Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

By

Ehab Hussein

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

For the degree of Master of Teaching

Copyright by Ehab Hussein, April 2016
Abstract

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest and one of the most ethnically diverse school boards in Canada serving more than 245,000 students. Statistics reporting on student achievement are compiled and published by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). When broken down by ethno-racial identity, current TDSB statistics point to the underachievement of self-identified Black students. According to the data, Black students are disproportionately more likely to be suspended than any other demographic group and experience a high dropout rate.

Members of the African-Canadian community along with researchers and educators have long called for the TDSB to invest in innovative teaching practice and research to help improve the school experiences of Black students. Following public debate, in 2009, Canada’s first Africentric elementary school was opened in Toronto. The Africentric school aims to support high academic achievement, instill self-pride and motivate students to succeed by grounding instruction and teaching philosophy in the principles of Africentric education.

By using Africentric pedagogy as an analytic tool, this study explains and uncovers the ways in which educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric pedagogy. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with two Africentric educators, this research was guided by the following questions: How do educators understand the role of Africentricity in learning about and understanding students’ cultural identities in the classroom? In what ways do educators understand students’ cultural identity in an Africentric classroom? How do educators use students’ cultural identity to promote engagement in an Africentric classroom? Findings suggest that Africentric teachers: (1) use students’ cultural identities to engage them in the curriculum; (2) employ culturally centered teaching practice; (3) form partnerships with caregivers; and (3) teach for and about equity and inclusion.

Keywords: Africentricity; Africentric education; Engagement; Equity; Inclusion; Social justice
Acknowledgements

“Ubuntu – I Am Because We Are” Southern African Proverb

*Ubuntu* speaks to the notion that an individual’s humanity is expressed through the relationships formed with others. For this reason, the educator that I have evolved into has been shaped and expressed by through my lived experience, identities, and interactions with friends, family, and the wider African communities.

I am not just a Black male. I came to Canada as a refugee. I am an ethnic Somali from a war torn country in Africa, and I am a Muslim man from a multilingual, lower income family that played an intimate role in giving me the space necessary to fall, rise, and make mistakes without losing faith in me as a son. To the matriarch of the family, Khadra Musa Mohamed, I thank you for your prayer and support. My life is lived in honour of my late father, Hussein Yousif Juma, and my family for which my love knows no bounds. To my siblings Abeer, Areej, Yazmin, Zahra, Raghda, and my brother Adam Casey, I am grateful to have your support. Specifically to the youngest of my clan of siblings, my mother, older sisters and I await the day we can celebrate your successes.

Throughout my life, I have had aspirations of breaking the cycle of poverty. As the middle child of seven children, I overcame financial and emotional hardships to become the first person in my family and my group of friends to get a university degree and master's degree.

To my mother-in-law, Miss Marie, thank you for relating to my story. I am grateful for all the conversations, assurances, and profound insights you have provided Teppers and I. It is through your compassion and wisdom that I have been made to feel like a welcome part of the family. To the many grand-mothers and grand-aunts, I appreciate all the food and sweet treats that have sustained me throughout.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

I owe the fulfillment of my aspirations, my dedication and resilience to an individual who I respect and have been inspired by since we crossed paths. She has changed the trajectory of my life in ways she could not imagine. This strong Black woman has granted me the honour of being her husband. It is clear to me that for better or worse, in her love my confidence never waivers. To my phenomenal wife, Teppers, without a doubt she has been and will continue to be a pillar in my life for many years. I cannot say enough about her steadfast support and partnership with regard to her faith in me, even when my faith in myself waivered. For this and many other reasons, I am devoted to you as my wife and life partner. Your day of celebration is just ahead of us.

In alignment with Ubuntu, I believe that success is not mine alone, but is a reflection of our success. Lastly, I wish to acknowledge and thank my MT cohort (Fancies) and professors. Thank you, Rodney, for your guidance, patience and encouragement. To you, I owe my mental health and well-being. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours. Love ya man!
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 1

1.1 Research Context ............................................................................................................................. 6
1.2 Research Purpose and Research Problem ......................................................................................... 8
1.3 Background of the Researcher ......................................................................................................... 9
1.4 Research Questions .......................................................................................................................... 10
1.5 Preview of the whole MTRP ........................................................................................................... 11
2.0 Introduction to the chapter ............................................................................................................... 12
2.1 Africentricity and Africentric Education ......................................................................................... 12
2.2 Africentric Education and Achievement Gaps ............................................................................... 13
2.3 Components of Africentric Education in Toronto ........................................................................... 14
2.4 Resources and Materials Used in an Africentric Program ............................................................... 15
2.5 Africentric Pedagogy in the Classroom (Nguzo Saba, 7 themes & CRRP) ................................. 15
2.6 Challenges towards operationalizing Africentric education in Toronto ....................................... 17
2.7 Partnering With Parents/Caregivers for Black Student Success .................................................... 18
2.8 Gaps in Literature .......................................................................................................................... 18
3.0 Introduction to the chapter ............................................................................................................... 20
3.1 Research Approach .......................................................................................................................... 21
3.1.1 Research Procedures ................................................................................................................ 22
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ...................................................................................................... 22
3.3 Participants ..................................................................................................................................... 23
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria ..................................................................................................................... 24
3.3.2 Participant Recruitment .......................................................................................................... 24
3.3.3 Participant Biographies .......................................................................................................... 25
3.4 Data Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 26
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures ............................................................................................................. 27
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths ..................................................................................... 28
3.7 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview ......................................................................................... 29
4.0 Introduction to the chapter ............................................................................................................... 32
4.1 Personal and professional connections to Africentric pedagogy .................................................... 32
4.1.1 Africentric Pedagogy & Teachers’ Cultural Identities ............................................................... 32
4.1.2 Africentric Pedagogy & Teachers’ Professional Experiences ................................................... 33
4.2 Importance and benefits of Africentric pedagogy in engaging student .................................................. 34
  4.2.1 Importance of Africentric Pedagogy: Enriched Academic Experience ................................................. 34
  4.2.2 Benefits of Africentric Pedagogy: Social-Emotional Growth .............................................................. 36
4.3 Africentric Approaches: Reflective approaches to classroom practice .................................................. 37
  4.3.1 The importance of Social Location ........................................................................................................ 37
  4.3.2 Participants reflected on their teaching practices .................................................................................. 39
4.4 Making meaningful connections and additions to the required provincial curriculum ......................... 40
  4.4.1 Connecting Ontario curriculum to Nguzo Saba .................................................................................... 40
  4.4.2 Connecting the Ontario curriculum to diverse resources .................................................................... 41
4.5 Challenges: Students, Caregivers and Colleagues .................................................................................. 42
  4.5.1 Challenges arising from teaching students ............................................................................................ 42
  4.5.2 Challenges in responding to caregivers .............................................................................................. 43
  4.5.3 Challenges from other teachers in the school ....................................................................................... 44
4.6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 45
5.0 Introduction to the chapter ....................................................................................................................... 47
5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance ...................................................................................... 47
  5.1.1 Culturally Centered Practice ............................................................................................................... 47
  5.1.2 It Takes a Village to Raise a Child ....................................................................................................... 49
  5.1.3 Teaching For and About Equity and Inclusion .................................................................................... 50
5.2 Implications ............................................................................................................................................ 51
  5.2.1 Broad .................................................................................................................................................. 51
  5.2.2 Narrow .............................................................................................................................................. 51
5.3 Recommendations .................................................................................................................................. 52
  5.3.1 Faculties of Education and Pre-Service Programs ............................................................................. 52
  5.3.2 Schools ............................................................................................................................................. 53
  5.3.3 Teachers ............................................................................................................................................ 53
5.4 Areas for further research ......................................................................................................................... 53
5.5 Concluding Comments ............................................................................................................................ 54
Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent .......................................................................................................... 60
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions .................................................................................................... 63
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Context
The TDSB is the largest and one of the most ethnically diverse school boards in Canada serving more than 245,000 students (TDSB, 2014a). According to data derived from the TDSB’s Student and Parent Census reports (TDSB, 2014b), Black students comprise 12 percent of the school board’s population.

Figure 1: Ethno-Racial and Family Background (TDSB, 2014b)

Despite making up only 12 percent of the student population, Black students are disproportionately more likely to be suspended than any other demographic group (Brown & Parekh, 2013). The TDSB report, Structured Pathways: Intersection of Disability, Achievement and Equity, highlights that 43.7 percent of Black students have been suspended at least once (Brown & Parekh, 2013). This is in contrast to 18.8 percent for self-identified White students (Brown & Parekh, 2013).
Using data from the Student Census and Student Information System (SIS), the TDSB Research Department examined the academic achievement patterns of students from various demographic groups (Brown & Sinay, 2008). In the report, *The TDSB Grade 9 Cohort 2006-2011: Graduation Patterns Fact Sheet No. 2*, researchers documented the high drop-out rate of self-identified Black students (TDSB, 2012).

**Figure 2: Suspension Data by Student Demographic Variables (Brown & Parekh, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>No Suspension</th>
<th>At Least One Suspension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td><strong>77.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>22.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td><strong>79.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td><strong>79.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: racial groups with less than 100 students are not included*

**Figure 3: Grade 9 Cohorts Fall 2000-2006 Racial Group and Region of Birth (TDSB, 2012)**

---

Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

In response to critical reviews from scholars, educators and researchers that point to variations in the academic experiences that exist between racial groups, the TDSB enacted initiatives that sought to close the academic achievement gaps. The TDSB has especially shown interest in improving the academic success and experiences Black students. For example, community-school partnerships and school departments such as the Equity Department, Africentric School, Somali Taskforce and Model Schools for Inner Cities have been created to identify and combat inequities in the TDSB (TDSB, 2014c). Such initiatives are committed to advocating for: (1) innovative teaching and learning practices, (2) support services to meet the social, (3) emotional and physical well-being of student and (4) meaningful relationships with community stakeholders (TDSB, 2014c).

