Looking Back to Go Forward: Student Evaluations of Experiences in African-Centered Educational Institutions

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LOOKING BACK TO GO FORWARD:

STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF EXPERIENCES IN AFRICAN-CENTERED

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

by

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Under the Direction of Makungu Akinyela, PhD

ABSTRACT

In educational research, a prevalent topic of discussion is African-centered pedagogy. This phenomenological study records the unique perspectives of adults who specifically grew up in African-centered learning environments from a young age. The sample includes 10 African American adults, aged 18-45, from various cities in the United States. Mixed methods are applied in this study: group concept mapping strategies are implemented to yield both qualitative and quantitative results for analysis. Data is further supplemented with one-on-one interviews, and a review of themes from interview transcripts using multiple coding processes. Findings from this particular demographic can add another dimension to the current literature on the relevancy and need for culturally relevant pedagogical practice for African-American children. The ultimate goal of this generative study is to serve as a resource for educators, parents and students – which includes documented practices and methods for further consideration and application.

INDEX WORDS: Program evaluation, African-centered education, culture, pedagogy,
Independent Black Institutions (IBIs), phenomenology

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DEDICATION

I give praise and thanks to the Creator of all things, my Ancestors and my Family. To my parents, Abena and Kweku Ivan Vassall, Jr., I would not be here writing this without your dedication, patience, love and constructive time spent working together. Ultimately, the idea for this research came from the example of my Uncle, Rodney Allen Hitchens Beckett. Uncle Rodney was truly my predecessor, and truly I live and work as a continuation of him, his story and the lessons he imparted. To my 8 siblings (here and 'over there') - all of you are epic examples of strength, courage and wisdom. I will always look to you for support and guidance, and I appreciate your much-needed presence in my life. I also want to express an appreciation to all of my teachers: community members of various ages, institutional/ organizational affiliations, and locations I have lived in. To the sample members, thank you so much for your contributions! This is for you.

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1 PROLOGUE

In my educational process I attended various African-centered schools, homeschooling and afterschool programs. In reviewing my experiences, and considering the experiences of my community, family and friends, I wanted to find a way to evaluate the strengths, challenges and effectiveness of these institutions. This brought me to a crucial question. How do these centers of learning improve the lives of people of African descent? How do these programs facilitate the idea of *Sankofa*, in practical ways that contribute to the growth of individuals and the communities they are a part of?

The symbol *Sankofa* can be used to describe a process of self-discovery and historical reflection, which many people and communities of African descent have engaged in overtime. *Sankofa* is an Akan Twi symbol meaning "go back and fetch it:" "it" referring to something important which was lost. This message serves as a metaphor for the collection, analysis and application of the lessons and traditions of one's ancestors. The goal of this "fetching" process is to ultimately move forward, from an empowered position of self-awareness and informed focus.

This *Sankofa* process is particularly crucial considering the enslavement, displacement, colonization and subjugation of people of African descent historically, on both the African continent and the African Diaspora. The term "African Diaspora" refers to the places globally in which Africans were either forcibly moved to or migrated to. Before capture and displacement, the peoples of the African continent were organized into family clans and ethnic groups, with similar yet unique value systems, cosmologies and practices. Africana philosopher Lewis Gordon posits that the ideas of "African" and European" were formulated during this time of contact and conflict in history; that peoples of the African continent did not see themselves as a united body with shared interests (Gordon 2008). The process of enslavement forced those of the

Wolof to connect with the Bamana, members of the Ewe to join hands with people of the Manding or Fulani ethnic groups, to endure and combat a common enemy. In these various places of the Diaspora, this New African population was forced to amalgamate, transform and evolve – they developed strategies and systems of survival and resistance to oppression. The term New African alludes to the idea of unification: the melding of various ethnic groups overtime which created, for many, a new shared identity and purpose to achieve liberation.

The human and civil rights of these New Africans, along with their traditional ways/customs, were under constant attack from elite European slaveholders, and the lower classes of Europeans and Africans under their orders. The goal of this process was to "break the spirits" of the enslaved: to create a lifestyle that would instill and perpetuate an internal acceptance of servitude and degradation. Many scholars argue that this process developed further even after the enslaved were emancipated, continuing in attempts to "educate" the people of African descent post-Civil War – for continued marginalization in society (Hilliard 1995, Woodson 1933). The experiences of Black people, in Africa and the Diaspora, were largely omitted or rendered insignificant to World History. This was also the norm in continental African countries, where children were educated to erase their ethnic and spiritual identities in order to identify with European colonizers, cultural expressions and interests (Ngugi 1993).

Both of these processes, of resistance and miseducation, informed the learning experiences of my parents. In the 70s and early 80s, my father attended Ivy League schools in Philadelphia, my mother went to public schools in Maryland. They both attest to feeling that there was something wrong with the fact that they weren't being taught about themselves, their history, and their ancestry. At the same time, they were surrounded by remnants of the Civil Rights and Black Power struggles, continued expressions of a long historical resistance tradition. While they were

purposefully sheltered from these movements by their parents, their awareness that "something was lost" created internal conflicts within them. This internal conflict gave rise to their *Sankofa* processes.

When my parents were in college, they were exposed to books by Cheikh Anta Diop, Ivan Van Sertima, John Henrik Clarke and Yosef ben-Jochannan. These scholars and others offered information that my parents knew nothing about – the ancient and current achievements, advancements and cultures of Africa. Their discovery of literature from Marcus Garvey, Ida B. Wells, and Malcolm X – along with learning about the experiences of people like Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, Frantz Fanon and Ella Baker – motivated them to want to contribute to the African resistance and empowerment movements developed globally. This contrasted what they were taught by their parents and schoolteachers: that Africa and its people were devoid of civilization, spirituality, social order and relevant knowledge systems. While many family relatives unknowingly retained customs, stories and practices from their African ancestors, they were taught about a "dark, heathenish" Africa through TV programs like Tarzan, literary texts such as Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, and religious circles, which preached that anything associated with Africa was "pagan" and "backwards" (Conrad 1899).

In the early 90s, my parents decided to supplement what they were reading with involvement in community development efforts. They joined a local Philadelphia organization, the Community Leadership Development Alliance (CLDA), which was concerned with curriculum development for youth leadership, neighborhood political awareness, and Black student union alliances in nearby college campuses. In their learning experience as adults, they involved themselves in both the Independent School and Rites of Passage movements, working in autonomous Black schools within CIBI (Council of Independent Black Institutions,)

specifically in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, GA. They were fortunate to learn from and work with a good number of the leading authors and institution builders mentioned within this document, at various stages in their development. Their experiences of being affiliated in nationalist organizations, attempting to repatriate to Africa, collaborating to initiate educational programs (Saturday programs, homeschool networks and an adolescent rite of passage process) and more shaped who I am today. Their example, along with those of many community family members, educators and elders, gave context for my interest in education.

From this position, I saw this project as an opportunity to survey other adults who have had similar journeys. In communicating with them, this was an informative way of placing my experience within a larger context, a larger movement of youth who were reared predominantly in African-centered environments, who have unique recollections worth examining. Recently, former students, with similar experiences, have shared the lessons they have learned – contributing to a growing body of purposeful academic literature. These perspectives can help various communities to better understand how African-Americans in this society experience the aforementioned *Sankofa* process from birth. We can gain a better understanding of both the shared and unique challenges former students have faced and currently face, as well as learn from the pragmatic solutions and valuable insights they have developed overtime. These solutions can be implemented in a variety of educational environments seeking to move towards more liberatory practices. This study aims to contribute to the attainment this goal.

2   INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study documents the lived experiences of African-American adults who grew up in African-centered learning spaces and home environments. In these settings, youth of African descent are encouraged to learn and apply African and African Diasporic concepts, historical lessons, political understandings and cultural expressions. With active participation and contributions from a sample of 10 participants, group concept mapping methods are employed to both illustrate and quantify their personal evaluations of their unique educational processes. These visual map findings are further illuminated with quotes from their recollections, collected in one-on-one interviews.

2.1   Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following:

1) What ideas, lessons, interactions and activities did sample members experience in African-centered learning environments, both in school-like settings and at home?

2) Looking back, did former students find their experiences meaningful in contributing to their overall personal development? If so, what were the specific ideas, lessons and interactions which they deemed most meaningful?

3) How can the research methods applied in this study contribute to program evaluation practices in community-based African-centered learning spaces?

2.2   Theoretical Framework & Important Questions in Context

Guyanese scholar-activist Walter Rodney best sums up the nature of education from an African-centered understanding; he spoke citing his studies in the daily life and practice of many pre-colonial African societies. In a 1972 speech, he argued that in contrast to the contemporary rigid, domineering, memorization-based colonial education of African students, learning in

traditional African societies focused the important role of youth in society. This included the

fostering of moral values, vocational skills, a connection with one's ancestors and overall

spiritual growth - inextricably linked to the growth of the family and the larger community

(Rodney 1972). In his assessment, Rodney pinpoints a central theme consistent in the history of

African-descended peoples in the Diaspora, which is the concern for children's internal growth

and the mastery of every aspect of one's existence. This idea could be argued to serve as the

ultimate goal of African-centered learning spaces.

In the book *Nationbuilding: The Theory and Practice of African Centered Education* (1992),

educator Kwame Agyei Akoto defines African-centered education as:

> *"…being rooted in the unique history and evolved culture of African people… [It is] committed to correcting the historical distortions born of three millennia of foreign invasion, destruction, enslavement, physical and mental colonialism, cultural disruption and dependency. African centered education is committed to rooting or anchoring the spiritual and intellectual energies of African people in the spiritual, moral and philosophical traditions of Africa. African centered, whether in the several nations of the diaspora or on the motherland, is concerned to fully develop the sense of African nationality within a broader Pan-African world. [It is] concerned to sever irrevocably the pathological and slavish linkage of Africans to the European or Asian ethos. [It is] concerned to enable the African person with nation building, nation management, and nation maintenance abilities. African-centered education is [concerned with motivating teachers, students, parents and communities] to advance the African nation/world by any means necessary"* (Akoto, pg. 49, 1992).

This statement includes a wide range of priorities to be considered. The definition of

"African" not only relates to being of the continent, here it also includes historical experiences of

Black people in the Diaspora. It takes into account how their cultural practices evolved to

practically suit their needs and realities. In *Nationbuilding*, Akoto outlines how these experiences

can be learned from to create structured families, communities and an overarching nation of

Black people globally. The skills required to conduct this higher level of organization and

management are informed not only by the models of leadership in the Ashanti, Bamana or

Yoruba ethnic groups, but also the efforts of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, free communities in

Suriname and the pre-integration thriving business culture of Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia, for example. This informs curriculum materials and programming for youth education, preparing students for academic excellence as well as the leadership qualities needed to affect change in their families and communities. Some of the tenets focused on include the following: spiritual awareness, African cultural unity, political/economic unity and complimentary, equal relationships between males and females (Akoto 1992; Akoto & Akoto 2000).

The terms "Afrocentric" and "African-centered" are often used interchangeably in scholarly journal articles to refer to the prioritization of the history and experiences of people of African descent (e.g. Moffitt and Harris 2004; Piert 2013; Jackson et. al. 2014; Durden 2007). Many authors in the current literature do not differentiate between these two concepts, however they seem to represent two very different approaches to the definition of "African." Certain researchers also define two different approaches to the incorporation and application of values and lessons coming out of historical and current experiences of African / Diasporic people (Tillotson 2011). This section attempts to define and delineate these two terms, as well as their overlaps in meaning.

The idea of Afrocentricity, credited to communications scholar Molefi Kete Asante, argues for a cultural return to specific cultural practices of pre-Modern or pre-colonial Africa. Asante defines this concept as the literal "placing of African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Asante 1998). Afrocentricity is noted to be both a cultural perspective and academic discipline. People of African descent are encouraged to apply traditional African names, languages, clothing, adapted cultural ceremonies, worldview and identified concepts/priorities from their lifestyles. This is supplemented by proposed efforts to rid oneself of all European influences – ideas, cultural practices and perspectives, as defined by

Asante. To him, this process confirms one's true acceptance of Afrocentricity. Many of the concepts, especially in the book *The Afrocentric Idea*, are valid and can be used effectively in the education of youth today. An example of this is the term *nommo*, defined as the "generative power of the word:" the power in our orature/oral traditions that creates effective and meaningful communication styles (Asante 1998).

However, with Afrocentricity there is an overarching concern with adoption of the specific cultural practices of KMT (Egypt), particular ethnic groups such as the Akan and the Yoruba, along with renowned Nguzo Saba principles of Kawaida Theory posited by Maulana Karenga. These are combined by Asante to form a cultural lifestyle guideline listing called the Njia (The Way); it is communicated that only people of African descent possess these ideals. Gordon notes that Asante and Karenga are recognized as the two main proponents of Afrocentric thought and practice, an idea replicated with many academic researchers who cite them (Gordon, pg. 106, 2008).

Along with this concern, the practices promoted in his Afrocentric model exclusively promote the ideas and expressions of the African continent vs. unique evolutions of African culture as practiced in the Diaspora. Implementation of this model places an individual, educational program or local organization in closer "cultural proximity" with the idea of "classical Africa," verifying "true" Africanity. This theory has been both praised as revolutionary and liberating (Gwekwerere 2011), as well as critiqued as problematic (Akinyela 1995) for the theory's non-consideration of efforts made throughout Diasporic history to prioritize and apply African values (in a variety of innovative and practical ways).

In *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Asante is highly critical of Black empowerment efforts throughout history that deviate from his prescribed Njia format. He

discusses noted historians and activists as "not Afrocentric enough" (W. E. B. DuBois in particular), to somewhat discredit their efforts – or render them less important that those he felt best embodied the Afrocentric concept. He states, "…no program, however brilliantly organized, can survive if its conception is not based upon Afrocentricity" (Asante, pg. 16, 2003). In the text, he goes so far as to deny the humanity of our ancestors who were forced to apply slave names – this is alluded to in the following quote: "…they were bodies without spirits, people without dignity, whether they knew it or not" (Asante, pg. 38, 2003). These assertions, along with other comments rendering "non-Afrocentric" Black people as ignorant or backward, are detrimental in practical attempts to evaluate, respect and apply the necessary lessons from our ancestry in all of their valid experiences. Currently, this line of thinking also creates enmity and division between people of African descent in all of their unique walks of life – as well as a thought process that inhibits folk, who prescribe themselves as Afrocentric, from genuinely engaging, learning from and incorporating our larger community.

Afrocentricity is contrasted by the African-centered approach in methods relating to community education and empowerment. This approach places the idea of "Africa as origin and priority" within the context of the history of African people globally; this is something that has always been understood by people of African descent. African-centered thought validates a variety of cultural expressions, along with political and social actions shaped in response to modernity. The experiences of our people globally share equal weight and importance in consideration. Tonia Durden discusses African-centered education within the context of efforts of historians like Carter G. Woodson. She documents historical attempts to create learning curricula based on African achievements, as well as the current uses of this curriculum in empowering African-American youth in their immediate situations (Durden 2007).

In the book *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, Ngugi wa Thiongo encapsulates the idea of an African-centered framework. Ngugi, like Asante, also discusses a process of "centering", and relates the importance of language and literature in expression of African concepts. However, Ngugi places African culture within a larger context of world cultures, considering respect and productive interactions/learning between cultures of the world. He argues that this can be done without the valorization or romanticizing of ancient Africa, as well as without the rejection or pathologizing of African Diasporic lifestyles and cultural expressions (Ngugi 1993).

The literature shows a definite overlap in these terms, especially in the area of education. This makes it impossible to talk about one without the other, which is why this section is important to this discussion. The research of Dr. KMT Shockley (Morgan State University) reflects a common interest of scholars in the field of Afrocentric / African-centered education: effective implementation of methods and activities in public, private, charter and Black Independent institutions. Shockley defines Afrocentric education as "the adoption of Afrocentric ideology and cultural relevancy for use in classrooms." He identifies Africa as the source of a crucial and relevant knowledge base of history and cultural expression; that this base must be applied to the education of Black youth since Africa is their place of origin (Shockley 2010, cited from Akoto 1992; Akoto & Akoto 2000; Asante 1990; Hilliard 1997; Shujaa 1994). In the article "Constructs and Dimensions of Afrocentric Education," he attempts to pinpoint specific qualities and features of Afrocentric thought that can serve as standards for all Afrocentric programming/ teaching efforts (Shockley 2010).

These examples reflect overlapping tenets from both concepts – the identification with Africa as a source of origin (Afrocentricity), combined with the equal acceptance of our adaptations and

evolutions in the Diaspora (African-centered); both include centering oneself within one's own experience, historical background and overall reality. In many works, the cited ultimate goal of this "centering" process is to facilitate the process of nationbuilding. Nationbuilding is defined as "…an intergenerational process of progressive but intense denuding [Africans] of multigenerational layers of alien values and things, and the progressive adoption and immersion of [Africans] in the culture and work of rebuilding" (Piert 2015, cited from Akoto & Akoto, pg. 73, 2000). In many African-centered learning spaces, nation-building is taught to operate from the self outward - self-management, leading to family and community maintenance, leading to larger organizational leadership and continuity.

In reviewing the germinal works on this topic, what are the documented theoretical differences between Afrocentricity, African-centered thought and Akinyela's Critical Africentricity? Multiple re-reads of their summaries and definitions reveal several factors to note. Asante's presentation of Afriocentricity, as an academic discipline, lifestyle choice and worldview, can be enacted within the current power structures of mainstream United States society. His texts, and others implementing this view, do not seem to particularly call for sovereignty for Black people. By sovereignty, I define that term meaning the ultimate goal of creating an independent nation-state, a community which operates on its own physically, economically, etc.

Akoto's discussions of African-centered operations include aforementioned practice of nationbuilding, expressed with sovereignty as the ultimate goal. Within this process, practical application of elements of indigenous African societies serves as a precedent for sovereignty. Contrasting Afrocentric views in texts, Akoto along with other community-based educators and organizers source our various independence efforts globally as references. With a prioritization

on indigenous African cosmology, epistemology and societal frameworks, these elements are applied also (Akoto 1992, Akoto & Akoto 2000, Shujaa 1994, Lomotey1992). In Moving the Centre, Ngugi challenges these methods to encourage a focus on current, interlinked international movements for social change, however, he aligns also with the focused call for sovereignty (Ngugi 1993).

With Critical Africentricity, as a theoretical approach, Akinyela closely aligns with Ngugi – and also includes an important push for nationbuilding practice and social change in our various communities. Critical Africentricity calls also for further analysis of class structures within the dominant American society, as well as appraisals of class structures within our internal communities and organizations. The previous authors mentioned include particular critiques of African societies: many do not solely cite our essential African past as idyllic or utopian. Akinyela expands on this understanding to have us consider the ramifications of our histories of both internal imperialsm and external colonialism/neo-colonialism (Akinyela 1995). Critical Africentricity is offered as a method of strategically reworking our past elements to pinpoint and remove systems of oppression we may re-create in our own social circles, in applying the elements of African-centered practice discussed previously (Akinyela 1995).

Finally, in terms of definitions, it is important to define an African-centered "learning space." For the purposes of this study, African-centered learning spaces include independent private schools, home schools, home environments in general, after-school programs, rites of passage initiation programs, and youth organizations. The education process is meant to transcend the classroom, with everyday activities reflecting the lessons needed for personal development, community involvement and negotiation of the larger society. The collected sample members

have participated in a number of types of African-centered learning spaces, which often overlapped in terms of participating community members.

How do former students, from within African-centered learning spaces, define the term 'African-centered'? Are their ideas consistent with the intentions of program developers, and/or scholars on this subject? How have students received the information shared in these learning spaces – what resonated most? This will be important to ascertain from this and other pivotal studies, based in our communities. Is this process actually happening in many spaces? What factors contribute to or detract from successful attainment of these goals longitudinally? How do African-centered educators and parents know the elements that make a critical impact long-term? This study attempts to provide important responses from former students to consider.

2.3   Application of Theoretical Framework

The methods of inquiry implemented in this study reflect the aforementioned principles of African-centered theory and practice. It is important to implement the principles of *kujichagulia* (self-determination) and *ujima* (collective work and responsibility) in making this study a community effort. These are two principles from the Nguzo Saba principles of Kawaida, credited to originate within organizational efforts led by Maulana Karenga. With *kujichagulia*, it was important to select processes that would empower participants to share their experiences, with the knowledge that their feedback contributes to further development and maintenance of African-centered programming. Sample members are also then encouraged to have a "piece of the action," a collective ownership of the reflections and knowledge shared. These understandings also facilitate the *ujima*, or collective work and responsibility to make this research project a success. As the researcher, I have a responsibility to uphold these standards, and use them to genuinely interact with the sample and ethically report their perspectives in an

unbiased fashion. Having come from a similar educational background, accountability is vital in ensuring transparency: being present in the research, but at the same time stepping back and allowing participant voices to operate at the center of analysis.

2.4 Assumptions

In recording the recollections of respondents, I considered a major assumption – the overall accuracy of the sample's memories. Since I wanted to outline the long-term effects of participation in African-centered learning spaces, this issue of interpretation is important. A respondent could respond in any fashion to communicate, or miscommunicate, their involvement or events/anecdotes that occurred. This could happen both knowingly and unknowingly, based on their perceptions, past experiences and/or omissions. I also assumed I would have to consider a respondent's allegiance or social connections, and how that would potentially impact their answers and evaluations. This would be the case if, for example, a particular sample member was a continued participant of a particular organization or school discussed in the interviews. How would they want to represent the institutions they participate in, especially in an academic, public research forum? The assumption this question alludes to also is the potential reluctance to divulge important information about the operations of African-centered institutions. This could be done with the understanding that, in many ways, these centers represent an antithesis to Western, mainstream, Eurocentric spaces, forms of knowing, protocols, ascribed behaviors, etc.

As a solution to this concern, I solicited members of various communities, in several states, and communicated to them the solution-oriented purpose of this study. I mentioned that the study's goal was to create a resource, from their documented views, which could be used practically. In sharing this purpose, the sample were enthusiastic about contributing to a project which could help celebrate, challenge and strengthen the institutions they care about (another

assumption worth noting.) In communications, I reinforced my intention that we collectively "own" this information, and can use it to improve our educational practices. The academic setting merely serve as the location to collect useful tools in constructing this research projects – tools which can be implemented on-the-ground, with their continued feedback.

A last assumption I had to consider was that respondents would deem any part of their experience meaningful or positive. I believe this study works, even if former student responses contain substantial points of critique, or experiences they would consider to be negative. If these came up, I would just interpret them as important points that could reflect the experiences of a wider range of current and former students. Documenting these points would be a necessary first step in investigating ways to solve these potential problems.

Working from this literature, germinal and seminal texts highlight various African-centered or Afrocentric teaching methods and subject matter as highly effective and impactful in the lives of African-descended people (adults, children, etc.) Having this experience myself, I consider my personal and academic journeys in African-centered learning environments to be productive. I also have had experiences in these environments that I would consider to be harrowing and disturbing. If I was not careful, I could've potentially projected these views onto the sample – this would be evident in interview questions, conversation responses and lines of inquiry, as well as the elements I focused on in the research findings. If this happened, however, I would be devaluing and undermining the ultimate purpose of this research. In this study, I serve as a humble facilitator, with the understanding that youth and adults have a wide range of experiences to consider – both positive and challenging – in African-centered learning spaces. Thoughtful and ethical processes of reflection on these experiences can contribute to a credible collection of material to be considered in this generative study.

2.5   Scope, Limitations & Delimitations

Results from this study are not meant to be generalized. This is important to state, especially I would argue that youth and adults of these type spaces have very nuanced, specific experiences. These unique experiences either could have contributed to or detracted from their overall growth, academic achievement, internalization of useful values and/or socialization (the feelings of connectedness to a larger extended family). In this search for meaningful elements of an African-centered education, respondents could ascribe these elements to a particular procedure in their homeschool program, spiritual concepts communicated in a rite of passage ceremony and/or a consistent extracurricular activity. This study merely aims to compile examples of these features from 10 participants.

It is not my intention to prescribe a standard list of successful practices, which absolutely must be implemented by all programs who consider themselves to be African-centered. Reviewers of this document may be able to connect with pieces of what the sample contributed. Readers could make efforts to apply a combination of several points respondents mention to consider in their own development, or a child's development into adulthood (if they are parents, educators, community organizers, etc.) In general, this document could just serve as an informational introduction to what students in these environments might go through, and nothing more.

In terms of limitations, one factor includes the actual interpretation and completion of the CS Global MAX^{TM} modules by the sample. As the process facilitator, I communicated the details of the process via email, or over the phone. I did not want to sway, or affect their responses by being present when they completed the online sorting and rating surveys. A disadvantage to this long distance communication strategy may have been that I wasn't able to explain details in

person. I could not plan for respondents' potential to misunderstand statements in the general listing of contributions from the entire group. This could, in the long run, have affected their interpretations of the rating questions – as well as their responses.

This was the first time I conducted a study of this magnitude, using concept mapping as a long distance method for collecting information online. Several respondents, and I, often had difficulties logging in to the CS Global MAX^{TM} webpage: I had to troubleshoot often to ensure they could sign in and complete the different tasks. I didn't anticipate how long they would take to complete – respondents noted that the sorting took at least 2-3 sit-down sessions to finish. 3 out of 10 members of the sample were unable to complete the concept mapping, citing a combination of all these issues mentioned. From this, I conclude that this was definitely an intense learning process, one that I can appreciate and build on for future studies of this nature.

