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Africanizing the Curriculum: African Diaspora Literacy Instruction In Elementary Classrooms

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AFRICANIZING THE CURRICULUM: AFRICAN DIASPORA LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors who have paved the way for me to do this work. To Grandma Mary, Pop, and Allean, your spirits have guided me through this entire degree. I hope I have made you proud. To my family (Mom, Dad, Danielle, Greg, Tileta, Matthias, and Annaka) thank you for believing in me and continuing to push me even when I wanted to give up. And to my students, you continue to be my inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. -Jeremiah 29:11

To God Be the Glory.

I am not who I am or where I am without my village who has supported me throughout my entire life. To Dr. Boutte, I remember the day that you walked into my classroom at Jackson Creek. Our spirits immediately connected, and you began pouring into me. I am forever indebted to you for your wisdom, guidance, and the opportunities that you have given me that continues to develop me as a person and a scholar. To my academic family, you all welcomed me with open arms. Thank you for being a support system for me personally and professionally. To my dissertation committee, thank you for your support and feedback through this process.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge many members of my village (in no particular order): Dr. Dywanna Smith, Dr. Lamar Johnson, Saudah Collins, Janice Baines, Valente Gibson, Dr. Sabina Mosso-Taylor, Dr. Susi Long, The Elizabeth Baptist Church, Da Winning Team (Kavon, Auburn, Lauren, and Jamarcus), The 17 K.I.N.G.S. and the Xi Phi Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Mrs. Delicia Harper-Baxter, and Mrs. Ayanna Brice.

ABSTRACT

Using a Critical Case Study design, this study examines the implementation of African Diaspora Literacy (ADL) in three elementary classrooms in order to understand successes, challenges, and student outcomes. African Diaspora Literacy (ADL) refers to becoming literate about African Diasporic peoples, histories, cultures, languages, epistemologies, cosmologies, and axiologies (King, 1992; Boutte et. al., 2017). Against the backdrop of worldwide and systemic anti-Black racism--the most dominant and virulent form of racism (Dumas & Ross, 2016), there is a need for instructional and curricular antidotes in K-12 schools and in the academy (Boutte et. al., 2017). African Diaspora Literacy offers a promising option. This study examined the implementation of African Diaspora Literacy in elementary classrooms. Four questions were proposed and discussed across three separate manuscripts that will be submitted for publication: (1) What does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content look like in elementary classrooms? (2) How, if at all, does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content intersect with the required fifth-grade S.C. social studies, mathematics, and English language arts standards? (3) In what ways, if at all, are elementary students' understanding of African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content evidenced in their academic work and conversations at school and home?

After three months of observation of two elementary teachers using African Diaspora pedagogies, I identified four characteristics of ADL instruction: (1) Communalism; (2) Empowerment; (3) Intentionality; (4) Interdisciplinarity. Required

curriculum standards were met using ADL content. Families in the school expressed

satisfaction with their children's learning about African Diaspora Literacy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADL ....African Diaspora Literacy

CRP .... Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

JCES...Jackson Creek Elementary School

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

To be Black in Amerikkka. What does that mean? How does that feel? To have to think about every step that you take, every word that you speak. To not feel safe taking a walk down your own street. To be Black in Amerikkka, where the sight of a blue light sinks your heart, the voice of an officer freezes your body. To be Black in Amerikkka to feel like the wrong move could be the last move. But not just older Black Americans but what about our boys and girls that are growing up. The ones who feel lost, the ones who need love. How do we protect them from the terror of Amerikkka? The land where to obtain freedom requires white skin. Safety is subjective. All lives only matter if Black ones don't. To be Black in Amerikkka, where any move is a wrong move. To be Black in Amerikkka, where you are expected to comply to massah's voice. To be Black in Amerikkka where you are longing for home, and you just can't find home.