1.2 Research Purpose and Research Problem

Adding to the calls for further research into the plight of Black students in the TDSB, community members used public forums, such as the Organization of Parents of Black Children, to express their dissatisfaction with the achievement of Black students (Dei, 1996). Community members have voiced varying views as to how to rectify the underachievement of Black students in public schools. For example, some have contended that minority children are more likely to learn if they can relate to the material being taught (Dei, 1996; Delpit, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 1994). Conversely, others have expressed doubts about what Black history could do for those failing in school (Dei, 1996). Regardless, scholars and community members alike have touted the importance of educators teaching about Black achievement in public schools and using this information to centre their students’ learning (Dei, 1996).

The Africentric school was conceived by academics, educators, parents and community members as a way to improve Black student achievement in the TDSB (Dei, 1996). Many believed that grounding a curriculum in the narratives, experiences and histories of those of African descent would support Black student achievement (Dei, 1996). In view of the underachievement of Black students and the establishment of the Africentric school, the goal of my research is to learn how educators in Africentric programs affirm the racial identities of students in their classrooms.
1.3 Background of the Researcher
My interest in the educational experiences of Black children is personal. My research is informed by my childhood relationships with schools and community. Black scholars, such as bell hooks (1993) and Patricia Hill Collins (2002), along with cultural commentator and historian, Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley (1997), have inspired me to write a scholarly piece where I engage in the research process as a way to “make sense of the world of my childhood” (p. 4). Such an approach provides me with the unique opportunity to delve into research as a way to understand the unique identities that I simultaneously exist in, negotiate and reimagine.

I grew up in the urban Scarborough community of Galloway. My childhood was characterized by intrepid expeditions into the nearby ravine. It was in that ravine where the neighbourhood children learned about and appreciated our relationships with one another and the environment. My childhood was shaped by the ways in which we used hip hop culture to express our frustration with an education system that understood us as underachievers. We used intricate dance moves and rap lyrics to affirm our unique identities. In my neighbourhood, the local basketball court was a meeting place where athletes of all ages would showcase their loyalty, ability and risk-taking skills. Relationships grounded in love and trust flourished and storytelling was used to document our existence. At home, the smell of spicy sauces, sweet bananas and tender goat meat engulfed my apartment reminding all ten members of my family of the tastes of our Somali homeland. Unfortunately, these rich community experiences were excluded from the classroom. Instead, my teachers labeled me, as well as others in my neighbourhood as simply underachieving Black students. As a result, our identities were erased.

I am not just a Black male. I came to Canada as a refugee. I am an ethnic Somali from a war torn country in Africa, and I am a Muslim man from a multilingual, lower income family. I lived and went to school in the Scarborough community of Galloway. Although riddled with violence, drugs and gangs, my Galloway community also taught me invaluable lessons of friendship, family and loyalty. My feelings of not belonging at school began during my early experiences as
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

an English language learner in elementary school and continued throughout my high school career.

My education experiences were marked by teachers who paid very little attention to my cultural, religious and linguistic identities. At school, my multiple identities were altered to mirror the negative stereotype of an apathetic and angry Black male, who overlooked the opportunity of accessing a formal education in favour of the urban, aggressive, street culture of inner-city Black males. Such stereotypes and assumptions devalued my presence in the classroom. When internalized, these stereotypes culminated in lost opportunities, by way of low expectations. These stereotypes also stopped me and so many other inner-city youth from pursuing paths which would positively contributed to our well-being, as well as to the health of our communities. These feelings of exclusion, hostility and confusion pertaining to the school system culminated in my interest in the experiences of Black students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

1.4 Research Questions
The following questions guide my study:

In an Africentric classroom, how do educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric pedagogy?

Sub-questions:

1. How do educators understand the role of Africentricity in learning about and understanding students’ cultural identities in the classroom?
2. In what ways do educators understand students’ cultural identity in an Africentric classroom?
3. How do educators use students’ cultural identity to promote engagement in an Africentric classroom?
1.5 Preview of the whole MTRP
To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two kindergarten educators about how they affirm students’ racial identities in their classrooms. In chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of Africentric education as it pertains to North America. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4, I report my research findings, and in chapter 5, I discuss these findings and their significance in relation to the literature. In chapter 5, I will also discuss the implications of the research findings for my own practice as a beginning teacher.
2.0 Introduction to the chapter
A burgeoning body of literature exists that examines Africentric education. However, this literature is overwhelmingly grounded in an American context (Dei & Kempf, 2013). As such, the experiences of students, families and educators who engage in Africentric education in Canada are underrepresented in the literature. This literature review will draw on both American and Canadian sources to provide readers with an overview of Africentric education. In so doing, the importance, benefits and core components of Africentric pedagogy will be explored.

2.1 Africentricity and Africentric Education
In 1980, Dr. Molefi Kete Asante (1980) published the revolutionary book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. Although scholars such as Kwame Nkrumah (1963) made reference to the notion of Afrocentricity as early as the 1960s, Asante’s work launched the first full discussion of Afrocentricity as a worthy philosophical concept (Asante, 1980). In this book, Asante (1980) defines Afrocentricity as, “a paradigm that suggests all discourse about African people should be grounded in the centrality of Africans in their own narratives” (Yancy & Asante, 2015). Guided by Asante’s (1980) work, Africentric education centres students in their own culture, experience and history. Whether students are from the African continent, Canada, the Caribbean or other parts of the African diaspora, Africentric education recognizes the impact of their history and current reality of structural inequities on their learning (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Africentric education seeks to remedy structural inequities by providing a nurturing learning environment and employing pedagogical approaches that use the identities of the student to make authentic connections to the curriculum (Dei & Kempf, 2013). The research maintains that Africentric education equips students to understand, navigate and interact with other cultures in a diverse society (Dei & Kempf, 2013). This approach to educating students of African descent is unique because it serves as a model for transformative and collective social action (Dei & Kempf, 2013).
2.2 Africentric Education and Achievement Gaps
Roughly 20 years ago, the Royal Commission on Learning described a crisis among Black youth in Toronto with respect to education and academic achievement (Dei & Kempf, 2013). In the 1990s, the Every Secondary Student Survey conducted by the former Toronto Board of Education reported a high dropout rate for Black students (Dei & Kempf, 2013). This crisis continues today with current Toronto District School Board data revealing that Black students have a graduation rate of 64.5% compared to 81% enjoyed by their White counterpart (Brown & Parekh, 2012). Moreover, Black students are overrepresented in the applied stream and are underrepresented in applications to postsecondary programs (Brown & Parekh, 2012). In 2011, the TDSB linked EQAO results in reading, writing and mathematics to parent census demographic information. The results revealed that race and poverty are major factors impacting educational outcomes of students, as early as grade 3 (Dei & Kempf, 2013). The report determined that the greatest discrepancies were among different racial groups, followed by that between income groups (Dei & Kempf, 2013; TDSB, 2009). Dei and Kempf (2013) warn that such demographic data ought not be interpreted in a way that problematizes students and their families by race. In fact, they argue that “these statistics indicate the education system’s inability to respond to students’ race and class backgrounds in ways that do not inhibit their academic and social achievements and potential” (Dei & Kempf, 2013, p. 55).

Many American research studies, and to a lesser extent Canadian studies, have sought to explain the academic achievement discrepancies between races. In the United States of America, bodies of literature purport that minority student’s experience a cultural dissonance between their home culture and their school culture (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001). When examining the educational experiences of Black students in the United States, some scholars suggest that the educational system remains in favour of White-education (Kunjufu, 2001). While others, like Anderson (2001), argue that the education that Blacks receive is not engaging them. In Toronto and other American cities, local school boards have looked to Africentric education as one way to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students (Marks & Tonso, 2006). The Toronto District School Board, African-Canadian community members and
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

Black scholars perceive Africentric education as a viable option to address opportunity and achievement gaps faced by Black students (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

2.3 Components of Africentric Education in Toronto
Since 2009, Toronto has become host to a number of Africentric educational programs. Publically funded pre-kindergarten, elementary and secondary Africentric programs have been established by the Toronto District School Board. These programs are optional and cater to students and families who are interested in attending (TDSB, 2009). Although each of the publically funded Africentric programs abides by the Ontario Curriculum, they also use an Africentric approach to teaching (TDSB, 2009). Africentric education provides students with the opportunity to learn the value and importance of their own histories (TDSB, 2009). According to promotional material and scholarly work, the Africentric programs established in Toronto aim to provide students with a nurturing, exciting, engaging and academically rigorous environment by instilling a sense of cultural identity, belonging, and collective ownership of education (TDSB, 2009). Africentric educators partner with caregivers and community to accomplish eight goals as detailed by Lee (1992, p. 165-166):

1. Legitimize African stores of knowledge
2. Positively exploit and scaffold productive community and cultural practices
3. Extend and build upon Indigenous African languages
4. Reinforce community ties and idealize [the concept of] service to one’s family, community, nation and world
5. Promote positive social relationships
6. Impart a worldview that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one’s people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others
7. Support cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness
8. Promote the vision of individuals and communities as producers rather than simply consumers
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

Africentric educational programs in Toronto seek to provide opportunities for students and their families, whose academic and socio-emotional needs have not been met by the current system. According to the Toronto District School Board (2009), students who attend Africentric educational programs become members of a learning community, and enhance their own success through this opportunity. TDSB’s Africentric programs endeavour to create a school environment that is conducive for making teaching and learning relevant to students’ cultural and social realities (TDSB, 2009). By so doing, it is believed that Black students will be engaged and enjoy higher academic success.

