachers who cared, and teachers who didn't care about me. The teachers who cared found ways to learn about me or where I was, where I grew up, where I lived, where they were teaching.” Samuel explained that through Africentric pedagogy, teachers are able to affirm the identities, experiences, and interests of students on both a curricular and emotional level. In his words: “I think one of the really important components of Africentric education is love; and having love and caring for our students; and believing in them that they can achieve; and the students believing in themselves that they can achieve.”

When asked about her recommendations for mainstream teachers integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy within their classrooms, Angelique told me:

Primarily, [I want teachers] to know that Black students are Black Gold for us. They are capable of so much and they are so important to us. And so, it's about respecting Black students, and Black parents, and also the Black community, and seeing them as valuable and seeing what's happening inside of our homes as valuable. And, if you don't feel comfortable with Africentric education or you don't feel comfortable with Africentric curriculum you have to learn more; you have a responsibility to learn more; you have a responsibility to do that.

With this, Angelique used the term Black Gold as a way of describing the power and capacity that she believes Black students have to achieve greatness.
4.6 Teachers valued the role to be played by spirituality and integrated it in their literacy pedagogy, though they recognized the challenges that accompany this work. As an Africentric teacher, Angelique used Nguzo Saba principals as a guiding force behind her classroom practices: “Nguzo Saba… guides our behaviours as students and as educators. So it guides our behaviours with principles like unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.”

While Samuel recognized the importance of integrating spirituality in the classroom, he also recognized that the topic can be tricky to broach. As an Africentric teacher, Samuel believed that within conversations of spirituality, students need to recognize the freedoms they possess to maintain different beliefs. As he explained: “It's just finding ways to let them [students] know that there are many other religions out there and it's okay to believe what you believe. There are things that are important to you [as a student] and I [as a teacher] have my own guiding beliefs that I follow. Just because we believe different things it doesn't mean that…we should be treating each other differently.”

Here, both participants addressed the positive impact that spirituality can have within the classroom environment. As Samuel asserted however, in spite of the benefits that spirituality can have for Black students, teachers should be mindful of recognizing a plurality of beliefs within spiritual practices.

4.7 A central component of these teachers’ literacy practices involved developing students’ critical consciousness and complex thinking in order to re-tell history and counter oppression.

Both participants outlined the many ways that Africentric literacy pedagogy encourages Black students to be critical of various forms of oppression within education. Aspects of
the pedagogy addressed below include inspiring critical consciousness and complex thought as well as re-telling history and countering oppression as means of empowerment.

4.7.1 The Development of Critical Consciousness

Angelique believed that Africentric pedagogical principles provide Black students with a powerful platform from which they are able to question systemic forms of oppression. In her words: “The Africentric literacy program believes that all students can read and all students can write; it focuses a lot on critical consciousness. So, how do we read with a critical eye?” Angelique believed that by encouraging Black students to question various texts—the explicit and implicit messages which may be embedded within them—they had a greater chance of recognizing their abilities to be critically conscious.

Samuel also believed in the power of critical consciousness within Africentric literacy pedagogy. As he explained, although it is imperative to have culturally relevant and responsive texts within the classroom, the texts that are not culturally relevant are ones that often provide the greatest lessons in critical consciousness: “I often grapple with this because we [teachers] don’t always have the types of representation in the books that we’d like to have. However, we should understand the reasons why these texts often help students be more critical in their thinking.” By this, Samuel believed that exposing students to texts that negatively represented their identities provided opportunities for students to challenge these messages, and thus develop a greater sense of empowerment.

4.7.2 Re-telling History

Both participants discussed, extensively, the importance of re-focusing or “re-telling” mainstream history through Africentric literacy pedagogy. As the participants asserted,
oppressions that have plagued the Black community throughout history continue to persist in classrooms throughout Canada and many other parts of the world today. With this, Africentric literacy pedagogy aims to challenge histories that have been told through a Eurocentric lens, and as such, work to shut out stories that could empower the Black community as a whole. As Angelique explained: “Even if we were teaching about Canadian settlers and colonization, we would look at where were people of African descent within that story, first, as a departure point and then we would draw others into the story.”

Samuel also expressed the importance of re-focusing history as a means of empowering Black students: “History sometimes shows one angle, or doesn't show the complete story of what has happened in the past and reasons for things that have happened. So, the Africentric model to me is really showing complete stories; as unbiased as possible; as unbiased stories that show all the angles of a story.”