The above reflection is a free write assignment I completed during my last semester of coursework. My time in my Ph.D. program is what I refer to as my "becoming." This was when I became one with my Blackness and the strength, power, beauty, and brilliance that accompanies it. This reflection shows that although I have had an "awakening," I still battle with the complex relationship of being Black in America. I have these reflections on life and the relationship between my Blackness and my existence as an American. DuBois (1903) referred to this as a double consciousness that Black people experience. I have become appreciative of my becoming one with my Blackness. Still, a part of me holds resentment because of being deprived of knowledge

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about my Black and African culture and histories for so long. I was impressed as a child when I heard about Harriett Tubman freeing enslaved Africans and Rosa Parks standing up against injustices but was never taught about the Africans who initiated math over 25,000 years ago using an Ishango bone (Williams, 2008) or an abundance of information about Africa. I often sit back and wonder how much different life would have been for me growing up had I understood the power of being Black and the contributions that African and descendants of Africa have had on this world. Instead, I internalized ideas based on negative, racist stereotypes and global anti-Blackness. I could not see past the United States, and in my experience teachers, curriculum, and media painted Africa to be one big poor village. I often ask myself what I would have been if I knew that I could be anything I wanted because African fingerprints are on every part of the world that we know. What would I have been if I could see the power and possibilities for myself as a Black child? While these questions are rhetorical, one thing I do know is I can make a difference in the lives of Black people, especially children, by exposing them to the power that is in our h(er)istories. I am committed to ensuring that Black children and people become literate about their histories.

For so long, I have lived a life that has been centered around rising to the expectations of eurocentric[1] ways of thinking and being. Therefore, as I continue to learn about African and African Diasporic history and culture, my intent is for the proposed

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[1] When defining and writing about white or whiteness, I chose not to capitalize it as it "does not describe a group with a sense of common experiences or kinship outside of acts of colonization and terror" (Dumas, 2016, p.13). When writing about europeans as a group of people, I choose to use lowercase although a proper noun to decenter their normalized and standardized experience, and I capitalize Black and Africa(n) to center the people and their experiences. I do capitalize Europe(an) when referencing the continent/countries.

study to be *Pro-Black*. To be Pro-Black does not mean *anti* any other ethnic or cultural group (Boutte et al., 2021). It simply means teaching about Black people's histories, cultures, worldviews, languages, and humanity from non-deficit perspectives. Inherent in this approach is the value of not only learning *about* African Diasporic knowledges, but *from* them as well. My goal is to examine how *Pro-Blackness* is translated into elementary classrooms and how students react to it.

Statement of the Problem

Considering initial reflections of my Blackness and knowledge, and lack thereof, I illuminate the omission, distortion, and disregarded histories of African Diasporic people. The three-pronged problem for the proposed study is interrelated. First, while African diasporic people represent approximately 20 percent of the world's population (Boutte, in press) and have made global contributions, their worldviews, ways of knowing, and ways of being have been and are currently overlooked, belittled, and rejected in the U.S. as well as worldwide (Fanon, 1963; Hilliard, 2002; Johnson et al., 2019; King, 2005; King & Swartz, 2014, 2016; 2018; Watkins, 2005; Wilkerson, 2020; Woodson, 1933/1990).

Second, although Africa has made rich contributions to history and is the cradle of civilization, African history, values, and culture are undertaught in P-12 schools— especially in elementary classrooms (Jackson et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2018). Rather than providing detailed historical narratives of the agentive experiences of African Diasporic people who were enslaved, P-12 textbooks typically share misrepresentations of Black history. African Diaspora Literacy aims to build a sense of love and pride for Blackness, both among Black people and others; therefore, opposing hegemony (Boutte et al., 2017; hooks, 2006).