2.4 Resources and Materials Used in an Africentric Program
In order to achieve the aforementioned eight goals of Africentric education, teachers, caregivers and community members must use resource materials that reflect the needs, interests, languages and demographics of their students (Lee, 1992). Resource materials must also represent issues of social justice and equity. The use of such rich resources in the Africentric classroom support teachers and students in challenging stereotypes and promoting positive images of Black people (TDSB, 2009). The literature contends that students in Africentric classrooms must have access to materials that supports their involvement in community initiatives, advocacy campaigns and social justice work (Dei & Kempf, 2013; TDSB, 2009). Through texts, digital materials and visuals, students in an Africentric program are introduced to Black scientists, mathematicians, writers, etc. Accordingly, resources and materials used in Africentric programs share Black thinkers as models of intellectual and academic success (TDSB, 2009).

2.5 Africentric Pedagogy in the Classroom (Nguzo Saba, 7 themes & CRRP)
According to Shujaa (1994), when discussing Africentric education, “more emphasis should be placed on pedagogy than on curriculum” (p. 256). In the Africentric classroom, pedagogy is guided by Karenga’s (1997) seven principles of Kwanzaa, the Nguzo Saba. The principles include: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, creativity, purpose and faith (Karenga, 1997). The focus on pedagogy conveys the central role that teachers play in the Africentric classroom. As such, Africentric pedagogy requires “teachers who are not only knowledgeable about Black history, but whose realities and personal/subject
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

locations are also grounded in the social ethics of African culture” (Dei & Kempf, 2013, p. 13). To further elaborate, the Africentric teacher is tasked to expose learners to the realities of society and empower them to deal with social pressures. This means teaching about racism, gender, disability, age, sexuality, language, religion and class oppression.

Dei and Kempf (2013, p. 131) highlight seven interrelated themes to which Africentric educators are committed to in order to nurture the academic and social success of Black students:

1. Representation: the visual culture/landscape of the school, knowledge representation of different bodies, and physical representation of exceptional Black and other minority educators and administrative staff who are well grounded in their communities
2. Language: the teaching of African and other Indigenous languages apart from the dominant local, regional, or national language
3. Family/community and school partnerships with a focus on shared responsibility: meaningful engagement with local communities as significant and valuable partners in the delivery of education to you
4. Co-operative education: education that stresses cooperative learning, multiple forms of student excellence, and doing away with many hierarchical structures of schooling
5. Equity and values education: the linkage of issues of power and social difference with schooling processes and knowledge production
6. Indigenous/community knowledges: cultivating multicentric knowledge systems in schools by affirming off-school and local cultural resource knowledge bases, as well as lifelong learning
7. Spirituality: evoking learners’ understandings of the self, inner strength/environment and connections to the group and outer environments, as well as stressing the body-mind-soul interface and the society-nature-culture nexus
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

The aforementioned seven themes demonstrate the ways in which Africentric educators define academic and social success. Since Africentric education situates learners within their community, academic and social success look beyond individual accomplishments to the broader community (Dei & Kempf, 2013). As a result, Africentric educators understand achievement as not only belonging to the individual, but are also a testament to collective sharing of knowledge and support. Dei and Kempf (2013) explain that student performance is linked to community because of “its strong influence on both successes and failures [of the child]” (p. 133). Africentric educators make the important distinction between collective responsibility for education and blaming caregivers and minority communities for structural problems that exist outside of their control (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

2.6 Challenges towards operationalizing Africentric education in Toronto
Following the decision to open Africentric programs at the elementary and secondary levels, the Toronto District School Board faced widespread resistance and uproar. The hysteria was played out in media outlets across the city. In fact, top African-Canadian scholar Dei (2013) received hate mail for his support of Africentric education. The outrage centred on debates around racial and cultural division. Critics petitioned that the establishment of an Africentric school represented a return to segregation (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Opponents also cited that an Africentric school undermined the implementation of inclusive education. Such critics blamed Black families and communities for the academic underachievement of Black students and not the public education system (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

In response to the hostility towards Africentric education, proponents explained that Africentric schools were similar in concept to Catholic, French language or even the Rainbow Program for LGBTTIQ2S students (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, 2 Spirited) (TDSB, 2009). Unlike under segregation, which was imposed by force on people of African descent, the Africentric school is open to all and provides choice in curriculum and pedagogical approaches (TDSB, 2009). Supports of Africentric education viewed the establishment Africentric Alternative Schools as a remedy for exclusion and unfavourable
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

conditions that Black students endure in the public education system (Dei & Kempf, 2013; TDSB, 2009). Advocates for Africentric education cite the disengagement of Black students from their education as a need to for such an alternative school. Equipped with TDSB data on achievement, these supporters argue that an Africentric Alternative school provides the public school system with an opportunity to accept a shared responsibility for the caring of Black students, setting high expectations and creating an atmosphere of collaboration with Black parents (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

2.7 Partnering With Parents/Caregivers for Black Student Success
Both American and Canadian literature stresses the central role that caregivers play in Africentric education (Dei & Kempf, 2013). In Africentric programs, caregivers are welcomed into the classroom and are seen as valuable resources. In fact, caregivers participate in key decision-making processes that impact the educational life of their children (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Africentric teachers invite caregivers into the classroom to share their areas of expertise with students and school staff. Africentric education also highlights the need for consistent, ongoing and timely communication between school staff and caregivers with regards to students’ educational experiences. Such communication between caregivers is evidenced through school newsletters, telephone calls, conferences and having them as guest speakers (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Scholars are careful to remind us that in Africentric programs, caregivers are not passive actors in the classroom, but rather actively participate and are involved in the facilitation of classroom activities (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Parents, caregivers and community organizations are utilized as a resource to help school officials understand community events, changes and issues. Furthermore, they provide Africentric teachers with vital information about their children to support the designing of curricular lessons that are culturally responsive and relevant (TDSB, 2009).

2.8 Gaps in Literature
It has been 7 years since the establishment of the first Africentric school in Toronto. Although much of the literature is grounded in the American context, the underpinnings of Africentric education and pedagogy in the United States have helped us better understand Africentric
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

programs in Toronto. Other than Dei and Kempf (2013), few Canadian scholars have
investigated in such detail Africentric philosophy, education and pedagogy. Despite work done
by Dei and Kempf (2013) in the field of Africentric pedagogy, there remains a gap in the
Canadian body of literature. For example, given the cultural diversity found within the Black
community, I am curious about the teaching and learning experiences of Africentric educators. I
am interested in the ways Africentric educators: (1) understand Africentric pedagogy and
implement it in their classrooms and (2) engage students who are members of varying cultural
Black communities. This research paper explores the practice of two kindergarten educators who
teach in a public Africentric program in Toronto. This research draws light on the diverse ways
that Africentric educators engage culturally diverse students.
3.0 Introduction to the chapter
My research interest is shaped by my experiences as a Somali man who came to Canada as a young refugee child. I conduct research as a way to affirm and validate my experiences of oppression and resistance. The research methodologies that I use honour the Somali tradition of nurturing members of the community through dialogue, investigation and sharing. As noted in the first chapter of this research paper, the primary motivation for me to undertake this qualitative research study is personal. I did this research because I wanted to better understand the complex experiences of my childhood, as well as those of other members of my African-Canadian community. I used this research study as a way for me to make sense of my complicated, and at times toxic, relationship with the public school system. For these reasons, this research study is guided by the following overarching question:

Research Question: In an Africentric classroom, how do educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric pedagogy?

Sub-questions:

1. How do educators understand the role of Africentricity in learning about and understanding students’ cultural identities in the classroom?
2. In what ways do educators understand students’ cultural identity in an Africentric classroom?
3. How do educators use students’ cultural identity to promote engagement in an Africentric classroom?

As an African-Canadian man, it is important for me to take part in a research process where the methodology and language used is easily accessible to and readily understood by members of my community. I aspire to create a body of work that is not pretentious and speaks to the lived experiences of African-Canadians.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

The methodology used for this research, as detailed in this chapter, aimed to explore the experiences of kindergarten educators in an Africentric program in a manner that affirmed their voices, worldviews and experiences. The methodology used for this study also honours who I am: an African-Canadian researcher, student, husband and son.

This chapter begins by describing the research methodology. I detail the general approach, procedures and data collection instruments. Participant sampling and recruitment are also described. In this chapter, I explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations taken. Lastly, the methodological rationale, limitations and strengths are presented.

3.1 Research Approach

When preparing for my interviews, I found myself struggling with negotiating the inescapable power-over I experienced with the researcher and researched relationship. Wilson (2001) emphasizes the need to think about the ways that power is manifested during the interview process, especially when engaging with members of racialized and Indigenous communities. Therefore, I incorporated a reflexive practice that helped in my quest to negotiate the power I held while conducting interviews (Riley, Schouten, & Cahill, 2003). I engaged in reflexivity throughout the qualitative research process as a way to interrogate my own biases, assumptions and power (Hsiung, 2008).

Members of African and diasporic communities commonly participate in the creation and sharing of personal and communal narratives. These narratives are used as ways to pass on their experiences, ideas and opinions with other members of their community. In fact, storytelling and the sharing of narratives are recognized as one of the most important traditions within African cultures (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Gross & Barnes, 1989; ). Thus, it was pivotal that my research approach provided participants the opportunity to share their learning and experiences through storytelling.
3.1.1 Research Procedures
The goal of the research study was to investigate teacher perspectives and experience in respect to the Africentric classroom, and how educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric pedagogy. In order to achieve this goal, I began the research by conducting an extensive literature review. Afterwards, I conducted two 45 to 60 minute interviews. I interviewed two Black kindergarten educators from a publicly funded Africentric program in TDSB. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. It was very important that the face-to-face interviews facilitated exchanges between the participants and I. The semi-structure interviews created opportunities for sharing in narrative form. The participants shared the pain, frustration, joy, and wonder of their practice with Africentric education.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection
In Indigenous Knowledge in Global Contexts, Dei (2009, p. 6), editor of and contributor to this collection of essays conceptualizes Indigenous knowledge as the following:

We conceptualize an 'indigenous knowledge' as a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group, and forms the basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar.