Furthermore, Samuel offered interesting insight into how history is taught, stressing not only the importance of re-telling history, but also recognizing how history is created in the present: “Every day is history. We need to look at history in the context of ‘each day is history’; so yesterday, last week, last month. We need to look at what happened ‘then,’ and how we're impacting history now. That way, you're, in essence, tackling the past and the future as well.” By this, Samuel believed that in order to fully engage Black students within Africentric literacy pedagogy, history lessons must consider the occurrences and struggles from the past, while also remaining conscious of the role that we all play in creating history in the present.
4.7.3 Complex Thought

For Angelique, the notion of complex thought can be seen as the ability for students to think critically, and achieve success in their lives inside and outside of the classroom. As she added however, the common view is that Black students lack the ability for complex thought, which not only affects their success in school, but also how teachers engage with them in school. As Angelique asserted, Africentric literacy pedagogy serves as a weapon to counter these narratives in ways that elevate the image of Black students: “[Through] Africentricity, we [Africentric teachers] come with the perspective that Black students are capable of complex thought. Some of the dominant narratives are that we [Black people] are illiterate and we are not capable of complex thought, or are incapable of reading complicated passages. It is very disturbing to think about some of these attitudes.”

Although he did not explicitly use the term “complex thought,” Samuel also expressed the importance of recognizing the ability that Black students have to achieve success:

You [teachers] want them [Black students] to become advocates for themselves and for society. You want them to speak up for themselves and be able to voice certain issues. There are some books that are [supposed to be]”Africentric" but to what degree? And, what types of characters are we? Sometimes we have little roles; we're not the stars or the main characters; they are not positive depictions of us. If you get them [Black students] to understand that, then you get them to understand how they can go through different materials and be critical of them.

Here, Samuel highlighted ways that teachers can encourage complex thinking within classroom pedagogy. He cited social justice-driven activities as well as critical literacy as ways of inspiring Black students to be advocates for themselves and their communities.
4.7.4 Countering Oppression

In addition to re-focusing history, both participants expressed the powerful role that Africentric literacy pedagogy plays in countering systemic oppression. As Angelique explained, Africentric pedagogy works to empower Black people and the relationships that they have with their communities: “It [Africentric pedagogy] counters the oppression that we face as Black people…in terms of opening doors and access for students… but it also counters the oppression that they could receive at school about themselves, about their families, about their communities.” Samuel agreed, adding that despite misconceptions that exist about the exclusivity of Africentricism, the pedagogy works to empower Black students within larger society: “I think there's misconceptions…People think it [Africentric pedagogy] is for Black kids, or Black schools. For me, it's more about teaching people about history and highlighting excellence and greatness that has happened in the past and also looking at how it [these factors] have changed overtime.” He believed that an important part of countering oppression through Africentricism is recognizing a plurality of cultures within the pedagogy. In his words:

If in the Africentric model you're only teaching about African history, or history of African people, and you're only starting from enslavement, in essence, you're doing what the European model has done: you're not showing the complete story. You're showing one side of the story and you can in essence be teaching the same things that the Africentric model is trying to work against. So, it's important to focus on different cultures and nationalities.

With this, Samuel recognized the importance of what he earlier described as the “whole story model” in which history depicts stories of multiple cultures and realities. As he iterated, when teachers focus on single, or incomplete stories (i.e. Black history through slavery), they risk reinforcing the very ideologies that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy aims to eradicate.
4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reported the findings from interviews that I conducted with Angelique and Samuel. These findings elucidate how these two educators enact Africentric literacy pedagogy to counter systemic barriers and engage disenfranchised Black students. The inclusion of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy; challenging cultural deficit models; recognizing Black students as critically conscious and complex thinkers; and the integration of love, care, passion, and spirituality within the curriculum—these are just some of the ways that the participants have made inroads with Black students as it relates to literacy. In chapter 5, I will position these findings against the scholarly literature (chapter 2) and engage the implications for the teaching and research communities, and my own identity as a public school teacher and educational researcher. In the discussion, I integrate my own experiences and beliefs not only as a Black student growing up, but as a Black researcher and teacher committed to making a difference. Within this discussion I will offer recommendations for teachers committed to implementing Africentric literacy pedagogy into their classrooms. Furthermore, I identify a series of questions that provoke considerations for future research in the area of Africentric literacy pedagogy.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction
Throughout this study, I have explored the benefits of integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy into mainstream classrooms as a means of engaging Black students who typically fall behind. In order to establish why this is important, I have outlined several areas of research which discuss topics such as the Black student achievement gap, and strategies to help overcome this gap. I then reported the research findings, based on interviews that I conducted with teachers who have experience enacting Africentric literacy pedagogy. The findings elaborate philosophical considerations and report practical instructional approaches that teachers can enact in their classrooms in order to be responsive to Black student identity and foster Black student engagement.