Even with these challenges, I chose to include as much information provided from their voices as possible – to ensure that all 10 members' contributions to this study are noted. They provided so much information, valuable points which could not all be covered in this thesis document. Because of this, I chose to identify the major two "things they kept:" the top two consistent subjects they all alluded to as being important to their development. These would be the two points they collectively considered to be the most meaningful points of knowledge they have applied, coming out of their experiences in African-centered learning spaces. While identifying the challenges they observed, I decided to include their descriptions of the specific challenges that pertained to these top two themes from the data analysis. With the concept mapping, it became important to outline the results which directly spoke to these major themes identified from the interviews. Using this strategy, I hope to present a concise introduction to this phenomenon, with research findings that require further investigation and presentation.

2.6   Significance of This Study

The first goal is to provide parents, community organizers and institution builders with perspectives, identified best practices, application strategies employed and observed challenges/conflicts faced – all from adults who grew up immersed in African-centered educational and organizational initiatives. The literature concerning the effectiveness of activities in African-centered learning spaces currently lacks the long-term evaluation research needed to show its true impact. We have yet to fully determine and efficiently track what works, what students/youth feel they can both connect to and practically apply in their lives, and specifically, what intricate dynamics contribute to or detract from a sense of belonging and willingness to continue the organizational and educational efforts spearheaded by parents and previous generations. We also have yet to truthfully ascertain the factors that may also negatively affect youth in these experiences. These elements can be further illuminated with the potential range of personal evaluations from former students. This study can contribute to the growing community-based research on student experiences from their vantage point, which can be considered and expanded upon in both academic and non-academic spaces (institutional development and reconstruction on-the-ground). The sharing of views and lessons learned from this specific demographic can be documented for constructive reflection and action moving forward.

This study also argues for the continued importance and relevance of Black independent institutions as a network of learning spaces designed to facilitate learning in all aspects of life for children of African descent. In the African-centered experience, the idea of "school" encompasses so much beyond the standards and subject areas promoted by a traditional Western education (math, language arts, sciences, etc.) The concern from our perspective is to educate within the context of our lived experiences, from the principles we choose to prioritize for our

survival. Values for living taught in the classroom setting are reinforced by lifestyle practices at home, social activist endeavors in the community, adolescent rites of passage involvement, public creative outlets and innovative business training. In incorporating the knowledge of our ancestors, elders, peers and the world around us, the education of our children should continue to include support systems we develop in the home – expanding outward to the immediate community/neighborhood, programs with both national and international alliances, based on genuine non-hierarchical egalitarianism. This serves the ultimate purpose of being as independent as possible on any level (mentally, economically, politically, spiritually, etc.), while at the same working within the context of having to survive and thrive in the modern mainstream world. From our history and current experience, we have examples of these type efforts to analyze – movements that directly influence and involve the sample collected. These systems, when created, reveal unique dynamics that youth experience, which contribute to their successful development, internal fortitude and the ability to adapt in mainstream spaces (public school, colleges/universities, workforce/corporate settings, etc.) after graduation.

2.7   Summary

In this introduction, the purpose of this research study was defined – the methods employed reflect the need for community-based, student-centered evaluations of African-centered learning spaces. This material, informed by an understating of African-centered theory and practice, serves to document best practices, challenges and solutions observed and discussed by young members of various communities, organizations and families. This reflects the idea of "centering" proposed by Ngugi wa Thiongo, which in this case operates as the "centering" of former students in the creation of this knowledge base (Ngugi 1993) The practical purposes of this study are also informed by Akoto's definition of nationbuilding, education and research used

to assist in developing individuals who attain skills of self, family, community and nation management (Akoto 1992; Akoto & Akoto 2000) The spaces which combine these understandings can be defined as African-centered "learning spaces," all-encompassing environments which transcend the borders of the standard classroom to include the home, planned afterschool/weekend activities, and community-operated initiation processes. These traditions operate today sourcing a long history of implementation, by people of African descent on the continent and in the Diaspora. These documented histories will be introduced and discussed in the next chapter, the literature review.

3   LITERATURE REVIEW

This study seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature – evaluative and generative research which seeks to document the impact of this type education on student participants. In this chapter, I present introductory points from the seminal and current works on this subject. This includes a historical overview of liberatory education efforts in African communities of the Diaspora, efforts that constitute a long resistance tradition. This tradition informs the development of many current African-centered learning spaces. Elements sourced include organization management, analysis of these historical efforts in school activities, identification with past educators and leaders of freedom struggles – "freedom fighters," and the development of cultural paradigms based on the qualities expressed in these past movements (with the Nguzo Saba as one example.)

After covering historical texts, it is vital to mention relevant academic studies conducted by university students and professors – this is done in the subsequent section. This discussion then moves to current works detailing student experiences. This section includes works from former students themselves – featuring best practices and, also, new dynamics to consider in evaluation of African-centered programs. This is the specific area of literature I want to contribute to, and the 4 texts reviewed directly inform my research. Along with these, the chapter closes with contributions of the recent Rites of Passage Movement: modern adaptations of indigenous African initiations. This is an important feature of many African-centered learning environments, and serves as a learning space on its own. Scholars of the 1980s – 2000s contributed seminal texts on evaluation and best practices gleaned from their observations of various adolescent rites of passage processes. Many students who were enrolled in African-centered/Independent schools were also simultaneously enrolled in rites of passage processes developed by the leadership of

that particular school or community. As such, it is necessary to include rites of passage

experiences as a crucial feature of this phenomenon.

3.1   The History of African-Centered Education in the United States

The subject of African-centered education has been very prominent in academic

discussions for the last 50 years. A variety of authors on the subject, including renowned

educators Carter G. Woodson and Dr. Asa Hilliard III, contended that the mainstream American

educational system was designed to miseducate, hindering African American children (as well as

children of other races) from learning the skills to truly empower themselves and their people.

This system is argued to operate as an extension of efforts instituted by minority elite to

perpetuate societal stratification and uneven distribution of wealth, across the lines of race, class,

gender etc. (Woodson 1933; Shujaa 1994; Akoto 1992; Lomotey 1992; Warfield-Coppock 1992;

Hill 1992; Madhubuti 1994; Hilliard 1993; Asante 2003). James Anderson corroborates this

assertion in his classic text, *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935*, citing evidence of

the implementation of white supremacist agendas and institutions of racism pervasive in the

early history of US public education. These efforts were conducted to discourage Black people

from creating and independently managing learning centers for Black children, allowing White

philanthropic elites the ability to determine what Black children learned for the purpose of

continued servitude (Woodson 1933; Anderson 1988; Akoto 1992; Shujaa 1994).

These systems of oppression are noted to operate as an extension of the psychological

warfare waged since the enslavement period, where people of African descent were forced to

abandon their languages, traditions, names, cultural practices – to ultimately "break" them for

perpetual disenfranchisement and compliance (Asante 2003; Hilliard 1995). These practices and

motives have affected the current operations of the public school system, and are often

mentioned in the literature focusing on the need for educational alternatives to serve African American children (DuBois in Aptheker 1973; Lomotey & Brookins 1988; Akoto 1992; Shujaa 1994; Hilliard 1995; Piert 2015)

African-centered education, in the historical tradition of liberatory education, has been implemented as a solution to "break this cycle" (Akoto 1992; Lomotey 1992; Shujaa 1994; Madhubuti 1994). In urban and rural areas across the United States, educators, community leaders and parents have developed their own learning arenas for African-American students. Educators in these centers develop their curriculum materials from the documented experiences, values and principles of African/Diasporic societies. This sourcing from ancestral knowledge is used to serve a practical purpose – the empowerment of young people of African descent, armed with the knowledge to both build independent, self-reliant spaces and also successfully engage the larger mainstream society we live in. They are encouraged to develop the critical thinking skills needed to challenge intentions and interpretations of all around them to adapt, create and contribute to the development of their families and communities. Educator and poet Haki Madhubuti offers a complex overall purpose, "…to tackle, absorb, decipher, reject and appreciate European American culture in all of its racism, complexity, contributions, liberating ideas, and models" (Madhubuti, pg 8, 1994). For youth of African descent, the establishment of a strong internal foundation can facilitate a successful learning experience – enabling students to develop from a well-informed position of self-awareness and self-worth.

Before moving forward, it is important to both outline and introduce some of the documented histories relating to our efforts to educate ourselves in independent spaces. By 'our,' I am referring to the efforts of African people of the Diaspora. During the period of enslavement, peoples of African descent maintained practical systems to educate their children for survival.

This survival prioritized the continuation of particular behavior patterns, organizational affiliations, spiritual understandings, industrial methods and lifestyle values, which were passed down from generation to generation. Several researchers of note document substantial evidence of these retentions, and how these retentions were adapted overtime to speak to people's immediate needs and concerns (DuBois 1903; Herskovitz 1958; Thompson 1983; Gomez 1998; Blassingame 1972; Hilliard 1995; Stuckey 1994; Stuckey 2013). In order to understand the nature and praxis of recent African-centered educational efforts, it is important to discuss relevant literature pertaining to education in the indigenous African context. This context illuminates "what we brought here": the systems we used to both facilitate self-knowledge in our children, and help them develop necessary skills to thrive in their surroundings. These systems were/are reflected in daily chore activities, retaining of ancestral lineage information, folklore, rites of passage initiations, gender-based organizations, consistent ritual practice and involvement in skill-based guilds (Zahan 1972; Kone 1994; Fu-Kiau 1988; Dieterlen & Cisse 1972; Boone 1990; Asare-Opoku 1978; Maiga 2003).

Concepts learned within these initiations originate from similar experiences and bodies of knowledge, shared throughout the African continent (Kamalu, pg. 13, 1998; Diop 1989). Famed anthropologist and historian Cheikh Anta Diop promoted the study of commonalities between the various ethnicities of the African continent. When identified, these commonalities reveal elements of a common worldview amongst African-descended peoples (Diop 1989). It is important to acknowledge the aspects that contribute to this African worldview. However, to avoid sweeping generalizations about the nature of African socieities, it is crucial to identify the education systems of unique ethnic groups and where their value systems overlap.

In the classic text *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities In the Colonial and Antebellum South* (1998), professor Michael Gomez identifies the various ethnic groups of African-descended people who were forcibly transported to the Americas in the Middle Passage. Gomez uses a variety of sources to document the nuanced experiences of the African-born enslaved communities in the United States. These sources include slave ship records, plantation inventory lists, runaway advertisements, folk tales, and popular documents from slave trading companies. These documents include detailed requests for the kidnapping and sale of specific ethnic groups, according to their particular agricultural and industrial skills. These dozens of groups, hailing from the Senegambian region of West Africa down to the modern-day nations of Gabon, Congo and Angola, include the Mende of Sierra Leone; Akan of Ghana; Bamana (aka Bambara), Dogon, Songhoy, and Malinke people of present-day Mali; the Ewe, Fon, and Yoruba of Nigeria; the Bakongo people of modern-day Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola.

Each of these groups had their own histories, languages, systems of knowledge and perspectives: enslaved peoples originally identified as strictly being part of their ethnic group. For people from the African continent, this ethnic affiliation was tied to one's connection with their family clan, land space and nation of origin. Gomez argues that from the traumatic experiences they faced, this enslaved population began to identify with each other as one race – an idea further cemented by their American-born future generations. As a collective body of prisoners, initial captives immediately noticed that they were categorized by skin color first and foremost. They saw themselves as being dominated by a common enemy, and also saw where their particular cultural traditions overlapped – these similarities helped them to forge the necessary alliances needed to assist each other in resistance movements large and small (Gomez

1998). Historian John Blassingame identifies this process as *acculturation* – "mutual interactions between cultures." This refers to the adaptation and mixing of practices from Africa (various ethnic groups) as well as European and Native American traditions, where all parties informed and influenced each other's customs, music, cuisine, concepts etc. (Blassingame, pg. 20, 1972). In reviewing the educational methods of particular ethnic groups, their consistent retentions in the Diaspora can be clearly pinpointed (Gomez 1998; Herskovits 1941; Harding 1981; Thompson 1983; Stuckey 1994; Stuckey 2013). A litany of works also include, in detail, the indigenous educational processes various ethnic groups employed for youth development physically, mentally and spiritually (Dieterlen & Cisse 1972; Diop 1989; Conrad & Frank 1995; Boone 1990; Ephirim-Donkor 1997; Falola & Amponsah 2012; Fu-Kiau 1994; Fu-Kiau & Lukondo-Wamba 2000; Fu-Kiau 2006; Gomez 1998; Harding 1981; Herskovits 1941; Kamalu 1998; Kone 1994; Maiga 2003; Thompson 1983; Zahan 1974).

In Sterling Stuckey's *Going Through the Storm,* he argues for the inclusion of the enslaved African's internal perspective in historical discussions of slave cultural expressions and lifestyle practices. This informative text cites storytelling and music as major tools used by the enslaved for self-preservation and uplift. In the most inhumane and degrading of conditions, Stuckey further proves that these real life men and women crafted systems of information to educate themselves and their children. Crucial lessons presented as proverbs, stories, songs and dances, served as valuable "curricula for survival" – a syncretism of relevant indigenous knowledge bases, practical resistance tactics and social maneuvering on the plantation. Documented evidence from this text asserts that while ethnic consciousness was present amongst enslaved Africans, Africa was known and revered as a point of origin and geographical base, for those both free and enslaved. This understanding contributed to the strategic implementation of a

national consciousness, with the formation of plans to achieve liberation in a variety of situations. Beginning during the enslavement process, these strategies informed consistent organizational efforts around Black Nationalism, radical Black Church movements, development of Maroon independent communities, as well as Black involvement in abolitionist efforts to end slavery (Stuckey 1994, Stuckey 2013).

These efforts must be noted as valid contributions to the rise of African-centered educational institutions and processes in the Black community. For example, Akoto cites three major influences on the development of African-centered independent schools in the United States. These "distinct sources" include "…Malcolm X's Black Nationalism and later the cultural nationalist theory of Maulana Karenga, outgrowths of the Freedom school efforts of the Civil Right Movement, and the efforts of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI)" (Konadu 2009; Akoto. pg. 60, 1992). Two important anthologies that present from this understanding include: *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*, edited by Mwalimu Shujaa; and *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition*, edited by Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Strickland. Their entries give a thorough historical and ideological background to the establishment of Black educational arenas for liberation.

Too Much Schooling is divided into four parts, which address key areas to be considered for those who want to understand the history and goals of African-centered education. The book first gives context with an outline of the nature of the education on Black children in America historically. Shujaa begins the anthology with a discussion of the difference between "schooling" and "education." Schooling is described as a systematic process of routine memorization of facts in a classroom. These "facts" do not speak to realities of Black students, or empower them to

elevate in society and facilitate community development. This process is shown to serve as a projection and continuation of White supremacy and institutionalized racism, keeping Blacks as a whole in a subordinate position (with few exceptions). On the other hand, true education is the process in which practical information is shared with students, for them to internalize and use to develop and organize solutions for a variety of situations in life.

This text also contains informative historiographies of educational efforts conducted by African Americans, as well as the challenges faced in implementing these efforts. In "The Search for Access and Content in the Education of African Americans," Joan Ratteray discusses early attempts Africans made to establish and maintain their own independent schools, going back to the late 1700s. With further reading, more examples of these early efforts are important to mention. Researchers on Black independent schools cite the work of 18th century abolitionist and spiritual leader Prince Hall (Ratteray & Shujaa 1987, Konadu 2009). 1n 1798, Hall started a school for free Black children at his home in Boston. In his school, he empowered his students and community members with proposed tenets of self-help, cooperative economics, frugality and academic excellence (Ratteray & Shujaa 1987). At the time, this was especially important given the institutionalized racism and disenfranchisement free Black people faced in the North and South. Local Whites often discouraged and attacked Black educational initiatives, through both legislation and overt violence (Harding 1981).

Other noted examples include the efforts of Ms. Catherine "Katy" Ferguson, and A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church founder Richard Allen. Ferguson, with a background in Bible study and religious teaching, started the Katy Ferguson School for the Poor in 1793. Angela Davis discusses how Ferguson recruited Black children from New York urban poorhouses, providing a safe space for these children to learn and overcome the adversities they

faced (Hoover, cited from Davis, pg. 102, 1981). Richard Allen also started schools for children and adults in the Philadelphia area (Bennett, pg. 82, 1964).

In the South, educators faced a higher level of hostility in the free Black communities. The majority of Whites considered free Black schools as threats to the power structures they sought to maintain, particularly due to the consistent and varied rebellion attempts of both enslaved and free Blacks. Literacy was seen as a tool to gain freedom, empowering those who learned with the skills to navigate and ultimately subvert systems of oppression (Anderson 1988). Harding tells the story of young Frederick Douglass' first attempt to organize a Sunday school in Maryland, with free and enslaved comrades near his plantation. In 1833, angry whites attacked Douglass' schoolhouse. These whites compared Douglass and his efforts to Nat Turner's revolt of 1831 (Harding, pg. 103, 1981). Ultimately, Black efforts to learn during enslavement are best summarized in Harding's overall analysis. He argues that education for the enslaved (and free) was "…an unmistakable form of resistance: at its simplest level, a challenge to white laws and white men; at its best, a forceful, personal movement toward self-determination and independence of the mind…Collectively, this secret learning represented a people's thrust toward new self-definition, toward the creative transformation of a culture" (Harding, pg. 163, 1981).

Violet J. Harris contributes an analysis of literacy/curriculum materials and children's books, during the period of 1868 and 1944. These were designed to provide Black youth with positive, affirming imagery of themselves to contrast the stereotypical degrading images of Black children popular at the time. All of these examples allude to agency on behalf of enslaved and free African-descended peoples, during the colonial and antebellum eras, in implementing solutions to the dilemmas they faced (Harris 1994). This evidence challenges ideas argued from some

Afrocentric scholars like Asante, who categorize "slave" ancestors as "ignorant", "bodies without spirits…people without dignity", overly accepting of White domination, standards, influences and names (Asante, pg. 38, 2003). Clearly, our people have a long history of acting on ideas of mental liberation, independent education and the adaptation of African cultural and spiritual principles.

In Part Four of *Too Much Schooling*, educators and researchers argue for African-centered thought and practice in education. African-centered thinking is defined as "…a process of personal transformation that brings with it the responsibility for changing oppressive social conditions…a collective exigency for the betterment of humanity" (Shujaa, pg. 267, 1994). Perspectives are offered from educators Joyce King, Thomasyne Lightfoote, Safisha Madhubuti (Carol D. Lee) and Kwame Agyei Akoto. These chapters address the implementation of African-centered pedagogy in independent schools. There is an explanation of the founding of CIBI, Council of Black Institutions, a national network of independent schools founded in 1972. CIBI conducts national conferences and teacher training initiatives. A number of the authors contributing to *Too Much Schooling* represent institutions that are members of CIBI.

Many texts seek to validate African-centered education as valid and needed for the productive growth of African American students. This process is presented as a natural extension of historical resistance and empowerment efforts post-Civil War, which go on to include the Civil Rights and Black Power struggles. During these periods, many individuals were tasked with engaging and teaching Black communities the necessary skills to contribute to these movements. Famed "freedom fighters" who contributed to these movements include Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Carter G. Woodson, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), Malcolm X, and many others over the years. Our Freedom Fighters serve as models

for both character development and community service. Students are encouraged to apply valuable lessons from both the strengths and challenges of these celebrated figures.

Teach Freedom focuses on efforts by educators that were not as well-known. This anthology features articles from "educator-activists" who relate histories of organized community efforts in education. These include Freedmen's schools post-Civil War, Citizenship schools for voter-registration and literacy during the 60s/70s and Summer Freedom Schools. Chapters analyze the practices and effects of specific programs facilitated by members of organizations like SNCC, The Black Panther Party and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

This book is particularly important because it includes perspectives from educators who participated in these movements, with examples of organizers like Ella Baker, Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson. The tradition of Freedom schools were shown to be continued in the profiles of centers like the Black Student Leadership Network, Baltimore Freedom School and Children's Defense Fund summer programs. Outlined also are school settings such as the African –centered New Concept Development Center (NCDC), described by founder Safisha Madhubuti (Carol Lee). The chapter on this institution serves as analysis of the strengths, challenges and creation of community in these institutions. Madhubuti explains that independent Black institutions (IBIs) "…represent the "laboratory" schools for the development of pedagogy and projects that reflect African worldviews and interests. Their experienced staff have developed comprehensive, classroom-tested unit plans and curricula that do not depend on commercial basal series or Eurocentrically biased textbooks; and they have engaged as professionals in extensive, ongoing study" (Lee 2008).

All of these movements give rise to the development of African-centered schools and extracurricular activities. With social activism as a major tenet for development, community

elders and adults facilitated youth-based groups, for young people to learn the skills necessary to establish organizations of their own. In interviewing students form this experience, I'm interested in their feelings about their institutions, the learning spaces the come out of. Do they connect or see this history evident and sourced? Can this history serve as a source for their development? Do they feel that it is relevant? This literature informs questions developed for the sample: questions relating to the observation of and connection with the educational efforts rooted in a history of resistance.

3.2   Evaluation Studies of African-Centered Learning Spaces

This section focuses on previous research articles, important studies conducted by academic students and professors of various universities. The body of academic literature on African-centered educational praxis often reflects two main strategies employed within African-centered educational efforts. The first is the implementation of culturally-relevant curricula for Black children in public school arenas. Often with short-term intervention procedures, researchers have tested whether students gained more of a sense of self-confidence, an identity associated with Africa or Blackness, and/or knowledge of African value systems like the Nguzo Saba (Lewis et. al. 2011, Bethea 2012, Murrell 1999, Thomas et. al. 2008, Woodland et. al. 2009).

The second strategy includes analysis of African-centered educators' efforts in establishing independent schools, operating outside of the standard public school system (Lomotey 1992, Hoover 1992, Murrell 1999). Much of these studies tested whether students in these institutions gained both the intellectual capacity and mastery or required subjects (math, language arts, science, etc.) equivalent to their public school counterparts. Researchers inquired if students in independent schools gained an academic advantage from being taught in settings that reflected their cultural context.

There is a gap in research efforts to investigate overall effectiveness and productivity of these culturally-relevant programs, and their specific contributions to the growth of youth of African descent culturally, psychologically and academically (Jackson et. al, 2014; Gordon et. al, 2009). Many recent studies use both qualitative and quantitative methods to track ethnic identity and acceptance of African cultural principles, with varying results – results which do not clearly confirm the benefits of Afrocentric / African-centered methods versus potentially other factors (Lewis et al, 2011; Okwumabua et al, 2011). A wider variety of samples are only recently being considered to offset the focus on at-risk males: including girls' experiences (Thomas et al, 2008), and coed cohorts (Lewis et al, 2011). More research is needed relating to the experiences of culturally-relevant mentoring for African –American youth of different class, socio-economic and family backgrounds, and how these variables inform mentoring processes.

Many studies also focused on the development of rites of passage programs (as extracurricular activity) starting in the late 80s/early 90s, often proving their effectiveness as interventions for adolescent, at-risk males. Examples include initiatives, which were formatted as afterschool programs, or sessions for boys involved in criminal activity (e.g. Harvey & Hill 2004, DeGruy et. al. 2011; Woodland et. al 2009). Another common subject in research efforts were independent school institutions (e.g. Lee 1992; Shujaa 1994; Akoto 1992) – outlining strategies for inclusion of African/Diasporic curricula and the development of an African-centered worldview in education. A number of sources during that time sourced the founding of CIBI (Council of Independent Black Institutions), and its teacher training programs (Durden, 2007). As far as recent articles, majority focus on successes in enrichment programs which adopt an African-centered approach. Further discussion of rites of passage processes is continued in the following section.

Bethea (2012) evaluated program outcomes of an African-centered community youth project – the Leadership Excellence Inc. Oakland Freedom Schools. This organization operated in public schools, churches and community centers, presenting free, all day workshops for local African-American children. The study questioned the improvement levels of three age-sets of students (5-7, 8-10, 11-14) in the areas of reading, self-concept, positive attitudes in relation to identity, social skill development and desire for involvement in social action. Results showed substantial improvements in all areas. These developments were attributed to the curriculum of the program, which included activities and procedures based in "African/African American history, culture and heritage through the eyes of children… [introducing] children to adults and children who have made and continue to make a difference in the lives of others" (Bethea 2012; cited from Freedom School Program Manual, 1998). Bethea proposes early incorporation of this method of education, in providing students of a young age with culturally relevant subject matter that facilitates self-consciousness, pride and self-worth.

DeGruy (2011) adds to this perspective in her findings from research done in Oregon, with Black adolescent males in the juvenile justice system. 200 boys were surveyed and observed, half from community-developed programs and the other from juvenile detention. She documents empirical evidence of the positive effects of programs that instill cultural awareness and self-respect in Black youth. Her results show the impact of these values in curbing violent behavior amongst youth who are heavily exposed to (and participate in) violent acts. Her constructs analyzed included racial respect, a "prosocial attitude that arises from the recognition of one's inherent self-worth, the honoring of one's racial origins by the self, peers and others in society, and an appreciation of the contributions made by oneself, one's family, and African Americans as a group" (DeGruy 2011). Racial socialization was the other, focusing on the transmission of

"values, history and knowledge about culture and race relations from one generation to another" (DeGruy 2011; cited from Wilson, Foster, Anderson, and Mance 2009).

