

LANGUAGE OBSERVING VISUAL EXPLORATIONS:  
AFTER SCHOOL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS (LOVE: ASAP)  
LISTENING TO AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS  
WITHIN A CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROGRAM

by

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(Under the Direction of Peter Smagorinsky)

ABSTRACT

Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP) is a participatory action qualitative research study. I listen to the voices of African American Middle School girls, and examine their schooling narratives. Poetry, prose and collages personify their narratives as they metacognitively engage in culturally relevant language and visual arts activities. Within these activities, they explore social justice, history, and accountability. As I excavate their personal narratives within a critical race narrative frame, evidence of racism, miseducation, suppression, omission, and the oppression of their sui generis and strengths recrudesces. This research addresses the issues that culturally relevant pedagogy remediates, alleviates, and combats. My study creates interlocution between African American Middle School girls, and educational research.

INDEX WORDS: African American Girls, Afrocentrism, Arts Based Research, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Learning, Language and Visual Art, Middle School, Narratives, Poetic Representation, Portraiture

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## DEDICATION

*To the children of the African Diaspora, African American Middle School girls,  
and for all of us who choose to create love, peace, and joy.*

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To My Father-God with whom all things are possible.

To the mighty cloud of witnesses who light the way. And to: My little Mother for being who she is in the world...tiny, titanic, and true; Daddy for teaching me perseverance and faith. To Elizabeth and Bob Peterson, my sister and brother, for dulcet words and brilliant perspectives; my big brother Donald for many blessings and coffee from the Land of Enchantment; it was a necessary luxury; William Christopher and Joseph Vicente for teaching me how to love beyond reason; King Davis, and Dr. "Dad" Powell my surrogate father's; Cousin Louis, Cousin Addie and the New York Winfield's for showing me my roots; my cherished friend Nancy Brown for helping me get outside of my head; Evanna, DJ, and Tamika for anchoring my heart to Arizona; My Fairy Godmother, Gwendolyn Shire for the magic; Victoria Pettis for open doors and borrowed books; Becky, Dianne, and Marianne my unsung heroes; May, Mercy, and Michael for joyfulness; from genesis to revelation I thank, Laura, Lauren, Laurie, and Leslie; the amazing, Juanita Johnson Bailey for always holding me in her arms, and never letting go; Richard and Peter for recrudescence championship; my ally, Courtney...you know why; my Bread Loaf Family, your recrudescence in my life leaves joy in its wake, always and always; Alzena and her middle school kids for sharing their classroom with me; Laquisha, Naqwaija, and Taylor for being my angels on earth; Tyra for delicacies, merriment, and rapport; Aaron Sinclair Peterson for unwavering belief in me, for knowing exactly when to call, and for faithful prayer; and my righteous and devoted comrade Nichole Michelle Ray for bread, salad, and tofu, for music, dancing, and silliness... for cascading laughter and salubrious tears,

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*Fanny: "One of us is going to be able to be president."*

The unwillingness of America to educate African Americans is older than its Declaration of Independence. Rapidly disappearing Affirmative Action policy legislates equal opportunity, but is impotent against ingrained systematized institutions of racism (Bell, 1987; Collins, 2006; Irons, 2002). Crenshaw (2002) describes affirmative action policies as "a foot in the closing door" (p. 9). To help keep equal opportunity doors open I examine the current educational experiences of African American Middle School girls in an after school program in the Southeastern United States. I observe strengths in these young girls that are creative, innovative, and ingenious. Even though many African American adolescents are drowning in the tidal wave of "No Child Left Behind" legislation, the African American Middle School girls in my study engaged in *Acts of Resistance* to facilitate school success. In the years following this legislation African American adolescents remain statistically submerged, literally left behind, and traumatized. The African American Middle School girls' schooling narratives report that trauma has shaped their schooling stories. Significant improvement in their status is stagnant (Back & Solomos, 2000; Bellows, 2001; Duncan & Jackson, 2004; Jacobson, et al, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Paley, 2000). This study adds to research that speaks directly to African American students.

I join the growing research community that believes in “the transformative possibilities that lie in making a more conscious connection to Africa in our work, and the process by which such connections can transform an academic life into one whose purpose is healing and service through teaching and research” (Dillard, 2006, p. x). I listen closely to the schooling narratives of African American Middle School girls looking for ways to blend critical race theory with language and visual arts stratagem. The girls and I met at the intersectionality of language and visual arts to engage in culturally relevant praxis. According to Freire (2000) “to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 88). As participant observer I listened to the authentic schooling narratives of African American Middle School girls while they transformed their worlds and my world.

### *Purpose Statement and Questions*

The purpose of my study is to examine the educational experiences of African American Middle School students within a culturally relevant language and visual arts after school program. My dissertation asks:

1. How do these African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?
2. How do these African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

My research empowered African American Middle School girls to talk about their schooling experiences. The girls' schooling narratives will inform theory and support practitioner knowledge. Opening this dialogue between students and the Language and Literacy educational research community will illustrate ideas to combat miseducation. Miseducation is the process that teaches members of an oppressed group that their culture is inferior to the dominant culture. Woodson (1933, 1990) states, "to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations" (p.3). The practice of miseducation continues to be inimical to the schooling experiences of African American children. To leave no child behind, society must be compelled to educate all children. This study is important because we cannot continue to educate certain students, while miseducating others.

### *Problem Statement*

The persistent chasm between academic achievement for African American students and their White peers is extensively documented. This achievement gap is rationalized and conveyed in the research as residing in the fact that many teachers are unprepared to teach these young people due to manifold antecedents (Back & Solomos, et al. 2000; Bell, 1992; Hull & Bell-Scott et al., 1982; Paley, 2000; Rothenberg, 2002; Singley & Bell, 2002; Tatum, 1999). Foundational causation for academic vicissitudes within African American student populations is the prodigious cultural divergence separating these children from the predominately White field of education (Back et al., 2000; Bell, 1992; Bell-Scott, 1994; Hull, et al., 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Paley,

2000; Rothenberg, 2002; Singley et.al., 2002; Tatum, 1999). My experience teaching language and literacy education courses to preservice teachers bears witness to the shortage of teachers of color entering the field. During the four semesters that I taught as a graduate assistant in a research one institution in the Southeastern United States, there were only four women of color out of approximately 80 students. The relative absence of African American teachers can partially be addressed with culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy incorporates strategies for educating diverse learners in classroom settings and within coursework for preservice teachers (Cazden, 2001; Du Bois & Aptheker, 2001; Freire, 2000; Guy, 1999; Hanley, 2002; hooks, 1994, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994,2001; Lee, Lomotey & Shujaa, 1990; Tatum, 2003; West, 2001; Wing, 2003; Woodson, 1933,1990). Regrettably, culturally relevant pedagogy remains noticeably omitted from American classrooms in both university and K-12 settings. The voices of African American Middle School girls are also absent; my study seeks their voices.

Ladson-Billings (1994) states:

Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (p.18).

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates learning and teaching environments that nurture and develop the preexisting cultural capitol that African American children inherit. By inherit I mean, passed from one generation to the next. It is also significant to note that

African American students who inherit material wealth are not shielded from racism (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Ogbu, & Davis, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

Further disadvantages for African American adolescents occur as standardized tests, employed to measure, compare and decide which students advance from elementary school to terminal degrees, are biased against them (Bell, 1987, 1992; Cazden, 2001; Dalton, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Gilyard, 1996; Gordon, 1993; hooks, 1992, 1994, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; West, 2001). Additionally, measures of creative strength that highlight the abilities of African American students are virtually nonexistent. Instead, (Woodson, 1933, 1990) states:

You simply have a large number of persons simply doing what others have been doing. The unusual gifts of the race have not thereby been developed, and an unwilling world, therefore, continues to wonder what the Negro is good for. (p.7)

Although this quote was written in 1933, it remains relevant because the majority of African Americans are trapped within enduring historical, as well as contemporary, racist stereotypes. The stereotypical roles that are assigned to African Americans are aligned along a continuum from entertainer to criminal. Yet, the greater reality for most African Americans is poverty. In fact, “one-third of African American youth under the age of 18 live in poverty” (Collins, 2006, p. 5). Poverty and academic failure often hold hands.

There are various reasons for academic failures of African American adolescents. However, the voices of the adolescents are often silenced. Unger (2003) states:

If teachers do not feel threatened by hearing the suggestions of their students, then the way is open for collaborative efforts to make positive

changes in classrooms and the whole school environment. And that can begin as we listen to the students. (p.1)

My research enables concerned individuals “to listen carefully to children children rarely have reason to mislead us. They are in this respect, pure witnesses, and we will hear their testimony in these pages” (Kozol, 2005, p. 12).

As a result of my research African American Middle School girls testify. This research is their forum for sharing their schooling narratives. This project is important to me because I am deeply concerned about educational systems that generally fail specific students. I am particularly interested in African American girls because in a patriarchal society, girls are studied less frequently than boys. I attempt to understand the experiences of a specific group of African American Middle School girls in a public because I believe they have valuable and creative insights to share at this important period in their lives. Finders (1997) states that middle school is, “a critical juncture of ...unlearning and relearning. Adults and adolescents must all renegotiate their roles and... relationships informed...by how adolescence is socially situated within multiple cultural, historical, and institutional settings” (p.13).

The African American Middle School girls in my study are socially situated within myriad cultural, historical, and institutional settings that discriminate against them in multiple ways. They are African American, adolescents, and girls. They live in an environment that is steeped in violent history of racism, and is currently divided along color lines. Because of their positionality they are eye witnesses; there is not a more powerful testimony. The experiences they describe and the understandings they share might motivate educational initiatives that educate everyone.

### *Conceptual Framework*

A central assumption of this research considers American education an environment where "The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (Woodson, 1990, p. 2). Clarke (1976) states: "Many White 'scholars,' classified as historians, are neither scholars nor historians. They are clever propagandists writing rationalizations in support of White world domination" (p.5). For example, Chagnon, Cronk & Irons, 2000; Herrnstein & Murray, 1996; and Terkel, 1992, wrote books that can be classified as propaganda. These books, like most of the history taught within academes are biased in favor of "White supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture" (hooks, 1995). Hilliard (1997) states:

...the United States was created as a slave nation, complete with deliberate designs to prevent the education of slaves. The designs included measures that would create certain beliefs to justify that curtailment. For example, the belief in...White supremacy...led to the development of an ideology that says that genetically, Whites are intellectually superior and people of color inferior. (p. 9)

Therefore, in order to understand the educational experiences of African American adolescents, the "permanence of racism" (Bell, 1987, 1992), must be considered.

### *Significance to the Field of Education*

As a veteran classroom teacher I watched African American students and other marginalized children struggle for reasons that had less to do with intelligence, and more to do with institutionalized racism. As a Master's student, I battled racism from the United States to the United Kingdom. These incidents included emotional, physical and spiritual assaults. For example, while studying at Oxford I was shoved into the street and called names that I do not care to repeat. I can concisely articulate the racism within my own milieu. I resist repression, suppression, and oppression daily. I believe that African American adolescents can explain how they resist racism in their environment, and articulate needs relating to their school success.

School success for African American youth is significant for the field of education because it is important for America to educate all of her children. It is imperative that we finally honor our promise for a free and appropriate education for all citizens because there is “immeasurable hope... for those of us who are committed to imagine a world that is less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanizing, and more humane” (Freire, 2000, p. 25), located in equality of educational opportunities.

This research is important locally and globally because as the world continues to be more universally connected,

We cannot afford to adopt the classic, detached, ivory tower model of scholarship when so many are suffering, sometimes in our own extended families. We do not believe in praxis instead of theory, but believe that

both are essential to our peoples' literal and figurative future. (Wing, 2000, p.6)

Our lives may soon depend upon those whom we fail to educate. Articulating theories embedded in strategies to reduce discrimination might create a more inclusive world (Bell, 1979; Dyson, 2004; Crenshaw, 2003; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Mosley, 2000). My research is vitally important because we must seek new ways to educate all students in globally responsive ways that will achieve the promise of "No Child Left Behind" because an educated populace edifies society. The promise that no child will be left behind is a worthy goal because the alternative is too painful to consider. The alternative is unnecessary to consider. Instead, it is imperative to listen because it is quite possible that African American Middle School girls can promote transformations in the quality of education.

It is the goal of this inquiry to free the excessively silenced voices of the children. My study adds to the research concerning best practices for teaching disenfranchised African American adolescents and points to strategies for meaningful inclusion inside educational institutions. Finally, this study addresses gaps in the literature created by the invisible voices of African American Middle School girls because:

when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard nor welcomed  
but when we are silent we are still afraid.  
So it is better to speak remembering  
we were never meant to survive.  
(Lorde, 1978, p. 31)

I still believe, in spite of all that I have suffered, regardless of how monumental the task,  
that my life can serve humanity because I hope.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### *Finding Emeralds in Bluegrass: African American Middle School Girls' Voices*

This study examines educational experiences of African American Middle School girls in a culturally relevant language and visual arts after school program in the

Southeastern United States. These questions guide my exploration:

1. How do these African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?
2. How do these African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

This chapter represents a review of the literature relevant to my reconnaissance of educational experience for African American girls. First, I describe the historical yearnings of African Americans for a free and appropriate education. Second, I summarize the contributions of African American women education pioneers, and the historically significant educational experiences they provided for African American girls. Third, I elucidate the African American philosophy of education. Fourth, I explain why it became necessary to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students, and describe three theories of culturally relevant pedagogy. Fifth, I ponder an

emergent theory of language and visual arts education as it relates to African American Middle School girls. Finally, I contextualize African American girls within the after-school literature.

A review of the literature reveals a lacuna in research about African American Middle School girls. I performed extensive research within the rich databases available at a large research one university and found a plethora of research about middle school students, and a sizable amount written about the education and failure to educate African American students in the public schools. However, there are comparatively few studies that focus specifically on my target group, African American Middle School girls. Three emergent themes in the literature are 1. the history of educational experiences for African Americans; 2. the role of African American women in the education of African American girls; and 3. culturally relevant pedagogy.

### *Deep Roots: Historical African American Education*

I summarize the essential literature that referenced education for African American people in a single noun: yearning. I define yearning as a deep, heart felt longing for something precious, and evasive. The most pertinent dictionary definition relevant to education for African Americans is “to long persistently, wistfully, or sadly...a tender or urgent longing” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1981). Langston Hughes devoted many poems to the topic of yearning. One of Hughes’ most anthologized poems, *Harlem* [2], allegorizes the concept of yearning:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a sugary sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

*or does it explode?*

hooks (1990) also addresses “yearning” as a longing manifested in: “oppositional ways of thinking, ones...different from the structures of domination determining so much of their lives” (p.2). This yearning is symbolic of the desire of an oppressed people to move beyond a violently enforced system of human bondage that made it illegal for African American people to acquire an education primarily in the South, but also throughout America. Intrinsic to the enforced denial of educational opportunities for African Americans was disempowerment. Yet, African Americans took significant risks to obtain an education, the object of their yearning, in spite of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their field of vision. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) explain:

Law and custom made it a crime for enslaved men and women to learn or teach others to read and write. And yet slave narratives uniformly recount

the intensity of the slaves' and ex-slaves' desire for literacy, the barriers they encountered in becoming literate, and what they were willing to endure in order to become literate. Even the threat of beating, amputation, or death did not quell the slaves' desire for literacy. According to the testimony of one slave, "The first time you was caught trying to read or write you was whipped with a cow hide the next time with a cat-a-nine and the third time they cut the first joint off your forefinger" (Cornelius 1991, 66). ...literacy was more than a symbol of freedom; it was freedom. It affirmed their humanity, their personhood... a mighty weapon in the struggle for freedom. (p.13)

African Americans yearned for education because it was viewed as an emancipatory vehicle. The desire for an education extended beyond the present reality into a hope for future generations.

#### *Free and public education for all*

Most people do not realize that the first generation of Africans came to the continent the Europeans called America in the 14th Century, before Columbus (Van Sertima, 2003), or that many African people came as artisans. They were free men and women who had skills, talents, and trades and recruited by those who knew the value of their expertise. "My own ancestors were invited here by the ancestors of General Winfield Scott, and were green glass makers from the southwestern coast of Africa. My family traded their African name for the first name of their host, and we became the Winfield's of Jamestown, Virginia at its early inception" (Winfield, 1995). Hidden and

obscured from American history is the fact that the first free and public schools were founded by the newly emancipated men and women immediately after the Civil War. It is a well documented but seldom discussed fact that the quest for education led a free African American people to establish the first public schools in America (African *American Desk Reference, 1999*; Bell, 1992; Cade, 1970; Katz, 1995; Perry, et al, 2003; Woodson, 1990). These public schools were conceived and implemented by African Americans during that very brief period of reconstruction, immediately after slavery was forcefully abolished, and before the Jim Crow Laws were implemented. “It was the newly franchised Black man longing for education for himself who fought for and introduced tax-free public education in the south” (Katz, 1970, p.125).

Katz fails to mention the Black woman. Also absent from the most discourse about the early education of African Americans is the remarkable young poet, Phyllis Wheatley, who learned to read and write in the foreign English tongue, and wrote exceptional poetry and prose in less time than is currently allotted for children to graduate from kindergarten. The African American female educational pioneers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century through the present time are also absent from most documentation. Their invisibility does not negate the fact that remains, African American women have directed the course toward endarkenment (Dyson, 2003; Giddings, 1984; Hansberry, 1969; Morrison, 1992). I use the term endarkenment to describe creative, innovative and transformative theories,

...in contrast to the common use of the term ‘enlightenment’ ...to articulate the...distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race,

gender, and other identities, and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women.(Dillard, 2006, p. 3)

African American were endarkened feminist in 1695 African American when they sent their children to Samuel Thomas's school in Charleston, South Carolina. Their relative invisibility in the historical and contemporary texts does not negate the fact that remains, African American women have practiced resistance to oppression throughout the course of American history. When South Carolina made it illegal to teach African American children in 1740, mothers organized home schools and church schools. In 1789 African American women organized public and private schools for their children in Massachusetts; and in 1802 fought for a national education bill. In 1831, members of the Afric-American Intelligence Society made ambitious plans to establish a high school, Maria Miller Stewart made an impassioned speech before the Society:

Shall it any longer be said of the daughters of Africa, they have no ambition, and they have no force? By no means. Let every female heart become united, and let us raise a fund ourselves, and at the end of one year and a half, we might be able to lay the corner stone for the building of a High School, that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us; and God would raise us up, and enough to aid us in our would raise us up, and enough to aid us in our laudable designs. Let each one strive to excel... (Stewart, 1995, p.28)

African American women did not limit their vision to elementary and secondary education; they also set their sights on higher education. In 1850, Lucy Ann Stanton

became the first African American woman to earn a four year college degree, “earning a bachelor of literature degree from Oberlin College in Ohio” (*African American Desk Reference*, 1999, p. 8). In 1859, Sarah Jane Woodson was the first African American woman to serve as faculty in the United States; she taught at Wilberforce, a century before the Brown versus Board of Education decision. African American women set precedents in the field of education working within churches, club societies, anti-slavery organizations, suffrage movements, and other feminist activities. Significantly, their primary motivations were altruistic because their aspirations were for the uplift of all humanity. Harper (1995) articulates this idea:

More than the changing of institutions we need the development of a national conscience, and the upbuilding of national character. Men may boast of the aristocracy of blood, may glory in the aristocracy of talent, and be proud of the aristocracy of wealth, but there is one aristocracy which must ever outrank them all, and that is the aristocracy of character; and it is the women of a country who help to mold its character, and to influence if not determine its destiny; and in the political future of our nation woman will not have done what she could if she does not endeavor to have our republic stand foremost among the nations of the earth wearing sobriety as a crown and righteousness as a garment and a girdle. In coming into her political estate woman will find a mass of illiteracy to be dispelled. If knowledge is power, ignorance is also power. The power that educates wickedness may manipulate and dash against the pillars of any state when they are undermined and honeycombed by injustice. (p.41)

In spite of subjugation, African American women cultivated the uplift of the human race. Working for equal and appropriate education was seen as a way to advance all of society. Harper warns that if we agglomerate, we fail to educate humankind, and our entire society is at risk of being “dashed against the pillars.” And, I imagine, that would hurt anyone.

History proves Black women have consistently fore fronted educational initiatives, even though the earliest African American female educators are lost to written history. Most of their names are not recorded for the same reasons Christopher Columbus’s navigator remains an anonymous black African; White men wrote the history books. The first African American women teachers were the multitudes of nameless, faceless mothers who persevered through American genocide. African American women taught their children to survive, in resistance to the merciless, animalistic men who enslaved them. African American women used their intellects whenever they were conceded chances to do so. One of the Arcean recorded examples of African American victory over adversity was the tiny Phillis Wheatley. I use the previous spelling, “Phillis” in this portion of the paper because this is the spelling used by Gates. Later, I use “Phyllis” as this is the spelling found in the historical documents referenced by Knupfner. In any case, Gates (2003) states:

Recall that this seven-year-old slave...spoke no English upon her arrival in 1761. By 1765, she had written her first poem; in 1767, when she was thirteen or fourteen, the Newport Mercury published a poem... In 1770, when she was about seventeen, she immortalized the Boston Massacre in

her poem, "On the Affray in King Street, on the Evening of the 5th of March, 1770. (p.20)

Wheatley's life remains shrouded in historical facts that are still suppressed by a society that seeks to maintain the status quo by keeping those who are in power, permanently in power (Back & Solomos, 2000; Bell, 1987, 1992; Freire, 2002; Gates, 2003; Wing, 2000; Wright, 1987). Maintenance of the status quo is one of the forces arrayed against African Americans.

Another obstacle to achievement for African Americans in this country has always and continues to be the denial of an opportunity to experience a free and appropriate education. Not only is the opportunity to excel denied but when excellence arises above all protests of its possibility, the excellence is oppugned. I revisit Phillis Wheatley to wrestle with this point.

Even though Wheatley learned to read and write English fluently in less than four years, the expediency with which she was able to do so was not called into question; her humanity was debated. Popular thinkers of the era believed that Africans were incapable of intellectual thought. In order to prove Phillis did not write her poetry, self-proclaimed experts gathered to test the validity of the outrageous claim that a young African American woman possessed the ability to think. They decided, "to assemble some of the finest minds ...of colonial America to question closely the African adolescent about the slender sheaf of twenty-eight poems that she...claimed that she had written by herself...she passed with flying colors" (Gates, 2003, pp. 28-29).

Who were these eighteen White men who could proclaim themselves "the experts"? What gave them authority to judge whether or not this African American

middle-school aged girl was the author of these poems? Why was the authentication important to the American colonist? The men, who proclaimed themselves “the most respectable people of Massachusetts,” included the governor and lieutenant governor, seven ministers, three poets, six loyalists, and several leaders of the battle for independence. Many were Harvard graduates. They were self-appointed experts, and gave themselves the authority to pass judgments. The eighteen American colonists were gathered to interrogate a vulnerable young girl of African descent to vitiate or authenticate her humanity. During the 18th and 19th centuries, popular opinion held that African and other indigenous peoples were not fully human. The idea of White Supremacy emerged philosophical writings during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Carruthers (2005):

The lowest point of modern western philosophy was the inclusion of arguments for White supremacy and "Negro" inferiority in philosophical writings during the 18th and 19th centuries. The prestige of some of the thinkers compounds the evil. David Hume (On National Character), Charles Montesquieu (The Spirit of the Laws), and Georg Hegel (The Philosophy of History) were the forerunners for writers like Thomas Carlyle (The Nigger Question) and Joseph Gobineau (The Inequality of the Human Races) who were in turn forerunners of Adolph Hitler.(p.2)

Gates (2003) explains “the broader discourse of race and reason in the eighteenth century” including the foremost thinkers of the era such as “Francis Bacon, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Frederick Hegel” did not believe Africans human”(p.23).

Gates expands the discussion of discourse of race and reason in the following quote from Hume:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than White, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica indeed they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning [Francis Williams]; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishment, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (p.23)

Gates further explains the racist nature of eighteenth century discourse when he cites Kant's response to Hume:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from the countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who

presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the Whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. (p.24)

Even as I write these words it is hard for me to accept that these men actually believed the words they wrote. Perhaps, they convinced themselves to assuage their guilt for having behaved toward us in such inhumane fashion. How could these “most respectable” men truly believe that a people, so beautiful, powerful and forgiving...could be less human than themselves? They were men, men who enslaved, brutalized, raped, and killed for money. How could they imagine themselves better than a people who survived against all attempts to destroy them? How could they later justify the repression and oppression of African American people? After winning their freedom African Americans did not seek revenge. First, most sought reunion with loved ones and family members. Second, African Americans pursued yearnings, and quests for education.

*Fertile Soil: African American Feminists and Pioneers*

Black women often led relentless quests for education , in spite of the seemingly impossible odds arrayed against them (Bell, 1992; Bell-Scott, 1994; Bell-Scott & Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Collins, 2000; Dyson, 2003; Etter-Lewis, 1993; hooks, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wing, 2003).When Phyllis Wheatley passed the test that legitimized her as the author of the first book written in English by a member of the African Diaspora in 1772, she became an education pioneer. Yet, when she died in 1784,

she was only thirty years old, and her third child died with her. Her first two children died before her. Her husband had already abandoned her. And the erasure of Black women from history continued.

Sojourner Truth was born in 1797; Maria Miller Stewart was born in 1803; and Anna Julia Cooper was born in 1859. All three African American women spoke convincingly and articulately for foundational education, yet, their names are fundamentally omitted from most historical documentation of educational pioneers. There is an amaranthine tally of African American women who fought for educational, social, and feminist justice. Virginia W. Broughton, Nannie Burroughs, Julia A.J. Foote, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Jarena Lee, Gertrude Bustill Mossell, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida Wells-Barnett are names the astute researcher would readily discover buried in the deep chasms erected by White historians. But what of the illiterate leaders? The unwritten texts and oral narratives of the mothers of African American society were stolen from the world by a system that held them in contempt. The narratives of the women listed above are found only by those who search assiduously for them. Therefore, I find it imperative to give voice to some of the philanthropically instrumental African American women educators.

Almost two decades after Phillis Wheatley died a free woman in America, Maria Miller Stewart was born. Stewart was the first African American woman to speak publicly about the rights of women in general and “daughters of Africa” in particular. As one of the first feminist’s, Stewart encouraged women to develop their minds, build schools, and become teachers. In an essay that first appeared as one of the first feminist texts in 1831, Stewart created theory. She subsequently delivered speeches from her text

in several venues. The first venue was the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society in Boston. Stewart (1831, 1995) eloquently elucidates her emphases:

I would strongly recommend to you to improve your talents; let not one lie buried in the earth. Show forth your powers of mind...unite heart and soul, and turn attention to knowledge and improvement... let us make a mighty effort, and arise, and if no one will promote or respect us, let us promote and respect ourselves...Let every female heart become united.

(p.26 &28)

Stewart challenged African American women to improve themselves through educational endeavors. Stewart subsequently broadened the scope to include both “powers of the mind” and “heart and soul.” She encouraged women combine their talents and work with the entirety of their gifts to engender respect. Notably, Stewart excogitated feminism in two important ways. First, she enjoined women to respect themselves when others did not. Second, she extended the invitation to all women. “Let every female heart become united” together in the struggle for educational opportunities. It was certainly an ambitious goal, one American society has yet to achieve.

Anna Julia Cooper similarly honored the achievements of the women of her era. In 1892 she wrote the first full-length black feminist text, *A Voice from the South*. Cooper states:

- Sojourner Truth, that unique and rugged genius who seemed carved out without hand or chisel from the solid mountain mass...
- Amanda Smith, sweetest of natural singers and pleaders in dulcet tones for the things of God and of His Christ.

- Sarah Woodson Early and Martha Briggs, planting and watering in the school room, and giving off from their matchless and irresistible personality an impetus and inspiration which can never die so long as there lives and breathes a remote descendant of their disciples and friends.
- Charlotte Forten Grimke, the gentle spirit whose verses and life link her so beautifully with America's great Quaker poet and loving reformer.
- Hallie Quinn Brown, charming reader, earnest, effective lecturer and devoted worker of unflagging zeal and unquestioned power.
- Fannie Jackson Coppin, the teacher and organizer, preeminent among women of whatever country or race in constructive and executive force.

These women represent all shades of belief and as many departments of activity; but they have one thing in common-their sympathy with the oppressed race in America and the consecration of their several talents in whatever line to the work of its deliverance and development.(Cooper, 1992,1995, p.48)

African American women pioneers built the foundation for American women who followed. Upon this firm foundation, the next generation of African American women built opportunities for successive generations. People like, Elise Johnson Mc Dougald, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Amy Jaques Garvey, Sadie Tanner, Mosell Alexander, Florence “Flo” Kennedy, Claudia Jones, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lorraine Hansberry in the early 1900’s stepped forward to create opportunities for the next generation of educators and scholars. These opportunities assisted women who did not write any books or even attend college, but who are equally important, in the history of educational experience for

African American people. African American women are particularly relevant to a study of the educational experiences of African American girls.

*Historically Significant Educational Experiences for African American Girls*

In a patriarchy the education of women is regarded as insignificant. At best, the domestic sciences and service professions are designated. It is within this context that I discuss the educational experiences of African American girls in America. White men retained the most power, White women were granted some power, Black men were allotted almost naught, and Black womanhood was reduced to the lowest uncommon denominator. The title of a book written by Gloria Hull and Pat Bell-Scott appropriately states: "All the women are White, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave." What happens to little African American girls in this milieu?

One can search for years and only uncover exiguous information about the educational provisions made for African American girls. When educational initiatives commenced, it was for the benefit of the African American male (Collins, 2006; DuBois, 2005; Fordham, 1993; West, 1994). Even colleges who opened their doors to females and people of color designed programs of study that kept women in specific roles (Lorde, 1984; Taylor, 2002). White females were tracked into classes that would prepare them for teaching and nursing. Black men were prepared for roles that would keep them subservient to the desires of the White man. Black women were prepared for servitude, and African American girls were left vulnerable (Giddings, 1984; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1989).

African American girls were left vulnerable and unprotected in society, and retrograded to a nethermost priority where they remain. To say there was nothing available for them would be a lie. To say there were scanty provisions made for them would be an understatement. To describe the one area of sanctuary for the African American girl-child is the best I can do. The African American girl found sanctuary in the heart of the African American woman.

The heart beat of the African American woman was made visible in the club movement (Cooper, 1995; Knupfner, 1997; Stewart, 1995; Taylor, 2002). This movement sparked a revolution in the way women prevailed. The club movement gave African American women the power that numbers often amalgamate. Women's clubs helped abolish slavery, secure female suffrage, and protect women. African American women also used the clubs to lobby for social and educational reform. Hundreds of these women's club thrived in America, for example: "The Ida B. Wells Club, the Giles Charity Club, the Woman's City Club, the McCoy -Gaines Club and the Kansas Federation of Colored Women" (Brady, 1987, p. 69). These women created girl's clubs such as the Topeka Oak leaf Club, the Hallie Q. Brown Rosebuds, and the National association for Colored Girls.

Club Women established kindergartens, nurseries, homes for the elderly, boarding houses for young girls and single women, orphanages, youth clubs, and schools. African American women created these clubs from coast to coast. One of the most well documented Clubs was the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home in Chicago, Illinois. Established by Elizabeth Lindsey Davis in 1896, it met the needs of the growing numbers of young endangered women escaping from the hateful southern states to the hateful

northern states. Another important sanctuary for girls was the National Training School for Women and Girls (NTS), founded by Nannie Helen Burroughs in 1909. (Brady, 1987; Knupfer, 1997; Taylor, 2002) I focus on the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home, and NTS these two institutions are both significant because they illustrate how African American women provided educational experiences for African American girls.

These two institutions are particularly relevant for several reasons. Both organizations were founded and sustained by African American women. Both organizations were dedicated to the uplift, and protection of young women. Both organizations were independent of White benefactors; they acquired financial support directly from the African American community. Both institutions kept their fingers on the pulse beat of African American communities and moved with compassionate understanding of the vital imperatives.

Though both institutions were dedicated to helping African American girls and women, their primary foci diverged. In 1896, The Phyllis Wheatley Club opened in Chicago, Illinois, and continued helping hundreds of girls each year until 1920. The club was dedicated to young women who were variously, working, trying to join the work force, or attending a university. NTS focused on providing a quality education for African American girls, and began with ten students, but soon had pupils from “nearly every state, and also in Puerto Rico, Haiti, South America and Africa and pursued careers as school principals, nurses, doctors, civil servants, entrepreneurs, and administrators” (Taylor, 2002, p.399). First, I use these two examples to contextualize education as it generally relates to African American educational philosophy. Second, I explore the unique qualities that relate to African American girls.