Since the two participants self-identified as African-Canadian and adhered to African Indigenous knowledge systems, it was important that the instruments of data collection were conducive to the worldviews, beliefs and perspectives of the participants. For this reason, I decided to use semi-structured interviews as instrument of data collection in an effort to provide opportunities for the participants to use stories and narratives to describe their experiences and practice. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to create an interview setting that nurtured informal exchanges of thoughts and feelings between the participants and I. Scholars, such as Creswell (2007) attest that a semi-structured format allows for the interviewer to design an interview that attends to
both the research focus and the possible need for participants to elaborate. I informed participants of the research topic and sub-questions prior to the interview. Participants answered a series of questions during the duration of the interviews (see Appendix B).

Indigenous researcher and scholar, Kovach (2009) explains the benefits of using qualitative approaches in research that facilitate narrative sharing, “these methods are more elastic, and this gives research participants an opportunity to share their story on a specific topic without the periodic disruptions involved in adhering to a structured approach” (p. 124). For my research, semi-structured interviews permitted my participants, who were accustomed to the oral tradition of sharing through narratives, to provide me with the contextual detail needed to appreciate the social, historical and political contexts that shape their teaching experience in the Africentric program.

Owusu-Ansah and Mji (2013) affirm that African Indigenous knowledge systems and research methodologies are characterized by their relational and reciprocal grounding. In my study, the use of semi-structured interviews as a primary instrument of data collection affirmed and valued participant voice. To promote a sense of collective responsibility, during the semi-structured interviews, the participants and I ate food as we explored the research question. During the interview process, I was aware that all participants, including myself, entered the conversation shaped by their lived experiences. Conducting and participating in interviews shifted my role from that of researcher to one of co-participant. It required that I relinquish my power over my roles of interviewer and listener. This meant that I was active in my response, acceptance, and resistance, as I was now subject to being questioned and rebutted by unrestrained participants engaging in the topic. No longer in the position of an outsider, we (no longer I) used questions to probed and narratives to construct, deconstruct, and fill gaps in our thinking.

3.3 Participants
In the sections below, I review the sampling criteria used for recruitment and briefly introduce each of the two participants.
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria
The participants interviewed were active educators and had a minimum of five years classroom teaching experience. As a result, the participants were able to draw upon their professional experiences to illustrate their develop beliefs and concepts related to teaching Black children. The participants recruited also had a minimum of two years teaching experience in an Africentric classroom. The participants were able to refer to these teaching experiences when recounting the ways that they engaged students by honouring their identities. I recruited participants that identified as being proficient in the Africentric principles and its application in the classroom environment. All recruited participants have undertaken professional development related to Africentric education, student engagement and equity. The participants chosen to take part in the study also assumed leadership roles in creating responsive learning environments. Participants were revered by their peers as having expert knowledge and leadership in the field of Africentric education and student engagement. The following are additional criteria that guided the recruitment of participants:

- Male and female educators with experience implementing an Africentric curriculum
- Educators who have taught in an Africentric program and have knowledge of Africentric pedagogy
- Educators who are aware of opportunity and achievement gaps faced by various racial groups (specifically those faced by Black students)

The above criteria supported me in identifying participants who were knowledgeable and confident enough to share their ways of engaging students in an Africentric program.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment
In July 2015, I had the opportunity to become immersed in a community of educators.

I volunteered with the TDSB Africentric Pre-Kindergarten Program. Volunteering allowed me to establish a network of educators, administrators and supervisors who were knowledgeable and
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

passionate about Africentric education. My relationships with members of my network helped me to identify potential participants for my study.

Upon completion of my volunteer role at a publically funded Africentric program, I provided my contact information to potential participants introduced to me by members of my network. By waiting until the end of my volunteer position, the educators contacted for the study did not feel obligated to accept a role as participant in my research study. Instead, the educators felt free to volunteer or decline participation without the pressure of being in my presence daily. I provided potential participants that matched the criteria with an overview of my research study and criteria for participation.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies
For the purpose of this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two educators. The two educators were identified throughout the research study by pseudonyms Khadra and Yousif. Both educators were able to draw upon their professional experiences in the Africentric classroom to illustrate their developed beliefs and concepts in relation to the issue of student engagement and cultural identity (ies) as part of an Africentric pedagogy.

Participants were introduced by way of referrals from educators who currently work in the field. I had the opportunity to meet with participants, prior to them agreeing to be interviewed, at a TDSB conference for which they facilitated workshop for parents. At the conference, I witnessed the participants talk to parents of low socio-economic status, about what student learning looks like in the classroom and how parents can become involved in the classroom. What I witnessed was the participants’ dedication to honouring parents/students cultural identities. Specifically, the participants focus was on the identities of parents from the African diaspora, for which the majority of those represented in the space, sought the knowledge necessary to advocate for their children.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

As a result of Khadra and Yousif’s experiences implementing mainstream and Africentric pedagogy and curricula, they would have been able to observe the impact that engaging students cultural identities has had on their students.

3.4 Data Analysis
Creating categories out of the data has felt like a subjective process that was inevitably formed and influenced by personal feelings and opinions and was arbitrary at best. Like Kovach (2009), Owusu-Ansah (2013), Mji (2013) and other Indigenous and African researchers, I engaged in a data analysis process that honoured the diverse voices, worldviews and identities of the members of my community. I recognized the need for me to analyze data in a manner that is communal and required critical self-reflection. As a result, throughout the data analysis process, I reflected on the ways in which my biases, experiences and identities informed how I interpreted the data. I also understood the importance of involving the participants in verifying the themes identified and ensuring that I appropriately interpreted the narratives.

During the interview process, I took notes. I also recorded and transcribed the interviews immediately afterwards. While reading the transcripts and reflecting on the literature as well as my own experiences, I was able to identify recurring themes and sub-themes, which will be presented in the following chapter. I printed the transcript and colour coded pertinent parts of the interview according to their themes. I, then, cut out and pasted relevant colour coded parts of the interview to chart papers labelled by theme and colour. The significance of colour coding and pasting pertinent cut-outs of the interview on the appropriate chart paper is that it allowed me to see the themes and interview clippings laid out together visually. This allowed me to further draw connections and note the interrelationships between the themes. Therefore, once charted, relationships and connections of the themes were easier to examine.

I was aware of the danger of imposing my biases while interpreting the research data. In order to avoid misrepresenting what participants said during the interview, participants were invited to
ensure that the themes identified were appropriate and that the narratives were correctly understood. As such, the participants played an active role throughout the analysis process. By inviting participants to be a part of the analysis process, I was able to share my interpretations of the data with them. It also provided the participants with opportunities to challenge or validate my analysis.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures
This research study followed the ethical review procedures as outlined by the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education and the University of Toronto. Several ethical considerations were taken for this study. These issues included:

1) Confidentiality and Consent
All participants signed a form consenting to be interviewed in a group setting and audio recorded. The consent form provided an overview of the study, ethical implications and participant expectations. The consent form can be viewed in detail in Appendix A. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. In order to further preserve their anonymity, any identifying information of the participants was excluded and the acknowledgement of their participation in the research study was restricted.

2) Right to withdraw
The signed consent form detailed to participants their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process. Participants’ right to withdraw from the study were not only outlined in the consent letter, but I also orally explained to each of the participants their rights prior to the start of the research process.
3) Member checks

Participants will be given an opportunity to review, evaluate, and retract any information on the transcript deemed personal, inaccurate, or detrimental in nature.

4) Data Storage

Research data will be stored on a secured hard-drive for a period of five years. Afterwards, the hard-drive will be permanently wiped - erasing everything.

5) Limited Risk

Minimum risk includes having feelings aroused as a result of the personal nature of the study. Given the research topic, participants may have an emotional response and experience feelings of vulnerability during the interview process. This risk will be minimized by providing participants with the interview questions ahead of time. The consent letter will also reassure participants of their right to refrain from answering any questions that they feel uncomfortable with. Participants will have the right, as detailed in the consent letter, to withdraw from participating in the research study at any time.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

When I first began this research journey, the limitations were glaring. I did not perceive myself as part of the academic community. Coming to Canada as a Somali refugee and growing up in the underserviced neighbourhood in the Scarborough community of Galloway, I viewed myself as an outsider. My writing style, language and knowledge of academic research protocol are still being developed. As a Somali visual artist and storyteller, I found the academic language and structure used for conducting research at times challenging and restrictive. Throughout the research process, I occasionally noticed myself conforming my thinking and writing style to emulate those of western scholars found in my course readings. Conducting this research study within a two year time frame guided only by a single research course also shaped the process. I
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

carried out this study while taking a course to learn about academic research, language and protocol. Because of time and resource constraints, my study only comprised of two participants. Due to this small sample size, my findings are not reliable to draw inferences across a population. My school schedule and personal responsibilities also limited the amount of interviews undertaken.

I am deeply connected to the research topic of my study. I am dedicated to improving Black student achievement in public schools. My biases, experiences and worldviews shaped how I conducted this study. Throughout, I have identified my biases and shared ways that they informed my research process. The interview conducted for this study also required the participants and myself to share our biases and recognize how our experience informed our practice.

Although my position as a Black male researcher poses some limitation to this study, it also strengthened my connection to the participants. The participants perceived me as a member of their community. My insider knowledge of the Black community helped me to create an interview process that affirmed their worldviews and was responsive to their cultural norms. As a result, the participants felt secure to share their experiences and open up about the ways that they engage students in an Africentric classroom. To help ensure that my biases did not cloud my understanding of the data, participants were invited to participate in the analysis process by challenging and validating my interpretations of their narratives. Despite the limitations, this research study succeeded in illustrating how an Africentric practice can inform what is good teaching.

3.7 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview
I began this chapter by sharing my personal connections to the topic understudy. I am interested in how educators in an Africentric program engage students in ways that honour student identity. When designing this study, I could not help but think about the reasons why I was writing the
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

study and for whom. I wanted to conduct a research study that explored diverse ways that educators nurture engagement and honour student identity in an Africentric classroom. I wrote this study for front line educators and members of my African-Canadian community. I especially wrote this study for Black students who, like me, continue to feel that they do not belong in the education system. I wrote this study in hope that the narratives shared by educators inspire and inform teaching practice, both inside and outside of an Africentric program. As such, the methodologies, languages and writing style used reflect my desire to present a scholarly piece that appeals to my intended audience and fulfill my intended purpose.