Third, while teaching about African Diasporic people's history and culture in P-12 schools is warranted conceptually, empirical data are needed to understand what curriculum and instruction look like in a classroom and the influence on student outcomes. That is, only a small number of studies have examined the implementation of teaching about African Diasporic people's history and culture in elementary classrooms (e.g., Collins et al., 2019; Wynter-Hoyte, 2021). The proposed research will contribute to a small but growing body of scholarship on this topic. Much of the extant literature (see, for example, Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017; Wynter-Hoyte, 2020; Busey, 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; King, 2005; King & Swartz, 2014, 2016, 2018) present foundational conceptual information about *what* should be included in classrooms. The proposed study seeks to probe *how* this conceptualization is translated into instruction and curriculum in classroom settings.

Significance of the Study

Several scholars have expatiated on the omission and inaccurate accounts of Black histories in school (Bickford & Rich, 2014; King, 1992; Kolchin, 1998). To say that the misteaching of African Diasporic history and culture is widespread and protracted would be an understatement. Few educational settings *in the world* include this knowledge base in informed and systematic ways. A common example of omission is teaching about Black people in the U.S. starting with enslavement; thus, omitting thousands of years of African history before Africans were forcibly brought to this country (Boutte, 2016; Browder, 1992; Jackson et al., 2021). Inaccuracies such as misrepresenting enslaved Africans as *workers* and misrepresenting the enormous landmass of the African country on maps are also pervasive (King, 2020). In general, all

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of this contributes to widespread illiteracy of P-12 students about African Diasporic people and history. African Diaspora Literacy serves as a counter to typical misinformed narratives by comprehensively including content on African Americans and others in the diaspora from their perspectives.

The proposed study centers on *African Diaspora Literacy* (ADL). African Diaspora Literacy refers to learning from and about African people in the diaspora— becoming *literate* about them. ADL includes having a deep and comprehensive understanding of African Diasporic people's histories, cultures, epistemologies, cosmologies, and the like (Boutte et al., 2017; King, 1992). ADL relates to African people wherever they are in the world (e.g., Caribbean, Europe, South America) (Boutte et al., 2017; King, 1992).

Research Purpose

This study examined African Diaspora Literacy instruction in elementary classrooms. Specifically, I studied what African Diaspora Literacy looked like in two classrooms in terms of curricular content, instruction, and classroom community. I documented both teachers' journeys using ADL and observed how the pedagogy was used in their classrooms.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study:

1. What does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content look like in elementary classrooms?

2. How, if at all, does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content intersect with the required fifth-grade S.C. social studies, mathematics, and English language arts standards?

3. In what ways, if at all, are elementary students' understanding of African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content evidenced in their academic work and conversations at school and home?

Definition of Terms

Frequently used terms are defined below to provide my interpretation of terms discussed throughout this study.

1. *African Diaspora Literacy:* I use *African Diaspora Literacy* to describe becoming knowledgeable about African diasporic people wherever they are in the world (Boutte et al., 2021). This definition is derived from King's (1992) conception of *Diaspora Literacy*, which she defined as the reckoning of the collective Black story. It includes Boutte et al.' s (2017) extension with "African" to honor the origin of Black people.

2. *Anti-Black:* I use Dumas & Ross's (2016) definition of anti-blackness, "a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not the person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White" (p. 416-417). I also adopt Dumas's (2016) stance to refer to anti-blackness with a lowercase *b* as it refers to the racialized social construct and not the people themselves.

3. *Pro-Black* refers to the illumination and affirmation of the Black experience in an unapologetic and agentive manner. Pro-Black does not indicate anti- any other group. (Boutte et al., 2021)

4. *white(ness):* when defining and writing about white or Whiteness, I chose not to capitalize it as it does not depict a collective groups' feelings of normal encounters or connection outside of demonstrations of colonization and dread (Dumas, 2016).

5. *Black(ness):* Black, used synonymously with African American, represents those of African descent. To be clear, Black can reference African descendent people who do not live in the U.S. I chose to capitalize Black to counter normed ways of decentering Black people and their experiences. Blackness encompasses the experiences, culture, and ways of knowing and being for Black people.