The prioritization of communalist values, stemming from African/Diasporic principles of unity and solidarity, is a common theme contributing to program successes with adolescents. An example of this is the 2014 empirical study of the UMOJA Network for Young Men, which operates in the Sunset Hills Academy network of schools in New York. Researchers noted and measured the two main qualities that contributed to the success of the program, gleaned from interviews of youth participants and mentors. These were "reciprocal love" and "culturally responsive caring." Reciprocal love is defined as a "deeply rooted interest in and concern for community that extends personal well-being to communal sustenance; love for the self that is inextricably linked to a love for others." (Jackson et. al. 2014) Culturally responsive caring, also called "ethos of care" refers to the "…holistic approach to understanding students personally and academically…considering the social and interdependent nature of ensuring that students develop a sense of moral, social and personal responsibility" (Jackson et. al. 2014).

As I previously mentioned, most of these articles strictly focus on males, within the context of curbing systemic criminalization and mass incarceration of teenage boys in particular. Few offer reports from programs focusing on the development of girls. Thomas, Davidson and McAdoo (2008) offer an evaluation study of the Young Empowered Sisters (YES!) program. Surveys were administered to 74 youth participants, testing their improvements in ethnic identity, racism awareness, feelings of collectivism/inclusion and interest in liberatory youth activism. Successful findings were noted to come from facilitation and program curriculum based in African values/concepts, focus on African American history, research projects on Black

female historical figures and field trips related to the Black experience (landmarks, local museums, festivals) (Thomas, Davidson & McAdoo 2008).

The results from these studies, and others, show the importance of instilling values of self-consciousness and self-determination, supplementing the standard education many students receive in public school arenas. From the literature, students seem to show awareness of and pride in their ethnicity, connection to others in communal settings and excitement for participation in culturally relevant activities. With continuing research, in both the academy and the larger community, scholars can continue investigations for the specific elements that contribute to student's personal development. What elements do students source after they graduate? What do they feel like they can use as adults?

3.3   Student Experiences: A Rising Field of Study

In conducting my study, I follow in the footsteps of recent pioneers in this both new and growing literature. This section starts with one text in particular, which is a case study of the first official African-centered independent school of CIBI (Council of Independent Black Insitutions) – an important first in terms of texts which zoom in to a particular African-centered learning environment (Konadu 2009). Subsequent authors discussed here investigate, from student perspectives, the meaningful methods youth were able to apply after their completion of African-centered learning programs (Piert 2015; Sobukwe-Sodaye' 2011; Sunni Ali 2014). It is important for me to outline their works here, and the substantial contributions they have made in documenting this phenomenon. In adding to the understandings they've presented, I argue that these works reveal the nuanced dynamics prevalent in African-centered learning spaces – unique situations that require continued analysis and reflection.

To give context, *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York* by Kwasi Konadu introduces readers to the lives of participants in an African-centered organization called The East. The East developed in the early 1970s. This organization started an extension of the Black Power Movement, as well as both local and widespread movements in Black communities towards creating autonomous spaces for learning (Akoto 2000; Konadu 2009; Lomotey 2009). Konadu interviewed former members of The East, including organizers, parents and adults who grew up in The East community based in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York City. As children, many attended the official independent school of the East called Uhuru Sasa. Uhuru Sasa was the first school institution inducted into CIBI (Council of Independent Black Institutions.) Konadu's interviews, analysis of official school texts and member correspondence reveal important experiences youth of this institution were impacted by.

In the Uhuru Sasa learning environment, educators formatted their curriculum using the idea of nationbuilding also. Students were taught the skills needed to organize and manage an independent community. These lessons were supported by their families' involvement with The East's business endeavors and cultural center activities. From preschool age, children were enrolled in the East's official daycare institution, called the Imani Childhood Development Center. Upon graduation from Imani, youth were transferred to Uhuru Sasa.

Learning processes implemented echoed African learning systems. An example includes the *kindezi* tradition of the Bakongo people of central Africa. To briefly summarize, in this *kindezi* system young children and adolescents are charged with taking care of their younger siblings, an act which helps them to develop parenting skills. Youth are assigned to become *ndezi* as early as the age of five. Community elders also serve as *ndezi*, sharing important life lessons with their youth *ndezi* counterparts and even younger students. All of this happens while the adults are

away for the day, either working on their fields or in the marketplace. While this sounds ordinary task-wise, in the culture a high priority is placed on a child's agency and autonomy in managing a compound alone. In directly working with their elders daily to help raise their younger siblings, young *ndezi* learn the skills to become what Fu-Kiau calls a "living pattern" " (Fu-Kiau & Lukondo-Wamba, pg. 4, 1986). A "living pattern" is defined as "…a model through which cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation" (Fu-Kiau & Lukondo-Wamba, pg. 4, 1986).

Similarly, children of Uhuru Sasa were taught according to the East's guidelines or educational goals, which included the following:

1) To enable children to further develop and strengthen their motor skills;

2) To have children devise strategies for getting something they want;

3) To enable children to become aware of their nutritional needs;

4) To enable children to respect their bodies, strengthen their minds and acquire the skills to learn how to learn;

5) To enable children to develop their creative skills (through reading, writing, computation, and analysis);

6) To enable children to develop positive self-images through knowledge of their rich African culture and traditions; and

7) To enable children to discipline their heads, minds and bodies through practical application. (Konadu, pg. 92, 2009)

Along with these tenets, Uhuru Sasa's teachers encouraged students to express themselves and their culture through the visual arts, poetry, song, dance, and drill team stepping. The East as an organization was especially noted for their link with visiting jazz musicians, famed writers

and performers associated with the Black Arts Movement. Well-known activists such as Kwame Ture, Sundiata Acoli and H. Rap Brown also visited and gave lectures (Konadu, pg. 28, 2009). The Nguzo Saba Principles of Kawaida were adapted and associated with daily activities within the school, each was associated with a subject area of study. For example, Konadu cites from Uhuru Sasa's handbook: "*Umoja* (unity) was a marker of morning ceremonies; *Kujichagulia* (self-determination) for martial arts; *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility) for lunch; *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics) for vocational and physical education; *Nia* (purpose) for math, science, language arts and history; *Kuumba* (creativity) for the humanities; and *Imani* (faith) for closing ceremonies (i.e., pledge, songs, inspirational words, announcements)" (Konadu, pg. 87, 2009). From interview of East members and Uhuru Sasa administration, Konadu provides a detailed outline of classroom design, samples of lesson activities, and statistics of student attendance overtime.

Along with documentation of the East's achievements, its members also reveal the challenges they faced in their organization. These culminated in Uhuru Sasa's close in 1984, mainly due to "constant political and financial struggles" (Konadu, pg. 111, 2009). Konadu critically addresses the internal and external conflicts. These include dissension amongst leadership, complex fallouts with partnering organizations (US, CAP, CIBI, etc.), and conflicting motivations amongst East members. One main subject, often unaddressed in discussion of African-centered organizations, were conflicts around polygamy, inequitable male-female interactions, breakdown of collective family relationships, and the effects of these disconnects on the children. In analysis of these accounts, Konadu cites Harold Cruse's assessment of nationalist organizations in 1960's as being "fragmented into sects, factions and cliques that resembled a morass of self-inflicted immobility" (Konadu, pg. xxxii, 2009). He also calls attention to

examples of "...nationalists that seek to organize the "masses," while their own families and children suffer from acute forms of neglect or abuse," (Konadu, pg. xxxii, 2009), as well as the effects of these instances on future generations coming out of these movements. This discussion is relevant even today: more analysis of these conflicts can serve as lessons to review and build upon for the future, so that they aren't repeated.

This text is a valuable resource to the internal workings of an African-centered society. It serves as a time capsule, which documents the grassroots world of the East. Many community-based institutions like this aren't documented; those who were/are involved are often the only ones who can speak to these unique experiences. It would be interesting to hear the accounts of Uhuru Sasa students, and what it was like to have grown up in the distinct environment of this organization. Current and future organizers can apply the information shared by Konadu in their own efforts. This reflection process is vital for all members of a particular community to understand the historical contexts which inform and shape the extremes that often occur in youth experiences within African-centered learning spaces. By extremes, I am referring both the positive and negative incidents and interactions that shape one's perception of how they were raised, what elements one chooses to apply as an adult, and what communities and/or organizing efforts one chooses to participate in as a result. Within this study, I'm interested in pinpointing the meaningful interactions the sample experienced, which impacted them in their development. Having been involved in several African-centered organizations, I believe an understanding of these dynamics can contribute to a constructive, solution-oriented approach to this research – which Konadu achieves effectively. This study, which includes sample members from a variety of African-centered youth organizations, can contribute to this larger dialogue.

Konadu's text delves into the unique dynamics of a particular Pan-African organization, dynamics that impacted the youth in a nation-building society like The East. Dr. Joyce Piert work expands on consideration of these dynamics, and their contributions to youth development. She is one of the first authors to conduct an in-depth qualitative study of student experiences, published in a book called *Alchemy of the Soul: An African-Centered Education* (published 2015). She conducted her research from 2004 to 2005. In this text, she interviewed administration members, parents and students of the Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy (FS/MGPA) in Michigan, which originally was an institution of CIBI (Council of Independent Black Institutions). The 7 former students were members of the first graduating class of the institution, and since had moved on to college – many had established families of their own. She presented their responses in a narrative format. Piert conducted one of the first research attempts to outline themes based on what the former students connected to most from their learning process in a specific African-centered learning space. Using observations, field notes and first-hand recollections, she also provides detailed accounts of school activities, outlining what students in different age groups did during the day.

In her data analysis, Piert pinpointed a wide variety of ideas to review. Initially, she compared student observations and evaluations with official handbook guidelines from both the school and CIBI. She did this to ascertain if student responses reflected actual achievement or adoption of the required benchmarks in the guidelines. The guidelines relayed the ultimate goals of the institution, which included the following: students' development of crucial skills for nation-building, knowledge of their culture, ability to advocate for themselves, and positive fostering of their personhood or self-concept (Piert, pg. 78, 2015). Piert used these goals to frame her questions to the respondents. Major themes gleaned from the data included the sample's

appreciation and application of the following qualities: capacity for nation-building, feelings of connectedness to a larger community, cultural proficiency, positive self-concept, high expectations for greatness, frequent implementation of higher order thinking, necessity of involvement in activism, agency and the ability to express and communicate the life values they prioritized – which were reinforced in the Shule. Overall, students felt that they were heavily equipped to navigate dominant mainstream systems, to become successful academically and to maintain constructive relationships in their community.

In addition, Piert also probed for challenges the respondents observed. Members of the group shared their constructive critiques, mainly in the areas of rites of passage discrepancies, issues of self-esteem and overall lack of athletics opportunities (Piert 2015). In rarely documented narratives on rites of passage affiliation, adults questioned the practicality of particular initiation procedures. One mentioned the importance of identifying for himself both the qualities he possessed and life experiences he went through that marked his manhood, as opposed to the completion of ritual ceremony. The same former student mentioned the disconnection with his male facilitators: community elders and adults who were "distracted with other issues of their lives," which impeded their ability to connect with and relate to him and the other initiates (Piert 2015). Feedback of this nature prompts further reflection, reorganization and the implementation of standards for checks and balances, which ultimately can help any African-centered organization or rites of passage initiative to grow in its productivity. Without a forum for youth to share their views, a one-dimensional, solely adult-based projection or evaluation could be accepted as the only truthful norm.

Working from Piert's example, more research highlighting youth experiences can reveal the specific activities and interactions that produce these confident adults, who can demonstrate and

actualize the positive themes previously mentioned. Also, with the daily operations, management and participation in community-based projects like FS/MGPA, consistent evaluation studies can serve to record these successes, in a way that parents, students, teachers and elders can easily access. With access to this information, gathered in a variety of arenas, international networks of independent schools like FS/MGPA can be further solidified – with the sharing of best practices, involvement of former students in shaping curriculum, and the continued knowledge of what works for specific situations (regionally, by organization, household status, students' area of focus, students' talents, etc.)

3.4   Research Conducted by Former Students

Invaluable contributions to discussions of African-centered institutions include new research and documentation from former students themselves. Educator Samora Sobukwe-Sodaye' provides best practices collected from his parents' educational methods; Samora and his 9 siblings were all successfully reared in this process. His parents, Mama Ama and Baba Wovoka Sobukwe, created the Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom School and Cultural Center in Mississippi. His recent book, *Thirteen Valuable Lessons*, outlines inventive homeschooling activities from this community-based institution, which parents can adopt and facilitate in teaching their children. These activities include agriculture, home construction/repair, engineering, animal husbandry, critical analysis of history, community service projects, political activism and more. Older relatives within the family were sourced for their knowledge also, contributing to the learning processes of the youth involved in the passing down of crucial skills for family, community and nation management.

In a creative format, Sobukwe-Sodaye' relays the foundational tenets he observed from his learning process in an African-centered space. He shares the values he internalized, which

include seeing both family and community as important microcosms of a larger nation project, and the importance of creating a culture of self-sufficiency in all aspects of life (Sobukwe-Sodaye', pg. 39-40, 2011). From this, he created a model of conduct and operations for himself, which he sources from now to teach young adults in the Mississippi Public School System. In later chapters, he talks about the successes he has achieved in establishing meaningful connections in the classroom, getting youth in public schools interested in African culture/history, and building an environment of respect in spaces where he facilitates – all tools he attributes to his parents' work and dedication.

Given the solution-oriented intention of my thesis, this is what I hope to achieve in my work also. Sobukwe-Sodaye' provides a model of documentation that highlights the specific elements that he connected to most, which provides a more in-depth explanation of what works successfully in African-centered educational practice. For him, it was the consistent engagement of his parents, siblings and community members in practical activities – which both brought them closer together and taught them to work together to achieve long-term goals. Is this consistent with other former student experiences? Can these collective statements be used for curriculum development? Sobukwe-Sodaye's example shows that this and further works can be used to implement further strategies to fortify African-centered educational efforts, and solidify practices for evaluating if these efforts produce the intended results. For this study, *Thirteen Valuable Lessons* works as guide for future research in best practices, from the views of someone who grew up in this environment from birth. It also ensures that the standards mentioned can be sourced from to hold parents, educators and program developers accountable for reproducing these meaningful experiences, and also to challenge us all as community members to ensure consistency in our educational practices.

In tandem with Sobukwe-Sodaye' contributions, Dr. Asantewa Sunni-Ali presents further analysis focusing on youth in Nationalist, Pan-African communal settings. Her cutting-edge dissertation, titled "Performing New Afrikan Childhood: Agency, Conformity and the Spaces in Between," delves into the nature of young people's internal workings – how they process the information shared in African-centered learning spaces. Reflecting on her own experience, she discusses the varying degrees to which students connected with the ideas and activities promoted in the institutions she participated in as a child. One of these institutions includes the New Afrikan Scouts Organization, the youth-based component of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), a Nationalist community organization with a chapter in Atlanta, GA, where she conducted her study. Sunni-Ali, like Sobukwe-Sodaye' works from the unique understanding of involvement in African-centered learning spaces from a young age.

In her dialogue with children in the New Afrikan Scouts, Sunni-Ali investigated if students felt empowered to identify with Pan-African nationalism, community activism and their own personal development – if the environments created by adults fostered this internal drive. Agency was used to refer to the youth's active, self-motivated presence in the organization, their participation in decision-making, planning and engaging the community. The alternative scenario considered – referred to as conforming – was if students were just compelled to follow what the adult leadership told them to do, without seeing the benefit of the activities in their own development. This includes students being enrolled in African-centered learning spaces without the home and community support to apply the methods learned.

These points of analysis are very crucial, and important to consider in research focusing on children in African-centered environments. Consideration of youth views adds more building blocks to much of the literature on African-centered pedagogy, which often contributes

discussions of methods, culturally-relevant curriculum materials, class facilitation, incorporation of African/Diaspora material, importance of Independent Schools, etc. Questions of youth perceptions of their experience can inform us as to how these educational methods are being received – ensuring that, with reflection, we can continue to create environments conducive for long-term student development and application of materials/skills learned. These environments can produce varying results depending on the attitude of teachers and facilitators, access to resources, status of community relationships, and more. These discussions all tie back to Konadu's work on The East, and the internal dynamics that affected student experiences at Uhuru Sasa. Valuable comparisons can be made from all of this research, evaluating the work of African-centered institution builders from periods like the 1970s up to today.

Having this experience herself, Sunni-Ali sourced from her own memories, her own observations to investigate similar thoughts coming from peers, and youth of subsequent generations. The question of internal motivation, along with identifying the relevant methods former students connect to in the long-term, informs this research study as well. Like Sunni-Ali, I would also like to investigate the following questions: What drives young people to adopt the qualities reinforced in various African-centered learning spaces? I assert that there will be a variety of answers to reflect on, which can contribute to further discussion and practical implementation of solutions.

3.5   The Rites of Passage Movement and Personal Development

In both African and African Diasporic societies, rites of passage activities are constructed to mark transition from one stage of life to another. Based on community values and practical skill-building, adults and elders of a particular African-centered organization, neighborhood or collective will often gather and facilitate workshops, ceremonies and trials constructed for youth

to attain and prove their maturity (Zahan 1972; Asare-Opoku 1978; Maiga 2003; Goggins 1996; Hill 1992; Warfield-Coppock 1992; Harvey & Hill 2004; Okwamabua et. al. 2014). This section delves into the literature provided on this phenomenon, a feature of African-centered learning spaces. My study seeks to contribute to understandings of these experiences, and includes sample members who have participated in community-based adolescent rite of passage initiations.

It has been argued that that the potential combination of attendance in a culturally relevant school and a structured rites of passage experience could facilitate major growth and change for youth in Black communities, especially teenagers (Goggins 1996; Piert 2015; Hill 1992; Warfield-Coppock 1992; Warfield-Coppock & Coppock 1992) Expanding on these ideas, the following texts go outside of the traditional school setting to show how participation in extracurricular activities can fortify youth's personal development. The idea of "personal development" pertains to youth's attainment and future mastery of life skills which include a strong sense of identity, self-purpose, interpersonal skills and the ability to maintain an internal process of self-awareness, self-reflection and productive action. In community based rites of passage, activities, ceremonies and mentorship are constructed by adults and elders to assist in facilitating this learning process.

Program evaluation specialist Nsenga Warfield-Coppock was a pioneer in this research, setting the standard for evaluations of modern African rites of passage processes and subsequent studies. She was a prolific writer on this topic, and worked as a community-based rite of passage organizer and educational specialist. In her work, she studied traditional African initiations like the *Sande* female rites (Mende, Vai, Temne of Sierra Leone)*,* the mystery systems of Ancient Kemet (Egypt) – and a variety of others. She adapted the indigenous African initiations she studied to reflect current realities in Black communities.

Warfield-Coppock was a leader in instituting two national organizations: ANROPUK (Afrikan National Rites of Passage United Kollective) as well as STARS (Sojourner Truth Adolescent Rites Society). These organizations initiated teenage youth (both male and female) in New York City (Warfield Coppock 1998). STARS focused specifically on the development of girls. A manual titled *Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls* (1987) as published based on the best practices observed in the program, serving as a resource for parents, teachers and community organizers who seek to implement rites processes for teenage girls. A variety of authors involved contributed entries: including Warfield-Coppock, Mafori Moore, Gwen Akua Gilyard and Karen King (Moore et. al. 1987). Another important work of Warfield-Coppock's is titled *Images of African Sisterhood: Initiation and Rites of Passage to Womanhood* (2009). This illustrated textbook includes helpful handouts, curricular lesson samples, personal reflections, booklists and questionnaires, which facilitators can use for workshop planning and evaluation.

A 1996 Essence article, featuring the programs and work of the aforementioned Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, introduced a trend of Afrocentric adolescent initiatory practices being implemented in Black communities nationwide. It opens with the story of Synade Jackson, a single mother who searched in her community for support in raising her 14-year-old daughter Kemikaa. Synade signed Kemikaa up for the STARS program; her main reason being that she entrusted the Black female leaders of STARS to assist in teaching Kemikaa to be a strong Black woman (Essence Magazine 1996). The article goes on to include Synade's observations, which include the following:

> *"I had wondered whether my daughter would choose education over adolescent pregnancy," Jackson says. "I wanted her to learn African history and spirituality. I wanted these values to be ingrained in her."... [Synade] Jackson seems to have gotten her wish. As Kemikaa*

and 13 other girls finished the ten-month program (which included classes on spirituality, sexuality, cooking - and even quilting), Jackson says she watched her daughter become a more confident, responsible young lady. And Kemikaa, too, was happy with the results. "I got a lot out of the group," she says, "especially the self-love and self-esteem class, where we talked about our body temple, and how we feel about ourselves." (Essence Magazine 1996)

The accounts of Synade and her daughter Kemikaa reveal the positive effects observed of these programs in community spaces. Warfield-Coppock is also interviewed; she shared her perspective that the dominant society cannot be relied upon to instill positive self-image and self-esteem in Black youth. For interested parents, a listing is also featured containing rites of passage programs nationally. Another female-instructed, girl-focused process (3-day workshop) is listed as operating in San Diego, called the African American Women on Tour Program (AAWT). The AAWT is mentioned to operate during national conferences in up to 5 cities at the time. The entry ended with a prompt for parents to contact Warfield-Coppock, who could be contacted for consultations for the building of rites of passage processes in their local areas. This passage gives more contexts for Warfield-Coppock's active work in the community, in her service as a resource for concerned parents of adolescents.

Her most well-known and sourced journal article in the field is called "The Rites of Passage Movement: A Resurgence of African-Centered Practices for Socializing African American Youth" (1992). In this selection, she conducted a study soliciting other rite of passage organizations nationwide in an attempt to highlight the standard and consistent features, activities and theoretical orientations of these processes. Responding to the gap in quantitative research on these efforts (at the time virtually non-existent), her statistical findings were tallied from 20 programs represented in the study. Her results reveal interesting points to consider for the time period:

"Altogether, the respondents reported their organizations/agencies as having conducted 87 rites of passage programs between 1984 and 1992, and as having initiated 1,616 youth. An

average of 19 youth participated in each rites program, with a range of 1 to 55 per program. Programs ranged in length from 3 to 18 months, with 6-, 9-, and 12- month programs having the highest frequency…most of the programs (35, or 40.3%) included both males and females in the rites process, 33.3% (29) were for males only, and 26.4% (23) were for females only" (Coppock, pg. 476, 1992).

This study proves that rites of passage programs reflected a larger movement across the nation, with a substantial number of students impacted. Ages of participants were noted to range from 7 to the early 20s. Different types of rites programs were discussed, ranging from church programs to those aligned with public schools and community centers, as well as initiations conducted by small local family collectives. Warfield-Coppock writes about the potential for alliances between these various organizations, with the ability to transcend differences, share ideas and implement productive change on various levels.

After-school and weekend rites of passage programs are also the focus of *Paul Hill's Coming of Age: African American Male Rites-Of-Passage* and Lathardus Goggins II's *African Centered Rites of Passage and Education*. Both texts focus on the purpose of age-set rites of passage programming, and how this ancient African process can be adapted for productive socialization in the present day.

Coming of Age specifically addresses the adolescent development of young males. It opens with argument for the implementation for rites of passage programming in Black neighborhoods. Rites of passage is defined as "those structures, rituals and ceremonies by which age-class members or individuals in a group successfully come to know who they are and what they are about – the purpose and meaning for their existence, as they proceed from one clearly defined state of existence to the next state or passage in their lives" (Hill, pg. 62, 1992). Examples are given of the role of rites of passage in indigenous African societies, which helped members of each age-set learn the skills necessary to grow and progress in society.

In our world today, this is encouraged especially in response to the US societal issues, negative behavior patterns and dangers that face young Black men in their development. Hill uses statistical evidence in the areas of demographic location, criminal activity, suicide rates, incarceration, unemployment and academic discrepancies to argue that Black men in American society are in serious jeopardy. He also discusses the deterioration of extended family structures in urban settings. He states that "family breakdown and community disorganization, along with the increasing influence of the streets and electronic media, have created youth who exhibit interpersonal violence and self-destructive behavior" (Hill, pg. 41, 1996). These self-destructive behaviors include drug abuse, glamorization of violence and gang activity. Interestingly, gang involvements are noted as natural social processes during adolescence – reflecting the need for young men to band together and find security with those of the same peer group. Hill also discusses the mainstream promotion of hyper-masculine behaviors, and the projected and internalized stereotypes placed on Black males, which are listed in detail. These include: acting "tough", absence of emotion, extreme competitiveness, manipulation and strict focus on being rich.

As a remedy for this, Hill prescribes the adaptation of indigenous rites of passage rituals and activities. Examples of activities, procedures, standards and subject areas covered are given from the author's own rites of passage organization: The Ohio Rites-Of-Passage Network. Some of the ultimate goals of the network are implementation of the following: legitimization of being, provision of a family code, sense of history, community and the Supreme Being. The intent of the network was to institute community building in local neighborhoods – to reverse the issues mentioned earlier on the ground level. An interesting point to note is the involvement of both African and African American doctorate holders / researchers in developing these programs.