*Sprouting Seeds: An African American Philosophy of Education*

Historically, education in the African American community represented hope. This hope for individual education was dichotomous to community accountability. The duality of commitment is illustrated in the National Association of Colored Women's motto: "Lifting as we climb" and the Phyllis Wheatley School motto: "If you can't push, pull, If you can't pull, please get out of the way." These mottos characterize an African American philosophy of education, Perry (2003) states:

For African Americans, from slavery to the modern Civil Rights movement, the answers were these: You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p.11)

Education for the African American people carried a communal responsibility for helping each other. Within this empathetic ethos of engagement the African American women's clubs were created, "Lifting as we climb" was more than a motto; it was a mission. Marie Fines wrote a song to emphasize the club movements' mission; the lyrics included the following words:

Train the junior girls all over the world,  
For as we step out they will step in,  
For the things we do will go to prove.  
Lifting as we climb we will win.  
(Brady, 1987, p. 72)

African American women were determined to press forward and bring others along as they advanced. This goal was clearly defined in the National Association of Colored Women's two-fold vision statement. First, the association was dedicated to assisting those who were less fortunate than themselves. Second, they were committed to self improvement. Education was an arrow directed toward mutual targets. Knupfner (1997) eloquently expressed the spirit of the African American club women:

The Club not only provided community service, but also served as a marker of social class, status, and prestige. These multiple activities and roles of club women...reflected the complexities of social reform ideology and social uplift practices during the Progressive Era...club women and other community members united in their efforts to combat racism and discrimination in employment, housing, and access to public facilities. Because club women were aware of the double burden of racism and sexism which all African-American women faced, more often than not they reached "across" rather than "down" to their less fortunate sisters. (p.222)

The clubs formed by White women, for example, The Daughters of the American Revolution, tended to exclude those deemed socially unacceptable. African American philanthropists had goals for helping their less fortunate sisters elevate their status. Education was the field used to reach the stated goals for uplift, and community advancement.

Within this milieu of mutual striving, the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Chicago was established, "In 1896 in accordance with the National Association of Colored Women's

(NACW) departments of Home, Education, Domestic Science, Philanthropy, Industry, Literature, Art, Suffrage, and Patriotism” (Knupfner, 1997, p. 222). The Phyllis Wheatley Club was formed under the umbrella of the larger organization of NACW which governed clubs all over America. Clubs in California, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Washington DC, have significant documentation, however, there were African American girls’ clubs in virtually every state. (Brady, 1978; Knupfner; Savage, 2002; Taylor, 2002). The Phyllis Wheatley Home was swiftly established as a refuge for young, single African American women. Many of the women escaped from the hostile and deadly South, but found unemployment, and a different breed of racism in the north. These women faced the dangers of being single, unprotected, and unemployed; club women rallied together to aid them. Support for African American womanhood was needed from establishments like the Phyllis Wheatley Home, and schools.

Nannie Helen Burroughs paid close attention to the need for schools. Burroughs founded the National Training School for Women and Girls, Incorporated (NTC) for African American girls. Taylor (2002) notes a significant difference between the Burroughs’s school and others: “It was founded by an African American woman, for African American women and girls, and... it was funded completely by the African American community” (p.390). These issues were important for several reasons. First, most education favored the dominant White male patriarchy and excluded women and African Americans. Second, when schools admitted African American students they were often funded by White benefactors who controlled the crucial issues pertaining to subject matter, hiring practice, and financial allocations. Third, schools were

coeducational and not concerned with the specific needs of African American womanhood. In contrast NTC,

Was not co-educational, it was not funded by any White benefactors, and it was not limited to training girls for the “traditional” female occupations. Burroughs wanted to train God-fearing women who would be committed to the uplift of their race. (Taylor, 2002, p. 391)

NTC first identified, and then focused on the unique yearnings of African American women and girls. The important decisions were controlled by Burroughs and supported by the church and club women. Burroughs stressed self-reliance and professional accountability to her students. She was actively involved in her church and used the guiding principles of her faith to strengthen her dedication to helping African American girls fulfill their hopes, and dreams.

The hopes and dreams of African American women and girls are distinctive but commonly disregarded by society. Fordham (1993) explains:

African-American women bring to the academy broadly defined— a history of womanhood that differs from that of White or any other American women. African-American women's history stands in striking contrast to that generally associated with White womanhood and includes (1) more than 200 years in which their status as women was annulled, compelling them to function in ways that were virtually indistinguishable from their male slave counterparts; (2) systemic absence of protection by African-American and all other American men; (3) construction of a new definition of what it means to be female out of the stigma associated with

the black experience and the virtue and purity affiliated with White womanhood; and (4) hard work (including slave and domestic labor), perseverance, assertiveness, and self-reliance. (p.8)

In other words, few people care about African American women, except African American women. Although there is a growing body of research to address the unique needs of African American women and girls, the existence of NTC over eight decades ago underscores the persistent lack and long-suffering nature of educational experiences for African American girls. Burroughs recognized a need that is as yet, unmet in America.

The similarity between the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs of Black women is shockingly omnipresent. NTC promoted the development of “true womanhood.” Fordham promotes a “new definition” of Black womanhood that exists separately, not comparatively, from White womanhood. According to Burroughs this new definition of true womanhood included training “designed to make its pupils keen of vision, alert in action, modest in deportment, deft of hand, and industrious in life” (Taylor, 2002, p.394). Similar sentiments are echoed by contemporary African American women scholars searching for ways to uplift African American girls (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Fordham, 1993; Hanley, 1995; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott, 1991). The goals for racial uplift, the ability to re-define womanhood on our own terms, and honor the African American women of the past becomes problematic when the next generation does not understand the sacrifices of the previous generation. African American women including Nannie Helen Burroughs, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Mc McLeod Bethune, and many thousands of Black women before them made sacrifices of which, the current

generation is unaware. Sonia Sanchez in Johnson-Bailey (1998) speaks to the deep disappointment experienced by Black women when young people do not know the history of women who carved paths, and tunneled through mountains to remove obstacles for them:

But in spite of our oppression we have maintained our humanity. We might be in danger of losing it with this younger generation, so our work is very important. We must work hard to make them understand the history/herstory that we have in the world—the humanity and the love that we have. I say to young people, I did not fight all these years to pull these sisters out of history, to put African women back on the world stage, to write about them and teach about them to have you get on stage and act like a fool or to become sex objects on MTV. It is a constant fight at the university and all over the earth to bring African women on center stage again, out of people's homes where they have relegated us – always somebody's mammy public or private. (p.218)

This passage echoes Nannie Burroughs's goals for young girls in her school and resonates with contemporary objectives for the education of African American girls. Supplying African American girls with the tools needed to survive in a hostile world is an enduring enterprise for individuals dedicated to the education of African American girls.

There is a crucial and immediate need to provide African American girls with the same kinds of skills Burroughs wanted for her students:

To give personal attention to the whole life of the girl—health, manners and character as well as to the mind. To prepare girls to preside over and

maintain well ordered, homes. To build the fiber of a sturdy, industrious, and intellectual woman. To prepare leaders by emphasizing honor, orderliness, precision, promptness [and] courage. (Taylor, 2002, p.394)

Burroughs's devoted her life to holistic concerns for African American girls. She trained girls for life by paying attention to extrinsic and intrinsic needs. The stated characteristics would benefit most civilized people; the fact that they were articulated in 1920 does not negate their importance in the present. Sonia Sanchez (1998) underscores this point:

I told them how at the turn of the century Black women started clubs because White women would not let them into their clubs. We were called whores and prostitutes because of our enslavement. We couldn't help it. It wasn't prostitution. They raped us. These Black women went to newspapers and said, "We're not whores, we're not prostitutes, we are church women, we are good women. You cannot denigrate us in the newspapers the way you have done." And now, I said, "You willingly denigrate yourself on TV." They cried and they said no one had ever told them that before. (pp.219-220)

May Angelou's oral truism "Once I knew better, I did better" succinctly summarizes the previous reference. Many young African American girls truly do not know any better. There are many reasons that can be attributed to this phenomenon. For example there are increasing numbers of single parent households, an absence of strong communities, and broadening geographical spaces between extended families. Additionally, negative images and messages in popular media are proliferated. Also, there is a lack of support for public schools. In other words, there are myriad reasons that African American girls

are miseducated. Miseducation can be traced directly to the horrid circumstances of an African Diaspora that is still suffering effects of global enslavement for African people; African American girls are still crying out for guidance. (Cade, 1970; Collins, 2006; DuBois, 2001; Dyson, 2004; Franklin, 2005; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 2001; Mosley, 2000; West, 2001; Woodson, 1990). A culturally relevant pedagogy for African American Middle School girls is crucial.

*In Full Bloom: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Any discussion of the educational opportunities and experiences of African American girls must be contextualized within the experience of African American women. When looking at African American women their experiences are immersed within dominate patriarchal societies. Schooling experiences for African American Middle School girls is further submerged within the institutional racism of the larger society. It is because of these extenuating circumstances that a discussion of the African American female educational experience is complex.

Adding to the complexities of an investigation into the educational experiences of African American Middle School girls is the truth that they are seldom a topic of serious investigation or academic study. Finding articles about this topic is like searching for an emerald in a field of Kentucky bluegrass. Where are African American girls situated? It seems that all the adolescent girls are White, all the boys are black, and the African American girls are audacious.

An investigation into the theories and methods specific to the education of African American girls leads almost exclusively to the efficacy of African American

women. However, this efficacy is complicated by the fact that methods used by this population to help their sisters, daughters, nieces, and fictive kin are undocumented. This fissure in the literature is directly related to factors embedded in the multiple ways women of color are “doubly refracted others” (Fordham, 1993). African American women have to overcome the double obstacles of race and gender, and the double consciousness of being simultaneously African and American. There are three foremost clarifications for this crisis of representation. First, African American women are in a constant struggle to survive. Second, once they have achieved a level of academic pedigree, it is much more difficult for them to publish their research. Third, when the research is published, their proximity to the topic is called into question. This occurs when the academy pervasively prefers an “outsider” perspective about the “other” (Alridge, 2003; Back & Solomos, 2000; Bell, 1987, 1992; Collins, 2000; Dyson, 2004; Fordham, 1993; Guy- Sheftall, 1995; Hull, et al, 1982; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lorde, 1984; Scott, 1991; Wing, 2000).

African American epistemologies, ways of knowing, are also treated suspiciously when theories are developed for the efficacy of African American education. These epistemologies are in radical opposition to the westernized colonized systems that privileges independence, greed, dominance, and manifest destiny. It is this dominator mentality which, kills, rapes, destroys, and oppresses for material gain that has been a detriment to the advancement of African American epistemologies (Bell, 1987, 1982; Dillard, 2006; Dyson, 2003, 2005; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Freire, 2000; Lorde, 1984). This dominator/ colonizer ideology first rejects difference, then coops it, and finally claims it as its own (Guy, 1992; hooks, 1994; Tate, 2003). It is no wonder that African American

women, and indeed all oppressed people constantly battle for survival in a world that attempts at every turn to erase them. Oppressed people are forced to depend on the very people who would like to destroy them because, “Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power—not because they don’t see it, but because they do see it and they don’t want it to exist” (hooks, 1994, p.49). African American women possess epistemologies that have endured forever. However, these ways of knowing are in direct opposition to dominant discourses (Dillard, 2006).

Instead of embracing alternate ways of knowing, there is and has been a tendency to silence, erase, and change ideas in a way that steals the spirit of the idea. For example Freire first coined the term *Praxis*. He defined praxis as, reflection and action which precedes transformation. However, the Educational Testing Service reduced “praxis” to the title of a standardized test. Another example of the way transformative ideologies of oppressed people are perverted can be found in the ancient African American proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The original connotation analogized the concept of community responsibility for the care and discipline of child rearing. However, it became just another political catch phrase.

Perhaps one of the most devastating examples of stealing the spirit of an idea is the “no child left behind” legislature. This phrase originated in a speech by Marian Wright-Edelman, who established the National Children’s Defense Fund. The tone and intent of the speech was to lobby for the welfare of American children. Instead, “no child left behind” legislature became a shovel which buried children alive.

Children are suffocating under the weight of standardized testing. Standardized testing is a feature of “no child left behind” legislature, and is reported in the literature as

biased against minority populations (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997; Barone, & Eisner, 1988; Bell, 1987; Paley, 2000; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Rothenberg, 2002). Like so much else in the world of dominance and oppression the particular knowledges of the dominated and oppressed are stolen, misused, and then confiscated and reinscribed as an invention of the oppressor. Thus the original creator, the oppressed people are erased. Hooks (1994) articulates this concept: This erasure is rendered all the more problematic when artifacts of that “vanishing culture” are commoditized to enhance the aesthetics of those perpetuating the erasure (p.49). Erasure or devaluation of spiritual epistemologies is another method used to devalue African American women.

African American women have long held spiritual epistemologies which, are in opposition to most White male dominant ways of being. Spiritual epistemologies are ways of knowing that consider the whole person in contrast to “dualism of the body and soul” (Asante, 1980; Bell, 1996; Cotton, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Dillard, 2006; Dimitriadis, G. & Carlson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Palmer, 1993; Richards, 1989; Stewart, 1995; Twine, F., 2000; Wade-Gayles, 1995). Spiritual ways of knowing are reiteratively ridiculed. Dillard (2006) defines Spiritual Epistemologies:

All that we do in every aspect of our lives speaks volumes about what we value and believe to be true about whatever we are undertaking, whether teaching, research, or service. We acknowledge by our every action, whether peace and justice are fundamental to the well-being of human relationships and life on this planet. From my perspective, this is not an optional part of an academic life that places spirit at the center. Part of our responsibility as teachers and researchers is to engage in continual

examination, reflection, and definition of who we are in our academic lives-and who we are becoming. This will give us insight into ways to create an academic life that serves and does not destroy and that resists those spaces and places that resist social justice, through embracing a paradigm where culture and spirit are central and peace and justice is the work. (p. 43)

Partially because of the absence of educational systems with culture and spirit at the forefront, it has been a difficult road toward culturally relevant pedagogy for African American girls.

Instead of a culturally relevant pedagogy, most African American girls receive an education that teaches them to hate themselves. This self loathing is often manifested in trying to imitate the oppressor. In Alice Walker's "The Bluest Eye" her protagonist wishes for the blonde hair and blue eyes of Shirley Temple. In today's society you can see this equivalent desire in the Black girls who straighten their hair, bleach it blonde and put blue contacts over their beautiful brown eyes. This self antipathy is reflected also in the eyes of celebrities like Bill Cosby who after forty years of silence, recently launched an attack against matters pertaining to African American culture:

What the hell good is Brown vs. the Board of Education if nobody wants it? And if they're getting in the way? ...When you walk around the neighborhood and you see this stuff, that stuff's not funny anymore. And that's not my brother. And that's not my sister. They're faking and they are dragging me way down. (Dyson, 2005, p. 58)

Bill Cosby is a funny man. He is a pioneer who broke barriers and opened doors. Further, Bill Cosby and his wife Camille are generous benefactors to the African American community. However, it seems he lost touch with the reality of the multitudes of Black Americans who remain trapped in cycles of oppression. It seems he has believed the gross mis-representations of the media. Can it be that he has forgotten where he came from? He might be trapped in a self imposed cycle, where he must first blame, and then attack the victim. A close examination of the study conducted by Ogbu (2005) may lead to the conclusion that both he and Cosby are engaged in a similar strategy. Lacking an understanding of the African American people they identify themselves as “other” with respect to African Americans.

For example Ogbu (2003) is hyper-critical of the African American students and parents in his study: “Black students verbally emphasized the importance of effort in achieving school success. But they do not work hard” (p.280). Ogbu compares African Americans to White families and states: “on the whole they were less attentive to what was going on” (p228). Additionally Ogbu states: “Black parents usually did not ask questions that were relevant to their children’s academic work” (p.233). When Ogbu discusses the motivation behind Black parents bringing their children to open house when White parents did not, he admits to a lack of understanding. However, instead of seeking a positive, or even a necessity he suggests, “The parents did not feel comfortable attending the Open House on their own or they did not know the purpose of Open house” (p.233).

Ogbu and Cosby choose to ignore a past filled with the horrors of an enslaved people, and refuse to interrogate the “permanence of racism” (Bell, 1992). In fact, the modern shackles around hearts and minds have successfully imprisoned Ogbu and Cosby making them tools in the continued oppression of Black Americans (Dyson, 2004; Mosley, 2000; Woodson, 1990). Further evidence of Ogbu’s cecity is illustrated in his lack of understanding about why the African American community did not trust him:

One major problem we did not satisfactorily resolve was finding an accommodation conveniently located for the study and acceptable to the Black community because housing was difficult to find, we accepted the offer of a room in the home of a White school board member. This soon made our status in the Black community somewhat problematic. Even though we spent almost all our time doing research at school and in the Black community, and used our residence primarily as a place to sleep, some Blacks still thought that living in the home of a White school board member would bias our research in favor of the school district. The concern over our residence in the home of a White family was a strong indicator of the mistrust the Black community had for the school system and the White people who controlled it (pp. xvi-xvii).

It seems apparent that the African American community of Shaker Heights possessed a great deal of insight, knowledge, and wisdom that Ogbu gave them absolutely no credit for in his book. Nonetheless, he proved their intelligence because they were evidently correct in their assessment of him. On page after page Ogbu blames

the African American community, who asked for his help, while exonerating the institution that paid for his research, and provided his lodging.

Both Ogbu and Cosby are playing the blame the victim game. Cosby attacks African American culture, taking the stance that, “We are not Africans” although it is not clear just who the “we” he refers to is; and Ogbu readily admits that he was not looking for problems with the institutions. Instead, he began his research looking for problems within the African American community. As is often the case, he discovered exactly what he sought. An appropriate summary for the discussion above is a question: “*Is this self-hatred-or someone hating me?*” There is no answer to this question. The source of loathing is indistinguishable from external and internal origins” (Mosley, 2000, p.44).

As explained by Mosley, and predicted by Carter G. Woodson, often illustrious characters go to great extremes to exhibit their self hatred:

The Negro stands just as high as others in contributing to the progress of the world. The oppressor, however, raises his voice to the contrary. He teaches the Negro that he has no worth-while past, that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and that there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great. The education of the Negro then must be carefully directed lest the race may waste time trying to do the impossible. Lead the Negro to believe this and thus control his thinking. If you can thereby determine what he will think, you will not need to worry about what he will do. You will not have to tell him to go to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door he will have one cut for his special benefit. (Woodson, 1990, p.192)

The problems encountered by African American girls as they experience education in the American public schools are compounded by a history of racism in America, "...survived by absorbing unimaginable acres of pain into a collective unconscious that cannot forget"(Mosley, 2000, p.42).These difficulties are magnified by a system that first negates and then appropriates their creative gifts. Collins (2006) terms this phenomenon as a: "curious position of invisibility and hypervisibility" (p. 4). The invisibility/hypervisibility split points to the concept that Black youth in popular media completely overshadow the reality of most Black youth whose actuality resides in "the dual processes of economic decline and the failure of racial integration" (Collins, 2006, p.5). These issues make survival difficult for African American students to succeed in a system that tends to alternately ignore and suppress them. These several circumstances: racism, miseducation, suppression, omission, and oppression of their unique and specific strengths are the issues culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to remediate, alleviate, and combat. Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to create circumstances to empower students to survive in a system designed to kill their spirits.

*Because...hope: Cultural Relevance Theories*

Emerging from discourse about culturally relevant pedagogy are four distinct theories relevant for a study about the educational experiences of African American girls. Those are The Ladson-Billings Approach, Afro / Africentism, Transformative approaches, and Connections between Art and Language. Each theory has unique aspects that I briefly outline in this section; however, a shared hope unites the triune theories. Winfield (2006) states:

*Because...hope*

*(Words and phrases from “Outlaw Culture” taken out of context and fashioned into a poem)*

female creativity has difficulty making itself seen

add to that being a creative black female...

it's even more difficult

this erasure is rendered even more problematic when

artifacts of our vanishing cultures are commoditized

to enhance the aesthetic of those performing the erasure

sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because

they recognize your power—

not because they don't see it, because they do see it

but they don't want your power to exist

we fall into periods of critical breakdown

because we feel there is no world

there is no world that will embrace us

grappling with betrayal leads to an understanding

of compassion, of forgiveness, of acceptance

that creates a certain kind of powerful love

redemptive love...is hinted then... goes away

and we don't know where it goes

why did it go away?

I want there to be a place in the world

where people engage in one another's differences

in one another's possibilities

using everything, everything we know

already know, to know more

hope because. because...hope.

(hooks, 1994, pp.2, & 24, 48-52)

*The Ladson-Billings Approach, Afro / Africentrism, and Transformative*

approaches have hope at their core. "Hope springs eternal"; "what does not kill us makes us stronger"; "keep your head to the sky"; "we fall down but we get back up"; and "brush yourself off and try again" are just a few iterations in the African American community. These phrases, as well as the multitudinous writings of African American people are part of the cultural capitol of a rich African culture. Although the first quote comes from Alexander Pope, an eighteenth-century English poet, it is as relevant as the quotes which originate in mother-wit, gospel songs, and contemporary African American song lyrics. The embedded message is to expect failure and keep going anyway. They are relevant to a review of the literature relating to the educational experiences of African American girls because perseverance is a major concern in culturally relevant pedagogy.

I will briefly discuss three theories of culturally relevant pedagogy: The Ladson-Billings Approach, which focuses on teacher education; Afrocentrism and Africentrism, which place the students and teachers at center; and Transformative approaches, which centralize transformational knowledge as the means to implement culturally relevant pedagogy.

### *The Ladson-Billings Approach*

The definition articulated by Ladson-Billings (1994) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as instruction that:

Empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p. 18)

In other words, a culturally relevant pedagogy gives students the tools to persevere in a dominant culture by teaching them to embrace their own culture, and respect different cultures. Culturally relevant pedagogy teaches students love themselves and from that place of self love, they learn to honor and respect differences among their peers.

In contrast, Hirsch speaks of cultural relevance from an authoritative stance, which privileges “White supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture” (hooks, 1995). For example Hirsch (2002) states: “No one in the English speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible” (p.1). Elementary students are taught to avoid the usage of absolutes, however, the arrogance of Hirsch’s claims, and apparently certain belief in the superiority of his Whiteness and maleness, allows Hirsch to reach wide audiences with his Eurocentric tome, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, claims both cultural relevance, and cultural dominance. This theory of cultural literacy is the direct opposite of the articulations from other scholars (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1994b; Cazden, 2001; Dalton, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Freire, 2000; Gilyard,

1996; Gordon, 1993; 1994, 1995; Guy, 1999; hooks, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paley, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; West, 2001).

The Ladson – Billings Theory of culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on teacher preparation. She identifies three goals for culturally relevant pedagogy, academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In order to meet these goals, Ladson – Billings identifies three theories of culturally relevant pedagogy: the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers.

These theories are further clarified as specific observable attributes:

#### Conceptions of self and others

- believed all students were capable of learning
- saw their pedagogy as art
- saw themselves as members of the community
- saw teaching as a way to give back to the community
- believed in the Freirean notion of “teaching as mining”(1974, p.76) or pulling knowledge out

#### Social relations

- maintain fluid student-teacher relationships
- demonstrate a connectedness with all students
- develop a community of learners
- encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another

## Conceptions of knowledge

- knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed
- knowledge must be viewed critically
- Teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning
- Teachers must *scaffold*, or build bridges to facilitate learning
- Assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence

Although, the Ladson-Billings Theory of culturally relevant pedagogy primarily focuses on teacher preparation, and other approaches focus on students and schools, they uniformly share the goal of giving hope to African American students.

### *Afrocentricism*

An Afrocentric theory of culturally relevant pedagogy is defined by several concepts. Lee et al, (1990) state that cultural literacy:

(a) legitimizes African knowledge base; (b) builds on productive community and cultural practices; (c) uses and extends indigenous language; (d) reinforces community ties and promotes service to family, community, nation, race, and world; (e) promotes positive social relationships; (f) imparts a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others; supports cultural continuity and critical consciousness. (p.50)

Afrocentrism attempts to prevent the erasure of the African culture by providing meaningful educational experiences for African American students, while honoring other cultural groups represented in American classrooms. To move from theory to practice

Afrocentric scholars suggest several strategies. First, they identify the critical need for those of the dominant culture to critically examine current educational practice. Second, they advocate a renewed dedication to the equality of educational facilities. Third, they call for political action that moves beyond the rhetoric of “No Child Left Behind” with its standardization without representation stratagem, into an ethic of caring that will reach across and uplift. In other words, Africentrism places African knowledges at the center of educational practice. African knowledges can be summarized as ways of knowing that construct cooperative community and cultural practices; nurtures and empowers indigenous communication; strengthens and serves family and society; advances affirmative relationships with the world; embraces personal empowerment while respecting the rights of others; and strives for social and economic justice.

One way for the dominant culture to critically examine educational practice would be to examine history. The world could learn a great deal about how to transform society by studying the methodologies of the Great African American Civil Rights Movement. According to Mosley (2002):

The Black experience is a subject that is supremely American. It is the history of a centuries-long war in which one group of people strove for justice, for a fair share. Relegating Black history to an elective or a ghetto or a moment in the past holds us all back. Black history is a torch that can lead us out of darkness. In order to find the way we have to work together

and follow one another's strengths. Black history can't address every issue but it can certainly talk about refusing to go another step without an accounting. It can show you how every man woman and child can be an impediment to injustice. (p.53)

The idea of Black history as particularly relevant for African American girls is significant because there is a fertile history of African American women, and their accomplishments that is absent from the current curriculum. An infusion of the history of African American women would benefit African American girls.

### *Africentrism*

Africentrism retains the core theories of Afrocentrism. Afrocentrism expresses a world view that formulates affirmative and enfranchised social relationships through service, reinforces cultural continuity and community ties, builds on productive cultural practices, including honoring indigenous languages, and enacts a critical consciousness that embraces self worth along with the right of self-determination for others. However, Africentrism adds three additional theories. Africentric theorists promote the creation of independent schools, Pan Africanism, and African spiritual knowledges. According to Shockley (2003): "Africentric educationists believe that Black children should be taught to take control of their communities because the current arrangement, (which is apartheid-like), is dehumanizing, demoralizing, and lends to low self-esteem" (p. 46). In other words, Africentricism asserts that independent schools are critical for providing a culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students. The failure of public schools to meet the needs of African American children is shameful (Kozol, 2005). Africentrism

provides a viable alternative to current educational practice (Cade, 1970; Dyson, 2003; Kozol, 2005; Ladson- Billings, 2006; Perry, et.al, 2003). Afrocentrism provides a proactive alternative for educating Black children that teaches students to embrace their own culture while respecting other cultures.

Lomotey (1978) explains:

The American educational system will never meet the needs of Black students because the successful accomplishment of that end is not in the best interest of those who are in power. What we are suggesting then is that public education in the U.S. has not worked in the best interest of African American people. (p. 11)

Shockley (2003) further clarifies Africentric theories:

As stated before, the ability to control the institutions in one's community is tantamount to having control over your own destiny. Africentrics hold that if someone else builds and controls the institutions in the Black community, then Blacks are at the whim of those who control those institutions. (Shockley, 2003, pp. 46-47).

In addition to independent schools with the dichotomous self-determinant theories, Africentric educationists articulate the need for Pan African and African values.

Lomotey (1990) states:

The Pan Africanist principle is the belief that Africa is the home of all people of African descent and all Black people should work for the total liberation and unification of Africa and Africans around the world...and schools for African American children should be based upon this principle. (p. ix)

Africentric educationists believe that children of African Diaspora are not being educated appropriately anywhere in the world. Pan African principles support a unified effort from all African peoples globally. The idea of universal unity is consistent with an African centered epistemology. Africentric educationists believe that children need to understand their cultural heritage. There are seven ontological terms that represent Africentrism. The Kiswahili words and the English translations follow:

1. Umoja – Unity
2. Kujichagulia – Self Determination
3. Ujima – Collective Work and Responsibility
4. Ujamaa – Cooperative Economics
5. Nia – Purpose
6. Kuumba – Creativity
7. Imani – Faith. (Shockley, 2003, p. 40)

Unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith are concepts that are not often taught in public schools. According to Africentrist's, African cultural knowledges are crucial for reversing the damages done to African American students, and instrumental for delivering hope.

Afrocentric Schools exist in many part of the United States, and Canada has a significant number of schools. The Afrikan Children's Advanced Learning Center. Oakland, California; Miller African Centered Academy Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Nsoromma School, Atlanta, Georgia; and Roots Activity Learning Center, Washington DC are noteworthy models. There is also a growing trend among African Americans to homeschool their children; National African-American Homeschoolers Alliance North Carolina was founded to meet some of their needs.

### *Transformative*

In his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donaldo Macedo "...found comfort in the immeasurable hope that Paulo represented for those of us who are committed to imagine a world, in his own words, that is less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanizing, more humane." I add the concept of love to the discussion.

True learning and effective pedagogy must have at its genesis, love. If you can continue to love after you have been hurt, after you have suffered and prepare yourself to forgive, before you have been hurt—then you are fully human. Only the fully human can be appropriately taught. Only the fully human can effectively learn. True learning flourishes in an environment of love. And only the loving can transform society in a way that is beneficial to all members of society.

In my opinion, love is even more important than respect because respect is simply a facet of love. If I love myself, I will automatically respect others... out of the issues of the heart arise the words. Spoken words, therefore, are the mirror to a human heart.

Respect, then, is defined as—a derivative of love, initiated in actions motivated by compassion, grace and mercy towards self and others regardless of perceived position. This is my theoretical extension of Freire’s “problem posing” education, with concrete application in Vygotsky’s mediated act, and bell hooks’ engaged pedagogy.

A person who uses love to transform a mountain of evil into possibility is exercising a praxis of possibility. Love is rock solid and unshakeable. It is not weak as many people view it. Love takes perseverance; it is an open invitation to painful experiences. Reacting to anger with anger, trading insult for insult, or silently sulking is an infinitely more automatic reflex, and therefore easily accomplished. However, turning anger, insults, and offenses into a dialectic of communication requires love. Love is an unnatural human response to anger. A person who can react in love when confronted with adversity is transformative in nature. This person, with firm, consistent pressure over time is both transformative and creative. Effective pedagogy is transformative. True learning is creative. Both have always at the core, love. Love hopes; both are transformative.

There are three specific theories of culturally relevant pedagogy. The Ladson-Billings Approach seeks to counteract the erasure of all other cultures in order to privilege Eurocentric cultures by focusing on the kind of teacher education that, trains teachers to create avenues of success for all students. Afro-centric and Africentric theories centralize understandings of African culture to transcend assimilation, promote self-love, and respect diverse cultures. Transformative approaches are grounded in love and hope to nurture the creative abilities of students, and include the overlapping

concepts of language and visual art. The creative ability of African American children is an area that I explore in the next section. Specifically, I investigate the intersection of language and visual arts.

### *Intersectionality of Art and Language*

The connections to language and visual arts are an important distinction to make when considering a curriculum that will facilitate the academic achievement for African American students. Creative disciplines are subsumed beneath the mathematics and sciences when most funding decisions are made (Burton et al., 1999; Eisner, 2002; Heath, 1983; Heath & Roach, 1999; hooks, 1995; Perry et al., 2003). Privileging math and science places creativity at the bottom of the list of priorities, which further disadvantages creative students in general and African American students in particular. (Cade, 1970; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; hooks, 1994; Kozol, 2005; Oreck et al., 1999).

Another connection between art and language is their potentially redemptive properties. hooks (1995) explains:

From my own experience, I could testify to the transformative power of art. I asked my audience to consider why in so many instances of global imperialist conquest by the West, art has been either appropriated or destroyed. I shared my amazement at all the African art I first saw years

ago in the museums and galleries of Paris. It occurred to me then that if one could make a people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their will and power to make art, then the work of subjugation, of colonization, is complete. Such work can be undone only by acts of concrete reclamation. (p. xv)

Both art and language can facilitate “acts of concrete reclamation” when children and adults alike look to their creative processes for healing.

In *The Habit of Surviving* by Kesho Yvonne Scott, the narrative of a woman named Marilyn provides evidence of the redemptive properties of language as she reflected on, “a litany of abortive quests for identity, betrayals by false social expectations, useless self-denials, and spurious successes...through it all, writing sustained her, and in the end, writing saved her” (Scott, 1991, p. 38).

According to Eisner (2002) “God lives in relationships” (p. 8). Clearly, God resides in the relationship between the language and visual arts. One need only walk outside to notice how creative S/He is. The strongest relationship between language and visual arts is creativity. In *The Arts and the Creation of the Mind*, Eisner outlines eight concepts that education can learn from the arts. This information is efficacious for describing the language and visual art connection.