6. *Re-membering:* I use King and Swartz's (2014) definition of *re-membering* to mean putting together multiple and shared African Diasporic knowledge bases and experiences that shaped the past in order to recover history.

Overview of Dissertation Project

In what follows, I present the conceptual framework that guided this study along with a review of related literature in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides insights to each of the chapters along my position as a researcher. Chapter 4, *Toward an African Diaspora Literacy Classroom*, is a manuscript for a research article that outlines the study and provides characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy instruction. This manuscript will be submitted to *The Journal of Black Studies*. Chapter 5, *I'll Take You There: Envisioning*

and Sustaining African Diasporic Educational Spaces, is a conceptual piece that documents my personal vision of a pro-Black space for Black students. This piece will be a chapter in an upcoming book project, *Pro-Blackness in Early Childhood Education Settings,* under review with Teachers College Press. Lastly, Chapter 6, *Adinkrahene: Sustaining African Studies in Elementary Schools,* is a practitioner article that details the implementation of African Studies at Jackson Creek Elementary and encompasses the voices of parents as they reflect on their families' experience with the African Studies class taught by Saudah Collins. This article will be submitted to *Education Leadership*.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

To fully understand the underpinnings of this study, I provide background information on two concepts, Pan-Africanism and Black Education. These two concepts provide foundational knowledge that not only guides my thinking in this study but underskirts the conceptual framework that follows.

Pan-Africanism

Since the 19th century, Pan-African movements have existed in all parts of the world. Pan African movements are African descendent people's efforts to restore a connection with their history, particularly after enduring enslavement, displacement, war, or other forced and unforced migrations (Clarke, 1988). Pan-Africanism is a worldwide effort to repair damages caused by colonization and enslavement as African descendants seek to stay connected to foundational African roots. Clarke (1988) metaphorically describes this connection as the umbilical cord that connects Black people to Africa. He explains that this umbilical cord was damaged but was not destroyed through enslavement and colonization. Pan-Africanism seeks to reconnect African people wherever they are in the world. In turn, African Diaspora Literacy aims to help people become *literate* about African descendant people's many dimensions of humanity globally.

Henry Sylvester Williams convened the first Pan-African conference in 1900 in

London with the goal of African unification (Andrian, 1962; Clarke, 1988). Williams is

considered, by some scholars, to be the father of Pan-Africanism and the one who coined

the term (Andrian, 1962). Aside from unification, Andrian (1962) asserted that the Pan-

African movement was established as an organizational structure that provided African

descendents opportunity to restore community amongst themselves. Pan-Africanism, as a

movement, provides a communal structure to reclaim the African identity and

collectively identify issues in the Black community. One of the major issues found by

pan-African scholars is the education or *mis*-education of Black people. Pan-African

scholars not only identified the issues within education but provided solutions to these

problems.

Instrumental in the Pan-African movement was W.E.B. DuBois. Reflecting on the

identity of African Americans, DuBois (1903) conceptualized what he termed as *double*

consciousness. DuBois suggested that Black people experience a dual identity, one as

African and another as American. He asserted, "One ever feels his twoness, -- an

American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring

ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder"

(p. 215). As he explored this idea of the double consciousness, he further described this

twoness:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- this longing to
>
> attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer
>
> self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not
>
> Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He

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would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows

that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it

possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and

spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly

in his face (p. 4).

Through Du Bois's exploration of the idea of the double consciousness, he outlined three

concerns: (1) the power that lies within stereotypes created and perpetrated by white

Americans on Black Americans; (2) double consciousness as a result of racism; and (3)

the battle between the African identity and the American identity (Bruce, 1992).

The idea of double consciousness impedes Black people's ability to function as

their authentic selves as they attempt to navigate through world systems and society,

particularly schools (Asante, 1991; Lee et al., 1990). As Black students and teachers try

to understand the world, they are forced to immerse themselves in whitewashed

curriculums, excluding the necessary knowledge to strengthen their cultural identities

(Boutte, 2016). Teachers also find themselves being taught by the same systems, unable

to provide students with cultural knowledges that are representative of themselves,

particularly Black and African cultural knowledge.