In this final chapter, I discuss what I have learned overall from this study, I speak to the implications of my research, and I make recommendations for teachers and researchers wishing to explore this topic further. In order to outline these learnings, I have organized this chapter into a list of themes and sub-themes, which illustrate the various areas I believe this study highlights as it relates to Africentric literacy pedagogy.

5.1 Discussion
In this section, I discuss the various ways that Africentric teachers foster connections in the classroom community and beyond in order to engage Black students in ways that have meaning to their everyday lives.
5.1.1 Africentric teachers are utilizing personal, cultural, and communal connections as components of their literacy pedagogy to engage Black students.

What I have learned through this study is that engaging Black students through Africentric literacy pedagogy means tapping into areas of their lives that exist outside of school. Throughout history, notions of family and community have played significant roles within the Black community in ways that continue to be evidenced today (Shockley, 2011; Harris, 1999). Based on these cultural realities, it is essential for teachers to acknowledge the dynamics of family and community within their literacy pedagogy—especially as it relates to Black students. As Samuel believes, one way of recognizing these cultural dynamics is by contacting parents to discuss their child’s academic successes instead of their failures. From Samuel’s perspective, these kinds of interactions are often appreciated by parents who are accustomed to receiving negative feedback about their children in school. In fact, as Samuel poignantly expresses, initiating this type of contact is essentially about fostering strong personal, cultural, and communal connections. Building connections, in this sense, means taking the time to involve parents within the classroom and school community. It means letting them know how invested you are in their child’s success, despite statistics that paint them as failures, and despite a world that may not always be so kind to them. Moreover, building connections with Black students through Africentric literacy pedagogy means using the forces of family and community as vessels through which engagement is possible in ways that are authentic, and rich, and life-long.
5.1.2 By recognizing the role of spirituality and bodily-kinesthetic opportunities within literacy pedagogy, and infusing it all with elements of passion, care, and love, Africentric teachers are engaging the whole child: mind, body, spirit, and heart.

Through extensive scholarly analysis, as well as excerpts from participant interviews, I have learned that in order to engage students through literacy—especially as it pertains to Black students—teachers must make it a priority to connect with students on a multiplicity of levels (McNair, 2012; Shockley, 2011; Harris, 1999; hooks, 2003; Oshodi, 1999). As such, I have chosen to describe these levels as mind, body, spirit, and heart. By fully realizing these holistic dimensions within classroom practices, we can create more opportunities to foster Black student engagement in literacy.

5.1.2.1 Engaging the Mind

In order to engage the minds of Black students, teachers must create literacy pedagogy that is not only curricular-based, but also culturally relevant and responsive. Based on insight shared by both participants and several scholars (Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Neville, 2004; Valencia, 1997; Oslick, 2011), this type of pedagogy could include: a range of books that celebrate Black culture; literature that encourages all students to challenge and reject racism within the school community and beyond; and moreover, an approach to teaching that sees all students as high achievers, regardless of race, culture, gender, or sexuality. Through this type of literacy pedagogy, teachers have the opportunity to tap into various aspects of learning that relate to Black students’ lives, both inside and outside of the classroom. Engaging the minds of Black children means recognizing the unique qualities they possess and the gifts they bring into the classroom environment. As both participants believe, these qualities and gifts include: the ability to engage and succeed in literacy through critical thinking; and moreover, the desire to celebrate the
accomplishments and stories of their ancestors and their culture within the classroom. As Shockley (2011) asserts, when this type of engagement occurs, Black students respond with expressions of joy and laughter, eager participation during lessons—and, if we are so lucky as teachers—demonstrations of deep understanding on assignments and assessments.

5.1.2.2 Engaging the Body

Engaging the bodies of Black students means remaining cognizant of the significant role that kinesthetic practices have played within Black culture throughout history (Oshodi, 1999; Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Oslick, 2011; Shin, 2011; Harris, 1999). As illustrated by the participants, integrating elements such as music, art, and movement within literacy pedagogy are ideal ways of engaging Black students on levels that are endemic to their culture. For Samuel, this type of engagement can be created through call and response activities which give Black students platforms to express their bodies and their voices in ways that are empowering. For Angelique, this type of engagement happens through arts-based lessons that challenge Black students to look in the mirror—perhaps in ways that they have never done before—and capture the qualities that make them unique; qualities that make them beautiful.

Reflecting on my own experience practice-teaching in mainstream classrooms, I recall many Black students being engaged during activities that involved movement and the arts. Although kinesthetic strategies have proven beneficial for Black students (Oshodi, 1999; Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Shin, 2011; Harris, 1999), they are strategies that should be implemented classroom-wide, as all students, regardless of race or culture, benefit from being active rather than passive. As such, it is important that teachers enact kinesthetic teaching strategies that are common in Africentric classrooms in mainstream
classrooms as a means of fostering Black student engagement. Through arts-based and
kinesthetic activities, teachers provide Black students with platforms that encourage
action and involvement, and most importantly, highlight their creativity and interests
(Harris, 1999).