For my research study, I conducted two semi-structured interview with two Black educators from a publicly funded Africentric program in TDSB. The interview setting and procedure aligned with the worldviews and traditions of the participants, all of whom self-identified as Black and proclaimed their adherence to the tenets of Africentricity. The semi-structured interviews required the participants to share personal narratives, ask questions and be critical of teaching practice. The interviews required the participants and I to each share our biases and recognize how our experience informs our practice. Pertinent information was also gained through a literature review. The participants were given pseudonyms to ensure that their privacy was respected.

I belong to an academic network dedicated to Black student achievement and the professional development of Black educators. A member of my network introduced me to each of the participants. All participants had experience teaching in an Africentric classroom, had in-depth knowledge of Africentric principles and assumed leadership roles at their schools.

My interpretations of the data collected for this study were shared with the participants. To ensure that my biases and experiences did not alter the meaning of the narratives and other data collected, the participants played an active role during the analysis process. Participants provided further insights, as well as challenged or verified my understanding of the data.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

My inexperience as a researcher, small sample size and personal biases are limitations inherent in this research study. Despite these limitations, I was able to design a study that provided educators with opportunities to share their experiences of engaging students in an Africentric program. The following chapter presents the research findings.
4.0 Introduction to the chapter
In this chapter, I report the research findings derived from two interviews that I conducted with teachers currently working at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Both interviews explored the topics of Africentric pedagogy and Black student engagement. The data from these two interviews provide insight into answering my overall inquiry regarding how educators engage students’ cultural identities as part of an Africentric pedagogy. In this chapter, I have organized the research findings into five overarching themes (and several sub-themes) based upon my analysis of participants’ responses. These themes include: 1) personal and professional connections to Africentric pedagogy; 2) importance and benefits of Africentric pedagogy to engage students; 3) reflective and reflexive approach to classroom practices; 4) meaningful connections to the required curriculum, as well as relevant additions to the curriculum; 5) challenges and strategic responses in the Africentric classroom. Participants are identified using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity: Yousif and Khadra.

4.1 Personal and professional connections to Africentric pedagogy
Both participants described the central role that their cultural identities and experiences played in grounding their teaching practice in Africentric pedagogy. Participants found that their cultural identities and personal experiences were integral components to their interest in Africentric pedagogy.

4.1.1 Africentric Pedagogy & Teachers’ Cultural Identities
When asked to describe their understanding of Africentric pedagogy, participants spoke to their cultural identities as a driving force in their practice. Asante (1991), Dei and Kempf (2013), in their literature, also attest to the invaluable role that personal identities and experiences play in teacher use of Africentric pedagogy. Khadra explained:
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

The daily cultural lessons that our ancestors gave to my parents, and my grandparents and they carried down through generations until now have led me to identify my cultural identity by my ancestral stories, by my race and by my gender. Africentric pedagogy fits my worldview that education is a tool that we, as African people living the diaspora, can use to bridge that gap created by racism.

Yousif also connected his cultural identities with his interest in and use of Africentric pedagogy. Like Khadra, Yousif viewed his experiences growing up in an Afro-Caribbean family as one factor that helped shape his understanding of Africentric pedagogy. During the interview, he revealed:

I am Afro-Caribbean. I am from a Caribbean family where my aunts, uncles and grandparents were educators. In the Caribbean, being an educator is huge in terms of the respect you have in the community. Educators in the Caribbean are connected to family. I see Africentric pedagogy as way for the school and Black communities to work together and nurture our children.

Yousif, much like Khadra, maintained that their own identity as Black-Canadians coupled with their upbringing in a community that valued collective responsibility shaped their understanding of Africentric pedagogy. Yousif and Khadra both disclosed that their attachment to Africentric pedagogy stems from its alignment with their personal worldviews and strong belief in collective work and responsibility.

4.1.2 Africentric Pedagogy & Teachers’ Professional Experiences
When recounting their interest in and experience with Africentric pedagogy, both participants did so in relation to their profession. For example, Yousif recounted how his professional experiences led to his involvement with Africentric pedagogy. Yousif explained, “I became involved in the Africentric program two years ago. I was inspired and was excited by this
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

professional opportunity. I wanted to help a child see the beauty in themselves, their culture, their family and community.” Yousif also expressed throughout the interview, that his interest in Africentric pedagogy lies in his desire to unite academic excellence and positive character.

Khadra stressed that, much like her personal identities, her professional experiences working with Black students solidified her interest in and understanding of Africentric pedagogy. For Khadra, her extensive work in predominantly Black communities in Toronto opened her eyes to the importance of adopting a pedagogy that centres on the cultural identities of students. Khadra maintained that this passion towards the education and engagement of Black students led her to work in TDSB programs dedicated to Black student success. In teaching in these programs, Khadra was first exposed to Africentric pedagogy and implemented a teaching practice that aimed to have students identify, accept and have pride in their own cultures. Khadra’s emphasis on her own cultural identities and professional experiences align with Shujaa’s (1994) assertion that, “It is the African centeredness of the teacher’s thinking that determines the African centeredness of the teaching” (p. 256). Participants perceived Africentric pedagogy as a way to develop and engage in a teaching practice that is dedicated to the educational upliftment of Black children. For them, Africentric pedagogy represented a viable way for educators to help ensure Black student achievement.

4.2 Importance and benefits of Africentric pedagogy in engaging student

Both participants identified the importance and benefits of using Africentric pedagogy to engage students. The participants understood Africentric pedagogy as a way to provide students with a relevant and enriched academic experience. The participants also emphasized the social-emotional benefits that students enjoyed when engaging in Africentric pedagogy. These themes are addressed below.

4.2.1 Importance of Africentric Pedagogy: Enriched Academic Experience

According to participants in this study, the importance of Africentric pedagogy lies in the enriched academic experiences it offers students. From the perspective of both participants, as
well as from the literature (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1996; Dei & Kempf, 2013), Africentric pedagogy enables teachers to engage students in a rigorous academic experience that is relevant and responsive to their lives. Both participants stressed the important role that providing an enriched academic experience played in supporting Black student engagement.

To illustrate her thinking, Khadra shared teaching experiences from her kindergarten Africentric classroom. Khadra recounted, “In my classroom, we have high academic expectations for everyone. We use examples and problems found in our community. We look at how to use our cultural and academic knowledge from school to positively impact our family and community.” Current academic literature on Black student engagement and Africentric pedagogy argue for the need for teachers to connect curricular topics explored in the classroom to real-life community events (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1996; Dei & Kempf, 2013). In so doing, Khadra was able to design classroom programming that is responsive and relevant to the interests, cultures and experiences of her students.

Yousif also echoed the importance of having a pedagogy that is grounded in the notion that all students can be academically successful. Like Khadra, Yousif believed that Africentric pedagogy requires teachers to centre their programming on the cultural and academic identities of students. Yousif explained that he drew on his creativity when developing and implementing an enriched academic program in his Africentric classroom. Yousif illustrated his assertions through his description of a mathematics lesson he designed for his kindergarten students where he used West African Kente cloth to support student understanding of patterning. By anchoring his lesson in an exploration of one aspect of West African culture, Yousif was able to provide his Kindergarten students with opportunities in their learning centres to: learn about the history of Kente cloth, create their own Kente cloth pattern, share fabrics and practice their counting abilities. Yousif stressed that one of the most important components of this lesson was that he invited parents/caregivers to share with the students patterns from their own cultures. Yousif explained that connecting mathematics to the cultural identities of his students resulted in a enthusiasm and a deeper grasp of the curricular content explored.
Literature affirms that Black students are empowered when they are able to connect their curricular learning to their own lives and to the members of their community (Asante, 1991; Dei & Kempf, 2013). According to Dei and Kempf (2013), “[Africentric] education aims to reinforce community ties and idealize the concept of service to one’s family, community, nation and world” (p. 31). Echoing conclusions drawn in academic literature, both participants maintained throughout the interviews that the significance of Africentric pedagogy is that it engages students in enriched academic experiences that centres on the cultural identity of the learners. The participating teachers stressed that such experiences required that the all members of the classroom community, teachers, students and caregivers, held high expectations of one another and connected learning back to the larger Black community.

4.2.2 Benefits of Africentric Pedagogy: Social-Emotional Growth
The participants spoke at length about the advantages that Africentric pedagogy afforded their students. Participants spoke of the socio-emotional benefits that students experienced when teachers grounded their pedagogy in the cultural identities of the students. Yousif shared the ways in which his students were empowered and felt a sense of pride in their cultural identity when the curriculum was taught through an Africentric lens: “[Africentric pedagogy] empowers [students] from a very young age with the belief that knowledge is power. It empowers our children from a very young age to feel that there is nothing that they cannot achieve.” Yousif further elaborated on the benefits of Africentric pedagogy by speaking to the self-esteem that his kindergarten students demonstrate when programming is centred on their cultural identities:

[Africentric pedagogy] helps us educators to build the child’s self-esteem from a very early age. In my Africentric classroom, the literature, the artwork...everything is reflective of their cultural identity. So, they know from a young age that, ‘I can contribute to my community and world.’ We learn about our ancestors who made this contribution and they were successful. All this helps me to reinforce the message to my students that there's nothing they cannot achieve; the sky's the limit.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

The participating teachers also looked beyond the individual benefits enjoyed by their students in the Africentric program, and spoke to benefits that the broader community experienced. Scholars Murray and West-Burns (2011) argue that when designing curricular lessons and units, teachers must think about the ways that they support the self-esteem, confidence and well-being of students and their families. For example, Khadra witnessed the socio-emotional ways in which her students and their families benefited from Africentric pedagogy. Khadra shared:

My students and their parents feel a sense of family with everyone in the classroom. They feel a sense of accomplishment (...) When I see a child and their parents smiling and laughing and able to express the connections that they made, I have accomplished my goal as an educator.