Black Education

Guided by Black studies scholars instrumental in the pan-African movement, lies

Black education scholarship that seeks to explain the educational experiences of Black

people and what is needed for educational and cultural excellence. Black education

focuses on what is being taught, who is teaching, how are they teaching it, and how are

students able to apply it to be global citizens (King, 2005). Foundationally, I draw from

the works of Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. DuBois to gain an understanding of the state of the education of Black children and what is needed to move forward. I then bring forward scholars who have continued Woodson's and DuBois's lines of inquiry to understand what King (2005) referred to as *transformative Black education*. The focus of *transformative Black education* is on the liberation and freedom of people of African descent. The process of liberation typically involves re-membering and relearning as a way of eliminating miseducation about Black people that is endemic in society and globally. Re-membering brings back together the African family, knowledges, and ways of being dismembered through anti-Black violence worldwide.

Early on, Black students become engaged in a complicated relationship with educational systems. Africans led the world in education for centuries. Mali was the home of three philosophical schools dating back to the 12th - 16th centuries, and attracted students from around the world (Black History Studies, 2018). Yet, Africans were deprived of access to education during enslavement, and from that point in history to modern day, schools have functioned to further enhance the eurpoean agenda (Woodson, 1933). Carter G. Woodson (1933) explained that educational systems are grounded in eurocentric ways of being and knowing, which allow white students to be successful. On the other hand, Black children are forced to internalize the uplifting of whiteness and demonization of Blackness (Jones, 2020; Woodson, 1933). The complexity of Black children in education lies in their requirement to engage in a system that was not built for them; therefore, it does not meet their educational needs. Black children are forced to live a double conscience life as a student in the American educational system and as a Black person (DuBois, 1903). Woodson (1933) addressed inequities that are present in schools

noting that they were present in resources, leadership, and the content being taught to Black students.

As Black people work toward educational excellence, DuBois (1970) emphasized the need to not show content with inequity and to let it be clear that Black people will not accept partial resources. He shared it is through persistent demand where equality is found. The equality that DuBois spoke of is not one of sameness but rather the ability to be seen as a human. Acknowledging inequities in schooling, DuBois (1935) asked, *does the Negro need separate schools?* To which he noted, it is not a separate school that is needed, rather simply education that Black children have not been afforded in the current educational system. What is needed is educational reform.

Drawing from foundational scholars such as Woodson and Dubois, King (2005) and the Commission on Research in Black Education (COIRBE) provided principles for Black education (see Table 1—excerpt from King, 2005, pp. 20-21). King noted that many stakeholders still contend that there is a worldwide crisis in Black education. King offered transformative Black education to address the crisis at its origins and provide ways to address the crisis. Attending to the basic human rights of Black people, King (2005) called for accurate, culturally relevant education ensuring individual and collective success for Black people. This is vital not only for Black people but for humanity, providing an alternative to the hegemonic standards being followed.