5.1.2.3 Engaging the Spirit

Engaging the spirits of Black students means celebrating the powerful role that spiritual
practices can play within the classroom dynamic (Harris, 1999; Shockley, 2011; Oshodi,
1999; hooks, 2003; Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Through spiritual integration, teachers have
opportunities to honour the guiding principles that have been part of Black culture
throughout history. These principles highlight traditional African spiritual notions of
unity—which inspire solidarity and harmony within the Black community; self-
determination—which encourage responsibility and self-respect; and purpose—which
allow Black students to proceed through life with a sense of confidence and direction
(Harris, 1999; Shockley, 2011; Oshodi, 1999).

During my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I had the opportunity to
experience the power Nguzo Saba in practice during classroom activities and school
assemblies. The sounds of joy in the students’ voices as they read aloud the principles;
the expressions of pride on their bodies as they stood in unison. As this relates to literacy
pedagogy, just imagine having Nguzo Saba principles displayed throughout the
classroom as a demonstration of the type of language and values that exist within the
school community. How would Black students—who typically feel disengaged with
literacy—respond to mantras that command their attention; that promote self-respect?
How would principles of collective work and responsibility—which encourage students
to support their fellow brothers and sisters through triumphs and through struggles—
inspire Black students to recognize the power that they have to use language as a vehicle for change within their communities? As well, how would the principle of faith—which encourages a belief in “higher-purpose”—inspire Black students to believe in their potential for greatness?

When Black students feel like they have an important role to play within the classroom community; when they feel safe to express their voices and use language in ways that challenge norms; they are more likely to feel engaged on emotional and spiritual levels (Harris, 1999; Shockley, 2011; Oshodi, 1999). Engaging Black students from a spiritual perspective means honouring the value systems that have guided Black culture throughout history—and using these value systems to inspire and empower Black students within literacy pedagogy today.

5.1.2.4 Engaging the Heart

Engaging the hearts of Black students means showing passion, care, and love within literacy pedagogy. Teaching with love is one of the greatest ways that teachers can connect to Black students through literacy (hooks, 2003; Shockley, 2011; Harris, 1999), and Samuel and Angelique shared concrete strategies for enacting this in practice. As Shockley (2011) so poignantly asks: “What would happen if teachers expressed more energy and more knowledge of Africa and were able to demonstrate that they cared about and love Black people? How would such teaching and relationship building make a difference for the children? It certainly could only turn what is happening now into a positive direction” (p.1043).

For Angelique and Samuel, expressing passion, care, and love through teaching means taking the time to understand where students are at in terms of academics; where they have been in terms of culture and experiences; and where they are going in terms of
motivation and potential. When students believe that they are loved and cared for, they participate more, they collaborate more, and they exhibit a greater sense of self-pride (Shockley, 2011; Harris, 1999; McNair, 2012).

Reflecting on my own experiences working with Black students, as well as my experience as a Black student growing up, I agree with the views expressed by the participants and scholars. For example, in my practice teaching blocks I have observed disconnections between Black students and teachers who failed to show love and care for their students. What this resulted in was an endless number of Black students who sat at the backs of classes; rarely participating, and rarely connecting with lessons. Conversely, when teachers took the time to positively engage with Black students (i.e. taking the time to understand their cultures and motivations for success on more intimate levels), these students expressed greater passions for learning.

5.1.3 Africentric teachers use a high-achievement approach within literacy practices which involves developing Black students’ critical consciousness and abilities for complex thought in order to re-tell history and counter oppression.

5.1.3.1 Complexity of Thought and Critical Consciousness

Viewing Black students as high achievers and thus, capable of complex thought and critical consciousness is a key component of Africentric literacy pedagogy (Shockley, 2011; hooks, 2003; Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Though it may seem challenging to see students who are typically disengaged with literacy as successful, this attitude on the part of teachers is essential for students to see themselves as high achievers. The “high-achievement” approach to teaching literacy involves teachers challenging the most marginalized students (in this case, Black students) when it comes to academics, despite
statistics that may tell them to do otherwise (TDSB, 2011; Valencia, 1997; Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Shin, 2011).