Both participants firmly believed that the social growth experienced by students in Africentric programs helped to create a classroom environment that nurtured culture, inclusion and high expectations. Such a classroom environment grounded in socio-emotional well-being, participants stressed, helped teachers and students create spaces where high academic achievement and critical thinking skills were not only valued, but also seen as necessary in the quest of being contributing members to the broader community.

4.3 Africentric Approaches: Reflective approaches to classroom practice
Participants expressed the importance of employing a reflective approach to their classroom practices. The participating teachers contended that it was imperative for them to think about the ways in which their own social location affected their teaching. Participants also highlighted the importance of reflecting on their teaching practice.

4.3.1 The importance of Social Location
Both participants consistently emphasized their need to critically think about their own social location. The participating teachers spoke passionately about their cultural identity and the ways in which it influenced how they engaged students with the curriculum. For example, Khadra
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

described her cultural identities as being grounded in her African ancestry, Caribbean heritage, love of the arts and profession as an educator. Khadra admitted that she often reflected about how her identities shaped her curriculum lessons, activities and physical classroom setup. She elaborated on her teaching experiences with kindergarten students in the Africentric program:

My cultural identity definitely affects my teaching; I think about it all the time. If you look around my classroom you can see African and Caribbean musical instruments and paintings by West African artist, David Kibuuka. One way that I engage students is by exploring with them how we can grow our brains to be wonderful African artists.

According to Khadra, her passion for the arts and her pride in her African-Caribbean heritage not only shaped how she approached the curriculum, but also how she interacted with her young students. Similar to Khadra, Yousif described himself as a reflective practitioner who thought about the ways that his cultural identity and childhood experiences influenced his work in the Africentric classroom. Yousif characterized his childhood in Toronto as a period of unrest. His childhood desire to find an inclusive space both within and out of the school had a major effect on his desire to become an Africentric teacher. Yousif explained, “I went through the school system and never had any teachers who were reflective of me. I wanted them see someone like themselves represented as an educator.” Yousif explained that his childhood experiences motivated him to be a type of educator that intentionally created learning spaces and opportunities where Black students feel like they were included and valued.

When asked to describe his cultural identity, Yousif pointed to his African-Caribbean heritage and linguistic abilities as important aspects of who is. He shared that he often uses multiple languages found in the Caribbean, such as Spanish, French, English Portuguese and Patois, to create spaces in his classroom where students and their families feel welcomed. Echoing conclusions drawn by Murray and West-Burns (2011), Yousif made a point to communicate to students and their parents/caregivers in their home-language. By integrating the diverse African and diasporic languages in his classroom, he was able to establish a welcoming environment for
4.3.2 Participants reflected on their teaching practices

Both participants shared that they constantly reflected on their teaching practices. The participating teachers took the time to think about their teaching practice and the ways in which it supports student engagement. Both participants indicated that they felt reflection was necessary to ensure the centring of students’ cultural identity in the classroom. According to participants, engaging in reflective practice gave them the opportunity to interrogate their own biases and assumptions about the identities of their students and their families and learn about authentic ways to connect the cultures of learners with the curriculum. In fact, Khadra appropriately said, “Through reflection, you will become more aware of your biases.”

Participants argued that reflection was necessary to ensure that personal biases are not negatively affecting a child’s learning or learning experience. When talking about her teaching practice, Khadra described the need for her to constantly think about ways that her teaching practice linked to the identities of her students. Khadra said:

I have no choice, but to always think about my practice. When I look at the curriculum, I always keep in mind the importance of connecting to children within their cultural realm, there space, honoring their identity, honoring who they are as individuals and as a unit within the classroom community... and respecting them and recognizing that their wonderful and showcasing the work of others within our culture. I always keep that at the forefront.

Throughout the study, participants highlighted that reflecting about their teaching practice, required them to think about the cultural identities of the students in their classroom. Participants emphasized reflective practice as essential in order to better engage their students. Yousif shared that thinking about his teaching practice not only required him to look at his lessons, but also to
think about the physical environment of his classroom. For Yousif, like for Khadra, reflecting on his teaching practice allowed him to ensure that his classroom space reflected the cultural identities of his students. He admitted, “I am always thinking about the things I put on the walls, tables and learning centres because everything included in the learning space needs to be reflective of culture and there is actually a classroom culture.” The participating teachers expressed that by assuming a reflective stance regarding their teaching practice, they were able to create a rich learning environment for their students that was engaging and grounded in students’ cultural identities.

4.4 Making meaningful connections and additions to the required provincial curriculum
When discussing the ways in which participants engaged in Africentric pedagogy, they spoke in detail about how they make meaningful connections and relevant additions to the curriculum. Khadra and Yousif shared the ways that they incorporated the Nguzo Saba (See chapter 2), used relevant resources and made meaningful connections to the cultures in the classroom.

4.4.1 Connecting Ontario curriculum to Nguzo Saba
As Africentric teachers, Khadra and Yousif used the Nguzo Saba (the seven principles) as a guiding force in their classroom. In fact, Khadra described the Nguzo Saba as “being our backbone in teaching.” Khadra used the Nguzo Saba to engage students with the curriculum in ways that centred on the learners’ cultural identities. For example, in her kindergarten classroom, Khadra designed curricular lessons where students used the Nguzo Saba to reflect on their learning experience. She explains, “In my classroom, we use the Nguzo Saba to highlight the importance of collective voice, union and creativity.” Khadra continued to explain that by grounding the curriculum in the Nguzo Saba, she was able to “keep it real with the children.” Her kindergarten students were able to see how the curriculum is applicable to their lives and the building of their communities.

Like Khadra, Yousif attested to the central role of the Nguzo Saba in making meaningful real-world connections with the curriculum. In Yousif’s classroom, the Nguzo Saba is taught to the
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

students through literacy and numeracy activities. Like Khadra, Yousif highlighted the communal aspects of the *Nguzo Saba*. In so doing, Yousif contended that students were able to access complex literacy and numeracy skills and connect it back to the community. Yousif said, “The *Nguzo Saba* allows children of the African diaspora to connect with the curriculum; to see meaning in the curriculum. It forces them to ask: What type of contribution am I going to make in my space?” Both teachers agreed that the *Nguzo Saba* enabled them to present the curriculum to their students in ways that connected to their lives and cultures. Such use of the *Nguzo Saba* supports arguments for the use of the *Nguzo Saba* as ways for Africentric teachers to ground provincial curricular in the cultural identities of students (Asante, 1991; Dei & Kempf, 2013).

### 4.4.2 Connecting the Ontario curriculum to diverse resources

Consistent with the literature (Asante, 1991; Dei & Kempf, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Murray & West-Burns, 2011), participants emphasized the importance of selecting appropriate curriculum resources to respond to the interests, curiosity and cultures of their students. When questioned about the resources used in the Africentric classroom, Khadra and Yousif took the opportunity to share how they determined which resources to use with their students. For example, during the interview, Khadra explained the considerations that her and her grade took when purchasing resources for the Africentric classroom:

> We look at the diversity of the children within the classroom and we gear our purchasing of items. Whether it's the books that we read, we gear it to their culture. Over and above all, because my mindset is also always on cultural awareness...respecting and honoring...when we are ordering we always order to honour the Africentric culture in the Africentric classroom.

Khadra emphasized that resource selection was important to validate cultures represented in the classroom, but outside of it as well: “We have to account for whose in our classroom, but we also have to account for who is missing from the space we occupy.”
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

Like Khadra, Yousif asserted throughout the study the valuable role that resources played in ensuring that meaningful connections between the students’ experiences and the curriculum. Yousif noted how resources helped students engage in the curriculum in ways that empowered them. To support his stance, Yousif shared titles of specific resources used in his Africentric program:

*The Colors of Us* or *Shades of Me* or *Beautiful Me* or *Black Is Beautiful* are examples of literature that’s reflective of my students. These stories celebrate them. It empowers them to feel that they’re just included and as important as the majority. It helps children of color feel included in the learning space.

Yousif and Khadra both maintained the importance of using resources that are relevant and responsive to the identities of the learners in the space. In their respective classrooms, both teachers witnessed their students engage in culturally relevant resources and make connections to the Ontario curriculum while using appropriate resources.

4.5 Challenges: Students, Caregivers and Colleagues
All participants identified a range of challenges they experienced when engaging students in an Africentric program. These challenges included those arising from students, caregivers and teachers. Throughout the interview, the participating teachers not only identified the challenges, but also described the strategies they undertook to overcome them.

4.5.1 Challenges arising from teaching students
In this study, both participants were asked about the challenges they faced when engaging students in the Africentric classroom. Participants admitted that, at times, they encountered resistance from students when exploring identities other than their own. For example, Khadra described how her kindergarten students humiliated one based on their culture or academic abilities. In Khadra’s own words, “children sometimes dishonour a culture.” However, instead of being discouraged by such instances, Khadra understands it as a teachable moment. Khadra
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

shared, “When children dishonour a culture, we take the opportunity to do research with the children.” In her interview, she advised that teachers “hit things head-on” and create inquiry-based lessons where students researched, shared ideas and asked questions about topics that they hold misconceptions about.

Much like Khadra, Yousif shared obstacles he faced when engaging students in an Africentric program. When creating curricular lessons that sought to engage students in topics of cultural identity, Yousif pointed to moments of tension with his students. Yousif explained that when developing and implementing activities and lessons, he would often assume that the students were blank slates in need of knowledge. His assumptions and biases led students to disengage in the lessons. He contended, “I had to realize [students] come to our classes with knowledge of math, knowledge of language, knowledge of social dynamics.” For Yousif, meaningful relationships with students are necessary to overcome obstacles he faced in the classroom. As outlined in the literature (Asante, 1991; Dei & Kempf, 2013; Murray & West-Burns, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995), both Yousif and Khadra said that they intentionally spoke to their students about their interests, curiosity and home life as a way to honour their multiple identities. According to Yousif and Khadra, such relationships with students enabled them to better plan and design curricular activities and lessons that were engaging and relevant.