<b>Eisner’s Lessons that the Arts Teach:</b>
1. Variability of outcome is okay: there can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem

<p><b>2.</b>Form and content interpenetrate: the way in which something is spoken shapes its meaning; form becomes content</p>
<p><b>3.</b>Imagination is important: invite students to see things other than the way they are</p>
<p><b>4.</b>God lives in relationships: the capacity for an art form to touch us depends on the way we relate to the composition. There is no chart one can consult, no prescription one can follow.</p>
<p><b>5.</b>Intrinsic Satisfaction matter: There is no great victory to learn to do something that one will not do when given the choice.</p>
<p><b>6.</b>Literal language and quantification are only two ways to understand and represent knowledge: music, poetry, drawings photographs and more convey knowledge and understanding</p>
<p><b>7.</b>Flexibility is important: objectives are held constant and means should be varied...improvise!</p>
<p><b>8.</b>Experience is not something you take; it is something you make: savor, relish, celebrate, enjoy...slow down—enjoy</p>

Both language and visual arts often facilitate the creation of self. The compensatory characteristic of language and visual art is a powerful connection between the two genres. Siegesmund (2004) states: “The arts are fundamental to how we make sense of the world around us, how we see ourselves in relationship to our world and how we interact with it” (p. 94). Therefore, I created a project that combines language and visual arts to offer

African American Middle School girls opportunities to describe their creation of self within culturally relevant school experiences. I chose the after school setting for several reasons. Key considerations are the early after school initiatives focused on boys, current after-school programs often ignore the needs of African American students, and what can happen to African American girls when educational institutions fail them.

### *After School Programs*

There are several versions of the story about the way the Boys Clubs began. In essence, two little-old-rich-White women invited some juvenile delinquent boys to tea. Quite to their surprise these boys were human beings. This made them wonder if all children needed the care and concern of loving adults. Thus, the Boys Clubs of American began. However, these original clubs excluded African American boys. As the name clearly implies, girls were also excluded. African American girls were doubly excluded. While many things have changed in contemporary after school initiatives, there is still a separate and unequal opportunity for African American youth (Heath & Adema, 1999; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Quinn, 1999; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). What happens to African American girls when educational institutions fail them is frightening. (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Miller, 1994; Siegal, 1995), however, there is promise in the fact that there has been historical and contemporary public concern for the well-being of adolescents during the time periods when they are not in school.

Public concern for students during after school and out-of-school time falls generally into three categories. The three most often cited public concerns are academic achievement, social skills, and relationships. These categories take on greater

significance according to the constituents and their concerns. The main constituents of after school programs are children, parents, and policy makers. Children express greatest concern for competency, relationships, and autonomy in an after school program. Parents are predominantly concerned with supervision and enrichment. Policy makers are most concerned with preventing crime, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse, and promoting school achievement (Dryfoos, 1999; Quinn, 1999; Larner et al., 1999). However, “programs can only work if they attract children and are trusted by parents,” and according to Quinn (1999) children want:

safe places to go, grow, learn, work, and ‘just hang out.’ They want structure balanced with choice. They want a voice in determining the program, services and opportunities. They want to learn and practice new skills. They want to spend more quality time with caring adults and with other young people. They want to contribute to the work of larger society. And—yes—they want to have fun. (p. 97)

Children have the highest stakes in the availability and the unavailability of after school programs. The types of programs available for children are as varied as their goals.

After school programs fall into two major typologies which are generalized as public and private programs. Public programs are primarily run by state and local governments and frequently receive funding from the federal government. Private programs are run by for-profit and philanthropic agencies. The early public programs began at the turn of the century. The Boys Club, YMCA, urban settlement houses, rural granges, 4-H organizations are featured prominently in the literature. The types of youth services provided by turn of the century youth organizations focused on

“recreational/educational groups, lending libraries, and cultural activities--art, music, theater, folk festivals. The diversity of programs reflected the needs of individual neighborhoods (Koern, 2003, p. 1). The public programs changed during the second world war to adapt to the needs of mothers working in the wartime shipyards and factories, becoming the prototype for contemporary day care centers.

The day care centers of the past became the 17,000 youth development organizations in 1990 that developed into the countless after school and out-of-school time programs of today. These programs are vast in number, scope and focus. A data base search will yield over five hundred million hits. Those programs designed specifically for middle school students narrows the field to one hundred million programs. Narrowing the focus to African American children will result in twenty million programs. Adding the search term “girls” to the equation reduces the findings to nine million hits. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) has a data base that includes twenty years of research; one reporting area is out-of-school time. Within hundreds of articles devoted to out-of-school time programs there are only eighteen identified as cultural/heritage programs. Of the eighteen cultural/heritage programs, eight target African American youth. One program specifically targets African American boys, two programs focus on middle school level children, and none have African American girls as their primary focus.

Foci for after school programs vary broadly. However, there are certain social goals of successful after school programs which resurface within the literature. There are four major social goals: to promote learning, to protect children, explore new interests, and to forge bonds with caring adults (Larner et al., 1999, p. 5). Although the goals are similar, the roads traveled to reach them diverge. The types of after school programs and

activities are generally divided into three categories: Academic-Sports Centered, Community Service Centered, and Arts-Based (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Heath & Roach, 1999; Larner et al., 1999). Academic-Sports Centered programs, as the name implies, integrate sports and academics to help youth succeed in school.

Community Service Centered organizations assist youth in the attainment of skills which help them become productive citizens. Arts-Based after school programs are focused on a variety of media including visual, musical and dramatic activities. Cooper (1999) explains: “Programs of all types, however—be they academic, recreational, or cultural in focus—appear to benefit from consistent structure, active community involvement, extensive training for staff and volunteers, and responsiveness to participants needs and interests” (p. 135).

Whether after school programs have an academic focus or community service focus the key factors in the successful implementation of these programs are structure, staffing, and active community involvement. According to Heath and Roach (1999), arts-based programs also “carry a strong component of community service and many have ...moved increasingly toward micro-enterprise in local neighborhoods” (p. 21).

The expectations for youth in effective after school programs follow:

- Individuals bring diverse talents, skills, knowledge, and networks vital to the life of the group.
- Everyone has to be ready to pick up the slack, to play different roles, and to be a responsible critic of the group's work or performance.
- A season means from start to finish, from plans and preparation to practice, performance, and evaluation.

- Practice, practice, practice goes along with the need to keep asking, first of the self and then of others, "how's it going? What do you think?"
- No one learns or does anything for just the individual; expect to pass what you know and can do on to others through teaching, mentoring, modeling, encouraging.
- Adults and youth alike have to be prepared to suspend disbelief, deal with intense emotions, and explore vulnerabilities.
- Everyone expects the unrelenting accountability that comes from authentic audiences. (Heath & Roach, 1999. p. 24)

Therefore, research suggests that whether to focus is Academic-Sports Centered, Community Service Centered, or Arts-Based the expectations for youth should be similar. Programs must respect the strengths of the individual students; allow for flexibility and fluidity in the roles of participants; be committed, consistent, and cooperative; provide multiple opportunities for practice; willing to share and exchange knowledge; provide a safe place for emotional exploration and trust; and be accountable to the larger community.

While these expectations provide a valuable outline for successful youth organizations, those concerned with the welfare African American children identify additional needs for this population. Most people would agree that “every young person wants and needs; friendship, a sense of belonging, discipline, boundaries, nurturing, bonding, security, and support” Most African American children also need, “a means of financial income, and rituals of passage... with an emphasis on academic achievement, cultural self-knowledge, character building, and virtue” (Warfield-Coppock & Harvey,

1988, p. 474). Additionally, African American students need programs to protect “them against the ravages of racist, sexist, capitalist, and oppressive society [and to prepare] them physically, mentally, and spiritually for active resistance and struggle against the seductive lure of the American way” (Fashola, 1999; Mason & Chang, 2001; Pierce & Sheilds, 2000; Shinew et al., 2000; Stevens & Owens, 2000). Therefore, programs designed for African American youth often have the additional imperatives within their “thrust and theoretical orientation” those are:

- to provide alternatives to or disengage youth from violence, crime, and drugs;
- to provide the impetus for improved school achievement and decreased incidence of school dropout for youth;
- to dissuade youngsters from early sexual activity and teen pregnancy;
- to provide additional support networks for single-parent households;
- to counter effects of low socio-economic status (p. 477).

African Americans share these specific dangers with most children who live in low-income neighborhoods, however, African American youth are the focus of my research and have suffered these indignities much longer than any other cultural group within America and all nations of the African Diaspora.

Many studies agree that the scope and sequence is less important than the fact there is actually a program available for children. However research shows that the availability of after school programs is unequally distributed. According to Halpern

(1999): “waiting lists for free or heavily subsidized programs might exist alongside empty spaces in programs that have less access to public funding” (p.83). Research reports describe the interest in low- income populations, the vast majority of whom are African Americans share certain beliefs.

(1) a belief that public spaces such as streets and playgrounds are no longer safe for children's out-of-school time, (2) a sense that it is stressful and unproductive for children to be left on their own after school, (3) a concern that many children need more time and individual attention than schools can provide to master basic academic skills, and (4) a conviction that low-income children deserve the same opportunity as their more advantaged peers to explore expressive arts, sports, and other enriching activities. (Halpern, 1999, p.81)

However, separate and unequal remains the rule rather than the exception in American institutions especially as they refer to African American children (Bell, 1992; Cade, 1970; Katz, 1995; Kozol, 2005; Perry, et al, 2003; Woodson, 1990). The primary challenges facing people concerned with providing after school program are facilities, staffing, and financing. While these difficulties are not insurmountable “one of the pernicious effects of poverty in the United States is the pressure it places on each individual institution in children’s lives to be and do more than is reasonable (Halpern, 1999, p. 92).

Poverty, racism, and sexism are three of the most visible problems facing an invisible population, African American Middle School girls. A survey of several data bases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Premier will yield

Thousands of articles about middle school girls. Even though the San Francisco chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) “found that only 8.7% of the programs funded by the major organization in San Francisco that funded children and youth programs ‘specifically addressed the needs of girls’ ( Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 196); when the focus is on African American girls the field narrows considerably. Within the search results, most articles that do focus on African American girls discuss problems and remediation. For example articles discuss obesity, drug use, abstinence, teen pregnancy, and violence. There are relatively few articles that consider the particular talents of African American girls. The reality of what happens when society fails to address their desires, needs, and talents is that they sometimes end up in other situations from which it is more difficult to escape. Chesney-Lind, M. (1999) reports:

- Girls account for one of four arrests of young people in America (p. 186).
- 1 in 5 violent girls felt they were physically abused at home
- 1 in 4 violent girls had been sexually abused
- In 1995, well over half of girls’ arrests were for larceny theft (25.8 percent), much of which, particularly for girls, is shoplifting, or status offenses (23.4 percent)
- Roughly 70% of the victims of child sexual abuse are girls
- 73% of female runaways have been sexually abused

These statistics are horrifying; however, this is what can happen to children who are left without positive alternatives while in the critical stages of adolescence during their out-of-school time. Once girls are incarcerated they are again discriminated against according to gender and race.

It is clear that girls of color have different experiences of their gender, as well as different experiences with the dominant institutions in the society (Amaro & Aguiar, 1994; Lafromboise & Howard-Pitney, 1995; Orenstein, 1994), programs to divert and deinstitutionalize must be shaped by the unique developmental issues confronting minority girls (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p.197).

Chesney-Lind's study describes the failures of after school programs to address the needs of girls, the worst case scenarios of the lack of positive out-of-school activities, and what happens to the girls who end up in public and private facilities for juvenile delinquents. She explains that "a racialized, two track system of juvenile justice, one in which White girls are placed in mental hospitals and private facilities, while girls of color are detained and institutionalized" (p. 194). Chesney-Lind further explains that:

White girls were more likely to be recommended for a treatment-oriented placement, as opposed to a 'detention oriented' one, than either African American or Latina girls. In fact, 75 percent of the White girls were recommended for a treatment-oriented facility, compared to 34 percent of the Latinas and only 20 percent of the African American girls...another

study compared private and public facilities in a Midwestern state and found that the girls in public facilities were 61% Black, while those in private facilities were 100% White. (pp. 194-195)

Even the girls' behaviors were described in a racist context with "racialized gender expectations." Specifically, "African American girls' behavior was framed as products of "inappropriate 'lifestyle' choices," while White girls' behavior was described as resulting from low-self-esteem, being easily influenced, and the result of "abandonment"(p. 195). Chesney-Lind concludes her study with the observation that "The major challenge to those seeking to address the needs of girls within the juvenile justice system remains the invisibility of these young women. (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p.199).

The invisibility of African American girls is paradoxical. While the greater majority of African American girls remain invisible, there is the "hypervisibility" (Collins, 2006, p.4) of the few who are highlighted and stereotyped in the media. There is also a "one-by-one" phenomenon (Collins, 2006, p.9) where the few who manage to succeed and are held up as the token of what is possible. This sets up an impossible standard of comparison for those African American girls who are trapped in a cycle of almost inescapable repression and oppression. The age old phenomenon of blaming the victim remains in place to effectively erase need, desires, and capabilities of African American girls. This research seeks to address this disparity.

## *Chapter Summary*

This chapter represents a review of the literature relevant to my study of the educational experiences of African American girls. I described the historical yearnings of African Americans for a free and appropriate education. These yearnings guided the establishment of the first free public schools in the United States. Next, I summarized the contributions of African American women education pioneers, and the historically significant educational experiences they provided for African American girls. Then, I elucidated the African American philosophy of education. Next, I explained why a culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students was necessary, and described three of those theories. Then, I discussed my emergent theory of transformative education which places love at center. I then, briefly examined connections between language and visual arts education as it relates to African American Middle School girls. Finally, I discussed After School programs as they relate specifically to the experiences of African American girls.

My inquiry into educational experiences of African American girls is similar to standing at the edge of forty acres of waist high Kentucky blue grass. The sky above is a deep golden canvas filled with cumulonimbus mammatus clouds. African American Middle School girls are likewise chilled by the evaporating droplets that seep into their souls as a result of educational experiences. These clouds usually indicate the approach or departure of a severe storm. For most African American girls school is a series of severe storms. Yet, they manage to glow like vivid sunset skies after a storm. However, if the intention is to discover emeralds which are the voices of African American girls, there remains a vast field of green to examine. The search is complicated by relentlessly

cyclical storms that have buried the precious voices beneath periods of great activity, followed by unavoidable impediments to research relating to African American females.

Most relevant research originates in the scholarship African American women who are in turn silenced, or prevented from access to the basic support offered to other scholars. Their scholarship is often suppressed, their opportunities for publication slim, and their epistemologies ridiculed. In spite of the vast fields of opposition, in spite of the agendas hidden deep in the rich black soil, in spite of the unseen emeralds scattered about...the jewels can be unearthed. The voices of African American Middle School girls will be found.

The wisdom of the ages is calling through the atmosphere on behalf of these too long oppressed and repressed members of society. The African American female researcher moves forward one step at a time into the field of research. She slowly and thoroughly examines the ground and re-searches with conviction. Moving beyond mindless retentions of ancient doctrines to create something new, courageously seeking truth for a group of neglected children, believing in the importance of every member of humankind keeps African American Women researchers, writers, mothers, and sisters seeking the emeralds, and finding African American girls. In other words, the people who care most about African American girls are African American women, and research in this area is similar to looking for emeralds in a field of grass. By this I mean that knowledge of the existence and authenticity of African American girls' voices is not enough. To find the emerald voices necessitates hope coupled with love.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and regulation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools, the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community (Ladson-Billings, 1994, ix).

The “denial of education, separate and unequal education, and regulation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools” are not component parts of past experience; it is a current reality for many adolescents in America. Kozol (2005) argues that:

It is the same old ballgame, with Hispanic students and now also many Southeast Asian students of low income placed in very much the same positions in which black kids have been forced to play for well over 100 years, and still are forced to play. And in most places they are playing in the same old rundown ballparks with the same inferior equipment and the same inadequate and overburdened supervision that black students in these districts have experienced, and still experience; and often, of course, they undergo the same indignities together. (p. 185)

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational experiences of a small group of African American Middle School girls in the Southeastern United States. I will describe the way they think and talk about their education. I will do this by recording their

thoughts as they engage in a culturally relevant language and visual arts after school program. Two questions guide my research:

1. How do these African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?
2. How do these African American Middle School metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

This chapter begins with a description of the Research Setting. Next, I explicate the Design of the Study which, explains comprehensive details about the implementation of Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Programs (LOVE: ASAP), to contextualize the study. I include the factors and considerations of the LOVE: ASAP's design. The Design of the Study also contains an interpretation of Participant Observation, Narrative Methodology, Portraiture, and Critical Race Theory. Next, I detail the Sampling Selection and Criteria, Site Selection, and Data Collection methods. Within the about Data Collection and Analysis subdivision, I consider data collection in specifying Written Narratives, Visual Artifacts, Audio and Video Recordings, Interviews, Field Observations, and Field notes. I explicate Data Analysis in terms of Authenticity and Credibility. Within the context of authenticity and credibility I define Member Checks, introduce my Community of Practice, and consider Subjectivity and Epistemology. I end with a statement of my Epistemological Stance, Researcher Subjectivities and a Chapter Summary

### *The Research Setting*

The African American Middle School girls in my study attend Zora Maya Giovanni Middle School (ZMGMS). All names are pseudonyms. ZMGMS is one of four middle schools in Blue County. It is one of the newest schools in the county, and is located in a rural residential area approximately ten miles from the nearest city. ZMGMS has two building administrators and 46 teachers. There were 582 students enrolled at the time of this study. The 63% African American student population placed the girls in my study in the majority. However, their teachers are predominantly White and female. There are 32 White female teachers, 14 male teachers; within this number, there are 14 African American teachers. With the exception of one teacher who self-identifies as multiracial, there are no other ethnic groups represented among the teaching faculty. ZMGMS is one of three schools that met the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To meet AYP schools must meet a goal of 95% participation, along with an academic performance criterion measured by standardized testing.

### *Design of Study*

I designed and implemented a culturally relevant after school program, Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP) to support, and enrich the preexistent after school program in a rural public middle school, with a 63% African American student body. For seven months, we met weekly, and devoted two hours to language and visual arts activities designed to elicit discourse on

culturally relevant topics. LOVE: ASAP combines poetry, prose, and fine art by African American authors and artists to create a culturally relevant curriculum. Students who participate in LOVE: ASAP explore complex themes of social justice, history, and accountability while engaging in activities designed to help them think about and describe their family ties, community involvement, and academic experiences.

Within this small group setting, during face-to-face encounters I queried African American Middle School girls about their metacognition. I provided language and visual arts projects. I used power point presentations, overhead transparencies, and provided examples of visual art and language art for models and prompts. Using these examples the girls wrote poetry and prose. They also created a collage. Additionally, they dramatically enacted the poetry, and even choreographed dance steps to express their poetry. I provided media and topical choices for expressing their texts; they chose the mode of expression. In other words we lived, loved, and laughed language and visual arts.

I designed and implemented LOVE: ASAP to support, and enrich the preexistent after school program, however, the activities would work well in most after school environments. We met weekly but the program would work well within an hour time slot several times each week, or it could be adapted to function in seminar, or retreat settings. The language and visual arts activities are designed to use to engage young people in metacognition.

*Sample Language Art Lessons*

One week I showed them an overhead transparency of my maternal ancestors. I told them about the town in New Mexico called Blackdom, where my ancestors settled. Then I asked them to share stories about their ancestors. During another session we looked at black and White photos of African American girls taken at the turn of the century in Harlem. I invited the girls to imagine what it was like for the little girls in the pictures, and then asked them to compare and contrast their own lives to the ones they imagined for the girls in the picture. Finally, the students used Walter Dean Myers' poem, *Blossom*, as a model for their own poems. (See Figure 3.1)

<b>Blossoms by Walter Dean Myers</b>	<b>About Lil' Cutie</b>	<b>Untitled</b>
I never dreamt that tender blossoms would be brown Or precious angels could come down to live in the garden of my giving heart But here you are	I never felt like rain falling down or clouds coming together but not but a stormy day	I always smell like a rose or perfume giving a scent to your nose everyday
<b>Figure 3.1</b>		<b>Poetry Exemplars</b>

The poems in columns 2 and 3 were written by two students. Throughout the duration of the program, the girls wrote in various genres and they loved to dramatize the poetry.

They read with emotion, paired actions with the words, and choreographed dance steps to the rhythm of poetry. They also created art.

### *Sample Visual Art Lesson*

The *Collage of Self* is an activity that I first used as a middle school teacher, then as a professor preparing preservice teachers to teach language arts. The primary objectives are to encourage students to think about personal identity, values, and beliefs; to express crucial aspect of their uniqueness; and to encourage the self-disclosure necessary when developing a writing community. *The Collage of Self* was a project that they worked on periodically from the beginning to the end of the program; it was constructed during several sessions as the girls collected materials to represent themselves. For example, the girls cut pictures from magazines that depicted clothing and hairstyles they liked, celebrities they admired, and food they enjoyed eating. They also used various media such as paint, glitter, and handmade papers in several different textures. The choices they made reflected their personal preferences and these preferences symbolized aspects of their individuality.

To make this project a true reflection of the individual girl, I asked them to work on it each week for short periods of time. On the day we read *Blossoms* I brought in a calendar with large photographs of flowers and asked each student to choose a flower that represented her. While they were choosing their bouquets we chatted about the reasons for their choices. Some chose a flower for the color, and others chose flowers reminiscent of something or someone. As is reflected in the untitled poem above, one girl chose her

flowers because their perfume is the way she smells everyday. Daily activities included multiple opportunities for verbal, written and visual expression.

### *Overview of Language and Visual Arts Intersectionality*

Within our developing writing community, the girls initially recorded their thoughts in journals that I gave to each participant, and later, on papers collected at the end of each session. On the first day of LOVE: ASAP, I gave each participant a pretty plastic envelope containing: a composition book, a mechanical pencil, and a gel pen. I provided construction paper in assorted colors, along with various decorative stickers. While the girls decorated their journals, I explained that the journals were gifts, and encouraged them to write everyday. I also asked the girls to bring their journals to each session of LOVE: ASAP. I further explained that we would use the journals to write about experiences and thoughts during LOVE: ASAP.

In order to encourage discussions about their thoughts, experiences, and ideas, I paired 16 examples of African American art with 16 pieces of poetry and prose. These were presented in power point presentations, handouts, and transparencies. These language and visual arts prompts were collected from a variety of sources devoted to African American culture. Each exemplar was carefully chosen to elicit responses to specific themes within the overarching questions: how do African American girls describe their school experiences; and how do African American girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program? In order to understand their school experiences I chose pictures and texts that focused on family, school and community relationships, and school experiences. For example, I chose a

photograph of an old log hut that was a corn shed before it was used for school for African American students and a portion of the text from *Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois to facilitate a discussion about school experiences.

Discussion about school experiences often led to issues of academic achievement. To understand the African American Middle School girls' epistemologies relating to both school achievement, and academic achievement, I chose pictures and texts that focused on culturally relevant learning experiences, socio political consciousness, and social justice. For example, I paired 5<sup>th</sup> grade *Autobiography* by Rita Dove with a painting called *Tender Moments* by Francks Deceus to discuss school and family relationships. We shared our poetic and prosaic responses to the art, poetry, and prose orally near the end of each session.

Another activity that we engaged in was photography. The girls and I took turns using my digital camera to take pictures of each other. Picture taking was primarily a community building exercise, but it also functioned to help me connect names to faces. However, the primary objective for picture taking was, to have fun. Fun was one of the priorities in LOVE: ASAP.

During LOVE: ASAP the African American Middle School girls dramatically enacted poetry, and even choreographed dance steps to express their poetry. They also created visual arts projects, and we had fun with language and visual arts. I provided media and topical choices for expressing their texts; they chose the mode of expression. My goal was to accurately represent their voices, and I considered them co-researchers. The flexibility to recommend changes, and offer suggestions was inherent in the program

because the interests and ideas of the students is the focus of the program, their crucial input made them participatory action researchers within LOVE: ASAP.

My goal is to accurately represent African American Middle School girls' of LOVE: ASAP. The centrality of their voices, positionality as co-researchers in this study, recommendations, and suggestions were intrinsic to data collection and analysis. I still talk to them frequently, attend school functions, and maintain contact with their primary care givers. This strategy helps me avoid "an ideological representation" (Roulston, 2001, p.281), and obtain a literal translation. In other words, when I have a question about the data, I call the girls to ask them for clarification. The repeated member checks assist attainment, and assiduity of authenticity.

#### *Program Design: Factors and Considerations*

The design of LOVE: ASAP considers several factors:

1. Adolescents are at a critical developmental stage (Dimitriadis, 2003; Finders, 1997); small groups are conducive for establishing communities of trust (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Michie, 1999);
2. Understandings of African American students as creative children who work best when actively engaged in topics that are important to them (Cazden, 2001; Delpit & Dowdy 2002; Hanley, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Smagorinsky, 1998); and
3. When African Americans are allowed to choose discussion topics family and culture, racism, and spirituality, often emerge (Johnson - Bailey, 2001; Dillard, 2000, Palmer, 1993).

These and other factors are considered within the contexts of school experiences and metacognition in this study.

Additional factors under consideration relate to new decisions, increased opportunities to question, and critical choices which epitomize adolescence.

“Traditionally, social psychologists have described ‘adolescence’ as an ‘in-between’ stage between childhood and adulthood, a time when young people struggle to define themselves by trying different identities off and on” (Dimitriadis, 2003, pp.5-6). What kind of identities do African American adolescent girls try on and off? What do African American adolescent girls think and talk about while engaged in a culturally relevant language and visual arts program? What types of conversations will they engage in when asked to define themselves? How will they talk about body image? Relationships? I plan to look for answers to these sub questions as I focus on the narratives of the African American Middle School girls in my study.

### *Participant Observation*

According to Stanfield (1993): “In qualitative studies, the researcher is recognized as being the data collection instrument, as the ethnographer, participant observer, content analyzer, or oral history interviewer” (p.8). My participant observer role is layered with the intentions of participatory action research because I seek to understand and change practices governing the education for African American Middle School students. In participatory action research “participants in a program or institution together design and implement a research project in order to make recommendations for changing practice” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.222). The African American Middle School girls actively

participated in the design of the program by making decisions about content and procedures, and later informed the analysis by participating in frequent member checks.

In my study, the African American Middle School girls contributed to the design and implementation by choosing the media and topics for expressing their texts. “Conventionally, psychologists have regarded interaction between participants as ‘contaminants’ to presumably pristine data. Yet from a different perspective, a researcher’s role in the data collection is instructive and constructive rather than intrusive” (Smagorinsky, 1997, p. 103). Built into the research design is the flexibility for the African American Middle School girls to recommend changes, and offer suggestions for the duration of data collection and analysis. In this way, our relationship was reciprocally “instructive and constructive rather than intrusive.” As the African American Middle School girls participated in the study, I depended on their input to guide the interview topics, and concentrated on accurately representing their voices. After data collection was complete, I relied on them to clarify questions that arose. Because their voices are intrinsic to this study, I refer to them as “African American Middle School girls” instead of “participants” and consider them co-researchers.

I asked African American Middle School girls to describe their school experiences, and listened closely to their reply. I sought understanding of a specific group, African American Middle School girls, within a specific context, an after school program, in a public middle school. I studied the ways African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage. By this I mean, think about thinking. This thinking occurred within LOVE: ASAP, a culturally relevant language and visual arts after school program that I designed, implemented, and facilitated.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) participatory action researchers “are not generating knowledge simply to inform or enlighten an academic community; they are collaboratively producing knowledge to improve...lives. Participants do the research about their own settings; the person in the official researcher role serves to facilitate” (p. 24). As participant observer “ The researcher enters the world of the people...she plans to study, gets to know them and earns their trust, and systematically keeps records of what is heard and observed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.2). I established trust by being fair and consistent; together we built a community within the district-wide after school program; and I systematically kept records of conversations and activities.

### *Narrative Methodology*

I use Narrative methodology to investigate the words, record the lives, and preserve the integrity of the African American Middle School girls in my study. Kozol (2005) states:

Try to listen carefully to children. I have been criticized throughout the course of my career for placing too much faith in the reliability of children’s narratives; but I have almost always found that children are a great deal more reliable in telling what really goes on in public school than many of the adult experts who develop policies that shape their destinies. Unlike these powerful grown-ups, children have no ideologies to reinforce, no superstructure of political opinion to promote, no civic equanimity or image to defend, no personal reputation to secure. They may err sometimes about the minuscule particulars but on the big things

children rarely have reason to mislead us. They are in this respect, pure witnesses, and we will hear their testimony in these pages. (p. 12)

These words encapsulate my intentionality for using Narrative methodology as a tool for analysis. I explore the voices, and preserve the integrity of the African American Middle School girls. Witherall and Noddings (1998) state: “understanding the narrative and contextual dimensions of human actors can lead to new insights, compassionate judgment, and the creation of shared knowledge and meanings that can inform professional practice” (p. 8).

I use narrative methodology because it is both methodology and theory. As a methodology narrative analysis is traditional genre for recording African American history; it seeks to analyze the actual discourse word for word. As a theory narrative analysis provides engagements with the type of personal insights into the lives of the African American Middle School girls I seek to understand. Narrative analysis has the potential to reach into the heart of the individual. Through narrative methodology I created a palimpsest that layered shared denotations and connotations to inform professional practice.

### *Portraiture*

Portraiture is an art-based research methodology that allows the researcher to illustrate the study within a larger context. Barone and Eisner (1988) state:

Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing. Although these

aesthetic elements are in evidence to some degree in all educational research activity, the more pronounced they are, the more the research may be characterized as arts based. (p.73)

These “certain aesthetic qualities or design elements” are divided into the following seven categories: “the creation of a virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualized vernacular language, the promotion of empathy, personal signature of the researcher writer, and the presence of aesthetic form” (Barone & Eisner, 1988, pp.73-78).

Portraiture is an art-based methodology that creates a “virtual reality” by “contextualizing” the study within the research setting. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain:

Portraiture is a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm...it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy... in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity... and in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied...She wants to capture the specifics, the nuance, the detailed description of a thing, a gesture, a voice, an attitude as a way of illuminating more universal patterns. (pp.13-14)

I plan to represent the narratives of the African American Middle School girls in my study in ways that honor their authentic voices, and in a format that creates “a new vision...When readers re-create that vision, they may find that new meanings are constructed, and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated” (Barone & Eisner, 1988, p.78). I will use arts-based research to create a detailed description through the use of “expressive language”, “contextualized vernacular language”, “the promotion of empathy”, my “personal signature” as researcher and writer, and the “presence of aesthetic form.” In other words, I will use poetry, and visual art to represent the data, and promote empathy for the African American Middle School girls in my study.

The “promotion of empathy” aspect of Portraiture enables me to contextualize African American Middle School girls within the concentric circles of society. I will do this by investigating the participants’ relationships with family and friends as they relate to the school setting, local community, country and the globe. (SEE Figure 3.2)

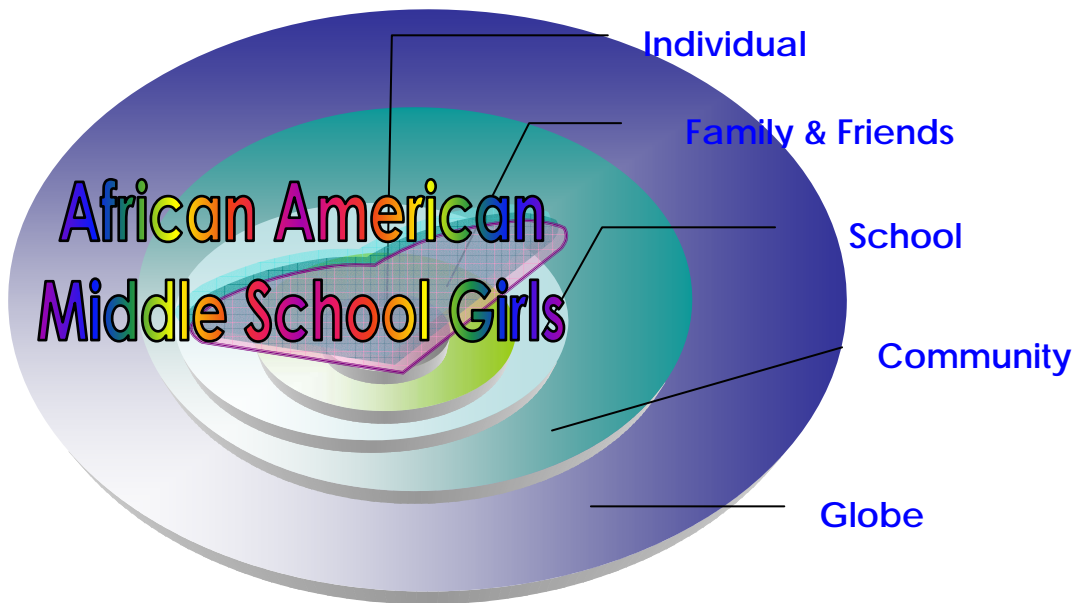


Figure 3.2

First, I will show each African American Middle School girl as an individual. Second, I will describe them as members of the after school program in a school that has a historical significance in the community. Third, I will illustrate their roles as members of this community. Finally, I will listen to their notions about what it means to be at the important life stage of becoming an African American woman in the global environment. By definition portraiture methodology also envisions hope for the future of the African American girls in my study through “the promotion of empathy” that invites change to social justice systems.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) also promotes an empathetic hope for the future of African American Middle School girls because it theorizes changes in social justice systems. More broadly CRT promotes empowerment for all marginalized people. Crenshaw et al. (1995) explains that CRT scholarship is “...unified by two common themes. The first is to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America...The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it” (p. xiv). CRT is further understood through several Critical themes. Delgado (2000) explains:

CRT begins with a number of basic insights. One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Formal equal opportunity–rules and laws...only remedy the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the

ones that stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront everyday and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair. (p. xiv)

In brief critical themes are “the insistence that racism is ordinary and not exceptional, the notion that traditional civil rights law has been more valuable to Whites than to blacks, the critique of liberalism, and the call to context...” (Delgado, 2000, p. xviii).