For Angelique and Samuel, developing critical consciousness and complex thought is made possible through texts that allow Black students to see their cultures depicted through positive lenses. Developing critical consciousness and complex thought is accomplished by seeing Black students as capable of success, and doing so, despite statistics—and moreover—in spite of the fact that oftentimes, these students cannot see success for themselves. As teachers, we can inspire critical consciousness and complex thought in Black students by providing them with more challenging literature (regardless of their reading levels); by using texts during read-alouds that are higher than their current reading levels (McNair, 2012); and moreover, by encouraging Black students to go further with critical analyses of media and the ideologies often present within them. As Mustakova-Possardt (2004) and Thomas et al. (2014) express, when we encourage students to be critically conscious and complex thinkers we awaken their abilities to be curious, and thoughtful, and participatory—and most importantly, as it relates to literacy—engaged.

Through this study—both as a researcher and as a teacher—I have been enlightened to the idea that when we view Black students as high achievers in literacy, we inspire their individual and collective voices to be heard within that process. As Angelique and Samuel have outlined, encouraging students to analyze texts with a critical eye; encouraging them to seek texts that depict them in positive lights; and moreover, inspiring them to believe in their abilities to be critical thinkers, discerning readers, and academically great—that is truly what the recognition of critical consciousness and complex thought is all about.
5.1.3.2 Re-focusing the Lens and Re-positioning History

Re-focusing the lens through Africentric literacy pedagogy means identifying ideologies and representations that have persisted throughout history, like cultural deficit models and other oppressions that have been damaging to the image of Black peoples (Valencia, 1997; Shockley, 2011; Oshodi, 1999). Refocusing the lens means re-configuring these ideologies in ways that empower Black students and enlighten us as teachers. Here, I view “the lens” as the perspectives from which teachers and larger society view Black students: their capacity for academic success; the power of their voices and unique cultural experiences. Transformation occurs when teachers have the courage to challenge the status quo, and in turn, inspire their students to do the same (Valencia, 1997; McNair, 2012). As Samuel and Angelique believe, this can be accomplished by re-imaging histories such as the transatlantic slave trade in ways that re-position Blacks as heroes and heroines. As Samuel so poignantly states: “If you look at the histories of a people who were kings and queens before being enslaved… and have now entered into a different time period where we are far more equal than we were during slavery times…a people who have overcome many obstacles… people who have moved past and forgiven for a lot of things that have happened …that can be empowering.”

Much of the history that I remember being taught in school positioned Blacks and other visible minority groups as disempowered. I recall learning about Black history—my history—through stories of slavery, and European history through stories of heroism. As both participants in this study share, much of what continues to be taught in Canadian schools is presented from a Eurocentric perspective, thus dismissing contributions that Blacks have made to society throughout history. However, re-focusing the lens and re-positioning history means that teachers have the power to question texts and how they teach what exists within texts (both on an explicit and implicit level).
Much in line with several scholars (Perini, 2000; Pino, 2004; Oslick, 2011; Shin, 2011), both participants realize the important role that teachers play in making this type of literacy engagement possible—particularly as it concerns lessons on history. Within this argument, I was especially moved by Samuel’s assertion that “every day is history.” A powerful way for teachers to not only engage, but empower Black students through literacy pedagogy, is to help them realize the roles they continue to play in creating history on a daily basis. In other words, how do Black students assert their voices during literacy lessons? How do they raise their voices within their communities? How do they make themselves heard in the world? If every day is history, then each and every day is integral to the types of citizens that Black students will become. By re-focusing the lens and re-positioning history, teachers create opportunities for marginalized voices of Black students to be heard. Moreover, re-focusing the lens allows students to see themselves and the world around them through an entirely new light.

By teaching history through this approach, Black students are given the autonomy to not only reflect on the experiences of Blacks in history, but also recognize the powerful roles that they—as Black people of today—play in creating their own legacies.
5.1.4 By including a range of materials responsive to Black students’ identities within their literacy practices, and by challenging cultural deficit models, Africentric teachers create opportunities for Black students to see themselves within the classroom in ways that are celebratory and empowering.

5.1.4.1 Challenging Stereotypes by Reflecting and Celebrating Black Culture in the Classroom

One of the ways that teachers can position Black students for high achievement in literacy is by representing and celebrating culture in the classroom. In order to do this, it is important that teachers choose texts that not only depict diversity, but also honour it in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive. Teachers can enact this type of pedagogy in the classroom by choosing literature that is driven by multiculturalism and social justice; literature that challenges stereotypes, honours difference, and encourages students to question texts, and what they accept as truth within texts (Okoye-Johnson, 2011). As both participants explain, when students see themselves reflected and celebrated in the classroom, they are more likely to feel like their cultures, and qualities that make them unique, matter. Because literature provides a powerful vessel through which students can situate their own stories as well as the stories of others, providing books that celebrate Black identities can result in generations of Black students who want to read more, want to learn more, and are more excited about being engaged with literacy (McNair, 2012; Shockley, 2011).