Anthony Mensah, Ed.D., Richard Kelsey, Ph.D, along with the author, use their understanding of history, socialization processes and youth development to create training models that can be duplicated. In this book, their program is packaged as a training model for other programs across the nation – the appendix includes a detailed outline of important guidelines, benchmarks and lesson plan points to be covered in planned workshop sessions.

Hill's work is very technical and descriptive, in presenting a straightforward argument for rites of passage programming. There is an attempt to make the proposed curriculum relate to the lives of Black youth, particularly in inner-city environments. Statistics are used to support claims of the overwhelming pathologies involving Black men in the community; however, the text doesn't include a discussion of outcomes of the rites of passage initiative, and its effects on students, staff and community members.

Goggins' *African Centered Rites of Passage and Education* expands on the ideas presented by Hill by providing testimonials of youth participants themselves (Goggins 1996) In his work, he conducted interviews of Jewish and African American youth that had undergone adolescent rites of passage activity, in an attempt to document their process of internalization and application of the information. African Americans and Jews are noted to have experienced similar forms of oppression. Goggins explains that they had to develop strategies in their communities to continue their cultural and social processes, while being marginalized in larger US society. This approach is also used to show how the need for culturally-specific rites of passage education transcends racial or ethnic boundaries – the process is not exclusively African, but essential for the development of young adults in general. The youth were asked questions relating to the purpose of rites of passage, what the experience meant for them, what they

personally gained, and finally, how the ideas of self-concept and education inform rites processes.

Common themes from respondents included: connectedness to community, family and the Creator, perpetuation of cultural standards, connection with ancestry (being a "witness" to historical events), self-awareness and definition of purpose and destiny in life, low expectation of public schools to prepare one for success in life, and a need for parental and community involvement in the education of children. Goggins uses these results, along with an analysis of various African and World value systems, to identify core tenets that can serve as a foundation for rites of passage education. These include "spirituality, interdependence, cooperation, respect, reciprocity, intergenerational balance, understanding and developing purpose, and cultural competence" (Hill, pg. 20, 1992).

Goggins goes on to argue for the creation of arenas for youth to develop a strong sense of self. He cites the approaches and works of four well-known authors on education: historian Carter G. Woodson, philosophers John Dewey and Paulo Freire, along with researcher Janice E. Hale-Benson. These reviews are supplemented with learning process models and diagrams, which educators can use in their planning efforts. These models include Shade's (1989) Information Processing Model, as well as Irvine's (1991) diagram of Factors Significant for Black Student Achievement. All of the information covered informs a fully-functioning rites program, which Goggins assists with managing.

This program is the Academic S.T.A.R.S. (Students Achieving and Reaching Success) initiative, operating out of Kent State University. It was formed for incoming African-American freshmen students. S.T.A.R.S. was designed to facilitate a smooth transition process from high school to college, including life skills training and academic/personal counseling. Goggins

outlines how the African-centered framework informs activities and material covered in workshops. He states that in the Karamu ya Wahitimu (Feast of Graduates) process, "African American faculty and staff serve as mentors and elders, thus creating the village necessary for rites" (Goggins, pg. 52, 1996). Feedback was provided from university faculty/staff, program coordinators and students, revealing the positive impact the program has on overall academic achievement and student life at the university.

The examples from Hill and Goggins show how African-centered rites of passage processes can serve as complements to daily school attendance. These initiatives involve the community with the development of its youth in a variety of areas: academic, cultural, emotional, spiritual, socioeconomic etc. In all of the texts mentioned, there is an overall concern with preparing youth to survive and thrive in this society with a strong foundation – and even also going as far as preparing youth to create independent arenas and potentially sovereign societies altogether. Goggins closes with mentioning the need for literature on how African-centered rites of passage programs operate, noting that works on the subject are near non-existent. Looking into this, I noticed that this discussion is still limited today: there are only a select few writers who touch on this topic in the late 80's and early 90's (Nathan & Julia Hare, Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Useni Perkins, and M. C. Lewis). These are similar in that they discuss curriculum development, adaptations of African values, models for teaching Black youth and the teaching of practical life skills.

In terms of current literature, there are little to no seminal texts which cover African-centered rites of passage experiences from the point of view of the "generation" of students, who came out of the African-centered institutions of the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s. What was it like going through a modern expression of African rite of passage rituals? The perspectives of these former

youth, who live, work and organize today, could shed light on the practicality, successes and challenges of these pedagogical processes. This could also assist in the expansion and continued advancement of African-centered educational efforts in communities across the nation. Further research can also incorporate the substantial evaluation forms and curriculum materials provided by the authors mentioned here, to garner feedback from youth participants for community organizers to review and work from.

3.6   Conclusion

Little research has explored the implications of both incorporation and reapplication of African educational traditions in our world today – particularly, the impact of these methods on students in African-centered learning spaces. This research is growing, and many scholars have made significant contributions to literature on African-centered education. Further points to consider include the following: how this impact could be different depending on the school location, organizational affiliation, body of adults and elders which create and inform the learning space, home environment, involvement of parents in the learning space, etc. The continued collection of former student voices is paramount in unlocking the views, incidents and perspectives to identify the many contexts and overlapping factors that either contribute to, or detract from, overall student development.

In conducting this generative study, I seek to add to these contributions by presenting a process for long-term evaluation of impact on students' personal development. I present points for consideration from statements sample members share in personal interviews. It is my hope that activities and qualities cited by study participants can be noted as best practices and successes, which can be incorporated and developed further in African-centered youth programs. Points of constructive critique can be linked to history, as we analyze the actions and decisions

that occurred overtime to impact students today. With this understanding, this research aims to

contribute to the solution-building endeavors of the scholars and community activists featured in

this literature review.

4   METHODOLOGY

This study employs two methods of inquiry that complement each other: concept mapping and in-depth interviews. Both strategies are conducted using the phenomenological design process. Creswell describes phenomenology as being concerned with identifying the "essence" or basic nature of a particular experience (Creswell 2007). In my questions, I want to identify the commonalities subjects have in their understandings – where their perspectives overlap.

The methodological strategies employed best facilitate this process. With both concept mapping and interviews, participants' lived experiences serve as the basis for the research. With the addition of group concept mapping – results can numerically and graphically support the information from the interviews. If the findings from each method contradict each other, this would also reveal interesting variables to consider for future research in this area. If concept mapping can both accurately quantify and visually show former student perspectives, then the method can serve as a valid evaluation activity – which can be used in African-centered learning spaces for program graduates, facilitators, and community members. This is an example of using academic processes for community development – bringing best practices "back to the people."

4.1   The Research Questions

Once again, the overarching research questions for this study include the following:

1) What ideas, lessons, interactions and activities did sample members experience in African-centered learning environments, both in school-like settings and at home?

2) Looking back, did former students find their experiences meaningful in contributing to their overall personal development? If so, what were the specific ideas, lessons and interactions which they deemed most meaningful?

3) How can the research methods applied in this study contribute to program evaluation practices in community-based African-centered learning spaces?

4.2   The Sample Member as Stakeholder

Supporting the ideas of communal ownership, centering, and responsibility, participants are called stakeholders in the concept mapping process (Kane & Trochim 2007). They are seen as creators of a knowledge base specific to their experiences – in this case, the phenomenon of being raised in African-centered learning spaces. These unique ideas will definitely change from person to person, depending on the time period, decade, generation, etc. For this group, the idea of each member being a stakeholder helps to cement the practical nature of this study, and the fact that each member can positively contribute no matter what their perspectives are.

4.3   The Process: Qualitative Interviews

An important work which guided me in the interview process was *Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America* (1980), by anthropologist John Langston Gwaltney. I stumbled on this text looking through citation entries of various related articles, and found it to be a useful model in this community-based research. In *Drylongso*, Gwaltney transcribed statements from members of various Black communities in 1970s. The text is a collection of documented oral histories that contains engaging anecdotes, points of wisdom and life experiences of Black mothers, fathers, elders, workers and parents – who often referred to themselves as "drylongso," or "ordinary folk." Their opinions cover topics relating to politics, interactions between Blacks and Whites, relationships, hard realities of survival, knowledge passed down to them from their parents and advice for younger generations. Reading this book really helped me to develop the basic questions, conversational style and lines of inquiry necessary to step back and allow interviewees

to engage and share very eloquent responses. My goal for this area of the project is to publish their statements with their written approval, in a style similar to *Drylongso*.

4.3.1   Procedures

I designed a flyer outlining the goals of the study to begin solicitation. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia State University (GSU) approved this flyer, along with subsequent email invites; private social media message prompts and consent forms. Interested participants responded to these prompts, and the consent forms were sent to them to sign (one for the study; two for interview guidelines and release of statements for viewing). A basic demographic survey was also provided for participants to fill out. In this process, it was imperative to ensure their confidentiality - especially since many respondents either still participate in or are close with community members who are still involved with the learning spaces they are evaluating. Once consent forms were signed, one-on-one interviews were arranged via phone.

Interviews were conducted and saved using the Google Voice app, which records calls after the approval of the respondent. Participants confirmed approval by pressing a number for the "yes" option, which ensures for future reference that that the interviewee consented to be recorded. From there, these in-depth conversations lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours. The Google Voice app saved the recording as an audio file to download. I then transcribed the interviews in Microsoft Word. Afterwards, I printed and highlighted quotes throughout to separate and identify statements that could be tied to a specific concept or theme.

4.3.2   Interview Questions

The standard interview questions were the following:

1) What African-centered school did you attend? If more than one, please describe.

2) What African-centered extracurricular activity did you attend? If more than one, please describe.

3) Were your parents involved in organizing any of these activities?

4) Did your parents participate in any of these activities? If so, how?

5) How would you compare an African-centered learning space to a standard public school setting?

6) Overall, what was your experience like? Describe your experience.

7) What are some interactions you remember (with staff, teachers, other students or participants)?

8) How did you feel about these interactions?

9) Was your experience meaningful? If so, why? If not, why not?

10) Was your experience challenging? If so, why? If not, why not?

11) What activities do you remember most from your experience?

12) Would you enroll your children in an African-centered learning space? Why or why not?

Other points of discussion, which arose in further questioning, included (1) how respondents define the term "African-centered," Relevancy for people of African descent today; (2) interpretation of the term *sankofa* ('go back and fetch it' as a continuous life process), application in life; (3) Observations about parents' experiences, Africanisms/ retentions in previous family generations, impact of parents' organizational experience on sample's development and learning process; (4) Response of relatives to parents' incorporation of African-centered views, lifestyles, political orientations, spiritual practices, etc. Potential conflict with family members; (5) Points of critique offered for institutions from their experiences; (6) Points of critique in how African-centered thought is applied in various communities; (7) Advice they

would give program developers, parents and youth in African-centered learning spaces; (8)

Observations of peers' experiences; comparisons made; (9) Relationships with community

members, influential adults – Evolution over time; (10) Contradictions and conflicts observed,

lessons learned; (11) Impact of community, organizational involvements on relationships with

parents; (12) Experiences transitioning to other learning environments, work environments

(public schools, corporate work environments), what is retained internally; (13) If and how

African-centered institutions engage the larger Africana community; (14) Top three lessons,

ideas, and/or activities which had the most impact on their personal development; (15) (For non-

parents in the sample) How respondents would want to raise their children, based on their

evaluations of their experiences; and finally (15) (For sample participants who are parents) How

learning process influences raising of respondent's children.

4.4   The Process: Group Concept Mapping

Social scientists William Trochim and Mary Kane introduced this particular method of group

concept mapping for use in research studies. In the 1980s, Trochim and his team at Cornell

University developed systems to visually chart, link and quantify the development of ideas

within groups of people. These results are then graphed in a variety of maps, which serve various

purposes. With this process, organizations, programs, communities, departments, etc. could use

these maps to effectively outline and evaluate their efforts longitudinally. The sample contributes

directly to the creation of solutions implemented in their line of work. Through brainstorming

and collective decision-making, priority is given to each member's ability to voice their unique

concerns, observations and overall points of view – from their lived experience and expertise in

the subject area studied. As stakeholders, the researcher and sample are equal team players in

concept mapping endeavors: the findings are shared amongst all members for approval.

A major strategy employed in concept mapping is the use of multidimensional scaling. These scaling techniques focus on the ways in which points of knowledge, created and shared by stakeholders, are rated taking into account multiple variables. For example, when a group shares ideas for either the planning or evaluation of a project, the group is tasked (by a facilitator) to group these ideas and rank them with Likert-type scales for feasibility, importance, progression (from one period to the next), or other variables. Active participation by the group, in creation of a knowledge base from their experience, allows for the communal creation of future measurement scales – which can be used in future projects and implementation of programs. With this study, the identified experiences, concerns and priorities of former students of African-centered institutions could be applied in the creation of evaluation materials specifically designed to be implemented in various centers of learning.

As the researcher, I served as the facilitator in correspondence calls, emails and group workshops for this project. In Trochim and Donnelly's *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*, their discussion on phenomenology clearly emphasizes the importance of "maintaining the meaning of the original verbalizations of the participants throughout the steps of the study." Also noted is the concern for establishing trust and reliability, particularly in cases where there is inquiry into a topic that is "relatively new, complex and sensitive" (Trochim & Donnelly, pg. 180-181, 2008). These three adjectives definitely apply to the contributions from this particular sample: research findings provided directly from the perspectives of former students (as opposed to educators, elders and academia.) The trust that is established determines whether safe, unbiased communications are created, which ensures the sample feels they can be both genuine and critical, honest and even controversial, if need be.

4.4.1 Procedures

CS Global MAX^{TM} is the official software developed from the texts of Trochim, Kane and the original research teams of Cornell University. This program operates through the online site conceptsystemsglobal.com, a web space which serves two functions: a) project facilitators can log in and set up the online modules for the study; and b) participants can set up an account and log in to plug in their answers. I obtained a license with Concept Systems to construct the account for this study. Following the interviews, participants were asked to log in and complete 5 modules. These included one basic demographic questionnaire (age range, gender, length of involvement, education level and region of country the respondent lives in.) The following modules constitute the basis for all data computation in the CS Global MAX^{TM} software: brainstorming, sorting and rating.

4.4.2 Brainstorming

On this webpage, respondents contributed short bullet-points to a master list of statements, answering the following prompt:

"FOCUS PROMPT: Generate statements that describe what involvement in African-centered learning spaces can be like. These type spaces include African-centered rites of passage processes, home environments, private schools, home schools, after school programs, youth organizations etc. What activities can one expect to participate in? What lessons are taught? Ideas promoted?"

It was important to make this prompt consistent with several interview questions – questions inquiring about the activities, ideas and values that were mentioned as features of the sample's experiences. These also included the "Top Three" question, where respondents were asked to share the three activities, ideas and/or values which have the most lasting impact on their lives currently. From the original master list of statements, answers that overlapped or repeated were

removed. A final total of 101 statements comprised the official list used in subsequent modules.

These statements are charted for review in the Findings chapter.

4.4.3 Sorting

In CS Global MAX^{TM}, the next step in the process is Sorting. This module opens an

animated, interactive field for the dragging and dropping of statements, contained in boxes.

Participants select boxes for each statement and drag them into various lists to form groups. The

instructions were as follows:

"INSTRUCTIONS: In this activity, you will categorize the statements, according to your view of their meaning or theme. To do this, you will sort each statement into categories in a way that makes sense to you. First, read through the statements in the Unsorted Statements column below.
Next, sort each statement into a category you create. Group the statements for how similar in meaning or theme they are to one another. Give each category a name that describes its theme or contents.
Do NOT create categories according to priority, or value, such as 'Important', or 'Hard To Do.'
Do NOT create categories such as 'Miscellaneous' or "Other" that group together dissimilar statements.
Put a statement alone in its own category if it is unrelated to all the other statements. Make sure every statement is put somewhere. Do not leave any statements in the Unsorted Statements column.
People vary in how many categories they create. Usually 5 to 20 categories works well to organize this number of statements."

The module required participants to sort all 101 statements into categories based on how they

felt each statement was connected – matching the statement to others which reflected similar

ideas. The names of the groups are important: names of categories help to define major themes

or concepts which contain the individual statements.

4.4.4 Rating

Using the same 101 statements, participants filled out two surveys answering two rating

questions. Their answers for each statement on the surveys were noted on a Likert-type scale of

1-5. The two questions posed were the following.

- Rating Question/Survey 1: How Meaningful: *In evaluating your experiences in African-*

    *centered learning spaces, **please rate how meaningful each activity, value or idea is in***

> ***contributing to your overall personal development***. *(Scale of 1 = relatively meaningless to 5 = extremely meaningful)*

- Rating Question/Survey 2: How Prioritized: ***At what level do you feel the leadership body of your particular African-centered learning space prioritized each activity, value, or idea below?*** *To define leadership, this term pertains to staff, facilitators, parents and organizers. (Scale of 1 = relatively meaningless to 5 = extremely meaningful, based on interviewee's perception)*

These two variables were crucial in producing relevant data comparisons for an evaluation study of this kind. The idea of "meaningful" is related to respondents' personal development, going back to the literature on African-centered education – the overall goals discussed by Rodney and Akoto for example, of self-fulfillment, self-actualization and family, community and nation management, which are considered to be interlinked. Many valuable academic studies focused on academic development, which is important. However, for this research, reflection on the development of the child (now adult) in all aspect of life serves as the context for the ideas, activities and concepts discussed.

Sample members' perceptions of adult organizers and community members are important to feature, because these assertions can answer a few questions. Are the intentions of parents, community members and program developers clear to their children, students and initiates? What can ensure effective transfer of information from teachers to recipients? Statements rated high in both variables can show the ideas, activities and concepts that successfully transferred, as least in the perspectives of former students. Statements rated low in both areas can highlight the elements that were both deemed less meaningful and less prioritized, opening avenues for discussion of those particular ideas and practices for reflection. Communities, institutions and

family can then decide how to approach these elements, and potentially adapt their methods to address these concerns. These results are charted with the understanding that each respondent has their own unique experience, so the rating result are not meant to be generalized – they just provide interesting points of analysis, especially if ratings are consistent among many participants. Ratings may also vary depending on the organization, community or family the sample member represents: analysis of the interviews can help give further context, identify the working best practices and highlight where an issue might be a feature of a particular familial, organizational or locational learning space.

4.4.5   The Visual Maps

The results of the rating and grouping activities are shown in 6 visual maps for each individual member of the sample. Each map is meant to communicate different relationships within the information. These graphs are the following (with explanations cited from Kane and Trochim's *Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation*, pg. 13, 2007):

1) Point Map – This is a chart map that displays points for each of the 101 statements on a grid, as they were placed using the multi-dimensional scaling process. This map is important in visually showing proximity, the numerical difference or closeness of statements. This is based on how the respondents grouped the statements. It is relational, showing how statements could be grouped within a larger construct.

2) Cluster Map – A map that shows how the statements were grouped by the cluster analysis. Two-dimensional polygons delineate clear groupings of statements, resembling a patch of islands. These "islands" reflect the boundaries computed for a cluster, and their relation in proximity to one another.

3) The Point Rating Map – The numbered point map with average statement ratings overlaid. This shows how each statement was rated on a Likert-type scale of 1-5. For example, for statement #54, a meter of three notches shows that that statement was rated an average of 3 for relevance (if "relevance" is the variable for the map.)

4) The Cluster Rating Map – The cluster map with average cluster ratings overlaid. Two dimensional shapes ("islands") representing each cluster are shown with 1-5 levels (making them three dimensional), reflecting the average rating of statements within that cluster. This is based again on the Likert-type scale of 1-5 given for variables.

5) Pattern Matches – Defined as pairwise comparisons of cluster ratings across criteria such as different stakeholder groups, rating variables, or points in time, using a ladder graph representation. To elaborate, this chart identifies two variables – for example, ratings of relevance vs. priority given to each cluster. The ladder image shows the numerical difference in averages of one variable in comparison to the other.

6) Go-Zones – This map is a bivariate graph (x and y axis, four quadrants) of statement values for two rating variables within a cluster, divided into quadrants above and below the mean of each variable. The x axis is the mean score for Variable 1, and the y axis is the mean score for Variable (from the scale of 1-5) The graph shows a "go-zone" quadrant of statements that are above average on both variables.

These various graphs show the intricate links between ideas shared. As the researcher, I (along with future researchers) can make comparisons between numbers recorded from individual sample members. I can also make further comparisons of findings from various groups within the sample, with categories by gender, age groups (18-25 vs. 30-45, showing potential change over time), community locations (a northern vs. a southern or Midwestern city),

or even attendance by institution, program or organization. The respondents can be provided with the information do make these comparisons as well. Specific experiences may come up out of a number of the sample's involvement with a specific program – which would need to be examined in detail.

5   FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present relevant data collected during this process. Everyone who

participated provided a substantial amount of personal observations, positive feedback and

constructive critique. For the purposes of this study, I will hone in on the specific results which

answer the three research questions. In the next section, brief introductions of the respondents are

included. This is followed by a succinct outline of prevalent responses from both interviews and

the group concept mapping process, again relating back to the distinct purposes of this study.

5.1   The Participants / Stakeholders

This sample of project stakeholders includes 10 participants, 5 male and 5 female, ranging

from age 18-34. Half of the sample members were between the ages of 18-24, the other half from

25-34. 8 listed themselves to be single, 3 were parents, and 2 respondents from the group were

married. 8 out of 10 members either graduated college, or were currently enrolled: one, Ajoa,

obtained a Ph.D. It is important to note that all of the sample members' parents were listed to be

college graduates, and also, a considerable amount of members from the group had a parent who

had a Master's degree (6 total).

All 10 were interviewed, and 7 signed up online for the group concept mapping exercise.

They are currently located in a variety of major Southern and Midwestern cities (7 Southeast, 2

Midwest, 1 West). All have either been students in an African-centered private school, or

participated in rites of passage activities and community youth organizations. Many transitioned

from African-centered learning spaces to public school, and, in some cases, alternated between

spaces. Pseudonyms were applied to respondents' names to ensure confidentiality. Their general

demographic information (Table 1) is included below:

Table 1. Participant Information

Name	Age	Level of Education	Relationship Status	Highest Education Level of Parents
Kafi (F)	25-34	Masters' Degree	Single	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Master's
Temitayo (F)	25-34	High School Graduate	Single, Parent	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Bachelor's
Ajoa (F)	25-34	Ph.D.	Single	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Bachelor's
Jibril (M)	18-24	Completed Some College	Single	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Bachelor's
Geb (M)	18-24	Bachelor's Degree	Single	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Master's
Adisa (F)	18-24	Completed Some Postgraduate	In relationship	Father: Master's Mother: Bachelor's
Rashida (F)	25-34	Masters' Degree	Married, Parent	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Bachelor's
Diarra (M)	18-24	Completed Some College	Single	Father: Master's Mother: Bachelor's
Sekou (M)	25-34	Bachelor's Degree	Married, Parent	Father: Ph.D. Mother: Bachelor's
Jeremy (M)	18-24	Completed Some College	Single	Father: Bachelor's Mother: Master's

All stakeholders, save one, mentioned being involved in African-centered learning spaces their entire lives (Geb listed 4-8 years). Home is defined as the basis of this involvement by many of them, with their household being defined as the first African-centered learning space - parents as their first teachers. Everyone was excited to contribute his or her stories. They often commented on how the process jogged many memories for reflection that were meaningful.

5.2   The Research Questions: Responses

This chart summarizes the overall connections between the questions and which particular methods, including interview responses and visual maps, answered each question.

Table 2. Summary of Findings

Question	From Interviews	From Concept Mapping
Question One: The Phenomenon: ***What ideas, lessons, interactions and***	<u>Major Theme</u> **Activities developing a sense of Purpose on Various Levels: Self,**	Top Eight Themes Identified by the Sample: a) Desire to Enhance Self-Motivation

activities did sample members experience in African-centered learning environments, both in school-like settings and at home?	**Family, Community and Nation**	b) What I Learned / What I Had (internal knowledge) c) African Pride d) Education & Development e) Community Equals Me f) Spiritual Life g) Self-Expression and Self-Pride h) Problems / Problematic Things Maps which answer this question: *Point Map* *Cluster Map* *Cluster Rating Map*
Question Two: The Evaluation ***Looking back, did former students find their experiences meaningful in contributing to their overall personal development? If so, what were the specific ideas, lessons and activities which they deemed most meaningful?***	<u>Major Themes</u> **Having People –** Community Interactions influence the Evaluation Socialization Process **Having Purpose –** Intent informing Reflection and Action	Confirmed in the statements for both the high rated "Desire to Enhance Self-Motivation" cluster and reference to community in statements for top-rated clusters Maps which answer this question: *Cluster Rating Map* *Pattern Matching* *Go-Zone*
Question Three: The Resource ***How can the research methods applied in this study contribute to program evaluation practices in community-based African-centered learning spaces?***	Interview Statements were used in Sorting and Rating process, producing the concept mapping results (maps, scoring, averages)	Top Three Rated Clusters/Themes a) Desire to Enhance Self Motivation b) What I Learned / What I Had (internal knowledge) c) African Pride Top Rated Themes in Both Variables: (Green Go-Zone) include – a) Love and Respect for African cultural expressions b) Academic excellence c) Encouragement of understanding of information shared vs. rote memorization Maps which answer this question:

		Cluster Rating Maps *Pattern Matching* *Go-Zone*

5.2.1   Question One – The Phenomenon

What ideas, lessons, interactions and activities did sample members experience in African-centered learning environments, both in school-like settings and at home?