CRT serves as a theoretical tool for the type of critical reflection beneficial to educators and researchers. Intrinsic to CRT is interaction with society that specifies changes in the social justice system. Therefore, CRT is particularly relevant for this study which, seeks to understand how African American Middle School girls describe school experiences, think about thinking, and envisions a hopeful future for the African American Middle School girls in this study. Narrative analysis, Portraiture and CRT are three cord strand not easily broken. Together, the triune strands create a powerful connection for a study which seeks to give voice, create a visual picture, and illustrate methods for achieving social justice for African American Middle School girls.

#### *Sampling Selection and Criteria*

It took 8 months, and a series of gatekeepers to gain access to the site. First, I met with the principal, who introduced me to the after school program director. Second, I obtained school district and IRB approvals. Finally, I interviewed all of the students in a designated school class. By this I mean, one teacher volunteered to allow me to interview her students and choose willing participants. I conducted the interviews on two separate occasions over a two week period. I stayed for the two hour duration of the program each

time. The first day I interviewed 9 girls for approximately 10 minutes each. During my second visit I interviewed the remaining 5 girls who had not been interviewed the previous week. I asked two open ended questions about language and visual arts: Tell me what you know about art? Talk to me about the importance of reading and writing. (SEE APPENDIX A) I selected nine students who were most interested in language and visual art. I wanted to obtain a purposeful sampling of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. According to Patton (2002) purposeful samples are selected because they are "information rich" (p. 40). Information rich, for the purposes of my study included girls from each grade level.

As a result of these interviews, I chose 9 African American Middle School girls from those who expressed interest in language and visual arts. There was an imposed criterion that I not take more than half of the girls from the existing class whose number fluctuated from 14 to 20 girls because participation in the after school program was optional. The primary criterion was an expressed interest in language and visual art.

My after school program is called Language Observing Visual Arts: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP). During the 2005-2006 school year, the LOVE: ASAP community dwindled. One student moved to a large Southeastern city sixty miles away; a second student was restricted from attending the program through parental intervention because of a school bus infraction; a third student stopped coming because her advanced placement classes required an excess of homework; a fourth student attended only once because her parents enforced her previous commitment to band; and two students stopped coming without explanation. This left me with three "information rich" and dedicated 11, 12 and 13 year-old students.

I chose African American Middle School students as my participants because they are underrepresented in the literature. I originally planned to study both boys and girls; however, the after school program was gendered. Therefore, I chose to work with girls because African American girls are an understudied group. Research tends to focus on the problems and not the spiritual and creative gifts of African American students. Research focuses on other age groups (Gilyard, 1996; Guy, 1999; Tatum, 2003), African American males (Dimitriadis, 2003; Duncan & Jackson, 2004) and White female adolescents (Finders, 1997; Pipher, 1994). Research for and about African American women is scarce; research for and about African American girls is rare. This scarcity of relevant research for African American girls, and the fresh perspective they bring to the conversation about African American students in the public schools, make this opportunity for new understandings significant to this research, and the research community.

#### *Site Selection*

I first attempted to conduct my study in a middle school located near the university that I attend. I worked as a volunteer, met with the assistant principal to discuss my research proposal, and provided copies of my proposal for both site administrators. I also met with the after school program coordinator. I tried to schedule an appointment with the principal. After several attempts to communicate through email I discussed my difficulties gaining access with one of my peers. She knew his wife and offered to help me gain access. Through her intervention my emails were answered. Yet,

after several months of failure to gain access to the site, I abandoned the pursuit, and looked for other options.

At an honor society induction in April 2005, I met a teacher from another middle school. She invited me to her classroom and helped me schedule a meeting with her principal. He was excited about my after school program and gave me his whole-hearted support. I met with him several more times. He took me on a tour of the school, introduced me to his after school program director, and I attended a grade level teachers meeting. This invitation began an eight month correspondence via email with the building principal, and the after school director as I waited for approvals from the county school district and the university internal review board (IRB). I finally received the required permissions, and began my research project on November 1, 2005.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

#### *Data Collection*

According to Bogdan & Biklen (2003) “data are both the evidence and the clues...data involve the particulars you need to think soundly and deeply about the aspects of life you will explore” (p.109). The narratives of the African American Middle School girls in my study were recorded in five media: written narratives, visual artifacts, audio and video recordings, observations and field notes. I will briefly describe each of these methods.

### *Written Narratives*

I define written narratives as the actual words recorded by the African American Middle School girls in this study. The written narratives were recorded in journals that I gave to each African American Middle School girl, papers collected at the end of each session, and an interview protocol. On the first day of LOVE: ASAP, I gave each African American Middle School girl a pretty plastic envelope containing: a composition book, a mechanical pencil, and a gel pen. I provided construction paper in assorted colors and various decorative stickers. While the African American Middle School girls decorated their journals, I explained that the journals were gifts, and encouraged the girls to write everyday. I also asked the girls to bring their journals to each session of LOVE: ASAP. I further explained that we would use the journals to write about experiences and thoughts during LOVE: ASAP, and that I would periodically request permission to make copies of their journal entries.

The girls frequently forgot to bring their journals with them and I discarded the idea, and provided paper for them to use. I made this decision because it was time consuming to allow the girls to go to their lockers to retrieve their journals, and most of the girls were only writing in the journals during LOVE:ASAP. Only one participant reported writing in her journal at home. It was this student who volunteered to give me her journal at the end of the school year. Therefore, the written narratives include the papers each girl submitted at the end of each session. The personal narratives that the girls wrote are represented in poetic and prosaic responses to the art, poetry, and prose that we shared. I paired 16 examples of African American art, with 16 pieces of poetry, and prose. These were presented in power point presentations, handouts, and

transparencies designed to elicit responses to my research questions. (SEE APPENDICES B-Q) These language and visual arts prompts were collected from a variety of sources devoted to African American culture.(SEE APPENDIX R ) Participants' written narratives offer "...an intimate perspective of a narrator's interpretation and understanding of her...own life unabridged" (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p.xiii).

### *Visual Artifacts*

The visual artifacts in my data set are photographs taken by the students, and photographs of the *Collage of Self* activity, a continuing project that was completed in stages throughout the duration of the program. The African American Middle School girls took turns using my digital camera to take pictures of each other. I used this strategy because children often like to take pictures of their friends, and photographs can "push the analysis and insights further than they might originally have gone" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 136). Picture taking was primarily a community building exercise, but it also functioned to help me connect names to faces, visualize the participants as I reflected on the sessions, and engage in "carefully cultivated thoughtfulness" (Van Manen, 1990, p.131).

The *Collage of Self* is an activity that I first used as a middle school teacher, then as a professor preparing preservice teachers to teach language arts. The primary objectives are to encourage students to think about personal identity, values, and beliefs; to express crucial aspect of their uniqueness; and to encourage the self-disclosure

necessary when developing a writing community. I took digital pictures of each collage, and these photographs became visual artifacts for analysis.

### *Audio and Video Recordings*

The audio tapes are transcribed and the transcripts are the primary source of analysis. The video facilitates observations of the nuances in body language, facial expressions, and interactions. I used a cassette recorder during all or part of LOVE: ASAP sessions. The girls had complete authority to ask me to turn off the recorder when we discussed concepts that they deemed too personal. I always honored these requests. I used a video recorder to augment the audio data. I usually used the video camera to record special events that would have been difficult or impossible to capture otherwise. For example, dramatic readings of poetry, choreographed dances, and skits were video taped. These tapes have been transferred to DVD format for analysis.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003) “data are both the evidence and the clues... data involve the particulars you need to think soundly and deeply about the aspects of life you will explore” (p.109). In addition to the written narratives and audio/visual recordings my data include interviews, observations, and field notes.

### *Interviews*

In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other

techniques. In all these situations the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world.

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 95)

I use interviews “in conjunction with participant observation,” “to gather descriptive data,” and to “develop insights” to understand the school experiences and metacognition of the African American Middle School girls in my study. First, I used interviews as a screening process for obtaining a purposeful sample of girls who were interested in language and visual arts. Second, I used a protocol to obtain information about how they described themselves, and their knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy. (SEE APPENDIX S) I also interviewed the principal for a richer picture of the school context, and to examine the history, economic, social, and cultural environment of the school. (SEE APPENDIX T), etc. For this protocol I used “examples of observational questions” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp. 236-246), and adapted the questions to my study.

### *Field Observations*

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) participant observation requires me “to move beyond the selective perceptions of both researcher and participants” (p.194). I conducted three site observations to move beyond the after school setting, and to experience the school environment during the regular school day. I developed and refined my participant observation skills as I observed for three days, and approximately 3 hours,

in the main artery of the middle school. (SEE APPENDIX U) I used this particular aspect of data collection to “understand the context” of my setting, “to look for patterns people are unwilling to talk about,” and to study the “big picture.” I observed during an interlude when I could consider choreographed class changes, the tranquil intermissions, and the drama of school dismissal. This time period revealed insights into the “performance of possibilities” which, according to Madison (2005) “is based on ethnographic data from the specific spheres of (a) the subjects, whose lives and words are being performed; (b) the audience, who witness the performance; and (c) the performers, who embody and enact the data” (p.172). I sat unobtrusively against a wall where I could “witness the performance,” and watch “the performers.” Later, at home in the solitude of my thoughts, I pondered the “lives and words...performed.”

### *Field Notes*

I use both descriptive and reflective field notes in this study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003) reflective field notes “record the more subjective side of your journey. The emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and...plans for future research ...” (p. 114). Additionally, reflective field notes are the spaces I created for thinking about ways to improve LOVE: ASAP to better serve the African American Middle School girls in my study. Immediately after each session I dedicated from one to three hours for writing field notes. I filled three journals with approximately 1000 pages in each with thoughts about the girls, plans for the next session. I created a data inventory to keep track of my data. (SEE APPENDIX V) I also synthesized relevant readings from my literature review.

During my fieldwork I took a qualitative research data collection class. Salient literature and notes from this class were included in my field notes. Madison (2005) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) notably influenced my thinking. It is also significant that Gloria Ladson-Billings was a guest lecturer at my university while I was in the field. Her essential words are recorded in one of my field journals, and a copy of her power point presentation is also included. Additionally, Ladson-Billings' text, *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms* informed my research, and was a required text in the writing pedagogy classes I taught for pre-service teachers. Essentially, my data collection methods flowed seamlessly through my life, and ongoing analysis was woven throughout my data collection process because "it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

### *Data Analysis*

According to Rossman & Rallis (2003) data analysis is:

The process of deep immersion in the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials you have collected; systematically organizing these materials into salient themes and patterns; bringing meaning to the themes tell a coherent story; and writing it all up so that others can read what you have learned. (p.270)

A useful metaphor for thinking about data analysis is that of an artist preparing to create a new collage. She knows the finished product will be arranged on a canvas. She has collected various materials such as glass shards, tree bark, and silk paper. She could organize her materials into categories according to color, texture or shape. Finally, she

would arrange these items into a pattern that others could recognize, and subsequently draw meaning from.

I used a biographical approach to data analysis which, “attends to the person in relation to society and takes into account the influences of gender, class, and family” (Merriam, 2002, p.9). During the data analysis I searched for internal thoughts and motivations, relationships to society, and component parts of the narratives. I call the component parts, *Conversational Chunks*. Portraiture and CRT are useful tools for aiding in this process because telling the story of these young African American girls is central to the purpose of this study. My research questions, answered in the narrative voices of African American Middle School girls, provide important insights about their educational experiences. Narrative analysis is a medium that allows the authentic voices to be heard. It is important to hear African American Middle School girls’ stories expressed in their own words. I will present the findings within a format that is accessible beyond the research community. My findings are presented in a language that is accessible to teachers, parents, and the focal group, African American Middle School girls.

Foundational to narrative analysis is the study of the people and environment who are the focal group. In an effort to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of the African American Middle School girls in my study, I read my field notes and transcripts assiduously. Next, I looked for similarities and differences using line –by –line analysis, and *Conversational Chunks* to study my field notes, transcripts, and the language and visual art of the African American Middle School girls in my study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) explain:

Mindful of the research question but open to the serendipitous, the researcher follows his intuition that suggests a deeper way to understand and interpret the data. This is an extraordinarily challenging phase of data analysis; however, without it, the analysis remains thin and undeveloped.

Generating themes is an art. (p.284)

I used a discovery and coding process to find the major themes. I began with codes and categories. I used a hard copy and coded my data by hand. The codes were categorized and themes emerged. Some of the codes were: art, acts of resistance, black history, love, collage, Crosstalking, God and spirituality, hair, struggle, making connections, “making the best” out of life, miseducation, opposition, optimism, poetry, popular media/culture, prose, racism, self, and storytelling. These codes were divided into categories that included: descriptions of teachers, descriptions of class activities, effects of teacher behaviors, miseducation, friends and peers, self awareness/self concept, school experiences, incidents and behaviors, acts of resistance, critical incidents, family relationships, school relationships, community relationships, global and world issues, and school experiences. (SEE APPENDICES Y and Z) From these codes and categories four major themes emerged: Trauma Has Shaped the Schooling Story; Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences; Negative Stereotypes Reinforce Inferiority; and Acts of Resistance Facilitate School Success.

I further analyzed my data using Patton’s foundational questions as a tool for analysis: “What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came?” and “How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?” (Patton, 2002, p. 115). These

questions were the soil from which seeds of analysis sprouted. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommend that participatory action researchers “think about the process as research” and “call the evidence...data.” The question at the heart of my analysis asks how to make my study “compelling enough to encourage others to act” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.227).

### *Authenticity and Credibility*

Many qualitative researchers prefer to seek “a standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.14). Credibility resides in the forthright acknowledgement of subjectivities to establish authenticity, rather than validity and reliability. Koro-Ljungberg (2004) suggests that: validity...can be addressed through successful dialogue between theory and practice, between researchers and participant... valid research must include strong participant involvement during the entire research process, research conducted with participants not about them” (p. 611). I conducted a rigorous and systematic analysis that included models for establishing credibility and authenticity. To establish credibility and authenticity I performed member checks, held myself accountable to a community of practice, and clearly stated my subjectivities, and my researcher stance.

### *Member Checks*

Member Checks are a common strategy for establishing reliability and validity in quantitative studies. In qualitative studies they are used to maintain a standard of credibility and authenticity. According to Merriam (2002): Here you ask the participants

to comment on your interpretation of the data...and ask whether your interpretation “rings true” (p. 26). I laboriously transcribed the tapes and presented portions of the transcripts to the African American Middle School girls for member checks. Their comments and corrections are a vital component of the analysis. Before presenting the transcripts to the African American Middle School girls, I color coded the *Conversational Chunks* assigning the participants favorite color to their parts of the dialogue. The transcripts are formatted in a landscape page set-up, and divided into three columns. The first column is labeled: My Comments. The second column contains the color-coded dialogue. The third column is labeled: Brown Angels Comments. We read these transcripts together, made corrections, and added clarifying comments. I also asked for elaborations and clarifications arising from questions I had about the data. I continue the relationships that I formed with the girls and their primary care-givers with phone calls and social events.

### *Community of Practice*

I am blessed to have three mentors. One is a recent graduate who was the first African American to earn a doctoral degree from my department. The second is a recently retired university department chair. The third is a member of my committee. These dedicated individuals offer advice, resources, and support and the promise, “We will get through this together.” I also have a peer de-briefer who is at approximately the same stage in the doctoral program as I am. She provides feedback and critique at each stage of the process. This community of practice helps me stay on course, focused and

provide academic, as well as, emotional and spiritual support. They assist with external authenticity and credibility.

I address internal authenticity and credibility in my research by a continuous reflexivity between the existing literature and my data. I continually speak to authenticity and credibility through faithful dialogue with the African American Middle School girls in my study, my peers, and mentors. I persistently forefront the idea that the primary focus of this research is the experience of African American Middle School girls, and not my personal experience.

The nine points set forth by Wolcott (1990) are particularly salient for keeping the experience of African American Middle School girls in the foreground: “talk little, listen a lot; record accurately; begin writing early; let readers ‘see’ for themselves; report fully; be candid; seek feedback; try to achieve balance; and write accurately”(p.134). “More over, the qualitative research paradigm views subjectivity, especially when it is forthrightly stated, as a propitious stance that allows readers to know the lens through which the research is presented and to then make their own evaluations about the legitimacy of the research” (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p.133). I am determined to conduct rigorous and systematic research that includes models for establishing credibility and authenticity. I further intend to clarify my subjectivities and elucidate my researcher stance.

### *Researcher Subjectivities and Epistemological Stance*

“Intellect and brains and academics are fine, but we also have a heart and soul.

It’s okay to use all parts of ourselves” (Cotton, 2004, p. 129).

I am dedicated to accurately representing the school experiences and metacognitive strategies of African American Middle School girls. My subjectivities and epistemology are constituents of a unified entity creating my researcher role; my faith in God unites the two. I bring who I am, and a long winding road, to the research community.

#### *Subjectivities*

I reject the idea that an outsider is objective, and embrace my “outsider/ within” (Lorde, 1984), locality as vigor. Johnson-Bailey (2004) explains:

... the idea that research that is produced by an insider is not real research relies on two ideas: Subjectivity can be equated with bad research, and only an outsider who has distance can observe and analyze clearly. The idea of the outsider as a person who does not have an agenda is soundly rejected by qualitative researchers. (p.133)

This awareness of my positionality as researcher heightens my commitment to approach this project with rigor, and reflexivity. I am not looking for a universal truth. Instead, I seek a dialogue, and mutual expressions of individual truths. The African American Middle School girls’ voices remain the transcendent cynosure of this study.

### *Epistemological Stance*

Believing what I know, and not what I am told, and beginning to understand the divide. *I am a Black woman. I am moral. I am intelligent. I am lovable. I am valuable.* But the majority of the messages I get all say that I'm not...I don't know how I do it. (Jones & Shorter-Gooding, 2004, p.3)

I add: I am vulnerable; I cry; I get myself up, and try again. I am a spiritual being. I believe in myself because I understand the history of my people who overcame obstacles that I can only imagine. Imagining what my people survived constructs my commitment to serving an African American community that survived genocide, degradation, and the violence of this country by defining ourselves for ourselves in opposition to oppression.

“Oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society” (Collins, 2000, p.4). The concept of oppression is highlighted in academia as even our ways of knowing are subjected to derision or ignored (Belenky, et.al, 1986; Dillard, 2000; hooks, 1994; Palmer, 1993). In spite of denunciation, and pococurantism there is an increscent corpus of research by and about Black women. I use Black as a term that includes all people of the African Diaspora. I add my advocative voice in an effort to champion the most vulnerable of Black women, little girls; my research stance is that of one “willing to embrace all of me for the good of all of us” (Dillard, 2000, p.457). In other words, my study is a critical race narrative that seeks to understand, and transform the quality of education for African American Middle School girls.

### *Chapter Summary*

In this chapter I detailed the methodological design of my study. My study examines the school experiences of a small group of African American Middle School girls in the Southeastern United states as they participate in a culturally relevant after school program. This chapter includes an explanation of the specific qualitative research framework and design. It explains the methodology, sampling selection and criteria. The theoretical frame is included because it affects data collection and analysis. I also explained the instrumentality of my decision to seek authenticity and credibility instead of validity and reliability. My researcher subjectivities and epistemological are explicated in order to illustrate my researcher stance. I am dedicated to authentic representation of the school experiences and metacognitive strategies of African American Middle School girls. The pre-eminent voices are those of the African American Middle School girls who participated in LOVE: ASAP. Their narratives guide the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PORTRAITS AND *PARTICIPANT POESY*

This chapter emerges from habituated saturation in literature relevant to African American girls, a voluminous collection of multi-media data, and a sedulous intent to present candid portraits of individual African American Middle School girls. The purpose of this chapter is to create spaces for understanding the girls' personalities. Each of the three girls in this chapter has distinct characteristics that emerged from their narratives. Therefore, this chapter is designed to introduce and describe the girls in my study.

The three girls who faithfully attended Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP) chose to call themselves Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie. I provide a brief autobiographical sketch, before I begin two-fold descriptions of the girls. Next, I briefly describe all of the girls who participated in LOVE: ASAP. Then, I provide detailed portraits of the three girls who persisted until the end of the school year. This trio of portraits is presented in two sections. Each portrait contains a *Participant Poesy* and this is followed by a Demographic Summary. Finally, I provide a brief autobiographical sketch to clarify my epistemology. This chapter is an introduction to the African American Middle School girls in LOVE: ASAP, and the ways we came to understand each other.

*The Girls in LOVE: ASAP: An Introduction*

A total of 11 girls participated in LOVE: ASAP. Their pseudonyms are Candy, CeeCee, Cutie, Fanny, Lil' Cutie, Mahogany, Nai-Nai, Shanna, Shay, Sweetie, and Willow; some girls entered and exited the program for various reasons. Primary among the reasons was the fact that Tuesday, the day I implemented LOVE: ASAP, was a day that several popular clubs were scheduled. For example band and sports were also programmed for Tuesdays. Also key among the reasons I was not able to achieve the desired numbers of participants is the fickle nature of the middle school child. By this I mean, participation in the after school program is voluntary, and students chose from a variety of offerings each week. Therefore, several girls attended and stopped without explanation.

Some of the participants explained why they stopped attending. Lil' Cutie moved to a large Southeastern city sixty miles away. Willow attended once; then her parents terminated her attendance because of a school bus infraction. Shanna stopped coming because her advanced placement classes required an excess of homework. Shay attended only once because her parents enforced her previous commitment to band. Mahogany attended the after school program infrequently, but she often stopped to chat on her way home. CeeCee stopped attending when she tried out for the track team. Fanny and Candy stopped coming without explanation. This left me with three information-rich, and dedicated students. Their pseudonyms are Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie.

### *Participant Poesies and Demographic Summaries*

I used the narratives of Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie to create and present a portrait of each girl. The portraits begin with data poems and end with summaries of their demographic data. I call the data poems *Participant Poesy* because they are poesy that arises from the participants' documents. The data used to construct the data poesy are an amalgamation of data collected from each girl. The data includes their interviews, a *Collage of Self* that each girl constructed, poetry, prose, and journal entries. Also included are excerpts from my field notes, and transcripts from audio and visual recordings. To create these poems, I read each data set and placed the words of each of the three girls in my study into separate binders.

There is one binder for each girl, which contains the poetry, prose and photographs of Cutie, Nai-Nai, or Sweetie. I examined each notebook carefully concentrating on one girl at a time, reviewing her narratives, and studying her images. Then, I returned to my first research question: How do African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences? Next, I reviewed the sub-questions and categories. The categories are family relationships, school relationships, community relationships, and school experiences. As I analyzed the documents additional categories emerged. All three girls spoke of global and world issues. Two girls discussed spirituality.

I used these categories to create a *Participant Poesy* chart for each girl. At the top of the chart I listed the specific data included in each girl's *Participant Poesy*, and assigned a color to each piece of data. I used color coding to connect the words to their data source. For example, Cutie's chart included data from two transcripts, two

interviews, field notes, a poem, and quotes from her *Collage of Self*. Since the title, *Collage of Self* was typed in turquoise at the top of the chart. I could see that the turquoise words and phrases in each column were excerpts from the collage. Next, I created a five-column chart to organize the *Participant Poesy*. Each column corresponded to a school experience category. Those categories are Individual, Family and Friends, School, Community, and Globe/World. Instead of adding a sixth column for the emergent theme of spirituality, it made sense to include references to spirituality in the Globe/World Column. (See Figure 4.1).

♥ Nai-Nai's "I love because" Poem Chart ♥

Individual	Family	School	Community/culture	Globe/ world
I love to sing music keeps me motivated. Music is my hobby. Music is my life. Music is me!!!! I love hip-hop & R&B I love to dance because dancing is my thing. I dance when I feel the rhythm & need to move my body. I love to dance. I love to sing I love children God is within my spirit, body and soul. I love children. I	I love my Family because they inspire me. My family made me who I am. My family keeps me strong. I love my family. They are my inspirational leaders. Singing is in my genes. Everybody in my family sings even my granddaddy		Singing Is my culture Children give me hope & are very cute. They also give me the courage to understand how to care more for all.	hip-hop & R&B singing is my world and the world. I love my God because he created us He made those who stand He protects me and you. Love is within all. I have love for all who love me! I love my God

Figure 4.1

Finally, I arranged the pieces of data to form a cohesive unit of meaning that I call *Participant Poesy*.

Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie are described in two ways. Each portrait begins with *Participant Poesy*. Each description ends with a demographic summary that contextualizes them within the categories of individual, family and friends, school, community, and the world/globe. The *Participant Poesy* is my effort to express the essence of each girl in order to create an affinity between the audience and the African American Middle School girls in my study. The text of the poem is delineated in two ways. I use a standard font to symbolize direct quotes from the girl's narratives. I use italics to represent my voice. The paragraphs following the *Participant Poesies* elaborate the contextual categories and place Cutie, Nai-Nai and Sweetie more concretely within their environments.

The overarching purpose is to provide background and insights into the lives of the African American girls in my study. Providing contextualized perceptions is important to me as a critical race theorist because I seek to create empathic understandings concerning my girls and the research community. Further, my stance as an endarkened feminist requires that my words possess instrumentality. Therefore, I attempt to create spaces of mutual understanding through these personal narratives in order to facilitate personal transformation in the person who reads this; I hope my audience will metacognitively engage with the text.

In order to create these shared cognitive contemplations, I bring my personal experiences to the forefront in the second section of this chapter as I briefly describe my early school experiences. I believe that credibility is established when we forthrightly state our subjectivities. Because of this belief I critically reflect on my personal experiences, while simultaneously inviting the reader to be reflexive throughout this

study. Alternatively articulated, this chapter is an introduction to the characters, setting, and context of my study.

*Cutie's Participant Poesy*

*Don't Tell Me What To Do...I'm Gonna Do It Anyway*

I don't live in a neighborhood, I live on a street

*Which one is better?*

They are just different

*You are absolutely right because I agree (smile)*

*bad, or better... things don't have to be...*

*they are what they are! So... tell me about yourself, Cutie*

I feel good about myself. I like who I am.

When I look in the mirror I think of my mother and my grandmother.

I think I look beautiful in my own way

*Tell to me more... about your family*

I love my family because they are always ... for me

and they are there to support my life

I love my Mother; she is always there when I need her.

I love my sisters; when I am bored they are my entertainment,

I love my grandmother... she is my hero; she gives me her full attention

She's a shelter that keeps me warm.

My great-great-grandmother was good to me. I liked her very much

My great-great grandmother died in 2001. She was 95– I think.

I didn't cry at her funeral.

*My grandmother died in a nursing home and my dad died home alone*

*let's talk about something less sad, something to make our hearts glad*

Umm- umm-hmm! Umm... Umm-mm...

*Umm...I know huh? Let's talk about school...What are your favorite subjects?*

I like language arts; in elementary school I liked it better.

*Is language arts class harder in middle school?*

The work is easy. I don't like it because we have a mean teacher.

I don't like to write paragraphs. We do it out of books: vocabulary words and punctuation

I love to read, all kinds, [*of books*] Black history, love stories,

and poems when they rhyme.

I like to write stories and poems, but I mostly like math.

*Math? Let's change the subject. Let's just say I am glad I have a calculator*

*Talk to me about the pictures you chose*

I picked this picture of a Black woman carrying cotton

because it shows that, um, mostly the ladies did all the work pickin' cotton and stuff.

And, um, it shows that Black women didn't give up either!

*I know that's true...but we won't talk about right and wrong*

*we are who we are, life is what it is, and that's our song!*

*Why did you pick the picture of the adorable kids?*

I picked this picture of two, two black, two black brothers and sisters

because they look so cute in the bathtub. Here, and, look at the smiles on their faces.

They ain't frownin' or nothin'! They just sittin' there cheesin'

*Well Cutie that's about all for today. Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

Don't tell me what to do...I'm gonna do it anyway

### *Cutie's Demographic Summary*

Like all three girls, Cutie chose her own pseudonym. She chose "Cutie" for two reasons. First, a search for a suitable version of purple, her favorite color yielded unsatisfactory results. We played with: Purple-Lee, Purpie, Amethyst, and Lavender, as possible pseudonyms but none seemed quite right. After discussing the fact that she was both cute and sweet, she chose the former because the latter was already in use by another of the LOVE: ASAP family. Thus, she chose the nickname "Cutie".

Cutie was eleven years old and in the sixth grade during the study. She lived with her mother, her maternal grandparents, and two siblings in an upper middle class neighborhood. Cutie is the eldest child; her sister was five years old, and her brother was two. She also has three brothers and two sisters on her "father's side." Cutie and her mother had a relationship that was more like sisters than mother and daughter. Her mother told me that they were like siblings because she was in her early teens when she gave birth to Cutie. Currently unemployed, Cutie's mother was compelled to quit her retail sales job because her son had seizures. The prohibitive cost of day care for a child with his medical needs was more than she could earn working for minimum wage. However, Cutie's mother had recently begun community college. She attended class two evenings each week while her mother provided care for her special needs son.

Cutie's written narratives reflected strong connections between her identity and her maternal heritage. When she described her personal identity she stated, "I feel good

about myself. I like who I am. When I look in the mirror I think of my mother and my grandmother. I think I look beautiful in my own way.” These statements seemed to suggest that Cutie’s perceptions of well-being, positive self-concept, and physical beauty were attached to her mother and grandmother. Cutie’s data also expressed familial nutriment. For example she stated, “I love my family because they are always there for me,” “they are there to support my life,” “my Mother; she is always there when I need her,” and “I love my grandmother... she is my hero, she gives me her full attention.” These statements expressed a sustained commitment to family, and illustrated the high esteem she held for her mother and grandmother.

There were 42 lines in Cutie’s *Participant Poesy*; she referenced family in 11 lines, and referred to self 20 times. Only three of her self references were idiosyncratic. Although she used first person pronouns “I” 27 times, 13 of Cutie’s first person pronouns alluded to relationships with family members. Significantly, the second part of the friends and family category, “friends” was blank. Cutie did not mention friends in this particularized data set.

In the school category, Cutie used the first person pronoun “I” seven times within six lines. She only mentioned school in direct response to my question: “What are your favorite subjects?” She was definitive about what she does, and does not like about school. The negative characteristics of school outweighed the positive in her descriptions of her school experiences. Her negative responses to school were predominantly found in her perceptions of teachers. For example, in line 26 she stated, “I don’t like it [language arts class] because we have a mean teacher.” The pedagogical methods used by her teachers were an additional source of discontent for Cutie. She explained her

dissatisfaction in these paradoxical statements, “I don’t like to write paragraphs” and “I like to write stories and poems.” These contradictory statements suggested that Cutie likes to write, but does not like the way she is taught to write. In other words, she preferred writing for a purpose, such as, creating a complete unit of meaning. She did not enjoy writing when it is formulaic practice.

Cutie had a corporeal concept of Community. One evening after our monthly “Girls’ Night Out,” while I was taking her home she said, “I don’t live in a neighborhood, I live on a street.” When I asked her to explain the difference, she told me that a neighborhood is a group of buildings together, “like apartments and stores,” and she lived on a street because it was “just houses.” Cutie further clarified neighborhoods as having specific clusters of cultural groups as in “mostly the Mexicans live there” and “basically all Blacks live there.” There was an abstract connection to community in her data when Cutie stated, “Mostly the [Black] ladies did all the work pickin’ cotton and stuff.” Her data revealed that Cutie’s community consists of Black women working hard, and “that Black women didn’t give up either!” Both Cutie and Nai-Nai lived in a community of women.

#### *Nai- Nai’s Participant Poesy*

*My Art Teacher Said I am Good at Art, But My Favorite Subject is Math.*

*I did not question vulnerability recognized in Nai-Nai’s dark brown eyes*

*I said, instead, please describe yourself:*

I am a dark skinned girl

People helper

Problem solver

Calmly, caring,

Friend maker

I love...love because

I need it to be strong...

I am *only* 5 feet 2

I dance when I feel the rhythm

Dancing, singing, laughing is in my genes.

Even my granddaddy sings.

On thanksgiving

I didn't wear a dress

I wore a pink shirt, black pants and a ponytail

my auntie straightened, then curled, just how I like it

because she wanted me to look beautiful.

For Christmas...

I didn't get much, but I got something.

On grandpa's day

I am going to make him something colorful

with my big brother and three little sister's signature on it

to remind him of our love-

I love my Family

They are my inspirational leaders.

Today is my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday and I am so excited.

For my birthday I want some shoes and lots of clothes;

I would like anything I can get.

*I recognized vulnerability in her dark brown eyes but I did not ask.*

*Instead...tell me about school, was all I said.*

On my progress report I had 100%, and 93%.

I am nice, I have many friends

My art teacher said I am good at art,

but my favorite subject is math.

*Tell me what you know about African American history I said.*

Harriett Tubman, she freed the slaves,

and Martin Luther King Jr., he made a speech.