In my own experience, both as a Black student growing up, as well as an informal observer during practice teaching blocks, I understand the perspectives of both participants when it comes to how students view their abilities within literacy. Besides my own feelings of shame associated with the education system, I have witnessed many
Black students who express negative views about themselves which are unfortunately not countered through positive representations in the classroom. As McNair (2012) explains, when teachers fail to honour their students’ identities through the curriculum—especially Black students who tend to be the most marginalized—students have limited opportunities to develop a sense of pride in their own identities.

However, honouring Black students’ identities through the curriculum does not simply stop at choosing books with Black faces on the front covers (Jordan Irvine, 2010; McNair, 2012; Okoye-Johnson, 2011). In fact, as both participants point out, this “unconscious” choosing of texts can often do more harm than good as it relates to the self-images of Black students. Unconsciously, in this sense, means believing that a book that has a Black character, or a title that sounds more “African American” like “Keisharella” (as Angelique shares) will help Black students feel like their stories are being told. Unconsciously means never giving a second thought to the narratives that exist within the texts which can be counterintuitive to the vision of an “inclusive” classroom library. On the other hand, choosing texts “consciously” means understanding and respecting the importance of Black students seeing themselves in powerful roles—as doctors, as part of loving families, as heroes, and as heroines. Essentially, choosing texts consciously means challenging—head-on—stereotypical narratives that plague our Black students one chapter; one book; one story at a time. Honestly, and “consciously” considering these important factors pertaining to Black children’s literature, will not only enable teachers to engage Black students on greater levels, but it will allow them to honour Black students in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive.

When literacy pedagogy fails to celebrate the identities of Black students, they have a much harder time succeeding (Shockley, 2011; McNair, 2013, Okoye-Johnson, 2011). As such, teachers have a responsibility to include literature that reflects and
honours Black students within their pedagogy, and furthermore, challenge ideologies that work to dishonour them. From the perspectives of Samuel and Angelique, when teachers are willing to do this within their classroom practice, Black student engagement—their connection to and appreciation for literacy—is heightened.

5.1.4.2 Challenging Cultural Deficit Thinking and Practice

Teachers play a significant role in perpetuating cultural deficit models that pertain to Black students and literacy (Gonsalves, 2004; Neville, 2004; Pino, 2004; Valencia, 1997). Deficit models of thinking have historically worked to position Black students as inferior and incapable of achievement—despite the motivation and desires these students may have to succeed (Neville, 2004; hooks, 2003; Oshodi, 1999). Samuel and Angelique explained that teachers can challenge cultural deficit models by “consciously” choosing to view their students as intelligent, and motivated, and positioned for excellence. Teachers can challenge deficit models by using statistics that point to massive Black student achievement gaps (Okoye-Johnson, 2011) as tools to motivate the belief that within their own classroom pedagogy, change is plausible. Change, in this sense, means turning disengaged Black students into students who love reading because of the positives ways that they are reflected in books. Change means using media literacy as a platform to discuss stereotypes, and through this platform, inspiring Black students to challenge ideologies and exercise resistance. Reflecting on my own experience, I have learned that when teachers perpetuate cultural deficit models—when they fail to recognize Black students’ abilities to succeed in literacy—these students are more likely to internalize these beliefs, thus, never achieving their potential. On the other hand, when teachers take the time to recognize and affirm the unique qualities and gifts that Black
students bring into the classroom community, they are in essence, working to expose and challenge cultural deficit thinking and practice.

5.1.4.3 Black Gold vs. Black Flaws

Several years ago, during my volunteer tenure at Hughes Academy, I had the privilege of witnessing a performance where Angelique’s students recited the lyrics to the song Black Gold (Esperanza Spalding). In their performance, the students sang lyrics such as: “Now maybe no one else has ever told you so, but you're golden, baby. Black Gold with a diamond soul” (Black Gold, MetroLyrics.com). I couldn’t help but feel moved by the power behind these words; the looks of pride that graced the faces of the students who sang them.

It is no wonder then, that two years later, while participating in our interview for this study, Angelique described Black students through the inspiration of this song. As she expressed, when teachers focus on positive aspects of the Black community: the importance of family and kinesthetic learning; the powerful legacies of struggles and triumphs; they inadvertently position Black students as culturally rich—like Black Gold. Though much of the research concerning Black students and literacy focuses on the achievement gap and problems or flaws that exist within the community (Hampton, 2010; Pino, 2004; Okoye-Johnson, 2011), Angelique chooses to view Black students through a more positive lens. Angelique’s approach really got me thinking: What if teachers refocused this lens to concentrate on that which positions Black students as culturally-rich and powerful? Re-focusing the lens, in this sense, does not mean naively ignoring the continuum of racism in society. Furthermore, re-focusing the lens does not mean forgetting about the powerful roles that other cultures have played throughout history, as Samuel asserts. Instead, re-focusing the lens means creating literacy pedagogy that
focuses on Black empowerment vs. problems; greatness vs. failure; Black Gold vs. Black flaws.