Table 2.1

10 Principles for Black Education and Socialization

---

1. We exist as African People, an ethnic family. Our perspective must be centered in that reality.
2. The priority is on the African ethnic Family over the individual. Because we live in a world where expertness in alien cultural traditions (that we also share) have gained hegemony, our collective survival and enhancement must be our highest priorities.
3. Some solutions to problems that we will identify will involve differential use of three modes of response to domination and hegemony: adaptation/adopting what is deemed useful; improvisation substituting or improvising alternatives that are more sensitive to our culture; and resistance resisting that which is destructive and not in the best interests of our people.
4. The ways of knowing provided by the arts and humanities are often more useful in informing our understanding of our lives and experiences and those of other oppressed people than the knowledge and methodologies of the sciences that have been privileged by the research establishment despite the often distorted or circumscribed knowledge and understanding this way of knowing produces.
5. Paradoxically, from the perspective of the education research establishment, knowledge production is viewed as the search for facts and (universal) truth, while the circumstances of our social and existential condition require the search for meaning and understanding.
6. The priority is on research validity over inclusion. For research validity, highest priority must be placed on studies of:
    a. a) African tradition (history, culture and language);
    b. b) Hegemony (uses of schooling/socialization and incarceration, for example); c) Equity (funding, teacher quality, content and access to technology); and
    c. d) Beneficial practice (at all levels of education, from childhood to eldership).
7. Research informs practice and practice informs research in the production and utilization of knowledge; therefore, context is essential in research:
    a. Cultural/historical context;
    b. b) Political/ economic context; and
    c. c) Professional context, including the history of AERA and African people.
8. We require power and influence over our common destiny. Rapid globalization of the economy and cyber-technology are transforming teaching, learning and work itself. Therefore, we require access to education that serves our collective interests, including assessments that address cultural excellence and a comprehensive approach to the interrelated health, learning and economic needs of African people.
9. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims, and the UNESCO World Education 2000 Report recently issued in Dakar, Senegal affirms, education is a fundamental human right and an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century. We are morally obligated to create safe, healthy, inclusive, and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning and socialization with clearly defined levels of achievement for all. Such learning environments must include appropriate curricula and teachers who are appropriately educated and rewarded.
10. African people are not empty vessels. We are not new to the study of and practice of education and socialization that is rooted in deep thought. We will not accept a dependent status in the approach and solution to our problems.

The principles of Black Education outlined in Table 2, guided, and informed my study as I reflect on how they show up in the implementation of ADL in elementary classrooms. Congruent with principles six and seven, this study sought to understand through a reciprocal relationship between research and practice.

While there is no singular way to engage in ADL in classrooms, there are clear guidelines and tenets. For example, the teaching of the history of Black people should *never* start with chattel enslavement in the United States (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; King, 1992; King & Woodson, 2016; Woodson, 1933). King and Woodson (2016) described the harm done to Black students by the way many curriculums teach about enslavement as *educative-psychic violence*. This speaks to how students' minds are impacted by what they learn. In many cases, Black students are implicitly taught that they are inferior to white people (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; King, 2005; King & Brown, 2014; King & Woodson, 2016; Woodson, 1933). King and Woodson (2017) use the educative-psychic violence concept to evaluate lessons about enslavement. Educative-psychic violence speaks to the psychological violence that prevents students, across racial and ethnic backgrounds, from gaining a full understanding of their identities; racially, historically, and politically. This evaluation examines lessons for anti-Blackness through standardization of european cultures and values; sole representation of people of color in an oppressive manner; generalization of people of color; and surface level perspectives of non-white people in historical accounts.

Beyond the evaluative use, I agree that beginning instruction about African descendants with the brutal history of chattel enslavement furthers the psychological damage of students (Johnson et al., 2019). The omission of Black histories beyond the

typical superficial and deficit inclusion in P-12 schools often prevents students from being able to reckon with the struggles and beauties of their histories and further embeds ideals of Black inferiority (Johnson et al., 2019). Acknowledging the damage that this does to students, I echo Woodson's (1933/1990) notion that education should start with self.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this study was guided by African Diaspora Literacy, which is informed by the theories aforementioned. Borrowing from the works of the African diaspora and African American studies scholar VèVè A. Clark (1989, 1991), King (1992) coined Diaspora Literacy as the act of learning about Africa's children and their knowledges in the world, whether it is in Africa or the "New World." King (1992) studied textbooks used in the state of California and the inaccuracies shared about Black people's experiences. This study was done alongside her role as an advisory board member of the California Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission. While in this role, she recognized that the accounts of enslavement in the textbooks excluded and distorted cultural aspects which impede on accurate understandings that were granted through diaspora literacy. That is, providing clear and sound accounts of the historical *African Holocaust* that provides students with knowledge that King (1992) asserted can be translated into strength.