*Tell me what you know about your personal history I said*

My great grandmother on my mother's side was

an Indian-Native American.

She died when my grandmother was a little girl about 7-12...

*And what else would you like to tell me I said*

The earth wouldn't be a world without Hip-hop & R&B

Everybody is somebody.

I love children; I love my God within my spirit, body and soul...

\*but nobody can make it out here alone.

and I am happy,

and to be here!!!!

*I am happy to be here too, I said*

*but didn't form the queries cycling through my head  
did not ask the questions deep inside our sensibility ...sensitivity  
juxtapositioned sweetly beside rock solid pride  
graceful Nai-Nai how did your young brown eyes  
so soon become so wise?*

#### *Nai-Nai's Demographic Summary*

Nai-Nai created her pseudonym from parts of her real name. She was explicit about the way her name was spelled and pronounced. She is heard correcting my pronunciation in an early audio tape. She enjoyed her new name so much that friends who were not in LOVE: ASAP also called her Nai-Nai.

Nai-Nai was 12 years old at the beginning of the study; she turned 13 three months later. She lived with her maternal grandparents and three younger sisters. Her mother and high-school-aged brother live in a small rural town approximately 75 miles northeast of her grandparents' home. Nai-Nai rarely mentioned her mother. Nai-Nai's father, his girlfriend, and their two-year-old son live a few miles away from her. In one of the audio transcripts she spoke fondly of "spoiling my baby brother." She was proud of the room she has at her father's house. She also spoke kindly of her father's girl friend who she called "my almost step-mother." Nai-Nai spends portions of the holidays and several weekends each year with both of her extended families.

In her 55 line poem, Nai-Nai devoted 25 lines to her personal identity; family was mentioned in 12 lines. Four of the 12 lines placed Nai-Nai's personal identity within the context of family. For example, she stated, "I dance when I feel the rhythm. Dancing,

singing, laughing is in my genes. Even my granddaddy sings.” Nai-Nai also addressed the important role that family plays in her personal identity; in lines 26 and 27 she states, “I love my Family. They are my inspirational leaders.” Nai-Nai’s personal identity is firmly grounded in family relationships, friends were only mentioned once, and school did not emerge as a priority.

Nai-Nai devoted a scant four lines to her school experiences. School is represented in her data as means of academic success and social relationships. In line 33 she described her academic excellence. “On my progress report I had 100%, and 93%.” In line 34 she tells her audience about her social relationships “I am nice, I have many friends.” In the two final lines devoted to school experiences she stated, “My art teacher said I am good at art, but my favorite subject is math.” In this statement Nai-Nai defined herself in opposition to what her teacher says about her. All three girls define themselves in opposition to school experiences. Cutie stated: “Don’t tell me what to do...I’m gonna do it anyway.” Sweetie stated: “It doesn’t matter what they think. It is all about how I think.” The girls felt secure enough within the LOVE: ASAP community to create counter-narratives. These counter-narratives are defined as *Acts of Resistance* in this study.

When Nai-Nai described a community beyond LOVE: ASAP, school, and her small town, she referred to the world of music. In lines 44 and 45 of her *Participant Poesy* she stated, “The earth wouldn’t be a world without Hip-hop & R&B.” Nai-Nai also widens her focus to include all of humankind on two separate occasions. The first community and global connection is in line 45 when she stated, “Everybody is somebody.” Nai-Nai’s second metacognitive link surfaced in a Maya Angelou quote. She

cited the famous African American poet on her *Collage of Self*. The poem Nai-Nai refers to is “Nobody can make it out here alone.” Spirituality is another emergent theme in Nai-Nai’s data; she stated, “I love my God within my spirit, body and soul.” From music to spirituality, Nai-Nai’s community expanded beyond the world, to encompass the heavens.

*Sweetie’s Participant Poesy*

*It Doesn’t Matter What They Think. It Is All About How I Think*

*Her confidence like rain on drought dry terrain...*

*eager to please like a sweet Spring breeze*

Stepping, dancing

*Sweetie entered the room*

I always smell like a rose

Or perfume giving scent to your nose

I think that I am a very beautiful girl

because I can love myself no matter what

I also feel good about my school life

and mostly everything I do.

...but I hear people calling me ugly everyday.

*When they disrespect you what do you say? What do you do?*

I tell them that it doesn’t matter what they think. It is all about how I think.

*I know that’s right, Sweetie, good for you!*

*I’m glad you joined LOVE: ASAP*

*What prompted your decision, please tell me*

I chose to be in this program because it seems like  
the only time I can express myself to a teacher.

The other teachers... just don't care about us (Black people)

*Well, then what keeps you going?*

My mother because she is my backbone

in times of need, in times of want

My sisters because they give me courage when I am down

My grandmother because she always gives me advice *like*:

It may be hard sometimes because of the struggles & heartaches,

But through it all you can make the best of it.

and you don't need anyone to tell you if you can or can't

*now, I need to ask what do you know of your culturally relevant past?*

I knew that Martin Luther King stopped segregation.

Rosa Parks stopped us Black people from sitting in the back of the bus.

I know a plethora more of African history that I cannot write down on this paper.

*Well, my new friend, the interview must come to an end*

*before we stop today is there more you want to say?*

I love traveling

Because it gives you a chance

To explore the wilderness

I Love God because without Him there wouldn't be a world

I love God because He is the Alpha & Omega.

Oh how much fun I had in Love: Asap  
For me, it was meant to be  
For all the good times I loved & shared  
it was always ready and prepared  
Oh how I loved Mrs. Winfield my teacher  
But it always seemed like she was a Black female preacher  
I will never forget the experience I had in Love: ASAP,  
because for Sweetie, Cutie, Nai-Nai & Mrs. Winfield it was meant to be

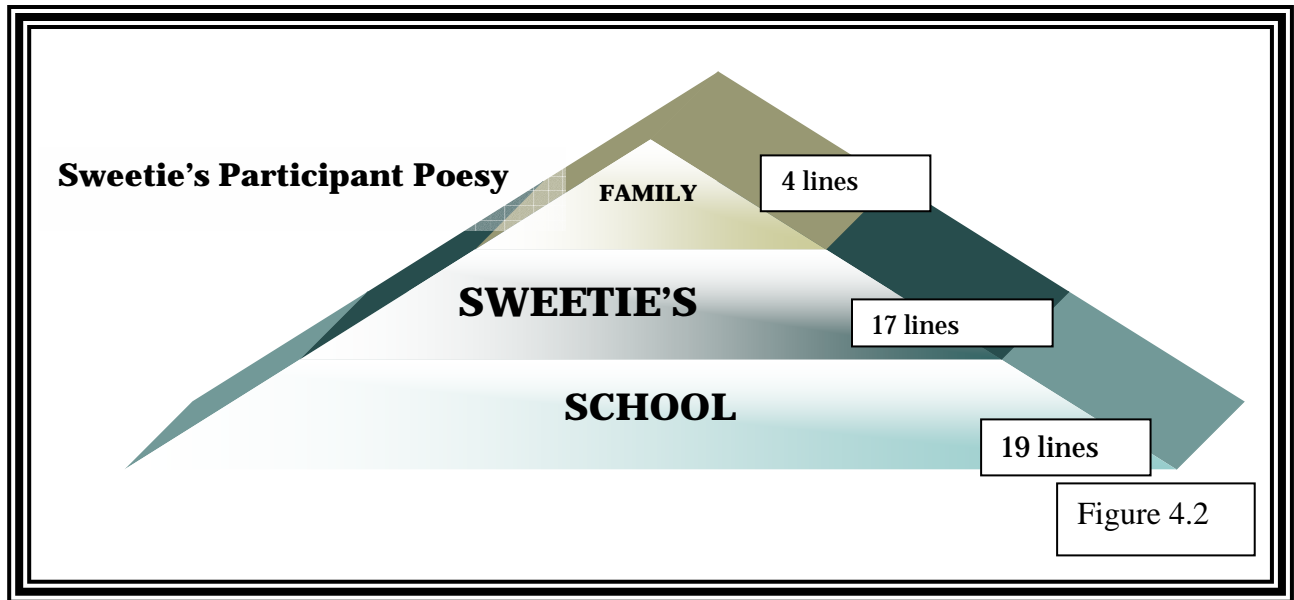
*Sweetie's Demographic Summary*

Sweetie chose her pseudonym because I called everyone sweetie. Students remember a teacher's name; teachers remember faces. The impossibility of remembering a thousand names prompted my habit of calling everyone sweetie. I was honored when Sweetie adopted the name for this study. The name also suited her personality.

Sweetie was 11 years old during this study. Although she was in the sixth grade, her maturity level led me to believe she was in seventh grade until several months into the program. Sweetie was the middle child of three girls. Her oldest sister was a year ahead of her at Zora Maya Giovanni Middle School (ZMG). Her youngest sister attended a nearby elementary school. Sweetie's mother was divorced, single, and the head of the household. As a bus driver for the public schools, her salary was only a few hundred dollars above my part-time graduate assistantship. Sweetie, her two sisters, and mother lived in what Cutie described as "a Black neighborhood." Her neighborhood was about five miles from the middle school that Sweetie attends. She lived in a community of

approximately ten, two-story apartment buildings clustered together. Sweetie did not spend much time in her neighborhood because her mother strictly enforced homework and no phone calls after 8 o'clock p.m.

Sweetie's data reflected a fundamental sense of personal identity. In lines 7 and 8 of her *Participant Poesy* she stated, "I think that I am a very beautiful girl; because I can love myself no matter what." Foundational to Sweetie's personality is her strong sense of self as illustrated in (Figure 4.2).



Personal identity monopolized 19 lines of Sweetie's 46-line *Participant Poesy*; she mentioned family in four lines; and school appeared in 17 lines. Sweetie gave further evidence of her self-confidence in LOVE: ASAP when she was frequently the most vocal of the three girls.

School was another category where Sweetie personified self-confidence. In line 9 of her *Participant Poesy* she stated, "I also feel good about my school life"; in line 11,

she tells her audience “I hear people calling me ugly everyday.” Although these statements initially seemed contradictory, she clarified herself in line 13. In her typically self-assured style she stated, “I tell them that it doesn’t matter what they think. It is all about how I think.” Because school was represented in 17 lines of Sweetie’s data, two categories emerged. Those categories were the regular school day and after school. Within the two categories Sweetie mentioned school experiences during the regular school day seven times and LOVE: ASAP ten times. Of the seven lines devoted to the regular school day, 4 contained specific complaints. Sweetie’s data revealed that her strong sense of self enabled her to survive her negative school experiences.

In addition to her previous statement that people in school called her ugly, further criticism of school was found in line 19. Sweetie stated: “teachers... just don’t care about us.” Dissatisfaction with school was also evident when Sweetie discussed her limited exposure to African American history from kindergarten through sixth grade. For example, she summarized what was learned in lines 29- 30: “I knew that Martin Luther King stopped segregation. Rosa Parks stopped us Black people from sitting in the back of the bus.” This statement signified that her knowledge was limited to the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, line 31 expressed frustration with the exiguity of culturally relevant instruction, “I know a plethora more of African history that I cannot write down on this paper.” Although her disappointment did not translate well in written words, her tone, facial expression, and body language were instructive.

Sweetie made unfavorable comparisons between the regular school day and the after school setting. For example in lines 17 and 18 she explained: “I chose to be in this program because it seems like the only time I can express myself to a teacher.” In other

words, she was silenced during the regular school day and allowed free expression within LOVE: ASAP. The after school setting was represented in her data as preferable to the regular school day in 8 of the 17 lines devoted to her school experiences. Lines 39 through 46 in Sweetie's *Participant Poesy* included excerpts from a poem she voluntarily wrote about LOVE: ASAP. These lines described how much she enjoyed the culturally relevant program, and believed "it was meant to be," a phrase repeated in lines 40 and 46. According to her data, Sweetie's most positive school experiences occurred within the context of LOVE: ASAP. In lines 41 and 42 of her *Participant Poesy* she described our after school program this way, "For all the good times I loved & shared; it was always ready and prepared." This line illustrated her sense of a shared communal space and an appreciation for the organizational structure of the LOVE: ASAP.

Emblematic of the communal trust and mutual respect between the girls and myself was the way Sweetie recognized and honored my inner spirit. In lines 43 and 44 she stated: "Oh how I loved Mrs. Winfield my teacher; but it always seemed like she was a Black female preacher." In the first line she described our teacher/ student relationship; the next phrase illustrates two interactions. First, the data revealed a shared sense of humor. In other words, Sweetie teased the teacher. Second, Sweetie recognized my spirituality by calling me a "Black female preacher." LOVE: ASAP was a safe community for Sweetie. This freedom to both tease and honor an authority figure shows that the community was safe for Sweetie.

Sweetie's data indirectly pointed to the final categories of Community, and Globe/World issues. First, her attraction to traveling indicated an interest in global and world experiences beyond her immediate community. She stated, "I love traveling

because it gives you a chance to explore the wilderness.” Informal conversations with both Sweetie and her mother echoed this longing for travel. Her second reference to a world/global identity beyond personal and school experiences was a spiritual reference. Sweetie devoted lines 37 and 38 to an emergent category of spirituality stating, “I Love God because without Him there wouldn’t be a world” and “I love God because He is the Alpha & Omega.” Both Sweetie and Nai-Nai expressed faith in God, only Cutie makes no mention of a higher power in the data analyzed for their *Participant Poesies*. Therefore, spirituality was an emergent category within this small group of girls. Spirituality is also an important theme in my autobiographical data.

#### *Autobiographical Sketch*

*And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” Isaiah 6:8*

This was my cry as I sought the face of God as a nine-year-old. It was a somatosensory scream conceived in the silent conveyance between an innocent child and an omniscient Father. Gazing up at twin lion sculptures guarding the gates of Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, I was transformed. Words are often inadequate for describing sentient moments. I was a child recently transplanted from New Mexico, drenched in images, enveloped in a tapestry of trees, and foreign flowers. Without the preexisting schema to prepare me for the waves of color rolling toward me, I simply planted my feet, closed my eyes and let the sensations wash over me. The words “having light, we pass it on to others” were engraved in granite at the entrance to Wittenberg, and I think I remember a flaming torch. Maybe I imagined the torch.

Imagination gives us the images of the possible that provide a platform for seeing the actual, and by seeing the actual freshly, we can do something about creating what lies beyond it...The image ... is qualitative. We do indeed see with our mind's eye (Eisner, 2002, p. 73 ).

Nonetheless, I caught a vision of the possible as I watched stone lions, balanced on hind feet playfully squirting water at each other. I imagined a lifelong mission of gaining and sharing knowledge. The lions-at-the-gate image of possibility was etched in the ethos of the child who became a teacher, envisioned actuality *de novo*, and created fresh opportunities for students. Deeply carved images beneath the palimpsest of me standing at the university gates reveal images that were never erased. However, the child who entered an adolescence ensconced within the fairy tale land of academia finished junior high in a roach infested inner-city nightmare. Retaining an impressionistic embodiment of optimism and hope was a tool of survival.

I necessarily created a counter-narrative to reconcile the chasm between where I came from and my new milieu. To survive, I drew pictures, wrote in my journal and read books. Thus, visual and language concepts permanently and inextricably intertwined within me. It is this embedded perception coupled with responsive compassion that prompts me to provide culturally relevant language and visual arts programs. I consistently endeavor to reflect on my past to help children imagine a future beyond their current circumstances. After all that is what faith is, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11: 1).

Cutie, Nai-Nai, Sweetie, and I employed “the substance of things hoped for” to create counter-narratives; we activated the “evidence of things not seen” to attain success in public schools. Each girl’s data set explicitly reveals that she had to ignore what others told her in order to maintain a healthy sense of self. Cutie’s statement, “Don’t tell me what to do...I’m gonna do it anyway”; Nai-Nai’s explanation, “My art teacher said I am good at art, but my favorite subject is math”; Sweetie’s proclamation, “It doesn’t matter what they think. It is all about how I think”; and my public school battles against oppression are evidence that school continues to be an unhealthy environment for the self-concept of African American girls. I designed Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP) to combat these problems.

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter introduced and described the African American girls in my study. It represents initial analysis of a rich collection of multi-media data. Those data consist of interviews, a *Collage of Self* created by each girl, poetry, prose, and journal entries. Also included are excerpts from my field notes, and audio visual transcripts. The data is represented here through *Participant Poesies* and demographic sketches. I include a brief autobiographical sketch to illustrate my motivations and subjectivities. My greatest motivation for this project is to provide a venue for the voices of African American Middle School girls. Clearly, the topic is subjective because I once was an African American Middle School girl. It is also important to note that I maintain a relationship with the girls and their care-givers through periodic, “Girls’ Night Out” gatherings. We

meet regularly for food and fun. Additionally, I fully intend to participate in the academic success of Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie, African American Middle School girls, and other underrepresented groups as I move toward my divine calling. "And I still cling to the dream of a radical visionary artistic community that can sustain and nurture creativity" (hooks, 1994, p.10).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS

*Candy: Can We All Just Close Our Eyes and Think About That?*

#### *Introduction*

This chapter reports and describes the emergent themes from the narratives of African American Middle School girls. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the lived experiences of several African American Middle School girls. Two questions guide my examination of the girls' narratives. The questions are:

1. How do these African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?
2. How do these African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

In answering these two research questions, four major themes emerged from the data: Trauma Has Shaped the Schooling Story; Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences; Negative Stereotypes Reinforce Inferiority; and Acts of Resistance Facilitate School Success. In this chapter I present the four themes and the data pertaining to each theme.

### *Trauma Has Shaped the Schooling Story*

There were many traumatic incidents in the narratives of the African American Middle School girls in my study. Trauma has shaped their schooling stories; it was a profoundly emergent thematic. I sorted the theme; Trauma has shaped the schooling story, into three categories. The first category is, Nobody cares about me: Active psychological abuse and preferential treatment. The second category is, I am contained/ I am not loved. The third category is, I am not learning about my people. The schooling narratives of African American girls are pullulated with traumatic themes.

Each of the three Middle School girls in this study readily offered traumatic incidents that defined who they were as learners in the public school system. The girls addressed the active psychological abuse that resulted from specific teacher behaviors, and the ways these behaviors affected how they saw themselves, and made meaning of their worlds through the stories they told. The African American Middle School girls' narratives described the methods used to contain them, and how their containment left them feeling unloved. Finally, the girls' pleas for culturally relevant knowledge emerged within conversations about the disappointment they experienced from not learning about African American people.

It is important to note that, while this study focused on the three girls who maintained a consistent presence throughout the program, there were eight other girls who wandered into and out of the program. I find relevance in the totality of what was said by each individual. Therefore, this study focuses primarily on Nai-Nai, Cutie, and Sweetie, and input from CeeCee, Fanny, Lil' Cutie, and Shanna is included. Three

additional girls participated, their pseudonyms are Nancy, Candy, and Mahogany; their voices appear when pertinent, in this document. It is also important to note that all names are pseudonyms except my own.

*Nobody cares about me: Active psychological abuse and preferential treatment.*

All of the African American Middle School Girls told stories about how their relationships with teachers traumatized them within their schooling environment. They described incidents where active psychological abuse and preferential treatment occurred. For example, Nai-Nai states:

Um, in math I had got an award because I had made high A's. And in Mr. Jade's class at Zora Maya Giovanni [Middle School], he told me if I took the test when I go to the 7th grade, I'll be in the 8th grade books. But I guess he didn't turn 'em in. But he said I did good on mine. But I guess he didn't turn 'em in. So...I can't-I didn't get into the 8th grade books.

In this example, Nai-Nai critiques a circumstance when she was tested for, but was not given the advanced placement class even though her teacher told her that she was eligible for such a placement. Nai-Nai's 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher administered a math test that reflected her ability to be successful in advanced placement math. Yet, Nai-Nai was not placed in the class. She was given no explanation and was left speculating about the reason for this omission. Nai-Nai states, "But I guess he didn't turn them [the test results] in. But he said I did good on mine. But I guess he didn't turn 'em in." Embedded in Nai-Nai's narrative

is a message about the importance of what a teacher says he will do, and the outcome when he does not follow through. The effects of teacher behavior on the schooling experiences of African American Middle School girls was echoed in a different way by Sweetie:

Some of the teachers that I have seem mean; seems like, seem like they don't like me and stuff because of the way they treat me, and the way they treat others. And I just sit there sometimes. I don't even want to listen to 'em cuz of how they treat me. And I just don't like some of 'em.

In this example Sweetie expressed a belief that she was treated unfairly because of her relationship with the teacher. For Sweetie, her perception of being disliked by her teachers causes her to retreat into silence and lack of participation. Additionally, Sweetie explains that because the teachers do not treat her fairly, "I just don't like some of 'em." When asked to further articulate her perception of being treated unfairly, Sweetie shares the following school narrative:

One time I got sent back to class cuz this boy kept messin' with me. And I told him to leave me alone. I said it out loud. So, I got sent to the classroom. And then this other boy got sent back to the classroom, too. And then when all the, when everybody came back, the teacher told the boy that he can go when everybody got back to the classroom; but then when I said, "Can I go to the bathroom?" He said, "Give me two tokens."

For Sweetie, there are multiple transgressions in this school narrative. First, she is sent to the classroom for defending herself, while her attacker is left unpunished. Second, another student is initially given identical consequences for inappropriate behaviors; he is

also sent back to the classroom. However, when the entire class returns to the classroom, the boy is allowed to go to the bathroom. Meanwhile, Sweetie is denied that privilege. Sweetie perceives further evidence of her unfair treatment as residing in the fact that she is required to pay, “two tokens,” before she is allowed to go to the bathroom. She illustrates the unequal treatment in the following dialogue between Sweetie and her teacher. Sweetie asks, “Can I go to the bathroom?” The teacher replies, “Give me two tokens.” However, the other child who happens to be a boy, and was also punished, is allowed to go to the bathroom free of charge.

In another example of a traumatic incident that shapes Sweetie’s schooling story, she talks about a time when a different teacher treated her unfairly. Significantly, she begins the schooling story by first addressing a positive trait in the teacher:

Sweetie: And, um, then, then he gives us homework and he lets us start that so we won’t have as much to do when we get home.

Maria: Oh, that’s nice.

Sweetie: I don’t like him for the stuff that we do in there.

Maria: Why don’t you like him? Tell me more about what makes you not like a teacher.

Sweetie: Their attitude and how they treat me and how they treat others, cuz, one...one day...I um, this-this girl, asked and Mr. Sharks said, sure. She asked the teacher if she could go get her book and the teacher, he said sure. And I asked if I could go get my book and he said no. And I said you let (pause) go and I said you let her go. And he said, “Well you can’t go get yours.” He told me to sit down.

In this example Sweetie describes a positive teacher practice before revealing her perception of unfair treatment. First, Sweetie describes “good” teaching when she states, “He gives us homework and he lets us start that so we won’t have as much to do when we get home.” Sweetie appreciates the opportunity to get a head start on her homework assignment, but she does not like the way the teacher treats her. Sweetie explains: “[I do not like] their attitude and how they treat me and how they treat others.” This statement describes her perception of preferential treatment for some, and the way it affects her relationships with teachers. Even though Sweetie likes a specific practice within this teachers’ classroom, it is the way the teacher interacts with her that is aversive. The teacher gives all students an opportunity to begin their homework in class, but gives preferential treatment to a specific student by permitting the student to get her book, while denying Sweetie the opportunity to retrieve her book. When Sweetie challenges the preferential treatment by stating, “You let [her] go,” the teacher makes no effort to conceal his lack of equanimity; he simply replies, “Well you can’t go get yours.” The teacher offers Sweetie no explanation and summarily dismisses her, “He told me to sit down.” Preferential treatment frequently emerges as a sub theme because there were 28 examples in the data. Because African American Middle School girls report perceptions of being contained and unloved, the privileged management of their peers often results in trauma for the girls in this study.

*I am contained/I am not loved*

The second category that emerged from the theme, Trauma Has Shaped the Schooling Story was, I am contained/ I am not loved. In this category, it is important to include an excerpt that contains the words of earlier participants because preferential treatment emerges in comments that report active psychological abuse. Specifically, the African American Middle School girls address the containment and absence of love exhibited by teachers toward an African American peer. In the following example Shanna, and Lil' Cutie discuss an incident where a male peer was given preferential treatment, while a female peer was punished:

Shanna: His name is Joshua. He had hit her and she had hit him back. Mr. Barrow had told her to stop and Joshua just kept hittin' her. And she hit him back and she had pushed him into Mr. Barrow. Mr. Barrow got mad and then she said, "Mr. Barrow, he hit me." He said, "That don't mean you gotta to hit him back." And then she got. Then, you know the little closet on the 6th grade hallway. It's a closet by...

Lil' Cutie: The janitor's office?

Shanna: By the bathroom and the counselor's office.

Lil' Cutie: Oh.

Shanna: She was in there. He told her to sit in there cuz he was gonna get the principal on her. And she said she didn't care. And then she had went into the room and she took all the stuff off the wall and she was throwing it into the trash can.

In this example Shanna, and Lil' Cutie critique an incident where a female peer reacted to negative attention from a male peer. According to Shanna and Lil' Cutie, when the girl retaliated, she was punished, but the boy escaped appropriate consequences for his actions. Additionally, they reported that the girl was confined to a janitorial closet.

Although this is one of the most dramatic examples of confinement in the data, there are many other examples of the ways African American Middle School girl's experience containment within the school setting. For example, during field observations I noted that groups of students are required to walk in single file lines through the hallways when moving from class to class. Additionally, when I tallied the actual number of students allowed to move freely through the hallways during the school day, I noted 39 students. Of the 39 students who appeared in the hallway during the first part of my observation while classes were in session, I tallied 7-White girls, 2- Latina girls, 17-African American boys, 3- White boys, and 0- African American girls. Towards the end of my observation, just before the bell signaled the end of the school day, I counted 7 African American girls. The African American girl's were usually alone, appeared from the direction of the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade hall and returned in the direction they came from. Although other students frequently appeared to wander aimlessly through the hallways, when the African American girl's appeared in the hallway, most seemed to have a specific destination and goal in mind. The comparative invisibility of African American Middle School girls in the hallways suggested a lack of freedom. The girls were contained within the classroom. This containment was also noted during another field observation when I wrote:

I see Cee-Cee and Nai-Nai...I get lost in the sea of beautiful brown angels filling the hall with their energy and youth. My joy is interrupted as the wide White man with gray hair calls an AAG [African American girl] out of line and gets right in her face. He towers over her speaking too loudly for my comfort. "You were chewing gum! You lied to me! Step out of line." He steps closer to her and talks down to her, lowering his voice. Now, I cannot hear what he is saying...he is too close [to the girl]. Finally, she walks away. She is still chewing her gum. Her face is stone. It hurts to look at her. She looks neither right or left...she walks straight ahead. Her body language is tight and stiff. I want to cry for her.

In this example both containment and a lack of love are illustrated in the White male teacher's behavior concerning the African American Middle School girl. The teacher contained her by pulling her out of the line, invading her personal space, and using his body as instrument to prevent her from moving. He exhibited a lack of love by disrespecting her in front of her peers and other inhabitants of the hallway. When the teacher yelled at the African American Middle School girl, and called her a liar, she exhibited signs of trauma. The girls' downcast eyes, and slumped shoulders illustrated typical markers of abuse. Evidence of the effectiveness of the teachers' containment is revealed in the African American Middle School girls' body language as she moves through the hallways, obviously demoralized, assiduously contained.

In another example of containment and consequently, preferential treatment CeeCee states, "Like yesterday, a White girl asked if she could get a Gatorade...yes—when I asked for one she said, "You can sit down and shut it." This statement is a

prototypical example of the traumatic experiences reported in perpetuum throughout the girls' narratives. The following comment illustrates another exemplification of African American Middle School girls' portrayals pertaining to the lack of care in their schooling experiences. CeeCee states: "Yup! But teachers that treat you bad because you are Black...they treat Black people different..." Her comment prompted me to ask the girls to describe their relationships with teachers. They responded in the following long excerpt of dialogue that I found important enough to include in its entirety:

CeeCee, Sweetie, and Lil'Cutie all start talking at once... "Teachers!!!"

(They say in unison)

Lil'Cutie: Shut the door (CeeCee quickly shuts the door) I don't like them.

Sweetie: Some of em' are skraight.

CeeCee: Yeah some of em' are alright like Mrs. X

Sweetie: No, she isn't.

CeeCee: You like Mrs. X!

Lil'Cutie: No, I don't. I don't like none of them.

Sweetie: Mrs. X is alright, you know you like her...

Lil'Cutie: No... I do not.

CeeCee: Well, Mr. X used to be (inaudible) but now he's skraight.

Sweetie: No he ain't...he ain't skraight...

Lil'Cutie: Sho' ain't! They swear up and down that we are the worst thing in the world.

Maria: So it is not the teachers you don't like, it's their inconsistent treatment and playing favorites.

Lil'Cutie: They always be rolling their eyes and smacking their teeth...writing you up...

Maria: Okay but what makes a good teacher?

CeeCee: You can't treat all races different...

Sweetie: They don't say, "Can you please" but they expect you to say please...

Lil'Cutie: And they lazy...they always want you to get something, throw something away for them...but do they say please?

Sweetie: They can get it they self.

Lil' Cutie: And Miss X she say she half Mexican or something so the Mexicans can do no wrong...

CeeCee: Mr. XX makes you pay 12 tokens to go to the bathroom.

Lil' Cutie: They just wait to get us in trouble

Sweetie: Miss Other says; go on, please say it, so I can write you up.

Maria: No... they don't say that!

Sweetie: Tell her, they say, "Please do it, I want you to do it, so I can write you up" Now, how mature is that? They always telling us that but they aren't acting very mature.

In the previous dialogue the girls critically explore the ways teachers treat them. They express frustration in the lack of love teachers express. They express a dislike for the teachers because of the negative department of teachers apropos of them. They describe various teacher behaviors as: insulting, "They swear up and down that we are the worst thing in the world;" immature, "rolling their eyes and smacking their teeth;" rude, "They

don't say, 'can you please;'" indolent, "And they lazy...they always want you to get something, throw something away for them;" and prejudicial, "She say she half Mexican...so the Mexicans can do no wrong." However, the common theme woven through all of the African American Middle School girls' stories is the idea that nobody cares about them.

This notion that teacher's treat them unfairly is represented in Cee Cee's statement: "You can't treat all races different." The girls' perceptions that they are not cared for result in narratives that describe an active psychological abuse that frequently manifests in preferential treatment. In another example, CeeCee states: " The teachers [give] pop quizzes when they don't even teach...I like to learn but they get on my nerves... always calling me out, I think, don't you see other people? They are all standing around doing the same thing but they don't get picked on." African American Middle School girls often describe preferential treatment; however, they rarely report being preferred.

### *I Am Not Learning about Me/My People*

The third category to emerge within the traumatic schooling experiences of African American Middle School girls was the category: I Am Not Learning about Me/My People. Emblematic of the girls' sentiments about the lack of representation for them and their people within the school setting was Sweetie's statement about African American history:

I think we shouldn't just talk about it [African American history] in Black history month. We should talk about it in all the months, no matter what month it is, cuz it ain't only Caucasian people that helped make this world it's Black people too.

In this example Sweetie expresses a desire to learn about African American culture beyond the confines of a specific month. She emphasizes her point in the following statement: "I think that we should talk about Black history month, I meant, Black history more often." African American Middle School girls express yearnings to learn more about culturally relevant topics; the gap between articulated appetency and actual educational experiences is addressed in Sweetie's statements in dyadic asseveration. First, she calls for more than one month of Black History, "We should talk about it [Black History] in all the months." Second, Sweetie actively resists the idea that people from her culture made insignificant contributions to society. She states, "It ain't only Caucasian people that helped make this world it's Black people too." In addition to the girls' longing for culturally relevant subject matter they exhibit a lack of cultural knowledge. For example CeeCee explains:

What can I tell you about the Black African American history? That...the black people, it was a lot of writers, it was a lot of poets, and we had a lot of artists. And umm, they did... they, them people back in the old days they inspire us for now because we know what they did and what they did

for us, and just the pictures they had and the stuff we have now. We got way more than they had. They didn't have a school or nu'in [nothing]...But look at us now. But that's what I can tell you about Black history.

Even though CeeCee states that she knows about African American people, the information that she shares is vague and incomplete. She seems aware that there were, "a lot of poets, and we had a lot of artists." However, she provides ambiguous information that alludes to African American poets and artists but does not include specific names. Nai-Nai also reported partial and indistinct information about her knowledge of African American history:

I know that back in the day they [African Americans] had to umm, go through slavery and I know that, um, it was, it wasn't fair to them but, um to...to, the Caucasian people. They tried to make the best out of it, and tried to treat us wrong, treat us how they wanted to treat us. But now everybody gets treated the same way because of people like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and other people.