In reviewing the sample's responses, several major points stood out in answering this question. In defining this phenomenon of "growing up African-centered," sample contributions help readers to "zoom in" to the day-to-day aspects this experience entails for many youth. The top themes observed, named by the sample, include the following 8 constructs: Desire to Enhance Self-Motivation, What I Learned/What I had (referring to the lessons they would always carry internally, about themselves), African Pride, Educational & Developmental Activities, "Community Equals Me," Spiritual Life, Self-Expression/Self-Pride and Problems/Problematic Things. During the interviews, sample members shared at length the details of their learning process – the lessons, interactions and activities which were included in their experiences "growing up African-centered." Consistent with the entire sample, a vital lesson shared was the importance of having a purpose in life, a purpose tied to one's family and larger community. This concept was noted to be the overarching concern which informed the specific day-to-day activities respondents participated in.

From interviews to concept mapping, both processes prompted the sample to answer this research question directly. These answers were collected into a final list of interview statements with the Brainstorming exercise. All statements were sourced from the interviews, where participants shared anecdotes and personal reflections expanding on these statements. It is important to mention that all members did not experience every statement listed here: this is just a final collection of what the entire group contributed. A total of 101 statements were

contributed. Only 7 respondents completed the entire concept mapping process; 3 members couldn't due to time constraints. Ajoa, Jibril, Adisa, Jeremy, Geb, Kafi and Diarra sorted and rated the statements provided by the entire group of 10 participants. Going forward, the statement list (Appendix A) serves as a reference point for the concept maps discussed later in this chapter.

5.2.1.1 Activities with a Purpose: Self, Family, Community, Nation

Members of the sample discussed how the high level of activity outlined in the statement list often operated outside the standard classroom setting. As former students, they discussed the well-rounded "grounding" process or mutli-faceted life skills which were developed by their parents, relatives and community elders. Specific activities were linked to particular ideas, best expressed in examples such as martial arts training for Diarra:

"With specific skills – well me naturally liking martial arts, and then training under a lot of different martial artists with some sort of African-centered mind-frame, because there was a big push towards reestablishing that warrior-ness in African males. And so martial arts was a big part of my upbringing because it was a part of that training to be able to protect yourself and those around you. Because, I mean, that's something vital, that we need a whole lot because the attack against us is never really gonna stop. It's just going to be highlighted at certain time periods, then not highlighted or whatever, but the amount is not going to get any lower. So I think it's always important to be able to protect yourself and your family, whether that's against white people or your own people."(Diarra)

The mixture of ideas and actions within the statements illuminates some of the types of conversations happening between age-set groups: aspects teachers or parents may address to children, discussions youth may have with one another, talking points observed amongst adults and analyses of current events – all relating back to the overall goals of particular African-centered households, institutions or organizations. An institution or family may focus on expressions of specific statements mentioned, and that would constitute their lifestyle. Rashida discusses this in her explanation of lifestyle and culture in African-centered environments:

"So most associations we make with lifestyle are derived from culture. So when you think of African centered lifestyle, we think of our culture being based in African cultural aspects like dress, language, religion … even down to your name, you know, that those things are African-centered or African-based, that you would have an African-derived name, or you would have African-style clothing, or fabrics that you would use. Your religion would have some type of African understanding, even if you are Christian. So, for instance, I go to a Christian church, an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), so there still is an African anchor when you think of cultural things.

…Now if you want to expand the lifestyle to mean economics, then perhaps you are patronizing Black-owned businesses. Or you are least conscious of the variety of Black owned businesses, as opposed to going to Wal-Mart or McDonalds, you would go to a local Black-owned health food store or raw food restaurant. You know that there are economic options. If you do a political lifestyle, usually…which it gets kind of complicated…for us in America, but if it was the political lifestyle, then you'd have an African or an oppressed person's perceptive apologist stance. So [knowing that] instead of the political policies benefiting the rich or the majority, you would have that "centric-ness' of "How is this gonna help the people?" Or people who are not rich, people who don't have health insurance, or people who don't have…you know it's more of a collective vs. individualistic perspective when it comes to deciphering political policies and agendas." (Rashida)

This quote appropriately leads into the major lesson they shared: that all lifestyle activities tended to function with an overarching purpose. As such, sample members reflected on how they have internalized this way of thinking for themselves. These often overlapping goals operated on multiple levels: self, family, community and nation. For example, they shared that if challenging oppression is the goal of an African-centered social activist organization, then its social activities are meant to reflect this goal. This goal is meant to transfer to the home lifestyle of its members, the everyday choices and decisions an individual makes, which is connected to his/her family and larger community. Depending on their experiences or affiliations, respondents' ultimate goals were communicated on the levels of:

- self: their personal aspirations, what they feel they could implement to be well-rounded as an individual; how these activities shape their own personality, spirituality and overall destiny (self-determination)

- family: how they would want to develop their own families, how they maintain connections to their relatives, how they maintain consistency and camaraderie within their nuclear families, strategies to provide resources for their family to ensure survival and healthy living

- community: how they want to continue the activities and socialization within their collectives, how they draw from the bonds they've made since childhood, how they plan with other families towards ensuring cultural continuity and consistency for their children; and,

- nation: how they would both want to see and contribute to people of African descent organizing on a larger scale, questions of location (Africa? America? Caribbean?) to continue building institutions, negotiating the dominant mainstream society, establishing long-term societies themselves in the future(and for future generations)

In African-centered learning spaces, the majority of sample members explained that these understandings informed all of the activities they mentioned. To elaborate on these points, here are examples from the group.

In his personal reflection, Geb talks about statement number 55, provided from his interview. He discusses how this value was informed by the activity of wearing African clothes on a consistent basis, and observing others in his learning environments dressing similarly. The act is shown to be connected with a deeper concept ("Love for things that are African", a concept which he feels contributes to his overall development. This would relate to the personal goals respondents often shared. The following quote is in response to the interview question of the top three aspects he would deem most meaningful:

"I guess just a love for things that are African. Things that are made by us. Things that are us, that represent us. So I mean and the clothes, it's not like I'll wear a dashiki or something

everyday, but I think just an appreciation for our arts, for our culture, for the way we do things, the way we talk, what we eat. Just an appreciation for who we are. Yeah. And I think that's something that not everyone has. I feel like there's a lot of negative connotations and what not, about who we are and how we do things, and so I think it's really important to me and I really appreciate that I have an appreciation for who we are. That I not only respect it, but I try and pull from that. I try to pull from that appreciation, pull from that beauty, pull from that knowledge, and do what I want to do. Do what I feel needs to be done." (Geb)

In terms of family development, Adisa mentions a crucial element of her process – the documenting of mission statements, with contributions from all members. This process encouraged her in wanting to expand on this method for her children:

"That's what I got from my family. We had a mission. We had a family mission. When you have that, it's easy for you to stay focused. And it's easy for you to call on the Ancestors, because you have a foundation for what all that spiritual work is being done for. Versus just no foundation at all. Other spirits and people can come in and tell you what to do. And you believe it. So when you have a family, when you have a mission, you have goals, you want to raise your children to be critical. Be critical thinkers. I want to raise my children to be critical thinkers. Critical thinkers not only of us as African people – what we need, what we need to stop doing – but also critical thinkers of their family and themselves. These spiritual children." (Adisa)

In this study, three parents were involved – Rashida, Sekou and Temitayo. They all currently enroll their children in activities within African-centered communities and learning spaces, including those they participated in as youth. Sekou and Temitayo explained their reasons for doing so in the following quotes. Their statements summarize many of the respondents' family goals, which they mention inform their actions and personal reflections:

"I found it to be that much more important for them to have an African-centered foundation as well. I think that, being that I went to African-centered schools, it made me want the same experience for [my children]. You know what I mean, cause I think it's sad that some people just don't know who they are. I would never want that for my children. And I feel blessed to be able to be raised the way that I was, and so, you know, if you feel blessed, you'd want that same blessing especially for your children. So that's the biggest thing. It definitely affected the way I talk to [my children], the way that I teach them, the way that I train them to defend themselves, and the way that I tell them what they can expect from this world as they grow up." (Sekou)

"For me as an individual, what's most meaningful is being able to take what I have learned, and what I have experienced, and to be able to gather that and now being able to foster that for my children. There are just so many things that they are exposed to, and it's important that [with] the home being the foundation, I am able to give them a sense of pride before they can

walk out the door. So, that's something that was given to me, and now I can pass that on to them and any child, any one I that I'm able to come into contact with." (Temitayo)

Moving to both community-based and national goals, Rashida and Temitayo explained the relevancy and overall links between the establishment of concrete social systems and the importance of organizing for social change. They relate these processes to their own development:

"...When you're in certain settings and environments with these like-minded people, then you know that pretty much there's a commonality amongst everyone. And that is the fact that we're African-centered, and that our goal is to be Pan-African. To be able to build with other Africans around the globe, not necessarily in just this [Southern city], or [State], but all around the country and the globe." (Temitayo)

An important point to note is that Temitayo builds from this to explain how she interacts with other Black people. With the understanding of Pan-Africanism engrained from a young age, she feels charged to be positive and respectful to others, regardless of their political views, ideology or mindset. The idea of Pan-Africanism purports that as African people across the globe, we have commonalities which should be highlighted and celebrated in order to network and build for the future. While she and other respondents identify African-centered environments as unique and distinct from the larger Black community, they still discuss how all Black people are connected, and should act as such. Rashida's points add to this, citing the responsibility of those who study in these arenas, and why these African and African Diasporic elements are sourced for nation-building:

"African centeredness is relevant because – basically, its place is to, how do I say this: Its gon check what's happening right now. So a lot of the things that are happening in 2016 are out of perspective, people have a historical amnesia about the world, for instance. So to revisit the African perspective of history is really to revisit the history of human beings. Not just centered on Europeans, and "life didn't start until after 1492," but its really a matter of understanding that we are continuing, as beings that have been around for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. It really would put things back into perspective.

You know and then in terms of like, it can go in either direction, you could think of African social structures, how those things benefitted children, how they benefitted women, how they acknowledged the environment, how they weren't destructive to the environment. Political systems that were not beneficial to just a small few, but impacted the majority, and they were more egalitarian in society. These types of things are relevant today because they are alternatives to what we experience right now.

"...And if we didn't know no better, the children that come up in these next generations – they would think this is all the world has been, and they wouldn't know that there are so many other things that had pre-existed [before] this reality that were more conducive to being a human being, and to acknowledging the Earth, and not raping the Earth, and things like that. So to move forward, we would have to re-center ourselves – and that African-centeredness is really Human Being-centeredness in my opinion, since Africans were the first. So to get re-centered in that is to really re-organize ourselves so that we can have a more productive future."(Rashida)

Rashida's discussion of African systems refers to the implementation of elements discussed in the literature review: the African and African Diasporic practices that were meant to produce balance in society. Knowledge of African cosmology, process of conflict resolution, government and family practices are noted to serve the function of "centering" one in their humanity. They are seen as implemented not just to repeat pre-colonial African traditions in an impractical, or outdated fashion – but to source the elements that we used to define our humanity, our interactions, our ultimate destinies in the world. They explained that these sources were then merged with an understanding of current realities. On a national level, these are the ideas and sources noted to inform larger organizational efforts in the community.

5.2.1.2   Results from Maps: Point Map, Cluster and Cluster Rating Maps

The concept mapping process reinforced the ideas shared by the sample. Using the statement list, we can see how sample members organized these ideas and activities into larger themes. This was achieved from CS Global MAX™ software computations of the sorting results, which were based in calculating proximity. The final Group Point map (Figure 1) was the clearest map relating to this particular research question. In looking at this point map, this visual could be likened to an operating "brain:" a mass of floating ideas and activities, which were categorized in

different areas based on how the sample associated these concepts. It's important to mention that

contributions, from the entire sample, could've definitely altered the results in this and

subsequent concept maps – this image reflects the sorting of the 7 who completed the exercise

(including Ajoa, Jibril, Adisa, Jeremy, Geb, Kafi and Diarra.)

Figure 1. Point Map

The numbers above represent each statement generated in the Brainstorming activity. Some

float independently; others are bunched together into what could be interpreted as linked

concepts. The distance between ideas is vital to note. For example, Statement 8 ("Pride in who I

am") sits high on this diagram, very far away from Statement 89 ("A need to address rigid,

stereotypical idea of a "warrior"."

These ideas were plotted to reflect how they were considered to be connected or less

connected by the sample. In contrast, Statements 3 ("Tools for critical analysis"), 85 ("An

internal drive to apply what was learned"), and 37 ("Deeper understandings of

information/subjects encouraged vs. memorization") were lessons/ideas shown to be directly

linked. These three points together serve as a potential anchor for a larger construct or concept,

shown as a "cluster" in the Group Cluster map (Figure 2) and Cluster Rating Map (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Group Cluster Map (Set to 8 Categories)
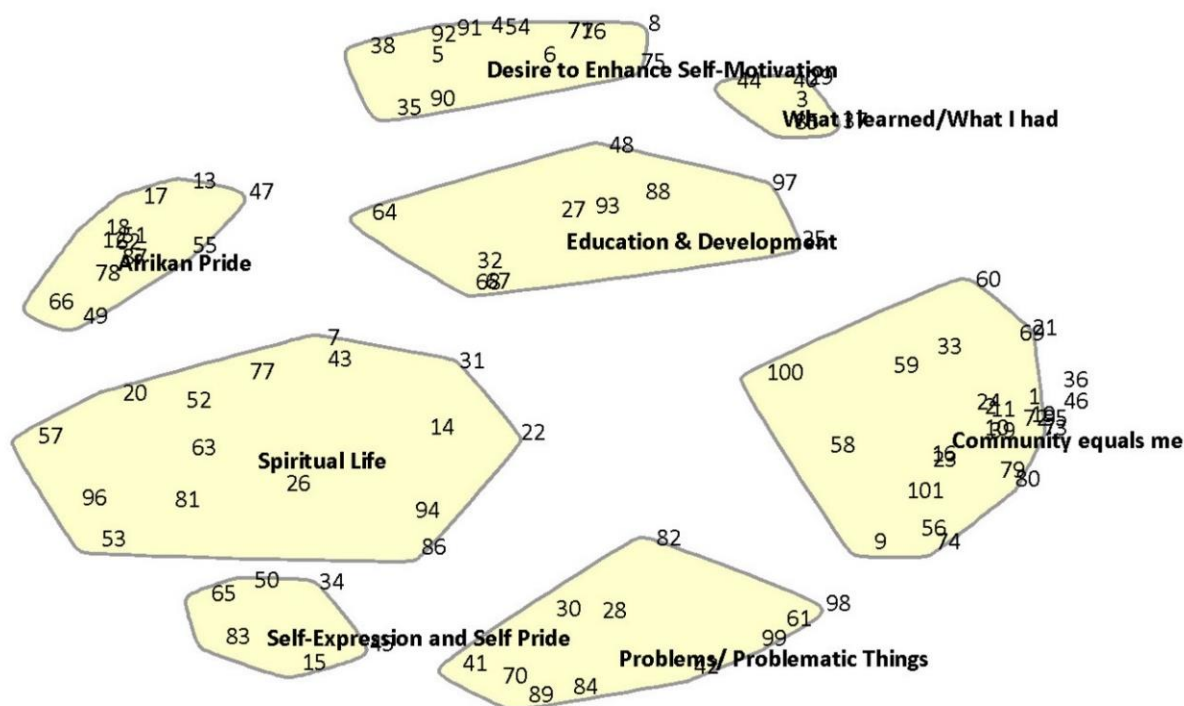
CS Global MAX™ automated sample-submitted titles for these clusters. For example, Ajoa

named her category "Community Equals Me." In the group results "Community Equals Me" was

selected within the software for the category based on the computation of statement results from

everyone that were closest to her defined construct (Other members titled similar grouping

"Community," "Extended Family," etc.) The program allowed for the option to create these type

maps based on selecting any number of clusters (1-20+): I chose 8. It is interesting to note that

the automated map for 3 clusters included the titles "Individual," "Spirituality" and "Community

Equals Me" as the top three concepts all statements could be grouped into. These clusters reflect

the aforementioned higher-order ideas, or themes, which the sample concluded they

learned/experienced in African-centered learning spaces.

"Desire to Enhance Motivation," shown to be aligned with the cluster "What I learned/What

I had," includes statements that align with the discussion of individual purpose – linked to

"Community Equals Me" through the "Education & Development" construct which sits in

between. "Self-Expression and Self-Pride" and "Community Equals Me" sit on either side of the

"Problems/Problematic Things" section of the graph, highlighting the potential assertion that

they are connected, even more by the clusters of statements which make up the borders of these

constructs. "Spiritual Life" takes up a huge portion of this "collective brain," including the

statements for the specific activities the sample felt constituted this way of being. The

placements of the clusters are crucial to note, since categories given higher priority or ranking sit

higher and areas deemed less impactful (tying to the next research question.)

This is also particularly shown in the Cluster Rating Map (Figure 3). The Cluster Rating Map

combines the Sorting and Rating results for review. These maps directly answer research

questions 1, 2 and 3 – the major activities/ideas identified by the sample, combined with how

these former students would evaluate both levels of these elements' importance to them. This

Cluster Rating Map (Figure 3) reflects their rating responses to how they would consider each of

the cluster-contained, 101 final statements to be meaningful in their personal development – for

the first variable of "How Meaningful." The major identified constructs, or subject areas

experienced, are shown in tandem with the scoring given for this variable (which moves into the

Evaluation aspect of this particular study). The values of average scores for each cluster are

expressed in the layers shown in this map from 1-5. Layer 1 represents the lowest values given in

response to the rating of statements (3.81 to 3.92), up to Layer 5, which represents the highest

values given for statements contained within a particular cluster (4.25 to 4.36). This particular

map shows the difference in averages for cluster values in comparison to each other.

Figure 3. Cluster Rating Map ("How Meaningful")
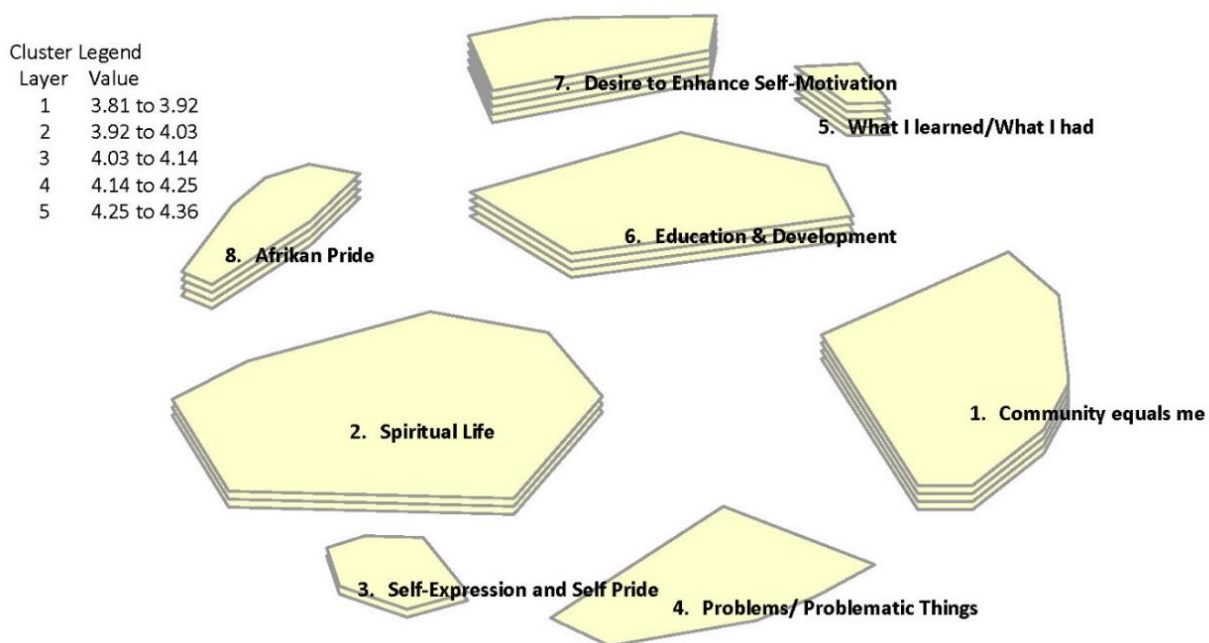
Further research is definitely required to continue investigations of the various placements,

distances and the groupings of specific ideas. Again, these maps help to effectively graph the

themes observed by the sample in answering this research question. With these 8 categories, the

concept mapping results verify these major ideas of this phenomenon, experienced by the

sample.

5.2.2   Question Two – The Evaluation

Looking back, did former students find their experiences meaningful in contributing to their

overall personal development? If so, what were the specific ideas, lessons and activities which

they deemed most meaningful?

All 10 sample members confirmed that their experiences in African-centered learning spaces contributed in this section here. Collectively, the sample concluded that their communal relationships served as a major factor in how they processed and applied the information shared in their learning environments. The second major quality observed related again to purpose and intent. This idea of purpose being highly meaningful ties back to the previous section, as it was noted to give context to much of the meaningful activities and lessons respondents experienced. Further elaboration, including sample perspectives, are discussed here as well. This section also includes the documented activities, ideas and values which they deemed important to hold on to, appreciate and apply most in their lives.

5.2.2.1 *"Having People" (Community/Communal Activities)*

In African-centered spaces, the idea of collective is highly prioritized – and has been throughout our history in the Diaspora. Respondents consistently talked about the role an established community, or extended family, plays in their overall development. With this idea, and its direct impact on youth, it is important to continuously evaluate if the ideals of collectivity reflect the actual realities young people experience. All of the respondents talked about the communities they were or are still a part of; the cadres of parents, elders and peers who interacted with them growing up in African-centered learning spaces.

Their feelings about their communities directly impacted their evaluations of their experiences. Sekou's following definition of community best explains why, with the idea that how one feels about their community – the people around them – informs one's perceptions of their environment, and their place within that particular environment.

"I guess a community, based on my experience, would be a group of people who hold similar values, are a part of an extended family outside of your particular household. You may not, you know, care for them as much as you care for your brother or your sister, or someone who lives with you like your mother or father, but you do hold them in some esteem. And so I guess a

community would be based on relationships. How you feel about the people around you, and based on how you feel about those people, how you feel about the environment, or how that affects your feeling about an environment." (Sekou)

This seems in hindsight like an obvious assertion, but from their testimonies, I could begin to see the nuanced dynamics and situations youth might experience – affected by both the adults they worked with, and the youth they were placed with to develop with together as peers. All respondents expressed levels of appreciation for their communities, with members who taught them life skills, standard school subjects and the importance of working together. Sekou and Rashida met and grew up with their eventual spouses; they all participated in the same youth organization. Rashida shared how this was priceless, which is why she chose peer group community as the top meaningful element she keeps with her today.

5.2.2.2   Socialization Process

Other aspects taught were noted to include how to interact with others, how not to interact with others, and what Diarra called "free lessons" – trials, tribulations and conflicts in financial and relationship situations which he could watch, learn from and avoid from seeing these particular examples. Kafi and Adisa also speak to being exposed to "adult issues" at a very early age: witnessing dynamics of adults' organizational meetings, discrepancies amongst facilitators, ascribed godparents who were deemed no longer their "mamas" or "babas" after particular incidents, and how these conflicts impacted children of now-distant families as a result. It is important to mention these reflections, since Diarra, Kafi and Adisa talk of now operating outside of organizations, or consistent collectives. From all they have observed and been through, they mention a preference for establishing and testing newer relationships in a variety of circles of people for themselves, as opposed to operating within the peer groups and organizational circles of their parents.

At the same time, they talk about these social experiences being purposeful as crucial lessons of their experience – informing who they are as people, and how they choose to interact with those around them. This reflects an idea that socialization, interpersonal dynamics, and "people skills" are hugely prioritized factors within communal-based pedagogy in African-centered learning spaces. Connections – and the skills to idenfity connections and disconnections – are highly stressed by the sample. This impacts their overall decisions to work and build a sense of community for their children: to recreate the often wholesome social environments they grew up in for future generations.

"I've kept a lot of my friends from childhood. Like Mama Ama's son Baraka, weve been close ever since the school started. And there are a few other friends like Chike, and Ryan, who went through the Rites group with me. And Chike's nephew Rasean, he was in that group with me. It kinda helped build a sense of community, I've always known these people. I feel that I know they'll always be around if I ever need help or anything.