4.5.2 Challenges in responding to caregivers
Both participants stressed the important role that caregivers play in the educational experiences of their children. For Khadra, “Africentric pedagogy requires that teachers value parents as part of the learning process.” This invaluable role that parents/caregivers play in the educational experiences of Black students is well documented in the literature (Asante, 1991; Dei & Kempf, 2013; Murray & West-Burns, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Nonetheless, Khadra and Yousif both admitted that they occasionally encountered obstacles when partnering with caregivers for student success. Khadra shared that many times caregivers often challenged her on the Ontario Kindergarten curriculum’s emphasis on play-based and inquiry-based learning models. Khadra said, “[The parents] told us that they were having this hard time understanding the curriculum.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

And if the parents cannot connect to curriculum then the kids cannot connect.” Overtime, Khadra developed a trusting relationship with caregivers. From the beginning, she would speak to caregivers and would often invite parents to help out in the classroom. As a result, Khadra developed an open and trusting relationship with caregivers to the point that they felt comfortable with confiding to her their apprehensions towards the curriculum. Instead of dismissing and discrediting their concerns, Khadra along with other teachers invited caregivers into the classroom and even established curricular nights so that caregivers and teachers could look at the curriculum, discuss learning gained outside of the school and explore authentic ways to partner for student success.

During the interview, Yousif also highlighted obstacles that he faced with caregivers in the Africentric classroom. Like Khadra, Yousif firmly believed that in order to engage students in the curriculum, the same had to be done with their caregivers. To illustrate his point, Yousif spoke to the obstacles he faced in his classroom: “Some parents are not, maybe because they work long hours, making the time at home to building the literacy skills of their children.” Instead of perceiving the caregivers as deficient and uncaring, Yousif saw it as an opportunity to create strong school-home relationships. Yousif stressed the need to think about diverse ways to communicate with parents, such as writing letters, using interpreters, inviting caregivers to volunteer in the classroom and calling caregivers during outside of the instructional day. Overall, both participants strongly believed that Africentric teachers had to form strong relationships with caregivers to help ensure student success. As Khadra put it, “We, as Africentric educators, have to work really hard to make sure that parents never feel that they are on the outside and that they can't bring in their culture and bring in stories and talk about how they teach their child at home.” Both participants saw the need to create inclusive environments for not only the students, but also their caregivers to ensure the engagement of students in their Africentric classroom.

4.5.3 Challenges from other teachers in the school
Both participants taught an Africentric program in a school building where the rest of the teaching staff ascribed to a mainstream, Eurocentric pedagogy. As a result, Yousif and Khadra
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

faced obstacles when dealing with mainstream teachers. In her interview, Khadra described instances where other teaching staff would question her pedagogy and would express apprehension at trying out Africentric lessons in their classrooms. Other times, Khadra stated that the other teaching staff would be amazed at the progress of her students and wondered what they could do to support Black student achievement in their own rooms. As a way to nurture relationships with other teaching staff, Khadra explained, “I would say to any educators is educate yourself; just educate yourself. Knowledge is power and the more you know, the more comfortable you will be in working with all children, throughout the African diaspora.” Moreover, Khadra shared interesting Africentric lessons with other teachers and introduced them to the *Nguzo Saba* and suggested ways that they could integrate it into their mainstream classroom.

At times, Yousif also faced challenges in forming relationships with other teaching staff who did not ascribe to Africentric pedagogy. Yousif found it disheartening the ways that some staff labelled students and assumed a negative conception of their Black students. In order to quell what he believed was the over identification of Black students as underachievers, Yousif advised teachers to “really embrace the students who are in your space for who they are. Get to know them. Get to know the children and the families.” Yousif also shared with mainstream staff engaging Africentric lessons, activities, resources and online materials that could be used during the opening school months that would help them to embrace the identities and cultures of their students. Altogether, study participants saw challenges that they faced with other teaching staff as opportunities to share the ways in which teachers can use Africentric pedagogy to engage learners in the curriculum.

4.6 Conclusion
In this chapter, I reported the findings from interviews that I conducted with two Africentric kindergarten educators, Yousif and Khadra. These findings elucidate how these two educators use Africentric pedagogy to engage students. In chapter 5, I will also explore this study’s implications for teaching and research communities, as well as for my own professional growth.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

as a classroom teacher. In the following chapter, I will integrate my own experiences and beliefs not only as a Black student, but also as a Black researcher and teacher committed to Black student achievement. Within this discussion, I will offer recommendations for teachers committed to implementing Africentric pedagogy for Black student engagement. Lastly, I will put forward a series of questions for future research in the area of Africentric pedagogy.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the chapter
I designed this research study to learn from teachers who are currently practicing Africentric pedagogy in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Throughout this study, I have explored the ways that educators engage with students’ cultural identities as part of an Africentric pedagogy. The findings from this study reiterate calls from literature for school systems to be responsive to the needs and identities of Black students to help ensure their academic and social success (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1996; Dei & Kempf, 2013).

In this chapter, I discuss the research findings and their significance in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I connect participant insights with the existing literature as to create a clear image of their significance. I will also outline the broad implications of these findings for the educational community, as well as ones for my practice as a teacher and researcher. Based on the research findings, recommendations are put forward for teachers and researchers wishing to further explore this topic. This chapter then concludes with a summary of how this study has re-shaped my vision of Africentric pedagogy and Black student engagement.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance
This section addresses the key findings of this study, informed by current literature on Africentric pedagogy. It is organized to address the following topics in sequence: 1) the various ways that Africentric teachers use students’ cultural identities to engage them in the curriculum; 2) the use of culturally centered teaching practice and formation of partnerships with caregivers; and 3) teaching for and about equity and inclusion.

5.1.1 Culturally Centered Practice
A review of the literature and an analysis of data derived from participant interviews reveal the importance of Africentric teachers grounding their practice in the cultures of their students.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

Echoing conclusions drawn from literature, participants in this study agree that the centering of students’ cultures in classroom instruction is crucial to their overall educational success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Dei & Kempf, 2013). The participating teachers assert that by designing lessons and activities, as well as engaging students in discussions that are responsive to their cultures, educators are able to create an empowering learning environment that enforces the belief that all students can and want to learn. Dei and Kempf (2013) affirm this stance by maintaining that when Africentric teachers draw upon the cultures and experiences of the learners in the classroom, they are able to provide their students with a learning space that is characterised by a sense of belonging and is conducive to educational success.

Participants in this study, as well as literature, stipulate that resources that are responsive to the cultures, curiosity and abilities of students are necessary to initiate and support such transformative learning spaces (Dei & Kempf, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Murray & West-Burns, 2011). Participants, Yousif and Khadra, maintain that curriculum materials, digital tools and resources must reflect the cultures, needs and interests of the students. Scholars have suggested that culturally responsive and relevant resources support educators in developing units and lessons that focus on social justice (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Participating teachers also spoke to the importance of exploring community issues, news and events in the classroom as a way to make meaningful connections between students’ lives and the curriculum. These kinds of practices can provide students with the opportunity to critically investigate oppressive acts (e.g., racism, classism, ableism, sexism, etc.) occurring not only within the school, but also within the broader community, as well as globally (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

This study, consistent with the literature, revealed benefits to the centring of students’ identities in classroom instruction. Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (2002), Dei & Kempf (2013) acknowledged that when education is grounded in the cultures, environments and communities of the learner, social transformation can be catalyzed. In this study, the educators found that using students’ cultural identities to ground teaching and learning was key for their students’
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

development of positive and progressive attitudes about themselves, their communities, as well as their educational journey (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Overall, this study’s findings serve as an important reminder of the interconnections between academic, cultural, social, personal and community well-being. Accordingly, as illustrated in this study and in literature, in order for students’ needs to be met, Africentric teachers must assume a holistic approach that, as Dei asserts, “acknowledges [students] as whole beings” (p. 138).

5.1.2 It Takes a Village to Raise a Child
An African proverb proclaims, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Participants drew upon this notion of collective responsibility repeatedly. Both participants, Yousif and Khadra, steadfastly maintained that a central theme in Africentric pedagogy is family/community and school partnerships. As seen in the findings section of this study, Yousif and Khadra both reported engaging with families and local community members to support student engagement and academic success. In each of the participants’ classrooms, families, caregivers and community members were invited to participate in various activities and learning opportunities for students. In fact, scholars Asante (1991), Dei and Kempf (2013) confirm the pivotal role that parents/caregivers play in realizing Africentric education.

Literature on Africentric pedagogy explains that parents/caregivers must be able to visit classrooms without being viewed and treated as infringing upon the authority of teachers (Dei & Kempf, 2013). Yousif and Khadra understood family/caregiver and school partnerships as integral components to their practice as Africentric teachers. As a result, they dedicated much effort to the establishment of a classroom environment that was welcoming and validating for families. In their classrooms, participants understood families/caregivers as an educational resource and their personal and/or professional knowledge of their children was valued. Like suggestions put forward by scholars Murray and West-Burns (2011), participants consulted caregivers and involved them in making key decisions regarding important aspects of their children’s school life. This included inviting community members and caregivers as guest speakers, storytellers and learning centre facilitators. In so doing, community members were also
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

seen as educators who were able to work with school staff to ensure that students’ cultures, identities and needs were being met.

All things considered, participants’ views regarding the integral role of parents are supported by the literature. Both this study along with the literature understood partnerships with caregivers as necessary to support Black student achievement. This was evidenced by the presence of open communication between the participating teachers and families regarding issues of academic development, equity and culture in the classroom. As attested to in the literature, each participant valued the diversity that exists within parent/family structures (e.g., extended families, blended families, and caregivers). The participants explained that they held reasonable and realistic expectations of family/caregiver time and resources. This is especially poignant, as Murray and West-Burns (2011) note that socio-political events (e.g. immigration policies, labour laws, and housing policies) shape family/caregiver involvement.