Both Nai-Nai's and Cee Cee's statement reflect the fact that they are not learning about themselves or people like them. Both girls repeat the incomplete information they have learned. Cee Cee knows of, but cannot identify artists and poets of African descent. Nai-Nai knows that her ancestors went "through slavery" but does not articulate what slavery meant. At first reading, Nai-Nai seems to say that enslaved Africans "tried to make the best out of it [Slavery]. However, the next phrase reveals that she is in fact talking about "Caucasian people." "They," Nai-Nai states: "tried to make the best out of it, and tried to

treat us wrong,” and “how they wanted to treat us.” Clearly, when Nai-Nai uses “us,” she speaks about African American people, and “they” references “Caucasian people.”

Nai-Nai provides further evidence that she is not learning about her people when she states, “Now everybody gets treated the same way because of people like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and other people.”

Nai-Nai supplies supplementary substantiation that she is not learning about African American people when asked about the frequency of culturally relevant discussions. Nai-Nai answers, “In some of our classes we...hardly talk about it, but in Black history month and in Mr. Mice’s class sometimes we talk about it.” In response to the same question about the frequency of culturally relevant discussions Sweetie replies, “I’ve got an answer ...only in February, which is Black history month.” The girls reveal that they are not learning about themselves or their people as they discuss schooling experiences in their narratives. The lacuna of culturally relevant experiences is also mirrored in their physical milieu. The idea that the girl’s are not learning about themselves is underscored by the small number of African American images in the hallways. This absence of African American representation emerged in my field observations. I wrote:

It was slow for a while so I copied the quotes hanging from the ceilings on beautifully decorated paper banners. One stated, “Happiness is not getting what you want but wanting what you have.” Then, I copied some posters, “Start Caring. Stop bullying;” and “Me quit? Never.” This poster featured a pretty blonde teenaged girl. “Climbed Everest. Blind.” This was a picture

of Erik Weihenmayer, a White man with crooked teeth. I noticed that there were no people of color featured in any of the posters.

All of the girls emphasized eagerness to learn more about themselves and their people in school. They revealed the serious absence of culturally relevant learning experiences that was reflected in the hallways. Feelings of containment, coupled with a sense that they were not loved inundated their explications of a traumatic schooling environment.

Additionally, they expressed longings for more opportunities to succeed within the public school they attended. Their relationships with teachers were frequently riddled with negativity and their relationships with peers were sometimes negative as well. However, peer relationships emerged as definitive and sustentative in the schooling experiences of African American Middle School girls.

#### *Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences*

A second preeminent theme to emerge during the reduction of data from the transcripts and field notes was the notion that peer relationships sustain and define schooling experiences for African American Middle School girls. All of the girls mentioned situations where peers either substantiated or typified their school days. For example Nai-Nai states, “In school people always ask me for help because people always say that I’m smart. Cuz I make good grades on my tests and stuff.” In this example Nai-Nai defines her success within the framework of peer statements about her. She portrays peer precognitions of her intelligence as evolving from, “good grades.” In an appositional example Nai-Nai conveys the aspects of peer interactions that depict a disappointing schooling experience:

They made me cry because they kept on telling me ....This one girl said I was sayin' stuff. I said, if ya'll keep messin' with me I'm a hit them. They said, they told Michelle...she said she'll hit you in your mouth. Um...and I didn't even say nothin' to that girl. She said I wish she would come over here. Hit me if you want to. And I didn't even say nothin'.

Maria: So, they were lying.

Nai-Nai: Mmm...hmmm-tryin', trying to lie on me. But it was connected to instigating.

In this example, Nai-Nai realizes that her peers are instigating, but she does not escape the negative consequences of the behavior of her peers. In fact, she is reduced to tears.

Shanna also reports an incident where she is destructively defined by peers:

Shanna: Hi! My name is Shanna and my school friends are jealous and some of them, they aren't.

Maria: (Laugh) some of them are jealous, and some of them are not?

CeeCee: She in a smart class.

Maria: Oh, they are jealous because you are in a smart class?

Nai-Nai: She in advanced classes and she thought everybody mad at her.

Lil' Cutie: I'm not. I don't care. I could care less. I mean I'm happy that...

Shanna: I know!

Lil' Cutie: You are in the advanced class. But I can care less. I'm in the advanced class, too.

Shanna: I'm not talking about you. I ain't talking about all day! I am talking about people I have every class with.

Maria: So people get mad at you because of what class you're in?

Nai-Nai: Yeah. Cuz she in the advanced class.

Maria: Tell me more about that.

Shanna: Cuz I got in the advanced class and then they like get mad. And then like, and then they, when somebody...

Maria: I don't believe that anyone was talking while you were talking.

Lil' Cutie: Oh...sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. So sorry.

Maria: Your apology is accepted.

Shanna: And then like, um, what...and like when I—I had got all them awards; everybody was like mad at me.

Maria: Oh, I just saw that award.

Shanna: No...not you!

Lil' Cutie: I was fittin' to say, cuz, I congratulated you when you won the Spelling Bee.

Maria: You won the Spelling Bee?

Shanna: Yes

Lil' Cutie: I congratulated you.

Maria: What place did you come in, sweetie?

Shanna: Uh...4th.

Maria: Wow! That's great! How many people were in it?

Shanna: 45.

Maria: Wow!

Sweetie: What number you were?

Shanna: 4th.

Maria: That's really good! Okay...

Shanna: And then they was sayin,' "I hope you lose the Spelling Bee," and stuff.

Shanna reveals that her school friendships are characterized by envy: "My school friends are jealous and some of them, they aren't." CeeCee and Nai-Nai explain why some of their peers are jealous of Shanna: "She in a smart class." and "She in advanced classes." However, Lil' Cutie's response seems to suggest that her self concept is threatened by Shanna's success. Lil' Cutie states that she is not jealous of Shanna: "I'm not [jealous]. I don't care. I could care less. I mean I'm happy that you are in the advanced class. I'm in the advanced class, too." Lil' Cutie's protestations are telling because she is not in advanced classes. In fact her written documents exhibit language difficulties. She has several misspellings in her first interview, and her sentences lack coherence. For example, she misspells pretty, grandmother, Prom, color, person, fighter, locked, light, and born. She uses verb tenses incorrectly as in the following sentence: "I am love math." In other words, although Lil' Cutie argues that she is not jealous of Shanna, she supplies undeniable evidence to the contrary. There is a dichotomy between Lil' Cutie's statements and the facts revealed in her data.

Shanna's dialogue also establishes a dichotomy. For her, the dichotomous relationship is between her satisfaction with her intelligence, and fear that her peers will not like her because she is an intellectual. Two illustrations of this phenomenon appear when she states: "I got in the advanced class and then they like get mad;" and "like when I...got all them awards, everybody was like mad at me." In spite of the conflict she

describes in the previous sentences, she makes no apology for her intelligence. She continues to describe accomplishments that include winning fourth place in the *Spelling Bee*. Significantly, it is Lil' Cutie who introduces the fact that Shanna earned fourth place honors in the school-wide *Spelling Bee*: "I congratulated you when you won the *Spelling Bee*." Still, there is sadness in Shanna's voice that is palpable when she states, "They was sayin' I hope [you] lose the *Spelling Bee* and stuff."

Complex, rather than simplistic understandings of school relationships emerge. For example, being picked on dominates Shanna's school narrative. Also, both Lil' Cutie's and Shanna's self-awareness, and self-concept emerge in this part of the transcript. Shanna's self-awareness and self-concept emerge through the eyes of peers and her negative interactions with them. Lil' Cutie's self-awareness emerges in comparisons she initiates between herself and Shanna. The emergent theme "Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences" is clearly illustrated in this dialogue because the girls narrate a story that verbalizes behaviors associated with class placement, awards and honors, and definitions of being smart. These behaviors are contextualized within peer perceptions that impact the schooling experiences of African American Middle School girls.

For African American Middle School girls, the verity of positionality emerged as a category within the broader thematic, "Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences." For example Lil' Cutie states, "Chase me if you want to. You'd be layin' on the ground. So quick; so fast; before you can blink an eye. I'm tellin' you. I'm serious." Although, this statement seems to suggest that Lil' Cutie will not be intimidated, she subsequently reports a contradictory positionality.

Lil' Cutie: I felt the girl sitting on the bench, I felt like she...I think she felt like she-she can't do anything about folks pickin' on her. And she feels like that she stuck in a corner and she can't get out of it. And, um, only sometime she need somebody to talk to, but sometimes it break her down.

In direct contrast to the indomitable persona that Lil' Cutie embodies in her opening statement, "Chase me if you want to. You'd be layin' on the ground. So quick; so fast; before you can blink an eye," this new statement reveals vulnerability. However, Lil' Cutie's camouflages her intellection of powerlessness within a fictional character. It seems that the face Lil' Cutie demonstrates to her peers, is very different from the face she disguises within the discussion of a culturally relevant poem. I believe that Lil' Cutie is talking about herself when she states: "She feel like... she stuck in a corner and she can't get out of it...sometime she need somebody to talk to, but sometimes it break her down." All of the girls shared schooling narratives that moved back and forth between peer relationships that sustain or define their schooling experiences.

In another example, CeeCee, Lil Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie describe the kind of friends they are:

Lil' Cutie: Ooooh, yeah... My name is Lil' Cutie again and, um--the kind of friend I am, I am a true friend. Like if you need somebody to have your back or you need somebody to talk to I am the one you need to talk to.

Sweetie: My name is Sweetie and I am a true friend like Lil' Cutie, because I don't go back and tell what people tell me. I used to but I don't any more.

Maria: That's important.

CeeCee: My name is CeeCee and I'm a good friend. Cuz when my friends have problems they always come to me like, "CeeCee I know you can help me with this" or something like that.

Nai-Nai: My name is Nai-Nai and I am a true friend because, ooooh...let me see (Laughter)

Maria: While Nai-Nai's thinking about the kind of friend she is, I will tell you about the kind of friend I am. I'm the kind of friend who will always be there for my friends. And even though I move around a lot, I keep in touch.

Nai-Nai: And back to me- I am a good friend because I - I listen to what my friends got to say. I'm a true friend because I help people, and I share.

Lil' Cutie: At home I have true friends. At school, some of them two-faced.

Sweetie: For the third time...My school friends are back-stabbers. And they go back and tell what you told them not to tell. And you just sometimes get mad with them. I'm gonna give you some examples. Like, um...

Nai-Nai: I um, this um, Nai-Nai and I have real friends-real friends at school. But I have people to talk to when I need to ...

CeeCee: My name is CeeCee once again. I have, I have, some good friends, and I have some true friends, friends that I can tell anything and talk to them about anything. And being here, [in school] I have some bad friends. Like, it's like three people that we're tight, but I can't tell them

anything. Cuz, like-like you can have good friends, you can have bad friends, you can have two-face-ted friends.

Lil' Cutie: But anyway, you real-real close with a friend and ya'll tell each other anything but once she got mad at you she go round tellin' all your business about what happened in your life and stuff....that's not a true friend. A true friend is, even though ya'll is mad at each other ya'll let it go eventually and come back friends.

In this dialogue the girls make pronouncements about the kind of friends they are, "If you need somebody to have your back or you need somebody to talk to I am the one," while simultaneously describing the kind of friends they appreciate, "A true friend is, even though ya'll is mad at each other ya'll let it go eventually and come back friends." Additionally, African American Middle School girls distinguish between good friends, bad friends, two-faced friends, real friends, and true- friends. For example CeeCee states: "You can have good friends, you can have bad friends, you can have two-face-ted friends." Nai-Nai defines *true-friend*: "I'm a true friend because I help people, and I share." Next, the girls locate friendships within two spheres; they delineate school friends; and they demarcate friends at home. For example Nai-Nai states: "I um, this um, Nai-Nai and I have real friends-real friends at school. But [at home] I have people to talk to when I need to." Lil' Cutie's statement also differentiates between two friendship categories: "At home I have true friends. At school, some of them two-face-ted." African

American Middle School girls divide friendships into complex and unambiguous groupings. These relationships sustain and define their schooling experiences. Sustaining and defining school experiences becomes crucial for African American Middle School girls as they face the challenges of incidents that reinforce inferiority.

### *School Incidents Reinforce Inferiority*

The third essential theme that emerged in the African American Middle School girls' narratives was, "School Incidents Reinforce Inferiority." All of the girls had stories to tell about the negative consequences they experienced from representations of African American inferiority. The girls described these representations as negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes included monolithic depictions of the people who were of African Diasporic descent. Whenever anyone of Afrocentric heritage was mentioned in the girls' narratives, the information was rooted in slavery. These monolithic tales were in turn steeped in further incidents of miseducation. Miseducation created a climate for the girls' acceptance of negative stereotypes.

### *Negative Stereotypes*

All of the girls described incidents, lessons, or teacher behaviors that were prejudicial and enveloped in negative stereotypes. For example Nai-Nai states:

They are sayin' that since all that stuff happened, we might as well,  
(Laugh) we might as well not even ...pretty much, for real, not even think  
about bein' in the world.

Nai-Nai's proclamation that African Americans, "might as well not even think about... [being] in the world," is telling. Her statement is a profound revelation of the ways negative stereotypes can steal a girls' heart. Nai- Nai punctuates her point by interjecting four complex prepositions, "not even ...pretty much, for real, not even." Nai-Nai's point is that she believes that most of the messages she receives from school and "in the world" are telling her that she should not expect much from society. In another example, Cutie and Nai-Nai state:

Nai-Nai: umm...umm...every, in, every movie that you mostly watch, if it has a black person in it, why does the black person always gotta be the victim? I mean the person, you know what I mean, the bad person who did something.

Cutie: And the person that shoots people.

Nai-Nai: (Inaudible) in movies that they play some roles in, they gotta be the person that ends up in jail.

Both Nai-Nai and Cutie readily offer examples of negative stereotypes they see in the popular media. Nai-Nai asks a rhetorical question and Cutie adds her voice to the discussion of the movie depictions that typecast African American's as victims, criminals, and prisoners. In another example of the ways negative stereotypes reinforce complex feelings of inferiority, Nai-Nai, Sweetie, and I address the movie roles that are assigned to African American girls:

Maria: And Nai-Nai says that most-most of the movies with Black girls...And so, we are going to talk about the roles Black girls play in movies. What roles do you, um, see Black girls in?

Nai-Nai: They mostly got to be the ones end up getting hurt. Like, raped...

Sweetie: That's what I was gonna say.

Maria: You were gonna say the same thing?

Nai-Nai: Oh...

Maria: How does that make you feel?

Nai-Nai: I don't like that cuz they always put...it always gotta be a Black person that ends up getting hurt, not a White person.

Sweetie: And you'll see a White girl getting raped once in a while but mostly it's a Black girl.

Nai-Nai paints a puissant portrait of the negative stereotypes assigned to African American girls in popular media. She states: [African American girls are] the ones [that] end up getting hurt, like, raped." Sweetie agrees, adding, "You'll see a White girl getting raped once in a while but mostly it's a Black girl." Both girls are concise in their reports of the harmful ways negative stereotypes affect them. Additionally, they report that they are disproportionately represented as victims. According to Sweetie, "White girls" are seldom raped, but "Black girls" are often the victims of abuse in the popular media. These negative stereotypes often germinated in monolithic lessons of the Afrocentric culture.

### *The Monolithic Black Experience*

Another category that arose from the African American girls' narratives of school incidents that reinforce inferiority was the Monolithic black experience. Fanny, CeeCee, Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie shared stories that reflected African knowledges that were

limited to monolithic portrayals. In the following example Fanny and I discuss the famous African philosopher and story teller:

Maria: Have you guys heard of Aesop?

Fanny: He was an African...

Maria: Yes, he was.

Fanny: An African slave.

Maria: Sweetheart, everyone who was African was not a slave, we were kings and queens and princesses...

Fanny: But didn't they say something about he was an African American and, um, then his poems, they uh, he-he... finally got famous when he, when he would say them, and all that.

This is an example of the way miseducation emerges from the monolithic stories African American girls are told in school. According to Fanny, all African people were once slaves. It is culturally relevant that her public school education would lead her to conclude that African History is related exclusively to slavery. Rooted in Fanny's metacognition is the belief that African equals slave as illustrated by her statement: "He was an African...an African slave." It seems that even my revelation that some Africans were part of a royal dynasty does not convince Fanny otherwise, "But didn't they say something about he was an African American?" Fanny's query suggests that she would rather believe a vague "something" than consider the idea that Africans were "Kings and queens and princesses..." Further evidence of Fanny's miseducation is observable in her spontaneous correlations to African, African slave, and African American. She makes no distinction between the two groups of people, or allow for the possibility that Africans

were not always enslaved. Fanny accepts the negative stereotype, monolithic Black experience, and exhibits a limited knowledge of culturally relevant information; this is a characteristic of miseducation.

### *Miseducation*

Miseducation emerges from the monolithic Black experience to become another significant category of school incidents that reinforce inferiority in African American girls' narratives. They exhibit a limited knowledge of their culture, even as they report few opportunities for gaining culturally relevant knowledge. In the following example, I ask the girls to demonstrate their knowledge of historical African Americans. CeeCee, Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie state:

Maria: Tell me, you guys, the...list, and list off the names of all the famous African Americans that you've ever heard of...we know Martin Luther King. Who else?

Nai-Nai: Malcolm X

Maria: Rosa Parks

Nai-Nai, Sweetie, Cutie, & Maria: Malcolm X

Maria: Rosa Parks

Sweetie: Harriet Tubman

Maria: Harriet Tubman

Nai-Nai: Ummm...

CeeCee: Cynthia Collins (pseudonym for the first woman to integrate a local university)

Maria: Cynthia Collins

Maria: Anyone else?

Cutie: Umm...

The girls can evoke only the most elementary name recognition; the names include Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and the local University of the Deep South (UDS) scholar. CeeCee ends the discussion with a report that she completed about an African American woman who is alive today. She was the first African American woman to attend UDS, in the town where the African American Middle School girls attend school. Even though CeeCee wrote a report about this local hero, miseducation reemerges as a theme in her text as she struggles to remember the details of this woman's experiences. In another example of miseducation, CeeCee blames the victim when she states, "She had been trying for years, and didn't do it on the first time." Blaming the victim is a classic characteristic of miseducation. By this I mean, CeeCee's statement suggests that she perceives Cynthia Collins' inability to gain entrance to the university as Cynthia Collins' fault. CeeCee does not consider the hostile racial climate that blocked Cynthia Collins' entrance to UDS; she instead, blames the victim. Nai-Nai provides another example of miseducation:

And then, we watched this movie in Social Studies. And they, and it, it had, it had some...the Neanderthals in it. And it had some more Neanderthals that, they looked more like humans. Like, the, the, the other ones, they, umm, they, they were like, old, and they, they had come from a

different part of Africa, Africa, whatever you want to call it, than the other ones did. And they looked more like humans than the other ones did, the other Neanderthals did.

Nai-Nai shares a portion of a social studies lesson. She reports that she and her peers watched a movie about Neanderthals. In the movie, some of the Africans “Looked more like humans than the other ones did.” According to her report Nai-Nai believes that the way humans looked was from the part of the continent they lived on instead of human evolution. Nai-Nai appeared to accept this miseducation without question.

#### *Acceptance of Negative Stereotypes/ Allowing Others to Define You*

The final category to emerge from the African American Middle School girls’ narratives of school incidents that reinforce inferiority was the acceptance of negative stereotypes. Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie all revealed ways in which they accepted negative stereotypes and allowed others to define them. For example Nai-Nai states: “Most of the Black people have bad stuff in their movies, um, videos and stuff. Like, they always have gangs in it or shooting a gun.” Nai-Nai knows that some of the movies with negative stereotypes are made by African American film makers. Consequently, Nai-Nai accepts the negative stereotypes and allows herself to be defined by the popular media. However, because of miseducation she does not have a culturally relevant knowledge base that would enable her to critically reflect upon the negative stereotypes she sees.

In another example of miseducation through the perpetuation of the negative stereotypes, Cutie and Sweetie engage in a spirited discussion of a social studies lesson:

Maria: So... tell me the story about Social Studies today.

Cutie: It's this, um-um, this story about this man, he, um, he a...

Sweetie: African American.

Cutie: Yeah, African American we were talking about in Social Studies. And this man, they—I think he was already...He already had a warrant on him and he was running from the police. He was riding his bike. He tried to speed up and stuff. He tried to speed up and he had fell, and then he hit so hard that he had died. He had, you know those metal fences that's real sharp? It had went through, all, all it had went through him.

Sweetie: Through him, everybody said that, they said that ... everybody spread rumors around that the police checked into this building...

Cutie: Yeah...and he had a ...one of those metal things through him and he died.

Maria: When? That's a current event? Is that something that just happened?

Cutie: It... we was reading it in Social Studies.

Maria: But did they say whether this was, um, a long time ago? Or was this...

Cutie: It was the 1970's.

Maria: Oh, okay, and so why were you guys reading that?

Cutie: I don't know.

Maria: What was the point? What are you guys studying right now in Social Studies?

Cutie: Oh—yeah...Australia. We studied Australia. And he gave us this paper. And we didn't read all of it. We read some of it. I liked it. I wish I would-a-um, kept it so I could show it to you. Cuz I like to read it...read it all. We was answering some questions on it and-and stuff like that. You know, like we were talkin' bout the ghetto and stuff like that. That's where he lived.

Maria: The ghetto in Australia?

Cutie: You know, um, the people that they, um. I can't remember the name of it. But the people that lived in, um, some part, some other part of the country. They, um, you know slaves....I think. They had sent them to another part of the ghettos.

Maria: In Australia?

Cutie: Yeah

In this example of miseducation the girls accept the negative stereotypes without remonstrance. Cutie begins the schooling narrative with a story about a man that Sweetie identifies as African American. Cutie agrees with this observation and continues to discuss the social studies lesson. Evidently, the subject of their discussion is an African American man who is a criminal. Cutie explains: "And this man... had a warrant on him and he was running from the police." My attempt to understand why this was a topic of discussion in social studies class leads to several questions: "That's a current event? Is that something that just happened"; "Why were you guys reading that?" and "What was the point? What are you guys studying right now in Social Studies?" I am trying to understand how a graphic description of the death of an African American man became a

topic of discussion in a sixth grade social studies class. Additionally, I try to understand whether or not the man is African American, or Australian. Miseducation emerges from the fact that Cutie does not have an answer. When asked why the girls were reading the article, Cutie answers: “I don’t know.” When I ask them what they are studying in social studies, Cutie states: “Oh–yeah...Australia. We studied Australia.” The girls could not explain, and I did not understand the rationale, goals, or objectives for the lesson.

The girls are effectively miseducated when their overall perception of a lesson full of negative stereotypes induces attentive engagement from them. There is no expostulation as Cutie and Sweetie offer this problematic social studies lesson as an example of “good” teaching. This class activity captured and retained their attention even though a Black man was criminalized, and it provided more questions than information. For example, if the story was in fact about a Black man in Australia, why did the girls think the man was African American? Why did the girls think that an African American man was living in an Australian ghetto? In this example, miseducation emerged in the kind of unquestioned acceptance of negative stereotypes that is the hallmark of miseducation.

Miseducation is also present when the girl’s are given flawed and incomplete information. For example, Cutie states, “He gave us this paper. And we didn’t read all of it. We read some of it.” This statement suggests that that the lesson was not complete; therefore, the girls received information that was both defective and inadequate. These elements are textbook examples of miseducation. The high value they place on this lesson indicates the depth of their miseducation when Cutie and Sweetie accepted, and allowed negative stereotypes to define them.

Most of the African American Middle School girls seem so thirsty for acknowledgement of their culture that they embrace any mention of people who look like them. Even though the social studies lesson contained counterproductive and incomplete information about a person of African descent, Cutie and Sweetie were excited about the lesson. The girls' excitement suggests that the absence of positive information about African American culture leads to an accordant acceptance of nullifying generalizations. The girls want to see themselves somewhere and this desire frequently leads to unequivocal engagement with disparaging stereotypes of inferiority which is also an indication of miseducation.

In the following example I ask the girls discuss their perceptions of how inferiority is reinforced. CeeCee, Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie move from acceptance to critical examinations of negative stereotypes:

Maria: Why do you think that is?

CeeCee: Because they dislike Black People.

Maria: Who are they?

Sweetie: The President...he...

Cutie: The President!

Nai-Nai: The President...he's trying to make us go back to war. And they only chose him to be President over a Black man because he was already President and he's White.

CeeCee: And his daddy.

Nai-Nai: And he's gonna get it anyway...it is never a Black person

President, always a White President. (Inaudible crosstalk and laughter)

Cutie: Cause his... Cause his daddy was President.

All four girls identify racism as a factor in the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. CeeCee states: "They [White people] dislike Black People." In addition to beliefs that White people generally dislike Black people, Nai-Nai reports that African Americans are disproportionately represented in wars. She states, "The President...he's trying to make us [Black people] go back to war." Additionally, the girls critically reflect on the presidential election process. They explain their perceptions that the election results unfairly advantage White men. For example, Nai-Nai states: "They only chose him to be President over a Black man because...he's White." CeeCee adds that the President's family background is also a factor in his winning the election. She adds, "And his daddy." Cutie agrees with Nai-Nai and CeeCee when she explains that the president won the election because, "His daddy was President." Nai-Nai seems to speak for the entire group when she states, "And he's gonna get it anyway...it is never a Black person President, always a White President." In this discussion the African American Middle School girls move from the passive acceptance of negative stereotypes to actively resisting them as they critically reflect on the socio-political processes. Individual *Acts of Resistance* are often the first weapon in the battle against miseducation.

### *Acts of Resistance Facilitate School Success*

The final theme to emerge from the careful consideration of the African American Middle School girls' narratives was that *Acts of Resistance* facilitate school success. Using various strategies, the girls actively resisted the negative stereotypes and created methods to attain achievement in school. The primary strategies for *Acts of Resistance* are the creation of counter narratives; the deconstruction of negative stereotypes; optimistic outlooks that transform struggle into victory; cherishing family relationships; and imagining a better school environment and world. *Acts of Resistance* keep the girls alive, sane, and breathing.

One method that African American Middle School girls employed to achieve school success was the creation of counter narratives. Counter narratives are told in opposition to the dominant discourse. In these counter narratives the girls acknowledge and contradict stereotypes as *Acts of Resistance*. In the following example, I ask the girls if the stereotypes of African Americans that they see in society are accurate representations.

Maria: but what I'm trying to ask you guys is that, do you think these, these stereotypes that you see, are those real...is that how we are as a people?

Nai-Nai: NO! We not...um, it's not all Black people that do that, but it is some that do that because they...I don't know—they just did it.

Nai-Nai emphatically resists negative stereotypes; her *Act of Resistance* is in the utterance of the singularly powerful word, "NO!" In another example of an *Act of Resistance* Sweetie and CeeCee create the following counter narrative:

Sweetie: They are trying to give us a message about White folks.

Maria: What is that message?

Sweetie: That White folks... that White folks are not the best, which they say they are but they aren't!

Maria: Okay.

CeeCee: I think the message is, Blacks are the bad person. Blacks are not the bad person! Other people, other, um, races, they can do stuff too. It's always, it seems like we always get the bad end of somethin'.

The girls deconstruct the negative stereotypes by simultaneously acknowledging and refuting their sagacity. For example, Sweetie states: "White folks are not the best, which they say they are but they aren't!" Her perception is, White people argue they are superior, but Sweetie disagrees. CeeCee also disputes the injurious messages, stating. "I think the message is, Blacks are the bad person. Blacks are not the bad person!" When given the time and opportunity to do so, all of the girls engage in *Acts of Resistance* to facilitate school success.

For example Fanny and Shanna deconstruct negative stereotypes to create the following counter narratives. They state:

Fanny: Everybody is somebody... a poem.

Shanna: I'm going to write a poem about freedom.

Fanny: And we are all the same

In this example Fanny and Shanna create counter narratives that oppose negative stereotypes. Specifically, they suggest writing topics that have cultural significance to them. When given a choice, the girls frequently choose to interrogate issues of parity. For

example, Fanny states, “Everybody is somebody.” Her statement contains an implication that equal status should be present in her school experiences. Shanna’s announcement also addresses equanimity. The fact that she is, “going to write a poem about freedom” reveals that she is also looking for autonomy. Fanny reiterates the idea that equanimity is important when she rephrases her original thought; in this example “every body is somebody,” becomes synonymous with, “we are all the same.” The data represent metacognitive engagements with a cultural relevance thematic. Both Shanna and Fanny use oppositional self definitions as *Acts of Resistance* to assert self- affirmations that are efficacious for school success. They resist notions that declare they are not “somebody,” express desires for emancipation, and request that they are viewed on an equal level with everyone else. The data reveal an *Act of Resistance* that emerges as optimism within the girls’ self-affirmations. They oppose negative stereotypes that would relegate them to the status of a “nobody.”

In fact, four girls: Candy, Fanny, Nai-Nai and Shanna metacognitively engage the “Everybody is somebody” theme. Within the “Everybody is somebody” discourse, Candy asserts, “No more racism. No more racism.” Candy’s insertion reveals that she connects the topic, “Everybody is somebody,” to an awareness of racism. It seems reasonable to assume that thinking about equanimity, led Candy to name a root cause or contradistinction. She identifies racism as the oppugnancy to equality; Candy’s statement is an *Act of Resistance* because she verbally opposes racism.

All of the girls used *Acts of Resistance* to facilitate school success. In the following example Nai-Nai exhibits how optimistic outlooks propel her through struggle into victory. Nai-Nai states:

Umm...when I first heard that Martin Luther King, umm, tried to get...um, stop racism and have the whole world join as one, and he was saying for everybody to be friends and get along and not have hatred against each other.

Nai-Nai uses her cultural knowledge of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to narrate hope. Significantly, she envisions a world that will “stop racism,” “join as one,” and “not have hatred against each other.” Nai-Nai imagines a world that is free of racial hatred, unified, and loving. In another example of the way African American Middle School girls maintain optimism in the face of struggle, Shanna states: “You can get past your struggles or friendship problems.”

The optimistic theme of “through struggle to victory” emerges in Shanna’s text, when she describes her belief that even though there will be struggles and problems, they can be overcome. As a metacognitive strategy, the statement illustrates that Shanna thinks about struggle as inevitable, but not necessarily debilitating. Shanna articulates an optimistic epistemology that allows her to see challenges as tools used to sculpt victory. Cultural relevance in Shanna’s statement is illustrated by the way she narrates life lessons in her text. The life lesson or advice that she gives is to “get past your struggles.” In another example, Shanna states:

I think about her poem that no matter what kind of mood she in, she still dance. And if she sad, she dances to get it off her mind. She just let’s the music take her away, come, and take her away when something upsets her. The music makes her let her soul come free, and just let her mind drift away, and be peaceful.

In this example, Shanna's *Act of Resistance* to facilitate school success emerges from an explication of a poem. In this statement, Shanna describes the way she uses her imagination to move through her struggles into victory over unpleasant circumstances. Her strategies include dancing and music to, "get it [sadness] off her mind;" and "Let her soul come free... her mind drift away, and be peaceful."

Another strategy that most of the girls use as *Acts of Resistance* to facilitate school success, emerges from statements they make about axioms from family members. For example Nai-Nai and Sweetie report:

Nai-Nai: My granddaddy told me that we are the best, color, people that you can ever meet. I don't know why he told me that...but he did.

Sweetie: Somebody told me that too.

Both girls agree that they are the best "people you can ever meet." Family relationships influence the culturally relevant metacognitive strategies of African American Middle School girls. Nai-Nai uses the words of her "Granddaddy" to support her theory that, "we are the best, color, people that you can ever meet." Self-awareness from the perspective of Nai-Nai's grandfather is an affirmative evaluation of her humanity. She quotes her grandfather in an *Act of Resistance* to the negative messages that she receives from others. These statements illustrate how the girls actively resist the negative messages they receive by repeating the positive messages they receive from family members. In another example of the ways African American Middle School girls cherish family connections in order to facilitate school success Nai-Nai states:

I picked it [this picture] because it's beautiful. It's a beautiful picture. And it has African American people sitting around and one girl's dancing. And they [are] having a party...and like I said before...these are my folks, even though I don't know them.

For Nai-Nai, embracing African American people as extended family is an *Act of Resistance* that facilitates school success. She creates a connection to her culture by embracing the people in the picture as cherished family members, stating, "These are my folks, even though I don't know them." In another example, Sweetie uses her mother's words as an *Act of Resistance* that facilitates school success. Sweetie's mother often tells her that it does not matter what people think because God judges the heart. She states, "I hear people calling me ugly everyday. I tell them that it doesn't matter what they think." Sweetie explains the way she maintains a positive self-image to counteract negative comments about her. In other words, she recalls her mothers' words in order to create a space for active resistance.

For Cutie and Nai-Nai, *Acts of Resistance* also occur on an individual level. They state:

Nai-Nai: I'm not a little girl. I'm a young woman AND I'm *grown*.

Cutie: I'm grown short- tee. I'm grown shaw-dee.

Nai-Nai: I'm dignified but still young. Shaw-dee, shaw-dee!

These statements emerge as individual *Acts of Resistance* wherein each girl makes positive statements about themselves. Each girl discusses maturity as a methodology for creating school success. Both girls declare, "I'm grown." All of the girls project themselves into an imagined future where they are "grown-ups." Grown-ups is a phrase

the girls use to describe adulthood. However, Cee-Cee also imagines a school environment where she is the teacher. She states:

I would say, "Please sit down...like don't make you sit down. Friday is fun day as long as you finish your work during the rest of the week. People who finish their work early could work ahead...let them learn...they could go to the computer lab or something.