I think when I do [have children], that I have to make sure that they experience the same community that I grew up with. The same sense of belonging together, and having friends and family who look out for you. That's really important in growing up, you know, how they say 'It takes a village to raise a child…' I feel like I want to be a part of a community that my children would be able to grow up in." (Jibril)

"And I mean having the same thing with like the Rites (of Passage], and a school like Sankofa, and having events. Having [other] children, parents and the Community, that's really important to me because I see what it's done for me, and I've seen people who don't necessarily have the same experience and I see the difference. Not that one's better or worse, it's just that I really appreciate what I've been through, and I want my children to go through something that's right for them. So yeah. I think that's a deep-rooted desire." (Geb)

Having a sense of community was a top meaningful point to respondents. It is then important to identify the specific activities they mention which resonated with them. Major point included the lifestyle practices their parents instituted in the home – consistent family meetings, development of mission statements, and a collective mission statement (mentioned earlier in Adisa's example). These included short-term and long-term goals each member would implement for their personal and communal development – spiritual goals (initiations, meditation

practices, modifying/working on personal character traits), financial goals, economic goals

(entreprenuership, land purchase, agriculture, etc.) For many of the respondents, their parents

were directed involved in their learning processes – they often saw and worked directly with

them every day. Diarra discusses the lovel of proximity with his parents in his learning spaces:

"Yes, my parents were involved in organizing most of the activities. Like my dad and mom having me go to do a whole lot of different things, in terms of apprenticeships – apprenticeship under a woodcarver for a couple of years. When I was in a rites of passage program, my parents organized and helped run the rites program that I went through. And even afterschool programs, in terms of them being the ones who organized and did them. Cause they did a lot in terms of African-centered education, and so naturally their kids were in a lot of things that they did." (Diarra)

Also within the family setting, Ajoa, Diarra, Rashida and Adisa discussed the importance of

their participation in extracurricular activities in the community – specifically with their siblings

and cousins. As youth, they were responsible for starting and often times directing youth

organizational activities, performances, community service projects and workshops. The adults

around them placed on them high expectations of productivity, self-management (which we will

discuss further later), public speaking and the skills to facilitate. They all cite both the

expectations and the skills developed to be crucial and meaningful contributions to their overall

development. Activities of this magnitude, conducted with siblings, cousins and "play-cousins,"

both reinforced and strengthened their relationships into adulthood.

"And so then we started, my siblings and I, started an organization called the Victorious Warriors. We took that name form a song we heard growing up singing, that my father wrote about Victorious Warriors being parents…people like members of the Black Liberation Army, members of the Black Panther Party. Basically movement people. And so we would always sing that song, we loved it, and we decided to name our organization Victorious Warriors. And we would pretty much do the same thing… similar things as the initial youth organization I was in. So we performed at [festivals], and like we weren't rivals or anything like that. When we got together, we were all together, you know.
And then it was so many of us, I'm the youngest of 7. So just my siblings alone, we were a squad. We brought in other people, and we actually carried on our meetings at the Wells Center, because we had a good relationship with the director of the Center at that time. Who I just saw at Kwanzaa this year, like I hadn't seen him for 20 years! He was totally open to having us there,

so we did that on Friday nights. Maybe for about 3 years. 3 or 4 years. We didn't do it for too long. My brother would teach us steps, he was in a fraternity – so he would teach us steps, drilling as well as step dancing." (Ajoa)

Geb cited referring to adults as "Mama" (mother) and "Baba" (father), as a meaningful style of interaction in his personal development. He shared his interpretation of the larger idea behind this protocol, as well as the importance of elders who continue to serve as guides in his life:

"I think another [lesson] is a respect of elders, and just people older than me. Like even having to say, not having to say, but being taught to say "Baba" or "Mama," and just having that form of respect, but also a form of humanism. Like "I respect you as a person, and I look up to you." "You're older than me, I respect that you are older than me, and you're giving me something, you're teaching me and I'm learning from you." So I think that respect for people that are older definitely still carried over with me. I know whenever I go back home, and even where I'm living, but more easily seen when I do go back home, like, I meet up with a lot of my elders. I meet up with a lot of my mentors, and talk to them about the stuff that I'm working on. And even if I just call on them, but ill check with them – "Ah this is what I'm thinking, this is what I'm going through right now…I'm a little confused about this part." And so I think that being able to receive that wisdom and realizing that, but definitely having a respect for elders, being willing to listen to that wisdom and to reach out to them to get feedback and guidance – I would definitely say that was a big thing that I kind of inherently learned." (Geb)

Kafi, Sekou, Jeremy, Geb and Jibril – who also participated in many of the aforementioned youth-based enterprises – shared similar points regarding their rites of passage memories. As teenagers, the entire sample (with the exception of 3 members) was initiated in a community-operated adolescent rites of passage process. Jeremy shared the intense feeling of power he continues to pull from, which he obtained during the tests he endured with his Rites Brothers. In his interview, he talked about the camping excursions and extensive physical training (running long distances included), which his rites directors facilitators conducted with his group. Being the youngest in the group, he felt that with his fellow initiates – his surrogate older brothers – he could overcome any obstacle, or push himself beyond any physical limit to become stronger. Sekou and Geb also reveal events from both their initiaions and camping trips:

"Man, when I was in my youth organization, we went camping one time and we went on a 10 mile hike in the mountains. That was a hell of an experience. And folks that went on that hike, to

this day, we still talk about that hike. Like, "Remember that time?!?" And, you know, it was hard as hell but we really created a bond based on that…[In] Rites of passage, when I was in the youth organization…we went through some things... some of those experiences are sworn to secrecy, were not ever supposed to talk about them. But it's just one of those things where all these people that I have met, throughout all of these different places, we still have those bonds to this day. I think it's because of those experiences." (Sekou)

"I think the 5-week retreat was really amazing. We just lived out on a 10-acre piece of land, and camped out there for 5 weeks. Didn't get to see our families, our mothers and siblings and such. We had to make our food, most of the time. We had to learn how to build fires, and farm and martial arts and cosmology, [African] languages. Yeah, so that was definitely big, that's where a lot of things culminated in terms of learning knowledge, being able to speak with different elders from the Community, so that was definitely major. And the [full rites process] happened for a year, and all the conversations, male and female relationships, and all – that happened weekly, where we would get together and talk about different things, and do some of the things we ended up doing on the retreat as well, but kind of gearing up towards that.

So the retreat was definitely amazing, an amazing thing. And I guess that going up to [Northern city] for the Conference, and meeting other people so its like, "Alright, its not just 12-15 people that are doing this thing, its other people who are like-minded and who are working with the same thing in mind – doing rites of passage as well. I think those two definitely stand out." (Geb)

On a larger communal level, recollections of events and holidays such as celebrations of Kwanzaa were huge. During the 70s on the west coast, Rashida's father was one of the first to implement Kwanzaa in their home – she talked about the memories her elders shared about going to Kwanzaa "way back in the day." Many share the importance of feeling solid in their own unique and consistent cultural practices – with collective events serving to solidify and remind everyone that they were a part of something special. While participating in Christmas with family members, or taking advantage of American holiday off-days, respondents felt the community events truly belonged to them. These community events were seen as continuations of African traditions, resistance practices during enslavement and afterwards, and reiterations of Pan-African, nation-building goal-setting.

"The holidays. The festivals, you know, the events. Those things give us life. Those activities are invaluable: the naming ceremonies, the blessingways, all of those things…Kwanzaa, all of that gave me not only the alternative, but…I was crunk about Kwanzaa! I didn't feel like I missed

anything, not being associated with these traditional American holidays. I felt that what I got is just as good, if not better." (Rashida)

In terms of spirituality, community was also noted to include the Ancestors – the collective body of both household and national contributors to nuclear family and communal development, who have passed on. Again, an understanding of history is important, particularly one's family history. Adisa highlights this as being a crucial practice in her development in African-centered learning spaces: the importance of knowing one's lineage, family stories, challenges and patterns of passed-down behaviors. Respondents often mentioned research of family lineage in their rite of passage activities. These priorities shaped her understanding of marriage, and why it's important to her as an individual. Before this following statement, Adisa discussed the spiritual nature of marriage: how, with purpose, she feels charged from her learning process to enact healing in her relationships, with an understanding of her family and historical traumas passed down generationally:

"So, in getting married and creating a new cycle, and putting positive energy in a positive marriage, with a positive person… you know, you're gonna have your struggles, but knowing that yall are there to heal the family, each other's family, that can work towards healing the ancestors that were abused, that were sexually assaulted, that were experiencing marriages that they felt they were unhappy in, or they just felt that was just normal. A lot of times we have these things in us, as women. Especially, as women. I am a woman, and we start to think about the illusions of what a relationship is because having an illusion of what a relationship is is gives you more control. You can say, "That person's perfect," you can visualize [being with them] in your mind, how its gonna go, because you feel like you're more in control of something that is an illusion because you can create everything in your mind.

So, when I get married, when I have children, it's gonna be a healing, first of all. Because I'm healing my family. I'm healing the females in my family lineage that went through a marriage that wasn't happy, that was abusive, and showing that it can be balanced. And healing that within myself, too. And healing the other person as well, and their family. [I can] make that a goal. And then I have a mission. When you have a mission, it helps you to have direction. Not just, "Oh I'm gonna be with somebody just because he's cute." But we have a goal. We're gonna build that. That keeps you focused." (Adisa)

From this and other examples, the sample proposed that the level of communal involvement, in all facets of African-centered learning spaces, definitely informs youth and adults' sense of belonging, relevancy and application of the necessary personality traits for personal development. As a group they also concluded that meaningful qualities and personality traits are cultivated through the many intentional and consistent activities mentioned by the sample. These all served in the creation of an entire reality that youth could eventually contribute to, building on the rites programs, communal gatherings, family meetings and friendships that would then form the solid basis for self-management, accountability, continued participation in African-centered institutions, political action, and economic enterprise. According to the sample, success in all of these areas boils down to the maintenance of relationships – which is what they remarked on most. Participants who critiqued the handling of social connections in their communities still maintained a personal motivation to both create and contribute to equitable interactions in the spaces they occupy now (the workplace, academic environments, their families, etc.) A major postulate mentioned by participants in this study was that the success or failure in managing positive, time-tested relationships guaranteed either success or immense conflict in both communal program development and individual learning processes in African-centered learning spaces.

5.2.2.3 *"Having Purpose:" Intent Informing Reflection and Action*

Interviewees consistently mentioned the quality of self-purpose as a key meaningful element of their experiences. This quality is evident in majority of the quotes featured in this document: the idea that a person can develop the skills necessary to identify and choose their destiny – and discern the path to achieving that destiny – for themselves. In the following quote, Temitayo

shares her understanding of the overall purpose of her education, which instilled within her a

sense of focused intent that allows her to both analyze and create solutions in her present reality:

"Being in America and recognizing that you are African-centered has a major influence. Just your self-esteem, how you relate to others. Knowing that you have an identity with African people gives you a better sense of direction of where you need to go, what you need to do in terms of further down the line, how you can get back to your community, how you can contribute and be more for the generations coming. It's important in this society, in this day and age now because we often times, we're pulled in so many directions whether it be media. Whether it be just the different influences of peer pressure. It's important because if you don't have a center, then you're not grounded, then you'll fall for anything, you'll go for anything, so it's important to have a sense of identity, a sense of culture – so that you are able to better yourself, and do whatever it is you have to do to strive for and maintain, to be successful for yourself and your family." (Temitayo)

From this practical understanding, respondents discussed how this sense of purpose

informs their process of self-reflection – the active ability to discern the meaning and purpose of

one's actions and outward expressions, their alignment of word and deed, and their

contradictions. The knowledge of this self-regulation, self-managing and self-determining

internal system is what produces what Rashida would call "a certain type of person."

Interviewees cited their experiences in African-centered learning spaces as contributing to them

producing this skill.

"But it influences everything. It is who I am. When you put your children in these type of spaces, it cultivates a certain type of person. If I were to have gone to anything else, I may not have been this grounded, and this sure about who I am, and what I'm doing. But at this point in my life, it all adds up. I don't do nothing that contradicts who I am." (Rashida)

Within the context of community, many respondents talked about how their families, peers,

teachers and elders created environments to assist them in identifying their purpose in life.

Interactions in these environments, both positive and challenging, were also cited to contribute to

participants' determination and resolve to achieve their goals. Ultimately, the sample members

collectively pinpointed this process, noted to be different for each person, as one of the most

important attributes of their learning in African-centered spaces. Former students remarked

heavily on their appreciation of the specific activities, interactions, and situations which helped them to develop a sense of purpose and intent for themselves – as both individuals and members of larger communities and organizations.

Cycling back to the aforementioned categories of self/family/community/nation, an idea presented by respondents was that one's purpose in these environments includes necessary contributions to all of these levels in equal distribution. For example, Temitayo praised her peers she grew up with, peers who have started families of their own, achieved their own personal goals, and brought skills and talents back (from academia, their jobs) to contribute to her community. She mentioned that their examples inspire her in her development of her current and long-term goals. Ajoa shared the successes of her siblings, and her own achievements. She felt that her connection to her ancestors, parents and extended family (going back to the "Community" section) helped her to ground herself in having a personal mission to be a leader in whatever space she found herself in. This motivation informed her purpose to continue in academia, conducting analyses of her experiences in African-centered learning spaces.

From the majority of their stories, I conclude that the distinct activities to be credited began in their home environments. Kafi mentions "growing up with nerds:" her father and his peers, who told her at a very young age about what they were reading, studying and discussing among themselves. The adults around her were community organizers and academics themselves. She notes being exposed to African and African-American history from early on, with the "expectation of comprehension" that she later built on for herself as she grew to become an adult. In reflection, Kafi felt this expectation of comprehension contributed greatly to her skills of analysis today, and her ability to discern for herself what makes sense, what doesn't, what she would need to research to inform her opinions, her decisions, and also identifying her friends and

enemies. The adults around her, including her father, challenged her to question everything. As an adult now, Kafi later discussed how this same quality was often negated by these same adults, when she challenged both the rhetoric and misconduct of particular community adults and elders. While she disassociates herself from much of the community she grew up around, she still appreciates both the family members and interactions that helped her to define her individual purpose. The logical games and line of questioning conducting by her father is consistent with other sample members' interactions with their parents and teachers:

"*My father is very analytical. He had like these logical games that we would play all the time. He had these rules. "Rule number 1, Kafi." "Always remember this." And one of his rules is that you must always have honor and integrity. Honesty and integrity, there's nothing more important than that. Honesty and integrity. My full name means "one who speaks and practices the truth." He always drilled that into my mind.*

"…*He always drilled into my mind that I had to know why I did the things that I did. In popular culture, there's this idea that women just do stuff. They don't understand why, they're just going crazy, or it's the hormones, or whatever. They're just doing stuff, and that's bullshit. That's just the rhetoric of popular culture. My father never allowed me to just play into that. The rhetoric of anything. He always made me think and understand things for myself. I always had to know why I did something. Why I agreed with something. Why I thought something was cool. Why I thought something was not cool. Why I like this person. Why I don't like this person. What value does [a particular thing] have to me? What does that do to my psyche, or how I see the world? What does it say about my worldview? (Kafi)*

The continued reminders and encouragements to be responsible for one's decisions struck a chord with Kafi and the rest of the sample. These exercise, questions and "reflection sessions," are useful strategies within the context of constructive criticism, a process sample members internalized and used to challenge themselves. This process was noted to facilitate individuals' development of their personal goals: the ability to avoid distractions, the awareness to work on their personal slip-ups/mistakes, as well as the nuanced strategies they would employ to achieve what they want in life.

Earlier in the Overall Analysis section, Adisa mentioned the mission documentation activities

conducted within her family. Her parents assigned her to write personal mission statements,

which she would share in family meetings and communal gatherings. These mission statements

included her academic goals, aspirations in spiritual development, life skills to learn, and how

she envisioned her future family. She mentioned that her entire family, including her parents,

participated in these activities. Together, they developed a unified mission document charting

their goals as a family: commitment based on how they wanted to interact, what values they

wanted to express and what economic projects they would work on as a collective. Also

mentioned earlier, Adisa talked about how the idea of purpose informs her perspective on

marriage (quote in the "Community section), a process informed directly by this personal

mission development activity. In connection with Kafi's points, understanding and

internalization of one's purpose allowed one to stay focused, and realign themselves even if no

one else was around to support them. Ajoa shared a significant anecdote illustrating this also:

"[A top lesson I learned was] Just that I'm beautiful. That Black is magical, and possibilities are endless. Not just because I'm a person, but also because I am a Black person. Thinking about what my ancestors have overcome. Feeling like and knowing that I'm walking on the shoulders of magical survivors, warriors. So that's always stayed with me. Being in the whitest of spaces, I would always remind myself where I came from. Or even, I remember posting pictures on my wall. It was interesting for me cause like, growing up African centered, and then I go to this school. This white ass school for this degree program, and then I start to feel all of this self-doubt, all this subconscious [stuff], and I'm still recovering from it. I'm still recovering from this experience.

"And it's like, I found myself having to put up my Red, Black and Green Flag. Like I had prepared myself, I guess I knew or people told me… But I found myself actively putting up physical markers that reminded me of how great I am or where I come from. Because just one of those classes. Just one! Just of those graduate seminar classes would totally have me feeling like Black people ain't shit. You know what I'm saying. Not because nobody ever said it, but because they don't say anything!!! Anything about Blackness. It's not a part of the conversation. At all. It's totally erased. And that makes you feel erased! Non-existent. Not important. Not worthy of even being a part of the conversation.

"So yeah that was one ideal that stayed with me even through that, and helped me to struggle against that. Nobody had to remind me. I didn't have to go to a talk, and hear somebody talk to me about who Mansa Musa was. It just came, you know. In my tears, and in my frustration that would come back to me, like, "No! This is who you are! They don't know this!" you know, "They have no idea!" And that sustained me and brought me through…that experience." (Ajoa)

Ajoa testifies to the importance of her African and Diasporic/based historic perspective, coupled with the physical and cultural markers of this history of resistance and triumph. Seeing herself as "part of a larger narrative of Black people" (cited from Kafi) allowed her to center herself in difficult times. Ajoa put up her Red, Black and Green flag to remind herself of her larger purpose – not just because it's the symbol of Pan-African nationalism (which is important), but it also represents her parents' work, the work of her peers, community adults, elders and Ancestors – whom she recognizes as contributors to her individual experience. They were and are present with her in spirit, her thoughts and actions. She mentioned that this allowed her to be successful in a completely alien environment to what she was used to. In support of this realization, Jeremy also discussed the importance of exposure to other groups and settings – to different and conflicting ideas, worldviews and activities. He shared how he felt this was necessary to helping youth from African-centered environments to develop their own sense of purpose, with the added experiences of learning from a wide variety of people. From his own experience, he shared that the connections built outside African-centered learning spaces could then help to further support youth in achieving long-term goals. This would also assist in exposing youth to being able to see how their work and impact can affect others positively on a larger scale.

As I mentioned previously, the idea of purpose was necessary to mention as a meaningful quality applied by study participants. The quality of having purpose was inherent in much of the statements shared; it was a common thread which linked their stories and opinions. In reflection,

this priority also informed their participation in this study. This was evident in their willingness to share their experiences with the goal of contributing to others' development: to youth who learn in African-centered spaces currently, to the further implementation of practical methods of evaluation for curriculum and program development.

To put it simply, the sample concluded that having people and having purpose were the top two aspects that were most meaningful to them. They shared the activities and interactions that they felt worked in assisting them to concretize essential personality traits and social skills they use now in their lives as adults. For community, these activities included youth-based organizing with peers and siblings outside of school, consistent weekly peer group gatherings, cultural events and rite-of-passage based trials, which built camaraderie, enduring memories and long-term maintenance of those prioritized relationships. Lasting concepts applied included the expressed idea of teachers and community adults serving as "mamas" and "babas" (surrogate parents), the sourcing those community adults for support/assistance, the importance of building community for one's children, and the necessity of healing: resolution of family traumas, communal conflicts and the feeling of disconnect from others.

With these elements and more informing one's purpose, further activities that fostered this quality were noted to include: question-based discussion in the home/classroom, personal and family mission development, and exposure to other types of spaces. Ajoa's story of feeling negated in her school environment challenged her to source what she knew about herself, her family, community and ancestry to solidify her in her purpose. Similar processes, according to Jeremy, can help youth in African-centered spaces to develop the skills to both appreciate their foundations and also expand themselves: to both learn from and impact peoples from various other communities, references, and walks of life. This is noted by the sample to be informed by

clear intent and goal-setting: an individual knowing his or herself, to the core, in any

environment.

5.2.3   Question Three – The Resource

How can the research methods applied in this study contribute to program evaluation

**practices in community-based African-centered learning spaces?**

Sample members contributed their evaluations with the understanding that their recorded

views would serve as a resource for African-centered communities and learning environments.

This reflected one of the ultimate purposes of this research: to highlight the long-term reflections

of former students and youth participants, to pinpoint the significant elements of their education

which they still connect with and internalize. With concept mapping and qualitative interviews, I

wanted to test the efficiency of this combination of methods – with the intention of contributing

to a system of evaluations which could be duplicated on-the-ground. Two distinct concept maps

reveal further nuanced dynamics to consider. These are displayed on two levels, with both levels

again relating to the sorting and rating results from the 7 who were able to complete all of the

modules. These levels pertain to: a) the collective group responses of the 7, expressed within

clusters, along the computed ranking of those clusters in the chosen variables ("How

Meaningful" and "How Prioritized/Perceptions of Adult Leadership's Priorities") displayed in

the Pattern Matching map; and b) computed rankings of individual statements (101 total),

displayed in the Go-Zone map. In this section, we move into a discussion of the results from the

Go-Zone map, combined with supporting (or detracting) information from sample interviews.

These particular findings serve to show how both the qualitative interview and group concept

mapping processes can be implemented together for productive evaluation practice in

community-based, African-centered learning spaces.

5.2.3.1 *Pattern Matching and Go-Zone Map Results*

Important visuals, which illustrate the overarching pertinent ideas from the sample, include the Pattern Matching (Figure 4) and Go-Zone maps (Figure 5). In Pattern Matching, visual results are a combination of the Sorting and Rating findings for review. These maps directly answer research questions 2 and 3 – how former students would evaluate both the levels of these elements' importance to them and perceptions of priority given by the leaders in their particular environments. The major identified constructs, or subject areas experienced, are shown in tandem with the scoring given for both variables. Also with Pattern Matching, CS Global MAX™ offers a visual comparison of the ratings of statements contained within the 8 clusters. This map shows the comparison between cluster ratings from the two variables employed: "How Meaningful," and "How Prioritized (by Adult Facilitators)."

Seeing the cluster ratings for the variables side by side reveals a lot of pertinent information. Even though the rating averages are slightly different, the chart denotes the potential difference in levels of priority as perceived by the 7 participants. These are important to note in their overall evaluations of the African-centered learning spaces they grew up in. "Afrikan Pride," "Spiritual Life" and "Self-Expressions and Self-Pride" are noted here to have been slightly more meaningful to adults than to the former students themselves, while they rated their priority of community to be higher as a group. Individual pattern matching results, and the analysis of specific respondents' ratings, would better reveal the stark differences in their perceptions – again highlighting the nuanced nature of youth's experiences. Individual charts, which I also have stored, also show the variety in perception based on the specific households, institutions, and organizations they each were/are a part of.

Figure 4. Pattern Matching Map
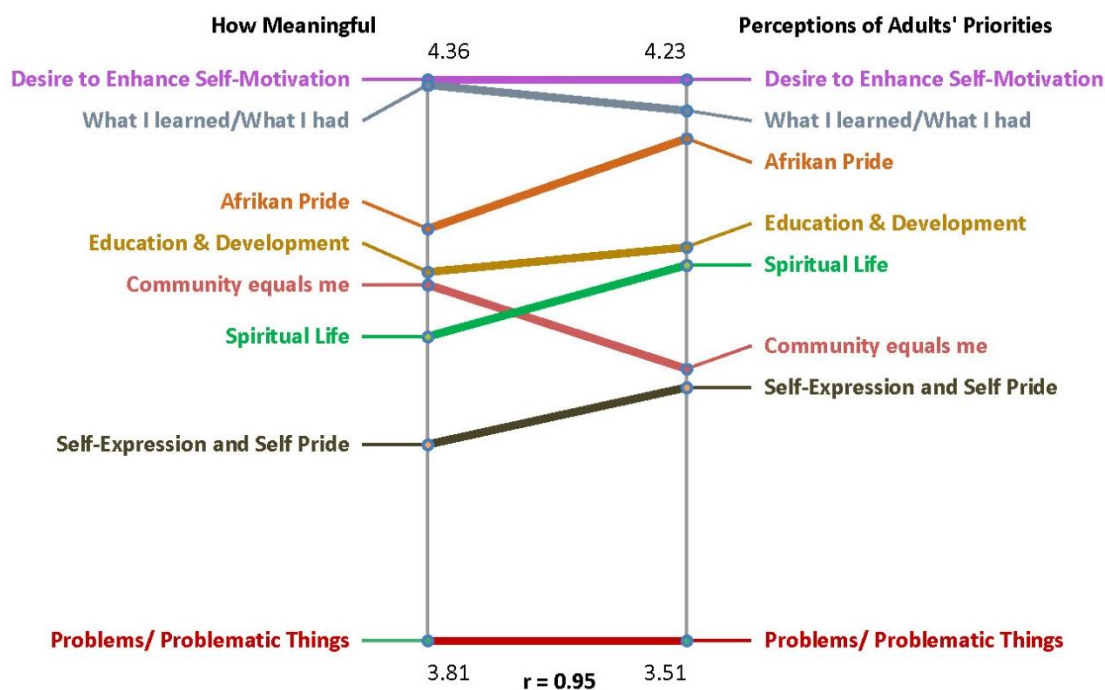
On the individual level, the map which best shows this successful combination of methods is the Go-Zone map (Figure 7). Again, this map reveals sample views using the two variables: a) How Meaningful (to the former student currently), and b) perceptions of Adult (Program Leadership) Priority Given. All of the 101 statements were rated in the two surveys for these variables (1 - relatively meaningless to 5 - extremely meaningful; 1 - not prioritized to 5 – highly prioritized.)