5.1.3 Teaching For and About Equity and Inclusion
Research participants expressed their desire to ensure that their students not only developed a strong respect for their own cultures and identities, but also for those of others. It is imperative that educators do not replace Euro-centricity with another worldview, but rather assume a multi-centric view where all groups are seen as significant and useful contributors (Asante, 1991; Dei, 1996).

Both Yousif and Khadra articulated throughout the interviews their aim to educate students towards a respect for self and others. Khadra, for example, spoke of her dedication to learning about and developing a healthy respect and interest in diverse identities. The participants’ dedication to creating spaces for cultures and identities led them to establish inclusive classrooms where diversity was seen as positive. Accordingly, as explored in the findings, the participating teachers were able to establish Africentric classrooms as places where all students matter. As Murray and West-Burns (2011) have elaborated, teachers, like Yousif and Khadra,
who are dedicated to equity and inclusion intentionally do outreach to include the voices from non-dominant groups. This dedication to equity and inclusion in the Africentric classroom led to the valuing of student voice. Yousif and Khadra put in place structures that allowed and encouraged students and their families to become involved in contributing to the development of curricular units and lessons. Altogether, study findings and scholars in the field of Africentric education maintain that equity and inclusion must form the foundation of teacher practice, as issues of power and social difference with students do exist.

5.2 Implications
Several implications arise as a result of this research study. Broad implications relating to the educational community, as well as narrow ones relating to my personal identity as a teacher and researcher will be presented and explored in this section.

5.2.1 Broad
Although the Toronto District School Board has undertaken meaningful steps in response to the academic and opportunity gaps endured by Black students, much work still needs to be done. This research paper has showcased what two teachers are doing to improve Black student engagement and treatment at the Toronto District School Board. The findings for this research paper demonstrates strategies and pedagogies that two Africentric teachers practice as a way to nurture Black student engagement. Culturally centered practices, family/caregiver partnerships with schools and teaching philosophies grounded in equity and inclusion are frameworks not only appropriate for teachers in specialized programs, but also for those in mainstream classrooms. The participants in this research study are a testament to the diverse ways that all teachers can use the cultural identities of their students to engage them in the curriculum.

5.2.2 Narrow
I began this research study by sharing personal accounts of my educational experiences in Toronto. As a young refugee from Somalia, the multiple identities that I hold (i.e., racial, linguistic, socio-emotional, religious and socio-economic) were never validated in my classroom.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

as a student. Conducting this research study has affirmed to me the importance of working with students along with their families and communities to create spaces where the whole child is understood as valued. The strategies revealed throughout this study have exposed me to innovative and creative ways that I can engage students and their families in my future classroom. For example, welcoming families into the classroom as valuable resources.

This paper has also shown me that dedication and passion are necessary when conducting research. Throughout the research process, I was required to reflect on my identities, biases and assumptions as to ensure that my personal convictions were not overriding participant insights. This study affirmed for me the importance of maintaining a respect for diverse worldviews and social norms in the course of conducting research with racially and ethnically minoritized individuals. For this research, forming trusting relationships with the participants was necessary to create an interview environment that was conducive sharing of professional and sometimes difficult to share personal narratives. Much as Indigenous researchers have advocated for research with Indigenous communities (Hart, 2010), I have endeavoured to bring a respect for the people and communities of African descent.

5.3 Recommendations
In order to truly support the academic success of Black students in Toronto, changes will need to be made at teacher education programs, school and classroom levels. It is important to note that supporting policies and frameworks are already in place to help bridge opportunity and academic gaps endured by Black students:

5.3.1 Faculties of Education and Pre-Service Programs
- Critical pedagogies that centre on power, culture and social identities should be implemented in pre-service training courses
- Pre-service training programs should aim to ensure representation of cultural diversity among faculty
- Topics of oppression, power and privilege in the Canadian context should be a mandatory and more prominent component of teacher-training programs
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

5.3.2 Schools
- Create opportunities for staff-wide professional development in designing curricular lessons and units on social justice
- Promote collaboration between staff members that support the centring of students’ identities in the curriculum
- Establish community outlets where families/caregivers are consulted with and involved in key decision-making about their children’s school life

5.3.3 Teachers
- Critically reflect on social location and personal experiences to inform teaching practices and improve the learning experiences of students
- Learn about students’ identities, experiences and interests to further teaching and learning
- Create meaningful opportunities to connect the curriculum to students’ lives, identities and their communities
- Actively include voices from non-dominant group members in curricular lessons and units
- Use learning materials that focus on aspects of social identities and self-esteem

5.4 Areas for further research
Although this study has led me to gain invaluable insights into Africentric pedagogy and Black student engagement, there are still areas in which further research is necessary. While conducting this study, I became interested in the use of Africentric pedagogy in mainstream classrooms. Little attention is given to this topic in the literature reviewed for this study. Study participants referred to instances of Africentric pedagogy within regular school programs, however not in great detail. This has sparked my interest and led me to ask the following questions:

1. To what extent, if any, are teachers working in mainstream schools implementing Africentric pedagogy in their classrooms?
2. When Africentric pedagogy is implemented in mainstream classrooms, how do Black students respond to and experience teaching and learning?
3. How do non-Black students respond to and experience teaching and learning when Africentric pedagogy is used?

5.5 Concluding Comments
The opening chapter of this study began with a personal account of my experiences growing up as a young Somali refugee in Toronto. Like the participants in this research study, my cultural identity was not included in my elementary classroom. Throughout my educational career, I, much like the study participants, Yousif and Khadra, felt excluded and disconnected from topics under study in the classroom. In my elementary classroom, curricular lessons, activities and classroom discussions were not relevant to my daily life in an inner-city neighborhood in Scarborough. These personal accounts of disengagement and academic underachievement in the public education system led me to wonder about the current experiences of Black students in Toronto. I was curious about specialized programs within at the Toronto District School Board that aimed to support Black student achievement. With my research question, I sought to investigate in great detail teaching practice occurring in publicly funded Africentric programs happening across the Toronto District School Board.

The Africentric educators interviewed for this qualitative study shared insights into their teaching and learning practices used to engage Black students with the curriculum. Through the sharing of personal and professional narratives, participants, Yousif and Khadra, revealed the importance and benefits of Africentric pedagogy for the educational experiences of Black students. The findings of this research study speak to importance of teachers using culturally centred practices, forming partnerships with families/caregivers and being dedicated to equity when working with any students.

This research paper demonstrates that there are educators, supported by Toronto District School Board initiatives, dedicated to, and passionate about, the learning experiences of Black students. Through this research and presentation of current academic literature, the powerful position that teachers hold in the lives of the students that they teach is evident. With this position, teachers
are tasked with creating a learning environment that is conducive to academic, social, and cultural growth: for both the student and teacher. Although this task is not an easy one, it is, nonetheless, one that teachers must engage in to ensure that *all* students have equitable opportunities to define their own success and then achieve it.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

References


Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity


Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity


Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

My name is Ehab Hussein and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric pedagogy. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a demonstrated commitment to Africentric pedagogy. I believe that your knowledge and experience will provide insight into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructors Angela MacDonald-Vemic and Rodney Handelsman. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will erase the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Ehab Hussein
(416)709-6149
ehabhussein@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructors’ Names: Angela MacDonald-Vemic and Rodney Handelsman

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca; rodney.handelsman@utoronto.ca
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Ehab Hussein and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _________________________________________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Introductory Script:

Thanks for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making the time to meet me today. As I mentioned in our correspondence, my research aims to investigate how educators engage with students’ cultural identity/ies as part of an Africentric Pedagogy. The length of the interview will be about 45-60 minutes, and I’ll be asking you a series of questions on your beliefs, practice, support and constraints around Africentric Pedagogy. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and that you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

Section 1: Background Information

I. Where have you taught as an educator?
II. What have you taught as an educator?
III. How many years have you worked as an Africentric educator?
IV. How do you identify your cultural identity?
V. How did you become involved in the Africentric program? (Probe: What is your interest in Africentric pedagogy?)

Section 2: Teacher Practice (Practice-What/How)

VI. How do you introduce cultural identity to students in the classroom? What steps do you take to familiarize students with cultural identity
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

VII. According to the Africentric school mandate, teacher practice is based on the Seven Principles of Nguso Saba. How do students’ identities play a role within this approach?

VIII. Can you share an example of how you connect students’ cultural identity to the curriculum as a way to promote engagement?

IX. How do you decide which books and/or educational resources to use for your classroom?

X. What role, if any does student experience play in your classroom pedagogy? Can you provide an example or give me a sense of what this might look like in your classroom?

Section 3: Beliefs/Values (Why?)

XI. What does cultural identity mean to you?

XII. Does your own cultural identity affect how you teach? If so, in what ways?

XIII. What does Africentric pedagogy mean to you?

XIV. What does student engagement mean to you?

XV. How does Africentric pedagogy shape the way students view themselves?

XVI. What is the purpose of making connections to students’ cultural identity in the classroom?

Section 4: Influencing Factors (Who?)

XVII. Why did you decide to teach in an Africentric classroom?

XVIII. What experiences have you had that have shaped your approach to exploring student identities as part of an Africentric curriculum?

XIX. What are some challenges to engaging students in an Africentric classroom that you have experienced?

XX. What are some of the challenges and/or barriers to making connections to cultural identity in everyday classroom instruction? How do you respond to these barriers?

Section 5: Next Steps (What next?)

XXI. Can you share an experience about the benefits you have experienced when connecting students’ cultural identity with the curriculum?
Engaging with Pedagogy: Significance of Africentricity

XXII. With regards to overcoming the challenges of making connections to students’ identities within the curriculum, what advice can you give to mainstream teachers who are interested in adopting Africentric pedagogy?

XXIII. What would you like to improve upon, or see as a priority for further professional development, in your own teaching?