5.2 Recommendations

As outlined within the themes listed above, teachers can authentically and richly engage Black students with literacy by:

- Engaging the minds, bodies, spirits, and hearts of Black students through the enactment of pedagogy that inspires and enables opportunities for spirituality, engagement with the arts, and kinesthetic learning.
- Using Black children’s literature and classroom materials that are culturally relevant and responsive in order to affirm Black identities and inspire Black student engagement.
- Developing literacy pedagogy that positions Black students as high achievers capable of critical consciousness and complex thought.
- Re-focusing Black history in ways that celebrate Black heroism vs. disempowerment.
- Exposing and consistently challenging cultural deficit ways of thinking and practice within literacy pedagogy as means of empowering Black students.
- Inspiring Black students to engage with media texts as a means of exposing ideologies and challenging oppression.

5.3 Further Study

Although I have gained invaluable insight into Africentric literacy pedagogy through this study, there are still so many areas within the research that remain unanswered. Instead of indicating flaws within the research, however, I believe these questions are evidence of
the overall underrepresentation of research conducted in the area of Africentric literacy pedagogy. As a result, the benefits of such pedagogy have not been fully realized at the mainstream level. The following are five questions that I still have pertaining to this topic:

1. If mainstream teachers are integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy into their classrooms, to what extent is it being implemented? Is it being integrated consistently or simply during select times of year (i.e. Black History Month)?

2. Do Black children benefit equally from Africentric literacy pedagogy in mainstream schools as they do in Africentric institutions?

3. What impact does the race of the teacher have on the effectiveness of Africentric literacy pedagogy?

4. What affect(s) does Africentric literacy pedagogy have on non-Black students in mainstream schools?

5. What implications could mainstreamed Africentric literacy pedagogy have on Africentric schools and teachers?

5.4 Implications of Research

Findings from my research pose several implications as it relates to theory and practice. First, as an educational research scholar, this study has exposed me to the existence of deeply-rooted inequities that have, in many ways, created generations of Black students who continue to fall behind when it comes to literacy. Centuries-old cultural deficit models, which have positioned Black students as failures; education systems which have failed to recognize Black students as critically conscious and capable of complex thought.
These realities, as discussed by participants as well as the numerous scholars cited throughout this paper, have been exposed through this study.

As a teacher made more aware of these realities through this research, I feel especially responsible for ensuring that change happens. Throughout this paper, I have addressed the ways that a single teacher can position his or her Black students for literacy success, instead of failure; I have addressed how he or she can, within a single classroom, engage Black students through mind, body, spirit, and heart, instead of working to further disenfranchise them. That teacher—the one whom I am addressing; the one whom I challenge to make these changes reality—first and foremost—is me. As an educational research scholar who has uncovered these issues—and as a teacher with the platform and privilege of putting these changes into practice, I accept the challenge.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

When I first sought out to explore Africentric literacy pedagogy for my Master of Teaching Research study, I began with a single question: what will the findings of my research mean in the context of what is known about Black student engagement and literacy? From a research standpoint, the approach that I would take to gather data relating to this question seemed fairly straightforward—articles and books related to my thesis, combined with participant interviews; eventually resulting in a fusion of theory and practice within a single paper. However, what I learned throughout the process of this fusion—from scholarly analyses; from the teachers who participated; from my own reflexivity—led me on a path of empowerment as a researcher; heartbreak as a teacher; and above all, self-discovery as a human being. I learned that despite desires that I, along with endless other teachers and researchers may have to eradicate oppression within education—despite desires that we may have to see every student succeed—cultural
deficit models, combined with inequitable education systems and pedagogies, can often stand in our way. I learned that the inequities that I experienced more than two decades ago as a Black student in the Canadian education system—inequities that I was sure would now be history—continue to linger and shackle the minds, the bodies, the spirits, and the hearts of Black students in Canadian schools today. However, what I have also learned is that although these issues are multiple, intricate, and very deeply-rooted, the path to untangle them is not impossible. For, if we—we who dare to call ourselves scholars—we who dare to call ourselves teachers—make it our mission to keep these issues, and the children who are affected most by them, at the forefront—Black children who continue to fall behind when it comes to literacy—Black children who desperately need our attention, our help, and our love—then maybe, just maybe, the change we seek will come to pass. As Angelique and Samuel have demonstrated, change begins with passion, it develops with support, and it continues with love. As the scholars cited in this paper have explicated, change begins and continues with recognition: recognition of issues, and recognition of strategies to overcome these issues. Finally, what I—both as a researcher and as a teacher—have tried to express to the teachers, to the scholars, to the parents, and to the students who may one day read this paper, is that change—the change we so desperately seek when it comes to Black students and literacy—begins with me; it begins with you; and most importantly, it comes to pass with us.
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the Africentric Paradigm Shift Discourse: Building Toward 