In this Go-Zone chart, the x-axis reflects Variable One ("Meaningful to Students") with a divide on that x-axis into grey and yellow "zones." That divide is the survey average. For this first variable, the Grey Zone contains the statements ranked below the rating survey average of 4.15 for this particular variable; yellow contains the statements that were ranked above that average. For Variable Two (Level "Prioritized by Adults") on the y-axis, the Grey Zone also contains also the statements ranked below the rating survey average of 3.96 for this particular

variable; the Orange Zone contains the statements that were ranked above the average for

Variable 2. In summary, this Go-Zone Map reveals the statements that were above average in

both levels of meaning to students and what they felt their facilitators prioritized: these

statements are contained in the Green Zone (top right corner).

The Go-Zone map visually displays and documents these former students' perceptions of

how each statement - how each activity, concept, or value – translated from their parents'

"generation" to them and their peer group. The highest rated statement in both variables was

Statement 55 ("Love for things that are African"); the sample felt that this point was both highly

meaningful to them and extremely prioritized by their adult facilitators. Geb originally

contributed this statement: his quote was mentioned earlier in this chapter (in the Question 1
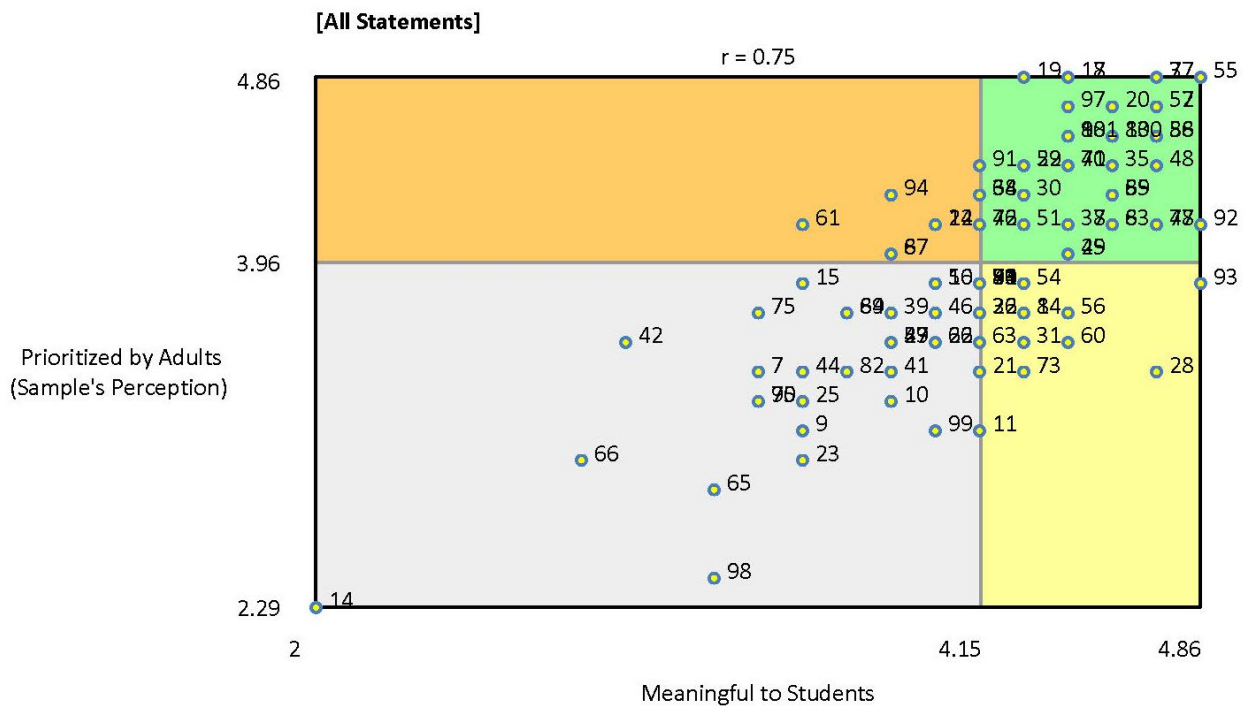
Section.)

Figure 5. Go-Zone Map

Table 3. Green (Go-Zone) Results

Statements in the Go-Zone (from highest to lowest rated) – Green Area	
Above Average for Both Variables (Top Five in Bold)	
3. Tools for critical analysis	**52. Adolescent rites of passage process**
5. Discipline	**55. Love for things that are African (highest rated)**
6. Importance of self-reflection	**57. Respect for my cultural expressions**
8. Pride in who I am	58. Respect for elders
13. Learning our culture to keep our traditions alive	59. Respect for people older than me
17. Having an African name	69. Family meetings
18. Kwanzaa as major holiday	71. I am always in a learning process
19. Consistent community-based events	**77. Academic excellence**
20. Very high expectations for success	78. Importance of humility
22. We are at war	80. I am because we are
29. Public speaking	83. Developing/Supporting conscious music that informs and empowers
30. Social activism	85. An internal drive to apply what was learned
35. Dealing with life situations requires strategy	86. Challenging mainstream media
37. Deeper understandings of information/subjects encouraged vs. memorization	88. Identifying with Black Freedom Fighters in history/today
38. Education is meant to help you realize yourself	90. I am a warrior for my people
40. Internal process of Sankofa - to go back, fetch and apply to move forward	92. It not about what you say, It's about what you do
45. Unity and harmony with nature is important	97. Exposure to deep concepts/understandings at a very young age
47. History of pre-colonial Africa	100. We must establish our own nation
48. History of the African Diaspora (our experience in the Caribbean, US, other places in the world)	101. We must establish our own independent family-based local village spaces
51. African drumming	

Statements within the Green Zone (shown by number) were rated above the averages for both surveys: above 3.96 ("Prioritized by Adults") and 4.15 ("How Meaningful to Students.") After the aforementioned Statement 55 ("Love for things that are African"), the top four rated statements for both surveys and variables include: 55 – "Academic excellence," 37 – "Deeper understandings of information/subjects encouraged vs. memorization," 52 – The "Adolescent rites of passage process," and 57 – "Respect for my cultural expressions." According to the sample members who participated in both the Sorting and Rating processes, all of the statements in the Green Go-Zone are the ideas and activities which they felt were highly meaningful to them and highly prioritized by the leadership components of the African-centered learning spaces they participated in.

As a resource, these particular statements represent the combined best practices identified by the portion of the sample who completed the statement sorting and rating processes. In their "top

three" answers (or answers to the question of the top three lessons most valued), sample

members explained why many of these statements "stuck with them." They also shared how their

community adults and elders reinforced these qualities. An example includes their discussions of

Statement 8, "Pride in who I am." Kafi succinctly explains this instance from her perspective.

She discusses the advantage she feels she had gained from being taught about her connections to

Black history, Black communities and a larger narrative, which she is a continuation of.

"So, [my education] established a foundation for me as far as identity is concerned. I think a lot of my peers struggle with being OK with being Black. With being comfortable in Black spaces. With being proud of Blackness and all of the ways that that manifests. I don't have those struggles. I had a firm grip on the idea that my Blackness is something that I should value. And my place in Black history, and Black culture is something to be proud of. And to be a part of the larger narrative of Black people is something to aspire to, and not to be ashamed of. I think that one thing that all of the people from my life have in common is that, is that fact." (Kafi)

For Kafi, this consistent positive reinforcement was noted to have helped in the formation of

her identity as an African-descended person. The specific activities which reinforced this, ranked

by the sample, include exposure to higher order concepts at a young age, comprehensive

historical discussion/application (including understandings from pre-colonial Africa, The

Diaspora, various time periods), specific cultural activities, and also, a collective push for

academic excellence. All of these statements come together in Rashida's explanation of her

confidence levels, which she cited to be informed by all of these experiences. She talked further

about wanting these cultural and learning institutions to continue for her children, whom she says

would also gain from these activities:

"It gave me such confidence of saying "Yo, this is who I am!" 100 percent. Through and through. Im gon raise my kids this way, Ima celebrate these holidays, ima teach these students from this perspective, ima do this music from this perspective. It gelled together. Literally I think maybe the last five years of my life it just came to one focal "Yo this me!" You gon be confident in that, then it helps you navigate the world. I'm not gonna be anyplace where I gotta hide or kinda not tell you I got African Studies degrees. Naw m----f----- that's who I am. If you like that, then wonderful. If you don't, then don't bring me in your space. (Laughs.)" (Rashida)

Analysis of these results and reflections, supports the idea that much of these practices

experiences by the sample are worth noting and outlining for further implementation. In moving

to the Orange, Yellow and Grey Zones, the findings begin to "muddy the water," or delve into

the challenges observed in African-centered learning spaces. With concept mapping, and

specifically with the Go-Zone Map, we can identify necessary points of contention to both

discuss and link to the interview results. If an item was deemed more important to the adult

leadership than to these former students, investigations (of why this is the case) are required for

further reflection and solution-building. This would come from statements contained in the

Orange Zone. The same goes for the opposite situation – if statements were considered to be

more important to the youth, and perceived to be less prioritized by their community adults and

teachers – we can do further research to ascertain why this might be the case in various spaces.

That particular conversation could start using the statements ranked within the Yellow Zone.

This process of analysis, again, supports and answers the third research question in this study:

how this combination of interviews and concept mapping can help as a meaningful evaluation

practice in various community-based educational spaces. To begin this discussion, we start with

the Orange Zone findings.

Table 4. Orange Zone Results

Statements Rated Higher for "How Prioritized" (from highest to lowest rated) – Orange Area *Above Average for Sample's Perception of Adult Priorities* *Below Average for Items deemed Meaningful to Former Students*	
4. I can create what I need	68. Interactive, hands-on activities
12. African dance	72. Having older community members of the same sex for inspiration/guidance
24. The community > the individual	76. I come from a very different reality
34. Engaging in spiritual practice	87. Wearing African attire
61. Age-set organization system	91. I can go to public school and still maintain who I am
67. Project based learning	94. Living the Nguzo Saba every day of the year

Interestingly, statements rated and contained within the Orange Zone were considered to be

less meaningful to them (below the average for that variable), yet rated higher for what they

considered to be prioritized by the leadership bodies in their institutions (variable two –

"Prioritized by Adults"). This could be interpreted to signify the ideas and activities which,

according to them, seemed more important to their instructors vs. themselves as former students.

Why are these particular statements placed here? What can we learn from the sample

members' contributions to the Orange Zone, which may reflect important situations to consider

in African-centered learning environments? Selecting one example statement for discussion can

potentially show, in-depth, various reasons to consider. For Statement 24 – "The Community >

the individual" – this point was originally contributed by Ajoa, as one of her top three lessons

learned.

*"Number one is certainly the community is more important than the individual. That was so
deeply inculcated in my being." (Ajoa)*

From her experiences, which she described in detail, Ajoa highlighted the social elements

implemented which encouraged her to feel safe in her community, safe and productive enough to

place the well-being of the larger group high in priority. While the adults she mentioned had

been organizing for a long time, spanning back to the 60's Black Power Movement, their

experiences prompted them to establish generations of consistent peer group relations –

relationships of camaraderie which continue today in Ajoa's experience.

In other respondents' experiences, they pinpoint the strengths and challenges they observed

in relating to other people in communal settings. In particular, Diarra and Adisa especially

challenged interested families and individuals to both maintain and act in their own best

interests, as opposed to becoming entrenched in communal organizations and family collectives.

In Diarra's explanation of community interactions, he shared the following quote:

*"Some people are better at [connecting with others] than other people are. Some people are
very subjective and very much are into themselves, and so they're looking for somebody to be
under them, to be inside their kingdom. I don't believe in that. Some people are genuine and they*

try to outreach to different people. But people really have to watch out in terms of coming under different people. That's why I say you have to observe for a long time period because some people are very crappy in terms of dealing with people, and ultimately trying to get people to join in or whatever but then based off their actions, the people that join in want to go away, it especially happens I see with younger folks that try to join different spaces." (Diarra)

From the experiences he mentions in conversations, Diarra talks about how one's involvement in a particular collective can either be beneficial, or recreate a groupthink-type situation, depending on the intentions or expressions of its leadership and/or members. To define "groupthink," the term describes the "pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group values and ethics" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Informed by his own memories, he discusses the consequences of instant, engaged prioritization of/involvement in African-centered communal family circles and organizations – how one can "get lost" without the internal work, stability and maintenance of one's individual purpose, outlook and views. He gave examples of these consequences amongst youth and adults he knew, including family members. This explanation gives context to why he rated this statement lower in how it was meaningful to him. In the circles he was a part of, he talked about how the adults around him prioritized community above all, often engaging in what he would call examples of "groupthink."

This is also supported by Adisa. Adisa talked about the process she observed from individuals seeking to join communities in this context. She notes that the line between individual expression and communal allegiance is blurred often, with many losing sight of, what she calls, their "own journey."

"...A lot of people come into the Community and they're like, "I'm new. I don't know what to do. So-and-so is this. So-and-so reads that. So-and-so went to these lectures; oh-my-God I need to catch up." To what everybody else is doing. You are on your own journey. Feel it out. If you don't trust people, you don't trust them! It doesn't matter if they have a dashiki on or not! Character. Go off their character. Go off how they treat people. Go off how they treat people

outside their circle. Go off their track record. Build a track record with them of your own. Cause sometimes other people might just be lying on [a person], cause they want you to be with them. So feel it out. And also take some time for yourself. Be in the Community a little bit, but in your own little space to research and do your spiritual work, because then you'll build up your confidence. Then you'll be able to negotiate with other people, and know where you want to be, and the values you want to be around. The character that you want to be around. Versus just being around everybody trying to fit in." (Adisa)

Like Diarra, Adisa talks about this issue being prevalent amongst the adults she grew up around, including her parents at one point. In her discussions with her parents, she mentioned the hard lessons they learned from their organizational affiliations – how their willingness to put the collective first often contributed to situations where they were marginalized. This gives better context as to why her scores may have contributed to this statement being in the Orange Zone. Her call to individuals to maintain a sense of themselves, outside of the collective context, would explain why she would rank this statement lower in elements, or lessons, deemed most meaningful to her.

With these insights, respondents contribute interesting points of analysis – a continued resource for the Community. Statements within the Orange Zone are directly related to the views shared in interviews – many of which both contrast and affirm various viewpoints on these important lessons. These viewpoints are then charted for consideration in this Go-Zone map. In going forward, this is a process which can continue to reveal the nuances within student experiences in different African-centered learning spaces. We now move on to what sample members ranked within Yellow Zone.

Table 5. Yellow Zone Results

Statements Rated Higher for "How Meaningful" (from highest to lowest rated) – Yellow Area	
Above Average for Items deemed Meaningful to Former Students	
Below Average for Sample's Perception of Adult Priorities	
1. Long-term friendships	60. I can communicate my issues to adults who care
28. How to navigate multiple type of spaces (Afr-Cen, Mainstream, Corporate, Academia etc.)	73. Importance of conflict resolution
31. Agriculture	84. A need to address strict gender roles

54. I am the solution I am looking for	93. Our experience here is just as important as pre-colonial Africa
56. We are responsible for resolving our contradictions	

With the Yellow Zone, these 9 statements include the ideas and activities which the former students rated highly as meaningful to them (first survey), yet were rated lower in their perceptions of their adult instructors' priorities in African-centered learning spaces. Concepts such as statements 1 - "Long-term friendships," 84 – "A need to address strict gender roles," and 56 – "We are responsible for resolving our contradictions," for example, were expressed in this map as points of concern and importance to the 7 sample members' evaluations. All of these particular points/concerns, noted by this portion of the sample, were evaluated as seeming less important to community adults, elders and facilitators who worked with them.

In her interview, Kafi contributed an important concern – a concern which links statements in both the Yellow and Orange Zones. The statements her discussion relates to include 60 ("I can communicate my issue to adults who care"), contained in the Yellow Zone, and 61 ("Age-set organization system"), contained in the Orange Zone. She talked about how, in her experience, a rigid system of age-set organization placed elder members in leadership positions automatically - while at the same time denigrating the ability for youth to directly communicate their viewpoints to adults. This point, mentioned by at least 2 other sorting/rating participants in their interviews, could help explain why 60 is in the Yellow Zone, and also a link to why 61 is ranked lower in former students' evaluations of items considered most meaningful to them.

In her observed reasons for this discrepancy, Kafi describes this age-set organizational method as an attempt, in many African-centered communities, to recreate African-based social systems of government. She stated that the issues amongst these age-groups were exacerbated by the fact that many people in her community were not raised around each other, and then suddenly, they were required to incorporate this type social system. According to Kafi, her

community members did not have the long-term, generational life experiences growing together, which she felt would've created – overtime – the genuine elder-adult-youth relationships necessary for trust to be established. As a result, she argues that with many elders, recent and immediate additions to collective family circles and schools, their word became law – while youth like her, who had opposing viewpoints, were silenced.

"There are people who just come to it – their kids convert, and then they convert because of their kids. So they are in their 50s converting to African-centered thought. And they convert into African-centered thought and then take on all of the respect, and all of the ideology of an elder without having earned it. Does that make sense? Because of the value that's placed on elderhood, you get a lot of people who think that because they elders, they always right. And their perspective is the only perspective that is legitimate. And people who come from younger age sets are often silenced. Particularly if they disagree. Because it's like, 'You just a child. What do you know?' And for me, its like, 'Just because I'm young don't mean I don't know.' Especially when it comes to things like personal interaction. Many times I was a child and I would say to people, 'That person doesn't rub me the right way, I don't feel good about that person.' 'I don't like that person.' And my opinion was dismissed, because I was a child. And then, lo and behold, 5 years down the road, 10 years down the road, something crazy happens. Then I'm like 'I tried to tell you this person was crazy when I was 12!" And you decided that because I was a child, that my opinion, that my logic – this feeling that I had – was not legit." (Kafi)

This combination of ideas is shown in the Go-Zone Map – concerns which are worth investigating further for solution-building. Ultimately, institution builders, parents and teachers can look at these specific examples, which can illuminate larger problems which can be addressed immediately in family circles and learning environments. This is important, as responses from former students – with both methods employed – can get at the root of why they might feel their voices are unheard, or unconsidered. Kafi's example effectively illustrates why the idea of age-set organization (Statement 61) might be prioritized by adults, yet deemed somewhat irrelevant, or even problematic, by the sample. She ties that directly to her concern for many youth's abilities to communicate their concerns to adults in their learning spaces (Statement 60), deemed in general to be higher in priority to the former students who completed

this exercise. Much of their documented recollections highlight this concern, coming from their

own experiences: examples where they felt their perspectives as youth were either considered

greatly or marginalized (some experienced both). To conclude this Go-Zone discussion, we

move to the Grey Zone:

Table 6. Grey Zone Results

Statements Rated Low for both Variables (from highest to lowest rated) – Grey Area *Below Average for Items deemed Meaningful to Former Students* *Below Average for Sample's Perception of Adult Priorities (**Bottom Five in Bold**)*	
2. Consistent peer group	44. Importance of outdoor activity
7. Martial Arts for Self-Defense	46. I have a variety of elders to go to for assistance/guidance
9. Not judging others lifestyles	49. Indigenous African cosmology
10. A need to address tension between youth and adults	50. We can adjust our spirituality to fit our present condition
11. Loyalty amongst participating families	53. Theater - Performing in skits, plays etc.
14. Corporal punishment (Lowest Rated)	62. Learning African languages
15. I was always told I was beautiful/handsome	63. Vegetarian diet
16. Trust for authority figures in the community	64. Physical fitness
21. Strategy/Organizational sessions with peers	**65. Learning about the spiritual parts or "organs" of a person**
23. A need to address conflicting messages from community adults	**66. African expressions of Christianity**
25. Youth can direct their own activities	70. The need to address convictions based on uninformed ignorance
26. Learning plan developed based on your individual talents	74. We dont need to look the same to have the same values
27. To implement learned security/safety tactics on one's own	75. I am not an American
32. Sustainability practices in the home	79. Importance of being relatable to other groups of Black people
33. I always have a community to come back to	81. Ideal of MA'AT
36. Support from like-minded people	82. A need to establish effective business practices
39. I'm connected to other similar communities nationally	89. A need to address rigid, stereotypical idea of a "warrior"
41. Need for addressing conflicts in approach to African-centered methods	95. 360 degree Circle of Unity (all community members included)
42. Competition between institutions/ organizations	96. My opinion matters to others
43. Survival techniques	**98. A need to address issues of cliques**
	99. A need for exposure to people from different walks of life/perspectives

The Grey Zone contains the statements rated lowest in both surveys. Their scores rank below

the averages for both variables tested in these two surveys. The bottom five rated statements for

both surveys and variables include: 23 – "A need to address conflicting messages from

community adults," 37 – "Learning about the spiritual parts or 'organs' of a person," 66 –

"African expressions of Christianity," 98 – "A need to address issues of cliques," and 14 –

"Corporal punishment." This means that the statements contained here were considered to be

least important to the 7 who submitted sorting/rating scores. These 7 also perceived that these

points were less prioritized by their adult community members and instructors (or not prioritized

at all).

The statements in the Yellow, Orange and Grey Zones reveal points of interest relating to

how the respondents ultimately interpreted these activities and ideas – raising questions of both

relevancy and the methods in which these concepts were taught, discussed and/or acted upon.

Again, with a slight difference in overall averages, a study with more participants could help to

really confirm any patterns observed in sample perceptions (A group of at least 25 would be

effective.) The great part about the results, categories and variables this chart presents is that it

sparks reflection. Along with educators and community members, each person involved in this

phenomenon could for themselves think back to how these statements were enacted in their

experiences. In a constructive manner, individuals could then offer points of critique or further

investigations that would help to strategize how these elements could be better translated or

taught to youth in the future.

With the lowest rated point – corporal punishment – Sekou elaborated on the instances of

physical punishment he observed as a small child:

"I remember when I was at the Lumumba School, one of my memories was we used to get swats if you behaved incorrectly. You misbehaved, your teacher had permission to spank you, pretty much. And so, you know, they didn't play that at the school that I went to. That was always something that I remembered. Because when I went to public school, you know they not having that in public school, [Child/Protective Services] would get called or something like that. But the schools I went to, it was a given. The teachers, you know what I'm saying, have the right to give you a whupping if need be. Yeah man." (Sekou)

The 7 respondents rated this instance very low as opposed to the statements in the Green

Zone. From this, we can ascertain that the respondents consider corporal punishment (defined

here as spankings, beatings or any repercussions for student behavior that involve inflicting

physical pain) to be problematic. With this being rated low for their perceptions of adult

priorities, this statement was seen as having less of the focus in their learning environments –

other more productive methods of communication and accountability were present. With

statements like "Vegetarian diet," "Trust for authority figures in the community," or "My

opinion matters to others" in the Grey Zone, the ratings of the 7 participants call attention to

subject areas that may need to be highlighted, investigated and reworked. We know that with two

of the statements just mentioned, "Trust for authority figures in the community," and "My

opinion matters to others," reasons for these ranking for the respondents could directly relate to

Adisa, Kafi and Diarra's aforementioned points of critique within the Orange and Yellow Zone

discussions.

    With this process of "reworking," we can make these points crucial topics of discussion,

networking across age-groups, and solution implementation. This can ensure that facilitators in

African-centered learning spaces can continue to develop and incorporate creative strategies for

resolving student issues, communicating and showing the relevancy or general understandings of

particular topics discussed. These topics could be better shown in action, translated or presented

for students, so that they at least can gain a stronger appreciation for them.

    In answering this last research question, these mapping results help to establish meaningful

points of dialogue amongst educators, parents, and students in African-centered learning spaces.

While they reflect the opinions of 7 former students, they reveal vital dynamics to consider in the

development and maintenance of initiatives for youth development. As a researcher, I am better

able to see how both the interviews and group concept mapping methods work successfully to

document a relevant knowledge base for further investigation and inquiry. This can be actualized

on the communal level, with evaluation strategies based in problem-solving, constructive critique

and honest analysis. Ultimately, the goal here is the continued development of solutions, guided

by the intent of building solidarity, camaraderie and accountability – solutions we can achieve

with an understanding of the best practices passed down to us by our ancestors, parents, elders,

teachers, and our peers.