CeeCee, imagines what she would do if she was the teacher as an *Act of Resistance*. In order to facilitate school success she imagines a situation that would enable her to succeed in school. It is significant to note that Cee Cee's ideal classroom includes increased opportunities for learning. As a teacher she would allow students to "work ahead" and "let them learn." Nai-Nai also invokes imagination to transform her educational and world view; she states, "Uhhh...what I know is that all the African Americans were heroes...that...um, for, for beating racism, um, happening in the world." This statement exemplifies Nai-Nai's *Act of Resistance* as a transformational strategy that she uses to describe African American "heroes... beating racism...in the world." For Nai-Nai, this positive world-view of heroic African Americans, and the cessation of racism facilitates school success.

Using various strategies, African American Middle School girls practiced *Acts of Resistance* to facilitate school success. The girls took polemic stances in resistance to negative stereotypes and fashioned systems for school achievement. Their principal approaches for *Acts of Resistance* included constructing counter narratives while deconstructing destructive descriptions of themselves. They chose optimistic outlooks that acknowledged adversity while working toward triumph. Cherishing family

relationships, and imagining an improved world was the final act of resistance. These strategies facilitated school success for African American Middle School girls.

### *Chapter Summary*

Nai-Nai: “I don’t even know nothing that’s fun about school.”

This chapter reports and describes the emergent themes from the narratives of African American Middle School girls. I describe the findings that arose from the girls’ discussions of their school experiences as they metacognitively engaged within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program. An examination of the African American Middle School girls’ narratives uncovered four major themes: Trauma Has Shaped the Schooling Story; Peer Relationships Sustain and Define Schooling Experiences; Negative Stereotypes Reinforce Inferiority; and *Acts of Resistance* Facilitate School Success. The recrudescency of these four themes shaped the African American Middle School girls’ schooling narratives. However, Nai-Nai provides a compelling summary; she states, “Mmm—I don’t even know nothing that’s fun about school, something that’s real-real fun”

CHAPTER SIX  
FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

*Introduction: Someone to Guide Me*

*“For every one of us who succeeds, it’s because there’s somebody there to show us the way”* (Winfrey, 2004, p.104).

I entered the Language and Literacy program at the University of Georgia to write a dissertation from genesis to revelation. I began an exhaustive research process with ecstatic anticipation, developed a Critical Race Narrative theoretical frame, and created an energetic methodology. My committee encouraged and supported my creativity which enabled me to transform the ivy tower into jasmine fields. The participants for this study were African American Middle School girls, and as the researcher I was an instrument in their hands. The resulting idea from this collaboration was a culturally relevant after school program. This program, which I designed, was based on my belief that the intersectionality of language and visual arts is an important consideration when developing curriculum for the academic achievement of African American Middle School girls. Therefore, it was named Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Programs (LOVE: ASAP). I believe that this program can break the oppressive chains suppressing youthful creativity because it freed the African American Middle School girls in this study. The lessons that I learned from the modest experiences of several extraordinary African American Middle School girls might deliver a Nobel Peace prize to my door.

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the lessons that African American Middle School girls taught me. I do not attempt to make generalizations about the entirety of the African American population. Instead, I focus on explicit narrative voices of the African American Middle School girls in my study. My purpose is to create an opportunity for the African American Middle School girls in this focus group to share their schooling stories. My goal is to facilitate voice for the African American Middle School girls in this study by conversing with them and relevant literature. Their voices are authentic, brevilouquent, and candid as they agree and disagree with the literature written about them.

The literature that addresses African American Middle School girls is usually written about, around, and for them but is rarely cooperatively written with them. Therefore, this study speaks to, and with African American Middle School girls. The girls in this study are distinctly individual; however their schooling narratives resonate with my own educational story, and the history of African American education. In this chapter, I merge their narratives with mine, and the relevant literature to create spaces for understanding what it is like to be an African American Middle School girl. My Critical Race theoretic guides my hope that this research will create empathic understandings of the ways that institutionalized racism has affected these schooling narratives to compel changes within the academy. I believe that listening to the African Middle School girls' schooling narratives will provide the research community with valuable insights about the commonalities and contradistinctions of humankind.

*The questions: It's beyond me*

*“Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can anyone deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me”* (Hurston, 1891-1960; 2004, p.88).

I began my doctoral program with a symphony of subjective questions about my divine purpose within the academy. Why had I survived the traumas of my life? Why was my life spared from the mind numbing professions within which other high school drop-outs are condemned to a lifetime sentence of labor without parole? How was I able to dismiss the predictions of my teachers that I would end up with too many children and on the welfare line? How was I able to shake off the cruel words of professors who said, “Blacks are genetically, intellectually inferior to Whites” and “I have made allowances for your creativity, but you still have to prove yourself”? How is my schooling narrative coincidentally and antithetically related to contemporary African American Middle School girls? I know better now than I knew then, that answers to these questions are a deeply spiritual matter. I knew then, the answers to these questions would facilitate survival in my doctoral program. I know now, finding and sharing the answers to these questions may help others discover their own corridors away from arduous atmospheres. I could not approach my research the way others had, simply to do what others had done. This journey is personal.

I believe that my personal triumphs predict success for others with equipollent experiences. I sought answers in books that encouraged me to keep, “making a way out of no way” (Johnson-Bailey, 2001); and listening to “the echo in my soul”(Clark & Blythe, 1962). Other African American women scholars taught me to acknowledge, “the skin that we

speaking” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002); and of my responsibility to, “teach to transgress” (hooks, 1994). African American women scholars meliorated perspicacity that “shifting” is a substratum which, sustains “the habit of survival” (Scott, 1991). Even though I am a “Sister: Outsider” (Lorde, 1984); and “all the women are White, all the blacks are men, ... some of us are brave” (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982). Like my “Black Foremothers” (Sterling, 1979), I am divinely led to respond with my existence. “I believe we are here on the planet to live, grow up, and do what we can to make this world a better place for all people to enjoy” (Parks, 2004, p.82). I believe humankind is responsible for changing intolerable facts of life, otherwise we tacitly agree with imparities. These core thoughts became a nexus from which two research questions emanated:

1. How do these African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?
2. How do these African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

To answer these questions I conducted a qualitative research study. I designed and implemented Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Programs (LOVE: ASAP), a culturally relevant language and visual arts program. My study was with, not about the African American Middle School girls who participated. In my role as a participant observer, I was the canvas that the girls used to paint impressions of their school setting. I hope that contemplating the narrative voices of African American Middle School girls as they answer these questions will inspirit the academy.

This study began by reviewing the literature around several major issues:

1) historical yearnings of African Americans for a free and appropriate education; 2) the contributions of African American women feminist's and education pioneers; 3) African American philosophies of education; 4) culturally relevant pedagogy; 5) language and visual arts education; and 6) after school literature. The ideas contained in the literature emerged in the African American Middle School girls' schooling narratives as they described their school experiences and metacognitively engaged within the culturally relevant curriculum of LOVE:ASAP.

#### *African American Middle School Girls Describe School Experiences*

In chapter two I summarized the history of African American education as “Yearning” because the quest has been a persistent and urgent longing. History repeats itself as African American Middle School girls continue to describe yearnings for safe spaces within American school systems. The girls are decidedly visible and indubitably invisible; this is a historical and contemporary phenomenon. Historically, African American girls were first viewed as chattel, later as cheap labor, and then obscured beneath incidents of abuse, cruelty, and exploitation. Currently, popular media accentuates the best and worst of African American youth while the vast majority is attenuated. This accentuation/ attenuation dichotomy ignores the reality that past and present African American youth, have been, and remain pilloried by socioeconomic struggles and segregated schools (DuBois, 2001; Dyson, 2004; Franklin, 2005; Hacker, 1992; Kozol, 2005; Tate, 2003; West, 2001; Woodson, 1990). These dilemmas frame the schooling narratives of the African American Middle School girls in this study who

describe feelings of being trapped in a repressive school system. Racism, miseducation, suppression, omission, and oppression of their unique and specific strengths are the facts of life for most female African American adolescents (Cade, 1970; Collins, 2006; Freeman & Hargrove, 2004; hooks, 2001; Jordan, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983; Tatum, 1997).

These facts of life stand in striking contrast to the issues faced by White female adolescents whose main concerns are body image, gender roles, and group membership (Finders, 1997; Pipher, 1994). Of the three issues reported to maintain primacy in the lives of White girls, “body image” is a corresponding factor for African American Middle School girls even though it is subsumed by the more mitigating circumstances of racism. Of the three primary participants of LOVE: ASAP, Nai-Nai is the only girl who directly addressed body image as part of her personal identity. She addressed skin color, height, fashion sense, and hairstyle. The other two girls did not directly describe body image in their narratives. Instead, Cutie stated that she was beautiful in her own way, and Sweetie described herself as a very beautiful girl. Nai-Nai used beauty within the context of her aunt wanting her to look beautiful. Both Cutie and Sweetie described their beauty in the first person, but Nai-Nai relegated her beauty to third-person status. African American Middle School girls frequently have to negotiate issues like self-image that are similar to their White peers in addition to other problems.

According to Christian (1997) adolescence is a terrain where children in the middle, “grapple with the confusion of becoming [young adults], and leaving childhood behind” (p.7). However, the schooling narratives of Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie revealed no such confusion. Instead, they describe clear positional ties to the realities of

their lives. They are sisters, daughters, aunts, nieces, caregivers and problem solvers. Each girl gave examples illustrating that the most pressing issues were trauma within the school environment, battling to sustain and define school relationships, combating negative stereotypes, and engaging in acts of resistance to facilitate school success.

African American girls describe issues of trauma, relationship, negative stereotyping, and resistance. These issues are well documented in the literature as major foci for African American women feminist's and education pioneers (Brady, 1987; Cooper, 1995; Knopfner, 1997; Stewart, 1995; Taylor, 2002). These early feminist's and education pioneers facilitated success for African American girls by creating educational opportunities, and social justice. The girls in my study report significant engagements with African American women. All three girls live in a household where the father is peripheral. Only Nai-Nai reports significant relationships with both her father and grandfather. She lives with her maternal grandparents and frequently spends time with her father. Cutie lives with her grandmother, mother, step-brother, and step-sister. Sweetie lives in house full of women. Her parents are divorced; her mother is the primary caregiver for Sweetie and her two sisters. African American girls abide in the historic, as well as, 21st century hearts of African American women.

History proves that the heartbeat of African American womanhood provides sanctuary for African American girls, and their overwhelming absence within school systems is troubling. Although, the student faces in the classroom are of increasingly multiple hues, ethnicities, and cultures, the teachers' faces are consistently one color, White. Ladson-Billings (2001) reports:

There are almost five hundred thousand full-time, regular, instructional faculty in the nation's colleges and universities; thirty-five thousand are in the field of education; 88percent of the full-time education faculty are White; the prospective teacher population is also predominantly White. The enrollment of schools, colleges, and departments of education...in the late 1990's was about 495,000... 86percent were White. (p. 12)

This statistic is substantiated in the middle school Cutie, Sweetie, and Nai-Nai attended. 63% of the students were African American. Most of their teachers 33 out of 44 were White. Only 3 of 7 support staff members were African American. The entire custodial staff was African American. The principal was an African American man. His assistant principal was a White woman. I reiterate the pertinent quotation "all the women are White, all the Blacks are men." The shortage of African American women educators and the prominence of Eurocentric tradition complicate attempts to honor African American philosophies of education. African American Middle School girls' descriptions of their school experiences and their metacognitive engagements with culturally relevant pedagogy highlight this crevasse.

*Metacognitive Engagements with Culturally Relevant Language and Visual Arts*

African American Middle School girls' metacognitive engagements with culturally relevant pedagogy compliment African American philosophies of education. These philosophies were conceived in the hearts of African American women. Stewart (1831, 1995) states: "Let us make a mighty effort, and arise, and if no one will promote or respect us, let us promote and respect ourselves...Let every female heart become

united” (Stewart, p.26 &28). African American educational philosophies centralize and unite the “powers of the mind” and “heart and soul.” Stewart’s articulation of the necessary coexistence of intelligence and spirituality is mirrored in contemporary works. For example, Dillard (2006) suggests, “embracing a paradigm where culture and spirit are central and peace and justice is the work” (p. 43). Although much has been written about the deterioration of African American culture (Collins, 2006; Dyson, 2004; Franklin, 2005; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 2001; Mosley, 2000; Perry et.al; West, 2001; Woodson, 1990) etc., most of the African American girls in my study disagree. Two of the three girls in my study metacognitively engaged within the unions of intellect and spirit, and both Nai-Nai and Sweetie freely discussed their individual spirituality in their narratives. In contrast, spirituality and culturally relevant pedagogy are not emergent themes in seminal texts devoted to White girls (Finders, 1997; Pipher, 1994).

Even though there are commonalities between African American Middle School girls and their White female peers, they differ when the unique circumstances created by institutionalized racism are described. Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers students to survive in a system that they were not supposed to survive. (Asante, 1980; Bell, 1996, 2004; Cade, 1970; Delpit, 1995; Dimitriadis & Carlson, 2003 ; Jordan, 2002; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lorde, 2001; Richards,1989; Scott, 1991; Twine, 2000; Wade-Gayles, 1995). When the African American Middle School girls were given opportunities to metacognitively engage culturally relevant topics, they frequently described incidents that detailed racist acts against themselves and others. These stories were shrouded in the internalized stereotypes that suggest limited chances for survival.

A very important finding in this study was that culturally relevant pedagogy empowered the girls to succeed in school. Enveloped in images of people who looked like them, and reading texts written by African Americans created safe places for the African American Middle School girls to critically reflect. These reflections empowered the girls to create counter-narratives that facilitated optimistic engagements in opposition to oppression. According to Stanley (2007): “Counter narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to the dominant discourse” (p.14). Each girl told schooling narratives that contained examples of negative stereotypes and their strategies to combat them. Often they used the words of family members as the first weapon of defense against the harmful messages that they received. This is in opposition to the literature that places interactions with peers among the primary foci for White girls (Duncan & Jackson, 2004; Finders, 1997; Pipher, 1994; Tatum, 2003), because family relationships dominated the African American Middle School girls’ schooling narratives. Peer relationships define and sustain the school experiences of African American Middle School girls; however, family relationships empower them.

I created a culturally relevant language and visual arts program to empower African American Middle School girls by providing opportunities for the creation of self within school experiences. The African American Middle School girls blossomed as they joyfully conversed while creating poetic and prosaic responses to the fine art of African Americans. Additionally, they metacognitively engaged while they produced their own works of art. Siegesmund (2004) states: “The arts are fundamental to how we make sense of the world around us, how we see ourselves in relationship to our world and how we

interact with it” (p. 94). Siegesmund’s theory emerged in relevant practice as each girl discussed her world through art. hooks (1995) states:

“It occurred to me ... that if one could make a people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their will and power to make art, then the work of subjugation, of colonization, is complete. Such work can be undone only by acts of concrete reclamation. (p. xv)

Both art and language facilitated “acts of concrete reclamation” when the girls used creativity as a process for working through negative schooling experiences.

Another connection between art and language is their potentially redemptive properties. I watched the girls translate anger, and frustration into language and visual arts. They consistently revised themselves as they created artwork and written texts. Each girl used the available materials to reform their schooling experiences. I watched as tears became a sweeping canvas of rain, and negative words were cast onto an imaginary character. Connections to language and visual arts are important considerations for designing curriculum to assist academic achievement for African American students. (Cade, 1970; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; hooks, 1994; Kozol, 2005; Oreck et al., 1999). At the intersection of art and language Cutie, Nai-Nai, and Sweetie re-created their lives. Creativity is crucial for the regular school day and after school time.

In the after school program the girls were free to be themselves, this freedom gave them time explore ideas. The literature reports that the key factors in the successful implementation of after school programs are structure, staffing, and active community involvement (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Heath & Adema, 1999; Miller, 1994; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Quinn, 1999; Siegal, 1995; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). I found relevance

in these research studies. Structure emerged as crucial to the girls; if I said I was going to do something they held me accountable. Staffing was more important to me than it was for the girls because the staff made the site accessible. The factor that was least important to the girls and me was community involvement. Instead, parental involvement emerged as crucial to the success of the program. Establishing relationships with the girls' primary caregivers was the chief factor for the success of LOVE: ASAP. When the girls metacognitively engaged within the after school setting they found relevance in culture, and power through language and visual arts.

### *Recommendations and Implications*

My study answers the calls for more research about African American girls. I believe that the strength of my study is the deliberate focus on three specific girls as I contextualize them within the history of American schooling experiences. Because I provide palimpsest descriptions of them, I believe this research will provide insights into their lives. These insights will create empathic understandings of what it is like to be an ordinary African American girl in today's school system. This will facilitate comparisons between historical educational opportunities and make visible the voices African American girls who are underrepresented in the literature.

I place myself within the research community as a critical race theorist, and an advocate for African American girls. I stand among the African American women who prepared a place for me. I am poised to create spaces of success for the next generation while preparing them to keep the torch burning for the generation that follows them. My study adds to the literature that interrogates the possibilities for success for African

American girls. I agree with the culturally relevant pedagogy theorists and practitioners. I found relevance in my life experiences as they relate to African American girls of today. My recommendations echo those of other scholars however, I believe they bear repetition. Fundamentally, I found that all children need to feel valued and nurtured within the classroom setting; all children need positive role models; and the cultural values of African American adolescents must be respected.

### *Implications for Theory*

I combined Narrative Analysis with Critical Race Theory to create a Critical Race Narrative framework. This theoretical frame enabled me to focus on the narratives of three specific girls to encourage empathic understandings as change agents. Listening to the African American Middle School girls' voices through narrative analysis offered intimate understandings into their lives as they narrated their schooling experiences, and CRT has the potential to bring light to the seldom seen souls of African American middle school girls. I also used Portraiture, and an Endarkened Feminist perspective to frame the schooling experiences and metacognitive strategies of African American Middle School girls. Portraiture assisted with the contextualization of African American Middle School girls within contemporary and historical American schooling experiences, while an Endarkened Feminist perspective provided instrumentality for their narratives. I believe that among the strengths of my study are new insights and opportunities for compassion.

Exploring the Critical Race Narratives of the African American Middle School girls allowed me to look for themes of empowerment, social justice and love by writing and speaking about them. Portraiture is an art-based research methodology that provided

the tools to illustrate the African American Middle School girls' lives within the concentric circles of their lives. Creating these palimpsest descriptions provides insights into their lives. Hopefully, these insights will create empathic understandings of what it is like to be an ordinary African American girl in today's school system. Creating empathy can facilitate comparisons between historical educational opportunities and make visible the voices African American girls who are underrepresented in the literature.

Finally, an Endarkened feminist perspective is extremely important when interrogating theoretical and practical issues concerning African American Middle school girls because it honors their spirits. Dillard (2006) states that an endarkened feminist perspective that has six core assumptions. They are:

1. Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community.
2. Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose.
3. Only within the context of community does the individual appear (Palmer, 1983) and, through dialogue, continue to become.
4. Concrete experience within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the "matrix of meaning making."
5. Knowing and research are both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward to the world; To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness.

6. Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on structure gender race, and other identity relations within research.

(pp. 18 -26)

I place myself within the research community as a critical race theorist, and use the narratives and portraits of African American girls to advocate for changes in the systems that oppress them. I stand among the African American women who refused to be silenced, and who were Endarkened Feminists before the terminology was available to them. These early Endarkened Feminist narratives prepared a place for me. In turn, I am poised to create spaces of success for the next generation while simultaneously preparing them to keep the torch burning for successive generations.

### *Implications for Practice*

According to Robinson (1995) Every young person should be able to develop his or her potential in freedom and dignity (p. 64). However, the girls in my study, my classmates, and I had no voice and no value in Middle School. We were not nurtured and the only way we attained attention was to demand it. Those who attracted negative attention were denied an education because they spent the majority of their time in the principals' office, or suspended from school. This study found that one African American Middle School girl was imprisoned in a janitorial closet. In my Middle School, those of us who were afraid of punitive measures suffered in silence; the girls in my study frequently chose silence as a strategy for survival. We completed the assignments, submitted them and were rewarded for our compliance. We were not successful because

of the teachers who taught us; we were successful in spite of teachers. These issues of feeling contained and an absence of love recrudesced in the girls' schooling narratives, culturally relevant pedagogy can alleviate these issues.

As a teacher, I still remembered what it felt like to be silenced within a curriculum that had no cultural relevance and made an effort to hear every voice, every day. One of the ways I made sure that each student had a voice was to make speaking a part of the daily routine. I put a daily quote on the board, gave students time to write about it, and then gave everyone, every day, an opportunity to respond orally to the quote. For those students who were extremely verbal, I gave time limits, for shy students I asked probing questions; some students even needed close-ended questions. Thus, we began each day in a democratic setting “the drama of teaching and learning with speaking parts for all” (Cazden, 2001, p.164). I do not pretend that I was a perfect teacher. I most definitely was not. However, I remembered how it felt to be discriminated against and tried to be conscious of the ways some children are privileged while others remain invisible.

“It is the responsibility of every adult—especially parents, educators, and religious leaders—to make sure that children hear what we have learned from the lessons of life and to hear over and over that we love them and they are not alone” (Wright-Edelman, 1995, p. 43). The girls in this study often expressed feeling unloved and alone in their schooling narratives. They expressed desires for positive role models. I find commonalities between the girls in my study and my own autobiographical narrative.

When my family left the sheltered environments of small military bases and finally, a small university town, I was thirteen. Thirteen is that peculiar age when a child dies and a teen-ager is born. Perhaps, if the only phenomenon in my life at the time was

school, positive role models could have made a difference in my life. Instead, adolescence began with neglect. Thrust into a large inner-city for the first time I was truly lost. My father surrendered to the disease he had been victorious over for years. For the first time in my life I knew what it was like to be fragmented. There were no safety nets in the impoverished neighborhood of my early teens and I went the way of the only peers who would accept me. The girls in this study also suffer from fragmentation and neglect, negative peer pressure, and not enough safety nets to buffer them. Opportunities for participation in the arts for economically disadvantaged youth are beyond the grasp of the African American Middle School girls in my study. There remains a pressing need for programs to help children channel their creative strengths into positive endeavors. My creativity was silenced for a long time; I hope to prevent this from happening to the girls in this study.

Fortunately, my parents planted a deep seed of faith in the fertile soil of my heart. The girls in this study also exhibit a foundational faith. God never left me, and eventually the mind numbing effect of oppressive happenstance had to relinquish control. God helped me break free. "Like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries. It speaks itself against our will, in words and thoughts that intrude even violate the most private spaces of mind and body" (hooks, 1994, p.167). These words resonate with my adolescence and the girls in this study. Language facilitated my personal *Acts of Resistance*; I still have the journals that chronicle my transformation.

The African American Middle School girls in this study used language and art to create innovative strategies for survival in an often hostile schooling environment. Additional voices that spoke against our fears of life and will to die were faith and the visual arts.

According to hooks (2002):

“Faith enables us to move past fear. We can collectively regain our faith in the transformative power of love by cultivating courage, the strength to stand up for what we believe, to be accountable in both word and deed.

(p.92)

I witnessed transformations in the lives of the African American Middle School girls as they courageously spoke their individual and collective truths even though they had few positive role models to respect and liberate cultural values and combat the absence of love the girls’ reported.

Unlike the dominant culture, many African Americans have retained a sense of communal responsibility and family loyalty. If you find this difficult to believe, just walk up to an African American and insult that persons’ mother. I can confidently assure you; you would not repeat the experiment. Another common cultural distinction for African Americans is a history of orality that is evident in the speeches of people from Frederick Douglass, to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, and scores of other African American orators. Evidence of African American oratorical skill is also apparent in the popularity of rap artists and the hip-hop culture. Well documented in the lineage of African American culture, is a past that is deeply rooted in music and movement. Although

African American adolescents bring a wealth of cultural capital to the educational setting they are more often penalized than embraced. Perhaps most significantly, a deep sense of spirituality has consistently permeated the African American community and has sustained us.

When I was an adolescent student God was only mentioned as we recited the Pledge of Allegiance. As a middle school teacher I was forbidden to talk about God. In fact, it was against the law. However, faith is historically and currently fundamental to African American culture. Derrick Bell is a prominent critical race theorist whose deep faith is evident as he weaves parables throughout his books. Many African Americans use Biblical scriptures frequently in their texts. (Dillard, 2006; hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings; 2001). Bell (1987) states:

White men handed your forebears their most sacred book as a pacifier, intending it to lull them into contentment with their lowly lot. They found instead, within its text both a comfort for their pain and the confirmation of their humanity. The Bible provided a vision of life for the slaves unlike anything their masters could ever know. It inspired them to survive. (p.73)

These words ring especially true given the fact that the book from which these words were excerpted borrows its title from biblical scripture: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” Jeremiah 8:20. Spirituality is salient to this study because all three girls expressed a belief in God that has inspired them to succeed.

African American adolescents are discouraged from speaking about their spiritual beliefs in most American public schools; this is a serious assault on their cultural values.

Other significant strengths that countless African American adolescents articulate such as communal responsibility, family loyalty, a rich oral heritage, and a past deeply rooted in music and movement are also dealt with severely in school. “Thus, many educational researchers promote curricula and instruction that reflect the learners' prior cultural knowledge, which for African Americans includes movement expressiveness, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, social time, spirituality, and the harmony of humans and nature” (Allen & Boykin, 1992, p. 587), and a history of resistance to oppression.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

I experience an often overwhelming sense of responsibility for aiding in the success of the children like the girls in my study. Millions of people who share backgrounds similar to mine dropped out of high school and fell into the bottomless lakes reserved for those whom society chooses to ignore. I inhabit the privileged position of one who overcame obstacles that have defeated countless others. Knowing my position first humbles, then empowers me to seek ways to facilitate positive changes in the lives of children. Future research should include more studies about the successful strategies students use to overcome obstacles. Such research should make more direct links to theory and practice. Therefore, my personal research agenda will include:

- Recording Cutie, Sweetie, and Nai-Nai’s schooling narratives for the duration of their educational experiences from this point on.
- Action research using the LOVE: ASAP curriculum.

- A comparative analysis of the ways spirituality affects and effects the schooling experiences of African American Middle School girls and White girls.

I hope other researchers will accept my invitation to study:

- Life histories of African American girls' schooling experiences
- Daily interactions between teachers and African American girls
- Fictive kinships within the African American girls' schooling experiences
- The ways spirituality affects and effects the girls
- Specific Acts of Resistance among African American middle school girls
- Teacher perceptions of African American girls

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter answered my research questions: 1) How do African American Middle School girls describe their school experiences?; 2) How do African American Middle School girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program? The participants for this study were African American Middle School girls; they described issues of trauma; peer relationships; negative stereotypes; and *Acts of Resistance*. These dilemmas framed the schooling narratives of the African American Middle School girls as they metacognitively engaged in LOVE: ASAP a culturally relevant after school program.

This chapter interpreted the lessons that the African American Middle School girls taught me as they shared their schooling stories. In my role of participant observer I collaborated with the girls as they described their schooling experiences while

metacognitively engaged in language and visual arts activities. Next, I contextualized the African American Middle School girls' schooling narratives within the relevant literature. I addressed the ways their schooling narratives resonated with my own educational story, and the history of African American education. I also discussed commonalities between African American Middle School girls and their White female peers, and the divergence that occurs when institutionalized racism is considered. I found that there is an accentuation/ attenuation dichotomy that ignores historic and current socioeconomic struggles and segregated schools. However, I believe that LOVE: ASAP can be implemented to help African American Middle School girls and other children, especially those from oppressed groups achieve academic excellence because it provides strategies for school success. I ended with theoretical and practical implications, and a call for future research.

## EPILOUGUE

*Surely, we who live globally privileged lives can commit ourselves to continue the struggle for justice, especially on behalf of our sisters and brothers who cannot write down their pain”( Wing, 2003, p.17).*

I am the Brown v. Board of education decision of May 17, 1954, personified. Born on May 18, 1959, I entered the desegregated schools resulting from the Brown Decision a decade after it commenced “with all deliberate speed” in the American public school system. As a military dependent, I was most often the solitary Black child in my public school classes, from New York to New Mexico. I began Junior High in the desegregated schools of Springfield, Ohio, and dropped out of High School Baltimore, Maryland’s segregated public school system. I wish my teachers had considered teaching methods that were effective with African American adolescents. They did not.

Segregation was legislated. Love cannot be. I was successful in school because I love to learn. I was unsuccessful in school when love was absent. In part, the Brown Decision states, “Where a State has undertaken to provide an opportunity for an education in its public schools, such an opportunity is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.” Unfortunately, value and nurture cannot be legislated. For most in the early days of the decision hatred was the rule; love the exception. My study proves that not enough progress has occurred in the American public school systems.

In the early years of my education I made straight A's in spite of the nameless teachers for whom I was invisible. I detested school because there was always a sense of foreboding hovering over me. I was always afraid that there was something inherently wrong with me and I never felt safe. The bulk of my education came from a passion for reading, compassion for others, absorption in art and a creative Spirit. I have struggled vigorously to remember what I learned in school. I cannot.

I loved to learn but I hated school. Of all the teachers I had from elementary school until high school, I only remember the name of my sixth grade teacher. I would like to say it was because of her compassionate loving kindness. She was unforgettable because of her cruelty. For months she emotionally and verbally abused us, her *Negro students*, as we were called in her classroom. Her actions proved we were considered to be inferior. She used a seating chart to segregate her Negro students from her White children and relegate us to the back of the class. We quickly learned not to raise our hands because she ignored us if she was not screaming at us. Nieto (1996) advises educators to listen carefully to students because their "voices sometimes reveal the great challenges and even the deep pain young people feel when schools are unresponsive, cold places" (p. 106). Finally, in sheer frustration, one of us snatched her wig off. It was wrong, but it was still a victory for all of us. After that day we were no longer afraid.

I became a teacher because I wanted to be the kind of teacher I never had. "Black women have long had .... A philosophy that accepts expressiveness and ethic of caring" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). I loved my students and they knew it. When I told them that I would be at the University of Georgia teaching teachers how to teach they were excited. They expressed happiness about the fact that my teaching techniques would be

taught to future teachers. Those pedagogical practices best suited and most effective with African American adolescents are similar to the ones that are efficacious for White children. Children need to be encased within an environment where they are listened to and cared for. I believe that the vast difference in the way Black children are perceived and treated creates the prevailing chasm and resultant failure for African American adolescents.

There are many reasons for the chasm that African American adolescents fall into. First, most schools in America exclusively value and nurture those who are a part of the dominant culture. African American adolescents are usually stereotyped and marked for failure. Young African American boys are perceived as a threat and spend disproportionate amounts of time within disciplinary structures. I recall visiting a school and seeing a young African American boy locked in the cage that surrounded the locker Ramada. Since he was a former student, I asked him why he was there. He had been throwing spit balls. I was appalled. For me it was all too prophetic. It seemed that the school was training him for incarceration rather than an advanced education. The statistics citing the disproportionate numbers of Black men in prison are staggering. Isaacs-Shockley (1994) states:

The overrepresentation of minorities is evident in the adjudication process, including arrests, detention, prosecution... Indeed, the overrepresentation of youth of color in juvenile confinement continues to soar in direct proportion to the fears of violence and crime that grip the minds of those dominant culture U.S. citizens who are least likely to be its victims.(p.19)

I have understood the evidence.

African American girls have their own unique set of stereotypes attached. They are often assigned one of two roles: Mammy or Sapphire. The role of “Mammy” according to Bell & Nkomo (2001) “refers to a motherly, self-sacrificing black woman who takes care of those around her.” Those assigned the “Sapphire” role are typecast as a “dramatic, bossy black woman who is full of complaints and mistrust” (Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 246). Each stereotypical role is problematic. These stereotypes are part of the reason I chose to focus on the unique personalities of the three girls. I believe that hearing their authentic voices will compel the research community to interrogate predilections for generalizations, and embrace cultural differences.

“Rather than a fault of the students, I propose that the deficiency lies in a system of education that refuses to adapt itself to differences among students” (Hanley, 2002, p.1). I reiterate, all children need positive role models. African American adolescents are largely taught by White females; this absence of African American teachers can be addressed in teacher training programs and college recruitment. “The idea that there is

only one way to handle a given kid, a given classroom, a given chunk of curriculum, a given element of writing...is not just wrong; it is profoundly, dangerously, insidiously wrong” (Gilyard, 1996, p. 91). Educators must finally be who we say we are. We know what to do, let us do it, together.

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## APPENDIX A

The screening process will consist of the following questions:

1. Tell me what you know about art?
2. Talk to me about the importance of reading and writing?

These questions will be used as a starting point but it is expected that the conversation will extend beyond the parameters of two questions into a free-flowing exchange

## Tender Moments

Francks Deceus



## Fifth Grade Autobiography

Rita Dove

I was four in this photograph fishing with my grandparents at a lake in Michigan. My brother squats in poison ivy. His Davy Crockett cap sits squared on his

head so the raccoon tail flounces down the back of his sailor suit.