Evidence-Based Africentric Interventions in Social Work Practice with 


Male Student Communication. College Composition and Communication, 


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ____________________

Dear ____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. As part of the requirements of my program, I will be conducting a research project with a focus on teacher enrichment within elementary classrooms. The working title of my research project is: "Integrating Africentric Literacy Pedagogy into Mainstream Classrooms: Inspirations from Africentric Teachers."

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Mary Lynn Tessaro. My research supervisor is Dr. Angela MacDonald. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.
The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Natalie Ann Davis

Phone number: 647-969-0945; Email: natalieann.davis@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Mary Lynn Tessaro

Phone number: 416-978-0065; Email: marylynn.tessaro@utoronto.ca
Research Supervisor’s Name: Angela MacDonald

Phone number: 416-978-0069 or 416-821-6496; Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Natalie Ann Davis and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________________

Date: _____________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Natalie Ann Davis

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee: Teacher

This is for a qualitative research study about integrating Africentric literacy pedagogy into mainstream classrooms as a means of student engagement.
Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you worked as an educator?

2. How long have you worked within the Africentric educational arena?

3. Why did you choose to become an Africentric educator?

4. What are some of the misconceptions you've observed concerning Africentric literacy pedagogy?

5. What methods do you, as an Africentric educator, use to select books in the classroom?

6. How would you describe Africentric literacy pedagogy?

7. What do you think the main differences are between Africentric literacy pedagogy and mainstream approaches to literacy?

8. What are the most challenging factors faced when it comes to engaging Black students with literacy?

9. What are some strategies mainstream teachers can use to engage students from various racial backgrounds with Africentric literacy pedagogy?
10. How do notions of hope and/or spirituality factor in your choices of books?

11. How do you find students respond to literacy strategies that integrate notions of hope and/or spirituality?

12. How do you find your students respond to Africentric literacy pedagogy?

13. What affects do you think Africentric literacy pedagogy has on your students’ self-esteem?

14. How do parents perceive literacy strategies that integrate hope and/or spirituality?

15. How do you, as an Africentric teacher, know that you are making inroads with your students when it comes to literacy?

16. What is some advice you can give to mainstream teachers hoping to adopt Africentric literacy pedagogy into their classrooms?
## Nguzo Saba: The Seven Guiding Principles
(Dr. Maulana Karenga, founder of Kwanzaa, 1963). Adapted from the [OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swahili Principle</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Umoja</td>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kujichagulia</td>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
<td>To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ujima</td>
<td>Collective Work and Responsibility</td>
<td>To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems, and to solve them together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ujamaa</td>
<td>Cooperative Economics</td>
<td>To build and maintain our own shops, stores, and other businesses, and to profit from them together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Nia</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kuumba</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Imani</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>To believe in all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.</td>
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Appendix D: Book Recommendations

The following list includes books that would serve as incredible resources in any primary/junior classroom. I have chosen these books because of the unique ways in which they capture the essence of Africentric literacy pedagogy. Enjoy!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Africentric Children’s Book List</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affirmation of Self</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children</em> by Sandra L. Pinkney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>I am Mixed (I am Book)</em> by Garcelle Beauvais and Sebastian A. Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>We’re Different, We’re the Same, and We’re all Wonderful (Sesame Street)</em> by Bobbi Kates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>I Love My Hair!</em> by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>The Snowy Day</em> by Ezra Jack Keats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah</em> by Laurie Ann Thompson and Sean Qualls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Chocolate Me!</em> by Taye Diggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>The Colors of Us</em> by Karen Katz</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Affirmation of Family</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>First Family</em> by Deborah Hopkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Full, Full, Full of Love</em> by Trish Cooke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Christopher, Please Clean Up Your Room!</em> by Itah Sadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Please, Baby, Please</em> by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>You Can Do It Too!</em> by Karen Baicker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Last Stop on Market Street</em> by Matt De La Peña</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Affirmation of Friendship &amp; Community</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>The Nutmeg Princess</em> by Richardo Keens-Douglas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>One Love: Based on the Song</em> by Bob Marley by Cedella Marley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>Every Little Thing: Based on the Song 'Three Little Birds' by Bob Marley</em> by Cedella Marley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>If Kids Ran the World</em> by Leo &amp; Diane Dillon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay</em> by Cari Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ <em>When Harriet Met Sojourner</em> by Catherine Clinton</td>
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