6   CONCLUSIONS

6.1   Connections to the Literature

In concluding this thesis document, I would like to discuss connections between sample members' recollections/evaluations of their experiences with the selected body of literature on African-centered education. Do these findings reflect the theoretical framework discussed earlier in the introduction? In defining African-centered, or an African-centered education, quotes from respondents include the following explanations:

"I guess I'd say it's a mindset…It's the way people focus on their heritage, well, African people, Black people, focus on their African heritage. It not quite religious, but something you hold in the back of your mind, it's something you at least try to carry with you everyday and in everything that you do. Just remembering and knowing where you come from, and trying to give off the traditions passed down from our ancestors." (Jibril)

"Oooooh. Life is the first word that come to my mind. Ideology. Guiding principles. Yeah for me it just has significance because for so long it was all that I knew… So for me, it just signifies something that is so ideologically powerful that guides people's lives in ways that they don't even know. So I think that I am New Afrikan, Pan-African and African-centered in ways that are just embedded in who I am. My personality. How I think. How I operate." (Ajoa)

"Oooh, that's interesting. I would say that African Centered means placing the African perspective at the forefront of, if were talking about school, then it would be at the forefront of instruction. So, if I were to be in an African centered history class, world history class, then I would be looking at the history of the world from the African perspective. As opposed to the traditional American quote-on-quote American world history classes, where you would be looking at world history from the European perspective. You know, kind of focusing more on Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and European exploration of the world, you know, those types of things. So it would be instruction from an African point of view." (Rashida)

In their understandings of African-centered thought and practice, many respondents alluded to mindset – internal principles one develops and maintains, ways of viewing the world (worldview) informed by both African ancestral experiences and the study of current events and realities. This is consistent with the definitions shared in the introduction, as well as the historical strategies of this nature discussed in the literature review. Rashida's point about classroom

instruction aligns with scholars like Hilliard, Asante and Ngugi, particularly in their discussions of Afrocentricity and African-centered thought – as they relate to the incorporation of African history and values in school learning. They all promulgate having African views at the forefront of subjects covered, using adopted ideas from pre-colonial African knowledge systems to then analyze all school subjects (Ngugi 1993, Madhubuti 1994, Asante 2003, Hilliard 1995, Akoto 1992). Shockley's points are also evident in many of the sample's responses, points argued for the identification of Africa as the source of a crucial and relevant knowledge base of history and cultural expression (Shockley 2010). Jibril mentions the importance of this, of Africa as a reference point, and the African traditions he "keeps… in the back of his mind." Included with this, Jibril (along with majority of the sample) speaks of the charge to continue relevant aspects of African and African Diasporic traditions.

Having this incorporated from a young age seems to further give context for Ajoa's quote and later descriptions. Ideology is mentioned; in such a way that it sub-consciously informs one's actions and decisions. Since ideology frequently came up, I needed to go back and look the word up – it is defined as "the body of doctrine, myth or belief, etc. that guides an individual, social movement, class, or large group…with reference to some political and social plan, along with the devices for putting it into operation" (Dictionary.com) Ajoa also mentions that African-centered ways of knowing can inform one's personality in the development of the traits prioritized by the community, the traits needed for the nation-building efforts discussed by African-centered educators like Akoto. These efforts include the "culture and work of rebuilding [African institutions]" whether they be economic, spiritual, familial, political, etc. and, also, reversing the effects of enslavement, disenfranchisement, "multigenerational layers of alien values and things." (Akoto 1992, Akoto & Akoto 2000)

At the same time, sample members challenged the standard interpretations and ideologies of African-centered and/or Afrocentric thought. Features challenged included the idea that the values and practices of Africa, particularly pre-colonial Africa, serve as the only authentic or real source to both identify with and apply for people of African descent. Another idea frequently challenged was the idea that all African societies inherently were idyllic, almost utopian realities – reflecting the ideal of Ma'at (balance, truth, justice, harmony, etc.) until later contact with Europeans. In many texts and ideological discussions of African-centered thought or Afrocentricity, Europeans are credited with bringing all levels of personal and societal decay, destruction and conflict. Much of the sample's views reflect the suggested approach of Critical Africentricity, proposed by Makungu Akinyela (1995). While he does not deny the effects of European incursion, Akinyela discusses the need for further in-depth analysis of positive and negative dynamics overtime within our communities and societies globally. He asserts that this cannot happen if all problems are attributed to outside sources (Akinyela 1995). Respondents also identify a crucial link between cultural expression and political action for social change – and the ability to source from various experiences and cultures while maintaining appreciation for their African foundations.

Rashida, who is an educator now herself, talks about the importance of knowing and analyzing various perspectives, including European worldviews in the context of curriculum material. She says it's important for students to know multiple angles or views of history and current events, while operating from an understanding of themselves first as people of African descent. She goes on to mention that presenting the information authentically, without giving special priority to one cultural viewpoint or lens, will give students a better opportunity to discern the truth for themselves. Diarra argues for value to be placed on our people's historical

experiences, spiritual traditions and political organizing methods in the US and the Diaspora. He says these experiences are unique and should be valued in African-centered communities – instead of all priority being placed on how people did things in Kemet (Egypt), the Akan of Ghana or the Yoruba of Nigeria, for example. This assessment was based on his interactions within various cultural nationalist organizations. Jeremy challenges the attitudes of many in African-centered learning spaces, who he feels have simplified African history and practice into a model that suits their interest. Like Akinyela, he calls for further study of the nuanced realities and interactions of Africa, for more acknowledgment of the continental diversities that complicate ideas of what or who an "African" is. With these critiques and more, respondents displayed their willingness to expand on what they learned, with a vested interest in contributing to the discussion of ideas in African-centered spaces.

With these assertions, I conclude that these former student responses reflect a transfer in an understanding of the original intent of many educators, community elders/leaders, and program developers of the "previous generation." From their words, they conclude that it is important for a youth, student or former student to ultimately understand how this guiding ideology is/was constructed, what purpose it serves and the skills necessary to both deconstruct and reconstruct aspect of this ideology for themselves. All of the respondents speak to the relevancy of African-centered thought in their lives – in education, relationships, identity formation, the workplace, etc. All discuss how they have applied and critiqued aspects of these definitions discussed, with an overall respect and appreciation for what scholars, educators, parents and community elders were trying to accomplish.

6.2   Discussion of the Research Questions

In deciding the pertinent questions to investigate, I wanted to focus on three goals: a) providing an introduction to student experiences in African-centered institutions; b) facilitating a process where former students could share their personal evaluations of these experiences; and c) testing a mixed-methods approach for further community-based research, reflection and solution application. With Question 1 (Which activities, ideas, etc…) the combination of personal interviews, brainstorming of statement lists and cluster maps worked well in outlining the collective framework or definition of their overall involvement. A reader could use these sources to gain a greater understanding of this phenomenon. Much of these greater themes, including both a positive self-concept and high expectations for greatness, were consistent with Piert's findings, in her qualitative study focusing on graduates of Faizah Shule/Marcus Garvey Preparatory Academy (Piert 2015).

With applications of all of the Nguzo Saba principles evident in sample responses, the tenets of *ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *kujichagulia* (self-determination), and *nia* (purpose) especially stood out, linking again back to the intentions of the educational efforts outlined in the literature review. Particular qualities, in relation to community, echo the concerns of academic researchers and program developers in previous studies. These include the Jackson – led research team, whose study of the UMOJA Network of Young Men attributed program success to the implementation of both reciprocal love and culturally-responsive caring (Jackson et. al. 2014) Again, reciprocal love was defined as "deeply rooted interest in and concern for community that extends personal well-being to communal sustenance; love for the self that is inextricably linked to a love for others." Culturally responsive caring, as a construct to be evaluated, was defined as the "…holistic approach to understanding students personally and

academically…considering the social and interdependent nature of ensuring that students develop a sense of moral, social and personal responsibility" (Jackson et. al. 2014) Many testimonies from the sample alluded to these same concerns, with a call for these to be further achieved and implemented in African-centered schools, youth organizations and rites of passage programs.

Applying the continued study of qualitative inquiry and group concept map findings can work in testing if goals like these are being reached. I absolutely want to use these methods going forward to illuminate the complex dynamics youth experience, as well as to create forums for students, parents and teachers to share their best practices. These points ultimately align with the purposes of both Sobukwe-Sodaye' and Sunni-Ali, in presenting the meaningful elements of their learning process as a resource for our communities (Sobukwe-Sodaye' 2011, Sunni-Ali 2014). With these scholars, they were able to show how they were strengthened by their education, and given the skills and tools necessary to help facilitate positive change in their surroundings. All 10 sample members eloquently explain how they are able to do the same. Ultimately, the "testing" or methods applied help us all to gain a greater understanding of the "how:" what variables in particular can contribute to this goal.

What can we learn from these findings? It is important to conclude with a succinct summary of each overall research purpose for this project:

6.2.1   The Phenomenon

First, as a phenomenology, the respondents' contributions present aspects of "growing up African-centered." Major themes, from their collected statements, include: community-constructed activities promoting self-motivation; internal application of purpose and intent ("What I learned/What I had"); Spirituality as an important focus ("Spiritual Life"), and

environment of education and development, consistent within and outside the classroom; African Pride, or, the observed connection and positive affiliation with a larger narrative and collective of African-descended peoples; and finally, also, the particular nuanced challenges they saw that affected them personally ("Problems/Problematic Things.") Their interview quotes support these subject areas, with distinct, memorable anecdotes and points of reflection. With mixed methods, the combination of qualitative interviews and concept mapping procedures displays an in-depth introduction to these type life experiences. It will be important going forward to evaluate and further implement the specific practices which contribute to what the sample would call a foundation-building – the internal qualities needed to exude both fulfillment and practicality in defining one's reality for themselves. For many, reading and working through these introductions may serve as a motivational experience, promoting camaraderie – and the understanding that this phenomenon is worth reporting on even more in future research, community development, networking and positive action.

6.2.2   The Evaluation

In closing, all respondents mentioned this phenomenon as being immensely meaningful in their lives today as adult, and for some, as parents. They identified the top concepts and practices, from their home, school and community recollections, which helped in them applying the values shared - making them relevant and useful in the environments they are in now. These practices operated under two central themes observed, that of community and, also, purpose. Within this community construct, sample members shared their socialization processes, citing several factors as key to their positive evaluation of their experience. These include consistent peer group activity, rites of passage initiation trials, frequent cultural events, youth/sibling led organizational practice, and the continued presence and support of surrogate parents. With the

overarching theme of purpose, the elements cited as both successful and impactful included

question-based learning and conversation in the home, personal/family mission statement

projects, continued analysis of historical/current events, and, interestingly, exposure to people

with other (even opposing viewpoints) in alternate spaces. In analysis of these factors, these may

be pinpointed as central best practices to celebrate, recreate and source moving forward.

6.2.3   The Resource

Major points of critique and reflection were revealed with the Go-Zone Map. With individual

statements ranked by importance and perceptions of adult priority, respondents were able to

share the successes and contradictions they observed. A major concern noted includes the

potential for marginalization of youth voices in instances where rigid age-set organizational

structures were implemented. With Kafi's analysis, and contributions of other sample members

supporting this, statements which both spoke to and connected with these type conflicts informed

results in the Go-Zone map. The ultimate purpose of this activity was to highlight these observed

challenges, featured in the Yellow, Orange and Grey Zones in particular. Implementing these

methods for this study, the purpose was also to create a space for respondents to document their

praises and concerns in a way that can serve as a reference for members of various communities

and institutions to review going forward. The findings collected in this process were very

detailed and substantial, and it will take a multitude of future analyses and discussion to

effectively pull and display all of the important information which the sample provided. As a

process, however, the combination of interviews and group concept mapping proved to be a

useful strategy in recording former student evaluations, along with the distinct subtleties which

made each member's experience unique.

In terms of the interviews, the quotes which participants provided with this document are invaluable, and also fulfill my intent of having the participant stakeholders' words operate as the 'center' of analysis. They are, ultimately, the important interpreters and sharers of their own perspectives. This project has proven to be a valuable resource for me personally, as I hope it will serve the same function for readers, members of various communities, organizers, parents, teachers and students. What can we do with this project? In hindsight, projects like these can be recreated, and fashioned to specific institutions.

A major critique I hold myself accountable for is the often wide-sweeping nature of the questions. This was done to give respondents the opportunity to talk about the variety in their experiences. Often times, youth and adults in African-centered spaces are affiliated with multiple schools, organizations, locations during various periods of time. With further research, the personalized evaluations of specific institutions can hopefully be conducted, using this mixed methods strategy.

6.3   Final Reflection

I am very thankful for the opportunity to conduct this study investigation. In many ways, this process helped me to gain a greater understanding of the educational process I went through in various African-centered learning spaces – the prioritized skills and personality traits that it fostered in me as an adult today. The sample – 10 powerful adults – identified the strategies they recognized as productive: strategies which would help contribute to successful and relevant student experiences in a wide variety of spaces. In reflection, their contributions confirmed important observations of this unique phenomenon. A significant socialization process, including the active and consistent support system developed of peers, parents, teachers, elders and relatives, in many ways cements a sense of empowerment for a child – a sense of purpose that

could, eventually, rise above and challenge a community's strict reliance on ideology to make sense of the world. A "grounding" process, or the intention of assisting the development of a child's right to self-determination, self-reliance and sovereignty, could in many ways foster the analytical skills necessary for that child to then question further, create new realities, assert new interpretations and revise time-tested strategies to go forward into the future. With this study, this group effort to record crucial experiences serves as the creation of a time capsule. So many of us, who live and work in these environments, are so busy "doing", and "acting" (work has to get done!), that it is necessary to save our thoughts on these processes for continued analysis.

I also appreciate having to delve into the literature on African-centered thought and pedagogy. It was intensely meaningful for me to observe this long-standing historical pattern of education for the purpose of empowerment. This pattern, to me, negates the often promoted idea that we as African people were ever truly "ignorant," "lost," or "removed from" the practices of ingenuity, adaptability, problem-solving and determination necessary to create meaningful learning processes for our children. While we worked to heal from internal and external challenges, we expressed our humanity, and used whatever tools we could call on and get our hands on to "create a way." In hearing the interview responses, I could hear the practicality and genuineness of intention from the sample. The narratives documented in the literature are continued with these 10 people's work, life experiences, community involvement, academic success and family building. Going back to the concept of *Sankofa*, their examples display the relevant process of action, reflection and application – a process that they have used continually to "align themselves," to internally assert themselves in any environment.

Again, these research results are not meant to be generalized. In the future, I would like to work with other community-based scholars and solution-builders to recreate this project on a

larger scale. With a greater sample (of at least 25 participants), interesting patterns in former student evaluations could be better confirmed for reflection. What further investigations do facilitators need to make, to better discuss and share about the past, the present, and the future? How can we incorporate the perceptions of youth, and place them at the center of classroom, extracurricular and rite of passage activity? As educators, aspiring teachers and life-long students ourselves, we can all use further responses to these questions to both create and revise meaningful activities which students can apply immediately in their everyday lives. Families can source the documented words of former students, who can relate the direct realities we all face today, and their strategies for solving the necessary problems and challenges our world produces. Armed with the histories and learned lessons of our fore-parents, we can use the practical elements they have passed down, and create our own knowledge bases to add to their contributions. With this process, in our communities we can continue to help facilitate the process of a child/young adult coming into self-knowledge, self-actualization and empowerment as an individual – with unique contributions, particular talents and a nuanced personal experience worth investigating.

Having people and having purpose, two meaningful elements the sample applied in their lives, can continue to serve as significant goals to be fostered in instruction. As a facilitator, I can look at the statements, sorting results and questions of analyses to reflect on my own practices, approach to others and the ultimate intentions that inform these actions. Are my words helping others to build a sense of self-confidence? Is what I'm discussing in class really relevant to these youth? What are the ways in which I can connect their experiences to this particular African historical fact in the lesson plan? How does this activity, or ceremony, communicate or produce a meaningful experience this teenager can actually reflect on and share about? Spaces must

continue to be created to foster this vital dialogue and action. These comments, shared here in this thesis conclusion, directly incite the continued development of this thesis project, as well as the community-based engagement necessary to enact the productive change needed for our continued self-determination and empowerment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

LIST OF 101 STATEMENTS
(Contributed from Interviews for the Brainstorming)

Table 7. Final Statement List

1) Long-term friendships	52) Adolescent rites of passage process
2) Consistent peer group	53) Theater - Performing in skits, plays etc.
3) Tools for critical analysis	54) I am the solution I am looking for
4) I can create what I need	55) Love for things that are African
5) Discipline	56) We are responsible for resolving our contradictions
6) Importance of self-reflection	57) Respect for my cultural expressions
7) Martial Arts for Self-Defense	58) Respect for elders
8) Pride in who I am	59) Respect for people older than me
9) Not judging others lifestyles	60) I can communicate my issues to adults who care
10) A need to address tension between youth and adults	61) Age-set organization system
11) Loyalty amongst participating families	62) Learning African languages
12) African dance	63) Vegetarian diet
13) Learning our culture to keep our traditions alive	64) Physical fitness
14) Corporal punishment	65) Learning about the spiritual parts or "organs" of a person
15) I was always told I was beautiful/handsome	66) African expressions of Christianity
16) Trust for authority figures in the community	67) Project based learning
17) Having an African name	68) Interactive, hands-on activities
18) Kwanzaa as major holiday	69) Family meetings
19) Consistent community-based events	70) The need to address convictions based on uninformed ignorance
20) Very high expectations for success	71) I am always in a learning process
21) Strategy/Organizational sessions with peers	72) Having older community members of the same sex for inspiration/guidance
22) We are at war	73) Importance of conflict resolution
23) A need to address conflicting messages from community adults	74) We dont need to look the same to have the same values
24) The community > the individual	75) I am not an American
25) Youth can direct their own activities	76) I come from a very different reality
26) Learning plan developed based on your individual talents	77) Academic excellence
27) To implement learned security/safety tactics on one's own	78) Importance of humility
28) How to navigate multiple type of spaces (Afr-Cen, Mainstream, Corporate, Academia etc.)	79) Importance of being relatable to other groups of Black people
29) Public speaking	80) I am because we are

30) Social activism	81) Ideal of MA'AT
31) Agriculture	82) A need to establish effective business practices
32) Sustainability practices in the home	83) Developing/Supporting conscious music that informs and empowers
33) I always have a community to come back to	84) A need to address strict gender roles
34) Engaging in spiritual practice	85) An internal drive to apply what was learned
35) Dealing with life situations requires strategy	86) Challenging mainstream media
36) Support from like-minded people	87) Wearing African attire
37) Deeper understandings of information/subjects encouraged vs. memorization	88) Identifying with Black Freedom Fighters in history/today
38) Education is meant to help you realize yourself	89) A need to address rigid, stereotypical idea of a "warrior"
39) I'm connected to other similar communities nationally	90) I am a warrior for my people
40) Internal process of Sankofa - to go back, fetch and apply to move forward	91) I can go to public school and still maintain who I am
41) Need for addressing conflicts in approach to African-centered methods	92) It's not about what you say, It's about what you do
42) Competition between institutions/organizations	93) Our experience here is just as important as pre-colonial Africa
43) Survival techniques	94) Living the Nguzo Saba every day of the year
44) Importance of outdoor activity	95) 360 degree Circle of Unity (all community members included)
45) Unity and harmony with nature is important	96) My opinion matters to others
46) I have a variety of elders to go to for assistance/guidance	97) Exposure to deep concepts/understandings at a very young age
47) History of pre-colonial Africa	98) A need to address issues of cliques
48) History of the African Diaspora (our experience in the Caribbean, US, other places in the 40) world)	99) A need for exposure to people from different walks of life/perspectives
49) Indigenous African cosmology	100) We must establish our own nation
50) We can adjust our spirituality to fit our present condition	101) We must establish our own independent family-based local village spaces
51) African drumming	

Appendix B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

This form contains a series of questions that will be used as part of the project analysis. This information will not be used to personally identify you.

What is your gender?

◯ Female
◯ Male

What is your age?

◯ 18-24
◯ 25-34
◯ 35-44

What is your education level?

◯ Completed some high school
◯ High school graduate
◯ Completed some college
◯ Associate degree
◯ Bachelor's degree
◯ Completed some postgraduate
◯ Master's degree
◯ Ph.D., law or medical degree
◯ Other degree beyond a Master's degree

What is the highest education level of your father?

◯ Completed some high school
◯ High school graduate
◯ Completed some college
◯ Associate degree
◯ Bachelor's degree
◯ Completed some postgraduate
◯ Master's degree
◯ Ph.D., law or medical degree
◯ Other degree beyond a Master's degree

What is the highest education level of your mother?

◯ Completed some high school
◯ High school graduate
◯ Completed some college
◯ Associate degree
◯ Bachelor's degree
◯ Completed some postgraduate
◯ Master's degree
◯ Ph.D., law or medical degree
◯ Other degree beyond a Master's degree

Which region of the country do you live in?

◯ Midwest - IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI
◯ Northeast - CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT
◯ Southeast - AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV
◯ Southwest - AZ, NM, OK, TX
◯ West - AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

How long have you been enrolled or involved in African-centered learning spaces? *These type spaces include African-centered rites of passage processes, home environments, private schools, home schools, after school programs, youth organizations etc.*

_____ *# Of years*

Appendix C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

<div align="center">

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Informed Consent

</div>

Title: Looking Back to Go Forward: Student Evaluations of Experiences in African-Centered Educational Institutions
Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela
Student Principal Investigator: Ivan N. Vassall III
Faculty Advisor(s): Dr. Sarita Davis, Dr. Akinyele Umoja

I.   Purpose:
You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to analyze adults' views on their experiences growing up in an African Centered learning space. These type spaces include African-centered rites of passage processes, private schools, home schools, after school programs, etc. You are invited to take part because you are a former student or graduate of an African Centered learning space. A total of 16 participants will be chosen for this study. To contribute, we will require up to 6 hours of your time.

II.   Procedures:
If you decide to be in this study, we will engage in four tasks.

1) You will fill out a basic form. This form will include your general background information (name, age, gender, highest level of education, etc.).

2) After this, the research will interview you on the phone. In this one-on-one talk, you will be asked questions about your learning experiences. You will also be asked what African centered learning spaces are like. This interview will happen only once, at a time that is suitable for you. Interviews are expected to last from 1-½ hours to 2 hours. All 16 members of the sample will be interviewed. Your interview will be recorded using the Google Voice app. The audio file of your interview will be sent to you for review.

3) This study will use a process called Concept Mapping. Concept Mapping is used to graph the views of a group visually. To begin this process, you will submit brief statements from what you have observed in African Centered learning spaces. All 16 members of the sample group will submit statements. All of these statements (up to 100) will be combined to form a list. From this list, each sample member will group statements, and rank them from most important to least important. You will do this "grouping and ranking" task online, using the Concept Systems Global MAX™ program (www.conceptsystems.com). This process is expected to take no more than 1-2 hours. You can complete this online form at a time best for you.
This digital program will visually map results from each sample member. These results will also include the combined findings of the entire group. The items ranked the highest will be noted to have the most impact on the group's learning processes: the most successful traits that were observed.

4) Concept maps, results and interview quotes will be included in a digital slide show and booklet. The student researcher will design these items. Each sample member will receive a copy for review.

III.   Risks:
After this study, the results will be shared to the public. Some results may also be shared online. The interview and concept mapping process requires your full honesty. You might be worried about how others will respond to your views. In the interviews, you may be concerned with sharing your personal stories and opinions about programs and people you know. You will remain anonymous. All place names will be omitted from your transcript. This includes names of specific programs, schools, locations and people you know.

IV.   Benefits:
Taking part in this study may benefit you in the long run. You may benefit from sharing your stories and views. This process may help you to reflect on and gain a clearer understanding of what you went through. Results from what you share can also help educators in African Centered learning spaces to enhance their programs. Interested parents can also apply helpful information and practices from study findings. Overall, we want to find out about the long-term impact of African Centered learning spaces for students.

V.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

VI.   Confidentiality:
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Makungu Akinyela, Dr. Sarita Davis, Dr. Akinyele Umoja and Ivan N. Vassall III will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).

Your information will be protected. Interview audio recordings, notes and documents will be stored on a password-protected computer owned by the head researcher. Files will be encrypted. One file will contain the real names and codes for each sample member. This file will be stored on a separate password-protected computer, owned by the head researcher. The file containing real names and codes will be destroyed after the study is completed. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed after transcripts are typed.

You will remain anonymous. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported under your alias. In your transcripts and quotes, all proper nouns (place names, names of those you know, location names, names of programs/schools) will be omitted. You will be allowed to review your transcripts, and the research documents for final approval on your end.

VII.   Contact Persons:
Contact the following if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.
Dr. Makungu Akinyela, Principal Investigator at 404-413-5141, *email:* makinyela@gsu.edu
Dr. Sarita Davis, Faculty Advisor at 404-413-5134, *email:* saritadavis@gsu.edu
Dr. Akinyele Umoja, Faculty Advisor at 404-413-5133, *email:* aadaku@gsu.edu
Ivan N. Vassall III at 404-963-6897, *email:* ivassall1@student.gsu.edu

You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII.   Copy of Consent Form to Participant:
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded (in interviews), please sign below.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator   or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix D

FINAL CONSENT/RELEASE FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Looking Back to Go Forward:
Student Evaluations of Experiences in African-Centered Educational Institutions
Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela
Student Principal Investigator: Ivan N. Vassall III

Dear Participant:
This form gives us final authorization to use material from your interview in this project. A draft of these materials should have been presented to you for your review, correction or modification. You may grant use rights for this draft "as is," or with the modifications you specify, if any. See "Conditions" at the bottom of the form.

I, _____, hereby grant the right to use information from recordings or notes taken in interviews of me, to Dr. Makungu Akinyela and Ivan N. Vassall III, African American Studies Dept., Georgia State University, and as presented to me as a draft copy. I understand that the interview records will be kept by the interviewer and the project, and that the information contained in the interviews may be used in materials to be made available to the general public.

The findings will be summarized and reported under your alias. In your transcripts and quotes, all proper nouns (place names, names of those you know, location names, names of programs/schools) will be omitted. You will not be identified personally.

_____
Signature of Interviewee   *Date*

_____
Signature of Interviewer   *Date*

The following conditions limit the release of information, as agreed between the interviewer and the interviewee:

_____ None needed

_____ Material may be released once corrections I specified have been made

_____ Material may be released once it has been edited by a third party (please specify)