My grandfather sits to the far right in a folding chair, and I know his left hand is on the tobacco in his pants pocket because I used to wrap it for him every Christmas. Grandmother's hips bulge from the brush, she's leaning into the ice chest, sun through the trees printing her dress with soft luminous paws.

I am staring jealously at my brother; the day before he rode his first horse, alone. I was strapped in a basket behind my grandfather. He smelled of lemons. He's died ---

but I remember his hands.

In search of color everywhere:  
A collection of African American poetry. E. Ethelbert Miller

APPENDIX C  
*Expectations*  
Hughie Lee-Smith



**WHO CAN BE BORN BLACK by Mari Evans**

Who  
can be born black  
and not  
Sing  
the wonder of it  
the joy  
the  
challenge

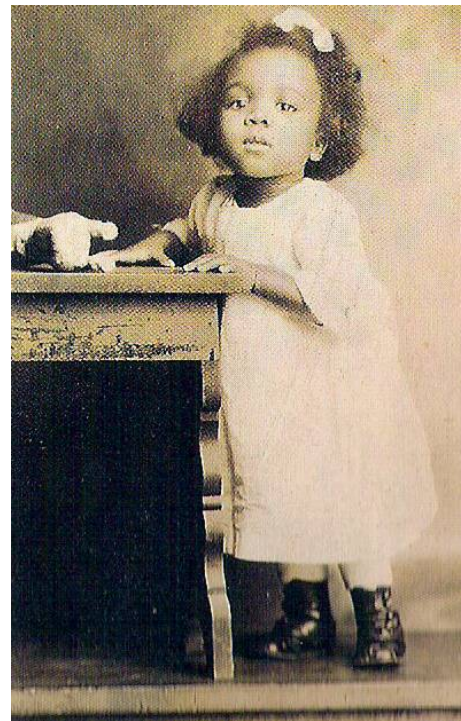
And/to come together  
in a coming togetherness  
vibrating with the fires of  
pure knowing  
reeling with power  
ringing with the sound  
above sound above sound

to explode/in the majesty of our oneness  
our comingtogether  
in a comingtogetherness

Who  
can be born black  
and not exult!

(p. 62) In search of color everywhere: A  
collection of African American poetry. E.  
Ethelbert Miller, Ed.(1994).Stewart Tabori &  
Chang: New York.

[Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP](#)



## **Blossoms**

Walter Dean Myers



**I never dreamt  
that tender blossoms  
would be brown  
Or precious angels  
could come down  
to live in the garden  
of my giving heart  
But here you are brown angel**

(p.3)

Myers, Walter Dean (1993). *Brown angels: An album of pictures and verse*. Harper Collins: New York.  
[Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP](#)

APPENDIX E

*Sunlight and shadow*

by Allan Rohan Crite (born 1910)



Sounds like pearls

*By Maya Angelou*

Sounds

Like pearls

Roll off your tongue

To grace this eager ebon  
ear.

Doubt and fear,

Ungainly things,

With blushings

Disappear.

(p.26)

Angelou, Maya (1994). The complete collected poems of Maya Angelou. Random House: New York.

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## Baseball Bubble Gum

by Robert Tomlin



### Those Who Don't

By Sandra Cisneros

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V., and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore nor a boy.

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.

Cisneros, Sandra (1991). *The house on mango street*. Vintage Books: New York.

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APPENDIX G

*Street life, Harlem*

William H. Johnson (1901-1970)



**Incident**

*For Eric Walrond*

By Countee Cullen

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
I saw a Baltimorean  
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
And he was no whit bigger,  
And so I smiled, but he poked out  
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore  
From May until December;  
Of all the things that happened there  
That's all that I remember.

(p.161)

Harper, M.S. & Walton, A. (2000) *The vintage book of African American poetry: 200 years of vision*. Random House: New York.

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## APPENDIX H

Anna Maria Horsford at Age 5  
Black: A celebration of culture



### Nikki-Rosa

Nikki Giovanni

childhood remembrances are always a drag  
if you're Black  
you always remember things like living in  
Woodlawn  
with no inside toilet  
and if you become famous or something  
they never talk about how happy you were to  
have your mother  
all to yourself and  
how good the water felt when you got your  
bath from one of those  
big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in

and somehow when you talk about home  
it never gets across how much you  
understood their feelings  
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale  
and even though you remember  
your biographers never understand  
your father's pain as he sells his stock  
and another dream goes  
and though you're poor it isn't poverty that  
concerns you  
and though they fought a lot  
it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference  
but only that everybody is together and you  
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good Christmases  
and I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me  
because they never understand Black love is Black wealth and they'll  
probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that  
all the while I was quite happy

Miller, E. Ethelbert (1994). In search of color everywhere: A collection of African American poetry.  
Stewart Tabori & Chang: New York.

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APPENDIX I

*The Lamp*



Romare Bearden

**Learning to Read**

Frances Ellen Harper (1825-1911)

Very soon the Yankee teachers  
 Came down and set up school;  
 But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it,  
 It was agin' their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide  
 Book learning from our eyes;  
 Knowledge didn't agree with slavery  
 'Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal  
 A little from the book,  
 And put the words together,  
 (pp.55-56)

Harper, M.S. & Walton, A. (2000) *The vintage book of African American poetry: 200 years of vision*,  
 Random House: New York. Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP

And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,  
 Who took pot-liquor fat  
 And greased the pages of his book,  
 And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen  
 The leaves upon his head,  
 He'd have thought them greasy papers,  
 But nothing to be read.  
 And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,  
 Who heard the children spell,  
 And picked the words right up by heart,  
 And learned to read 'em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending  
 The Yankee teachers down;  
 And they stood right up and helped us,  
 Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And, I longed to read my Bible,  
 For precious words it said;  
 But when I begun to learn it,  
 Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,  
 Oh! Chloe, you're too late;  
 But as I was rising sixty,  
 I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,  
 And straight to work I went,  
 And never stopped till I could read  
 The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin  
 A place to call my own  
 And I felt as independent  
 As the queen upon her throne.

APPENDIX J  
*Spiritual  
Meditation*

*by Arthello Beck Jr.*



*Something New  
Nikki Grimes*

Grandma used to sit  
in her vinylized chair  
wire-rim glasses on  
the tip of her nose  
teasing gravity

and she'd surrender  
to Spillane or  
Agatha Christie

for the night.  
On the doiled  
table beside her  
haloed in lamplight  
would be her Bible  
alongside Webster's tome  
kept handy just in case

her murder mystery  
should yield some  
new word-treasure.  
She'd be equipped  
to find and measure

its meaning before  
adding it to her massive  
collection. Still, "You're  
never too old to learn  
something new," wasn't

tattooed on my memory  
until the day  
my grandmother  
turned sixty  
and earned her G. E. D.  
(pp. 51-52)

Grimes, Nikki (1998). *A dime a dozen*. Dial Books for Young Readers: New York  
Maria Inez Winfield ©2005 LOVE:ASAP

APPENDIX K  
**TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED,  
 AND BLACK**

Weldon J. Irvine, Jr.  
 Young, gifted, and black  
 Oh what a lovely precious  
 dream.  
 To be young, gifted, and  
 black  
 Open your heart to what I  
 mean.  
 In the whole world you know  
 There's a million boys and  
 girls  
 Who are young, gifted, and  
 black And that's a fact!

Your soul's intact!"



*Scurlock Studios, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*



*Malcom X with his two daughters, East Elmhurst, NY, 1963 by Robert Haggins*

You are young, gifted, and  
 black  
 We must begin to tell our  
 young,  
 There's a world waiting for  
 you.  
 Yours is the quest that's just  
 begun.  
 When you're feeling real low  
 "There's a great truth that  
 you should know  
 When you're young, gifted,  
 and black

Ah to be young, gifted, and black  
 Oh how I've longed to know the  
 truth.  
 There are times when I look back  
 And I am haunted by my youth.  
 But my joy of today  
 Is that we can all be proud to say,  
 "To be young, gifted, and black  
 Is where it's at!  
 Is where it's at!  
 Is where it's at!"



*Ballentine Academy of Dance students by Wendy Phillips*

In search of color everywhere: A collection of African American poetry. E. Ethelbert Miller, Ed.(1994).Stewart Tabori & Chang: New York.

[Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP](#)

APPENDIX L

Elizabeth Eckford (1957)

From: A History of Black America



If We Must Die

Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Harper, M.S. & Walton, A. (2000)The vintage book of African American poetry:200 years of vision. Random House: New York.

Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP

APPENDIX M

Monday's Child

by Dane Tilghman(1998)



MY COUNTRY

*For Mandela*

ZINDZISW A MANDELA  
(at twelve years), South Africa

I stand by the gate School's  
out

Smoke fills the location

Tears come to my eyes

I wipe them away

I walk into the kitchen

To see my mother's

Black hard-washing hands

A forceful smile from

A tired face

We sit and have supper  
I pick up a picture of  
My father and look  
My mother turns away  
Tries to hide

My father left my mother  
In his arms  
He is roughly separated  
From her

The van pulls away  
Mother watches bravely  
enough  
I as a child do  
Not understand

My heart aches  
How I long to see my  
father  
At least to hold his hand  
And comfort him  
Or at least to tell him  
He'll be back some day  
(pp.2-3)

Linwaite, Illona (1987).*Ain't I a woman!*  
*A book of women's poetry from around the*  
*world.* Wing Books: New York.

Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP

## APPENDIX N

*Absynnian Baptist Church:  
Easter Sunday in youth church.(1995)*  
by Bob Gore



### **LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING**

by James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the  
dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the  
present has brought us,  
Facing the rising sun of our new day  
begun  
Let us march on till victory is won.  
(p.59)

In search of color everywhere: A collection of African American poetry. E. Ethelbert Miller, Ed. (1994). Stewart Tabori & Chang:  
New York.

Stony the road we trod  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn  
had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our  
fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with  
tears  
have been watered,  
We have come, treading our path  
through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright  
star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on  
the way;  
Thou who has by Thy might  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places,  
Our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine  
of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand.  
True to our GOD,  
True to our native land.

*My Angel* by Michael Escoffery



## The Song of the Smoke

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois

I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am swinging in the sky.  
I am ringing worlds on high:  
I am the thought of the throbbing mills,  
I am the soul of the soul toil kills,  
I am the ripple of trading rills,

Up I'm curling from the sod,  
I am whirling home to God.  
I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am the smoke king,  
I am black.  
I am wreathing broken hearts,  
I am sheathing devils' darts;

Dark inspiration of iron times,

## APPENDIX O

Wedding the toil of toiling dimes  
Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes,

Down I lower in the blue,  
Up I tower toward the true,  
I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am darkening with song,  
I am hearkening to wrong;  
I will be black as blackness can,  
The blacker the mantel the mightier the man,  
My purpl'ing midnights no day dawn  
may ban.

I am carving God in night,  
I am painting hell in white.  
I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am the smoke king,  
I am black.

I am cursing ruddy morn,  
I am nursing hearts unborn;  
Souls unto me are as mists in the night!  
I whiten my blackmen, I beckon my white,  
What's the hue of a hide to a man in his might!  
Hail, then, grilly, grimy hands,

Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!  
Hail to the smoke king,  
Hail to the black!

(p. 65) In search of color everywhere: A collection of African American poetry. E. Ethelbert Miller, Ed.(1994).Stewart Tabori & Chang: New York..

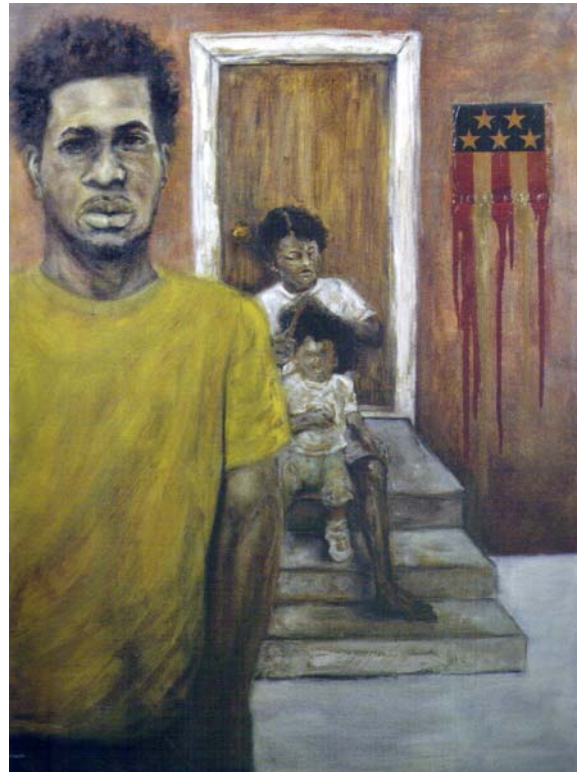
# Survival

Audre Lorde

*Self-portrait with flag*

by Ibn Kendall

For those of us living at the  
 shoreline  
 standing upon the constant  
 edges of decision  
 crucial and alone  
 For those of us who cannot  
 indulge  
 the passing dreams of choice  
 For those of us who were  
 imprinted with fear  
 Like a faint line in the center  
 of our foreheads  
 Learning to be afraid with our  
 mother's milk  
 For by this weapon,  
 this illusion of some safety to  
 be found-  
 the heavy-footed hoped to  
 silence us.  
 For all of us  
 this instant and this triumph-  
 we were never meant to  
 survive.  
 And when the sun rises we are  
 afraid  
 it might not remain  
 When the sun sets we are  
 afraid  
 it might not rise in the  
 morning



And when we speak we are  
 afraid  
 our words will not be heard  
 nor welcomed  
 But when we are silent  
 we are still afraid.  
 So it is better to speak  
 Remembering  
 we were never meant to  
 survive.

Maria Inez Winfield ©2005LOVE:ASAP

## APPENDIX Q

*Dance* by Francks Deceus



### *Still I rise*

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room?

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors  
gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise  
I rise  
I rise.  
(p.68).

Miller, E. Ethelbert (1994). In search of color everywhere: A collection of African American poetry. Stewart Tabori & Maria Inez Winfield ©2005 LOVE:ASAP  
Chang: New York.

## APPENDIX R

LOVE: ASAP References:

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New York: Random House.

Beck, Arthello Jr. (1999) *A study for the dancer in red*. Calendar print: African American Perspectives, March, Bay Street Publishing: Dallas. Arthello's Gallery, 1922

South Beckley Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75224, Phone: (214) 941-2276

Beck, Arthello Jr. (1999) *Outside dreams*. Calendar print: African American

Perspectives, March, Bay Street Publishing: Dallas. Arthello's Gallery, 1922

South Beckley Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75224, Phone: (214) 941-2276

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Philadelphia: Running Press.

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## APPENDIX T

### Interview Protocol for the building administrator:

I will ask the principal about the history, economic, social, and cultural environment of the school:

How long have you worked here?

What made you want to work here?

Describe the historical background of the school?

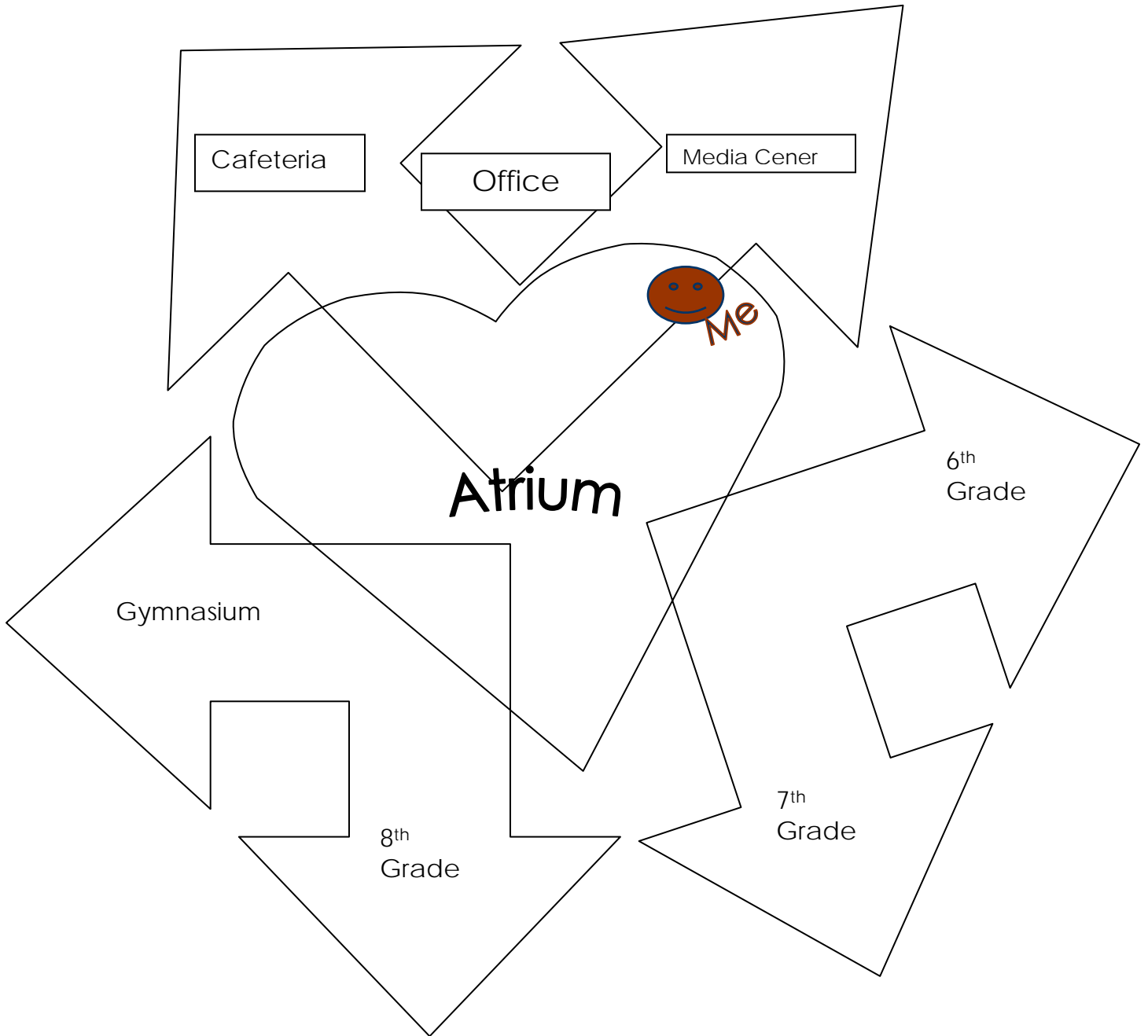
What is the socioeconomic composition of the school?

What is the reputation of the school in the community?

What are some of the major problems the school has faced over the past five years?

What is the nature of the relations between different ethnic groups in the school? What else would you like to say about the school?

APPENDIX U-Site Central(ZMGMS)  
Zora Maya Giovanni Middle School(ZMGMS)  
Site Map of the central convergence of the various hallways.



maria Winfield

## Appendix V

### DATA INVENTORY

#### ABSTRACT: DATA INVENTORY

Language Observing Visual Explorations: After School Academic Program (LOVE: ASAP), is a participatory action research study that examined the educational experiences of African American middle school girls in the Southeastern United States. Within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program, students explored complex themes of social justice, history, and accountability while they metacognitively engaged in activities designed to help them describe their ways of knowing. Within a critical race narrative framework, I examine the personal narratives of African American middle school girls as they describe their school experiences. This study contributes to research concerning best practices for teaching disenfranchised African American students within educational institutions. Opening this dialogue between students and educational research will inform theory and support practitioner knowledge. In the tidal wave of "No Child Left Behind" African American adolescents are drowning beneath their peers this research is a life boat.

Inventory as of: 8 July 2006

#### 1. Categories of data collected

##### a. Maps:

Interior of research site

##### b. Transcripts of interviews

2 completed

7 Mar 06 -Bratz Doll and Pizza Party

21 Feb 06 – Interview project & Ce-Ce’s social justice narrative

Interviews to transcribe:

Building administrator – 1 (plus notes)

Screening interviews from students in the after school program- 14

c. Field notes of observations: (in situ and reconstructive)

Reflective field notes: (Journal Entries)

Butterfly Journal	31 Jan 06
1 Nov 05	7 Feb 06 (in situ)
8 Nov 05	7 Feb 06
15 Nov 05	14 Feb 06
22 Nov 05	21 Feb 06 (in situ)
29 Nov 05	21 Feb 06
6 Dec 05	28 Feb 06 (in situ)
17 Dec 05	28 Feb 06
28 Dec 05	7 Mar 06
3 Jan 06	21 Mar 06
5 Jan 06	18 Apr 06 Ladson-Billings @ Aderhold
10 Jan 06	
16 Jan 06	Sapphire Journal
17 Jan 06	7 Mar 06 handwritten transcripts
	21 Feb 06 handwritten transcripts
Emerald Journal	
24 Jan 06	
31 Jan 06 (in situ)	

d. Facilitating documents

IRB application

Consent form

Assent forms

Interview protocols

e. Proposals (grant committee, etc.)

CCUSD

Fletcher Fellowship

John Hope Franklin Fellowship

Spencer Dissertation Completion Fellowship

f. Timelines of research

IRB approval

2 March 2005 IRB renewal

5 May 2005 IRB renewal

13 October 2005 Approved

September- renew IRB if necessary

13 October 2006 Expires

Participatory Action Research

Data collection-1Nov 05/ May 19 2006

Data analysis – 1 Nov 05/ Dec 2007

Writing final chapters – August 06- Jan 07

Dissertation defense – Feb or March 07

g. Timelines inherent to what I am studying

2005-2006 Academic Year

First Day of School - 4 August 05

Holidays (No school for students or teachers)

5 September

23- 25 November 05 Thanksgiving

19-30 December Christmas

16 January 06 MLK Day

21 April

Planning/In-service (No school for students)

1-3 August 05

2 January 06

19, 22, & 23 May

Spring Break (No school for students or teachers)

13-17 March

End of 45 Days (Students in school)  
6 October 05  
8 March 06  
Last Day of School – 18 May 05

## 2. Artifacts

### a. Photographs

Obtained from: personal camera

Created by: participants and self

Dates: 3Jan 2006 – 10 May 2006

(51 photos located in LOVE: ASAP folder/photos)

### b. Audiotapes

Not yet catalogued representative of each day listed above in field notes. With the exception of reflective field notes written on days I was not in the field.

### c. Videotapes

Not yet catalogued representative of first few sessions and special days.

### d. Documents

### e. Other objects

1. Lesson plans for each day: NOV 05- MAY 06

2. Unfinished collage made by a student

3. Nai-Nai's Journal with 11 entries dated: 21NOV 05, 29NOV 05, 6 DEC 05, 7 DEC 05, 25DEC 05, 1JAN 06, 5 JAN 06, 6&7 JAN 06 (one entry about both days), & 28 JAN 06

4. LOVE: ASAP binder includes: calendars; research questions, sub-questions & categories of questions; art exemplars paired with poetry; art transparencies; reference list documenting poetry and art sources; sections for each student with their photo, first

interview, poetry & prose written in response to lessons; and a unit about the history of the research site.

5. LOVE: ASAP computer file includes: 14 folders and 299 documents

6. LOVE: ASAP power point

7. Invitation to “Girl’s Night Out”: Art show and poetry reading

### **3. Additional questions**

a. Who am I studying?

African American middle school girls

b. When was each data item collected?

During the after school program and at the Art Show and Poetry reading held for my participants and their primary care givers at my house.

c. Who collected the data—when? Where? For what purpose?

I collected the data from 1 November 05 until 19 May 06 at a middle school in the Southeastern United States. The final meeting was a celebration at my house. The purpose of my study is to examine the narratives and artifacts created by African American middle school girls as they share insights about experiences within American public schools.

d. How? (Collected as participant observer?)

I collected the data as a participatory action researcher. By this I mean, I developed and implemented a culturally relevant language and visual arts program. I worked within the time frame of the existing district after school program. At the end of the program and academic school year, I invited the participants and their primary care givers to my house for an art show and poetry reading.

e. Memos/ journals

Email correspondence:

1. Paper trail from IRB approval process: 11 emails, starting on-Wednesday, April 13, 2005 3:54 PM ending on -Thu 13 Oct 18:53:19 EDT 2005

2. Paper trail from building administrator & after school director: 16 emails, starting on-Fri 28 Apr 15:26:06 EDT 2006 ending on -Fri 28 Apr 15:26:06 EDT 2006

#### **4. Reports/ Write-ups**

a. What data do you intend to acquire, from whom, when, where, how?

1. I plan to interview the building administrator a second time, in August or September 2006, on site, using a protocol generated from his first interview.

2. I plan to interview the director of the after school program, on site, using the interview protocol generated from questions emerging from data analysis.

b. What gaps do you know exist in your inventory? What data do you not have from whom, etc.?

1. The gaps in the data include a more generalized impression from a larger sample of participants in the after school program. I plan to conduct a focus group pending IRB: Continuing Review of Approved Research.

2. I have also obtained permission from two parents to interview them concerning their school experiences as African American females in the Southeastern United States.

3. I plan to continue LOVE: ASAP during the 2006-2007 school year.

**APPENDIX W**

**1. How do African American middle school girls describe their school experiences?**

- a. How do African American middle school girls describe themselves?
- b. How do African American middle school girls think family members describe them?
- c. What do African American middle school girls say about teachers, peers and other school personnel?
- d. How do African American middle school girls think teachers, peers and other school personnel describe them?
- e. How do African American middle school girls talk about school?
- f. How do African American middle school girls describe their participation within the classroom?
- g. What relationships within the school setting are most important to African American middle school girls?

Family Relationships

- 1. Where are you in age order among your siblings?
- 2. Describe the people you live with and your relationship to them.(What kind of sister, daughter, niece aunt ....are you?)
- 3. Which holidays do you celebrate? How do you celebrate holidays?
- 4. What do you know about your heritage? How far back can you trace your family?
- 5. What else would you like to tell me about your family?

School Relationships

- 1. What kind of student are you?
- 2. What kind of friend are you?
- 3. Describe your school friends?
- 4. Describe your relationship with your teachers?

- 5. Describe your relationships with any other members of the school staff.

Community Relationships

- 1. How long have you lived in this town?
- 2. How many different places have you lived?
- 3. Have you attended another middle school? If so where? How would you compare the two schools?
- 4. How do you define community?
- 5. Describe your role as a member of the community?
- 6. Describe your community friends?
- 7. In what ways will your community be different when you grow up?

- 8. In what ways will your community be similar when you grow up?

School Experiences

- 1. What do you like about school?
- 2. What do you dislike about school?
- 3. Describe the best teacher you ever had.
- 4. Describe the worst teacher you ever had.
- 5. What are the characteristics of good teachers?
- 6. Tell me about the best school day of your life.
- 7. Tell me about the worst school day of your life.
- 8. What are your plans for high school? College?
- 9. Who do you know that has been to college?

**2. How do African American middle school girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?**

- a. What is necessary for African American middle school girls to function successfully in the classroom environment?
- b. What are the specific activities that help African American middle school girls learn?
- c. Is their cultural background mentioned? Valued? Criticized?
- d. In what ways are spiritual values important to school success?
- e. Do African American middle school girls feel supported within the school systems? If so who supports them and who does not?
- f. How do African American middle school girls describe caring within the school system about their academic achievement?
- g. Who are the positive roles models within the school environment? Are any of these roles models from their cultural background?

- 1. Academic achievement
- 2. How do you define academic success?
- 3. Describe a time when you achieved academic excellence?
- 4. Who is the smartest person you know?
- 5. Describe a time when you felt really smart? What were you doing? What or who made you feel smart?
- 6. Describe the roles teachers have in making students feel smart?
- 7. How do you measure your success?

- 8. What is necessary for you to achieve academic success?
- 9. Has any one ever talked to you about going to college? If so, describe the setting and nature of the discussion.
- Culturally relevant learning experiences
- 1. What can you tell me about African American history?
- 2. How often and under what circumstances do you discuss the contributions of African American people?
- 3. How often and under what circumstances do you discuss the stereotypes of African American people?

- 4. Describe a time when you learned something about African American people that gave you a sense of pride?
- 5. Describe a time when you learned something about African American people that gave you a sense of shame?
- 6. Which experience occurs more frequently, a sense of pride or a sense of shame?
- 7. How often do you discuss the achievements and contributions of people African descent?

8. What can you tell me about your personal history?
9. What can you tell me about your family history?
10. What can you tell me about Georgia history?
11. Describe the connections between school and your history?
12. Under what circumstances is talking about your family background and cultural heritage encouraged?
13. In what ways do your teachers show respect for you?
14. In what ways do your teachers show respect for your family?

15. In what ways do your teachers cultural heritage?  
Socio political consciousness and social justice
  1. How do you define justice?
  2. How would you describe American justice systems?
  3. What can you tell me about politics?
  4. What are the social groups and classes in America?
  5. Is there a way to move from one social group to another?
  6. Who is responsible for making the country a better place?
  7. Who is responsible for making the world a better place?

8. What is your responsibility to the nation?
9. What is your responsibility to the world?
10. Who has the power to change the world?
11. Do you have any power to change the world?
12. (Why or why not?)
13. Where does the power to change the world reside?
14. What would empower you to change the world?
15. What role can you play in the future of social justice?

## APPENDIX X

### After School Program Teacher Protocol

This purpose of this interview is to get a sense of why there is an after school program and whom it serves. In other words, who teaches, who attends, what do they do, and why?

What are the types of activities available after school?

Who teaches the program?

Who attends? ( mostly 6<sup>th</sup> grade... socioeconomic factors...etc)

Are there any mandatory after school programs?

# R Q 1

<p>Appendix Y</p> <p>teacher behaviors &amp; practices</p>	<p>Friendships &amp; Peer Relationships</p>	<p>How do African American middle school girls describe their school experiences?</p> <p>School Incidents &amp; Behaviors</p>
<p><b>Behaviors:</b>  <i>Descriptions of teachers relationships\ interactions with teachers attitudes of teachers teachers behaving badly unfair treatment by teachers</i>  <i>Effects of teacher behavior</i>            desire to learn            acts of resistance to teachers            preferential/ unfair treatment  <b>Practices</b>  <i>Descriptions of class activities</i>            “good” teaching  <i>Miseducation</i>            reinforcing negative stereotypes            flawed and incomplete information            what they learn versus what they want to learn  <b>Self-awareness/ self-concept.</b>            according to positive &amp; negative treatment            teacher’s voice echoed in the words of the girls            perceptions of “caring”            definitions of school success</p>	<p><b>Friendships</b>            at school            at home            good friends            best friends            bad friends            fictive kin            gender specific  <i>boyfriends &amp; girlfriends:</i>            relationships defined            interactions with boys            conversations with boys            sexuality</p> <p><b>Peer relationships</b>            rationalizing/ explaining the behaviors/actions of peers            preferential treatment for boys</p> <p><b>Self-awareness/self-concept</b>            through the eyes of peers            negative interactions with peers</p>	<p><b>Overall perceptions of school</b>            typical school day            typical class            PE class            smart classes/advanced placement</p> <p><b>Critical incidents</b>            hair talk            sexual harassment            the school bus            being transferred to a different class</p> <p><b>Acts of resistance:</b>            to teachers            in defense of others            self defense</p> <p><b>Self-awareness/self concept</b>            Definitions of:            “good” student            smart            school success            according to awards and honors            personality</p>

How do African American middle school girls metacognitively engage within a culturally relevant language and visual arts program?

Metacognition (thinking about thinking)	Cultural Relevance
<p><b>Self affirmation /self confidence</b>            oppositional self definitions            perceptions of fairness            optimism: from struggle to victory            peer relationships            family relationships            self defense/ defending others  <b>Negative self image</b>            self-contradictory statements            believing negative stereotypes            blaming the victim  <i>Internalized stereotypes:</i>            limited chances for survival            good , bad, &amp; nappy hair  <b>Learning styles, strengths &amp; preferences</b>            Crosstalking            Multitasking  <i>Call and response:</i>                to illustrate approval                to signal participation                to show interest            shared language that excludes teacher            connecting preexisting schemata  <b>Creativity:</b>            Spontaneous creations                of activities                of rhymes                of new words            explications of poetry            tone            simile            Word play            brainstorming writing ideas            echoing, mimicry, repetition  <b>Storytelling:</b>            racism narratives            life lessons/advice            negative stereotypes            accepted stereotypes            adults who disrespect students            through visual art</p>	<p><b>Acts of resistance</b>  <i>Opposition to negative stereotypes</i>                through self affirmation                through silence                through argument/anger            refusing to be ignored /erased            (making sure her name is spelled correctly by the white male teacher)            life lessons/advice            shared language that excludes teacher            selective stereotypes  <b>Popular media/culture</b>            Role models            Dream dates  <i>Negative stereotypes:</i>            Black girls as victims of rape            Black girls as violated            violence and anger            feeling trapped/limited chances for survival  <b>Miseducation</b>            limited knowledge of Black History            requests for more Black History            slavery as singular African contribution to history(Aesop, Australia)   <b>Other issues</b>            girls teaching me            teacher’s words in girl’s voice            maternal voice in girl’s words</p>