Additionally, schools teach in a manner that disassociates the oppression and trauma of Africans who were enslaved with the current racial inequities that Black people experience. In reality, the racial inequalities established by enslavement remain today, evident in many areas (Kendi, 2016; Bickford & Rich, 2014). King (1992) explained the

need for students to engage with diaspora literacy as a counter to the "struggle against miseducation" (p.317). This *mis-education* can be remedied in what King (1992) situated as consciousness; one's ability to critically analyze all aspects of an issue including the essential nature of society and one's own personal interest. King places diaspora literacy as a way to reach consciousness as it is cultural re-memory. It is through human consciousness that one can re-member the many narratives that are lived. It is where humanity can be found for Black people whose stories have been distorted and misrepresented. Diaspora literacy is reclamation of the stories of African people around the world.

Expanding the initial research of King, Gloria Boutte (2016) added the word *African* to name the origin of Black people. Through the critique of social and equity injustices, African Diaspora Literacy seeks to uplift African people marginalized worldwide (Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017) not just for people of African descent but all people. Boutte et al. (2017) positions African Diaspora Literacy as a healing antidote for students.

The present study is underpinned by scholarship on the African diaspora (Boutte et al., 2017; King, 1992; Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Engaging with the rich histories of the people in the African diaspora can be foundational to the healing that some African descendant people seek. King and Swartz (2014) referred to this healing process as re-membering, putting together, in a sense, the puzzle of history using multiple and shared knowledge bases. They suggested the fragmented pieces of history about marginalized people have dismembered history. Engaging in African Diaspora Literacy is a means to re-member that which was dismembered.

Although descendants of Africans are often thought of individually, the diaspora is the collective experience that holds all descendants of Africa together regardless of where they are in the world. Butler (2001) offered a visual metaphor of the diaspora, illustrating it as a wheel. The center of the wheel represents the diaspora that connects the rods of the wheel, which embodies the members of that diaspora in their new locations. The diaspora holds together the central ideologies that continue to connect the members of the diaspora.

Butler's (2001) use of the diaspora as a connection point for those amongst the diaspora aligns with the thoughts and goals of the Pan African Movement, whose goal is to maintain a connection among people of African descent. While African descendants are dispersed worldwide, and movements like Pan-Africanism exist, not all African descendants acknowledge African connections (Boutte et al., 2017).

An important assumption of African Diaspora Literacy is that standard, eurocentric school practices are harmful to all students (King & Swartz, 2018). That is, not only do eurocentric practices harm students who are marginalized by them, but they also fail to teach other students the inherent worth of all people. The absence of ADL instruction and curriculum in K-12 educational settings contributes to a lack of informed content about the humanity of African Diasporic people (Johnson et al., 2018).

Borrowing from the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Commission on Research in Black Education [CORIBE] report (King, 2005), dismantling anti-Black racism can be thought of as a precondition of global social justice since African thought and Blackness represent the diametric opposites of eurocratic thought and whiteness—which have been privileged in institutions and society (Boutte et al.,

2017). Hence, there is a persistent and urgent need to dismantle anti-Black racism and other forms of racism in K-12 curricula and instruction. King (2006) suggested that there should be an emphasis on research that supports an increase in analytical and critical learning of Black history.

Against the backdrop of worldwide and systemic racism, anti-Black racism is the most dominant and virulent form of racism (Dumas & ross, 2016). In contrast to racism, where Black examples may be used to explain the principles, anti-Blackness is the embodiment of Blackness collectively which is scorned and antagonized (Dumas & ross, 2016). Anti-Black racism shows up in policies, practices, and other socially constructed systems designed to dehumanize Blackness in an effort to uphold white supremacy (Dumas & ross, 2016). There is a need for instructional and curricular antidotes against anti-Black racism in K-12 schools and in universities (Boutte et al., 2017). African Diaspora Literacy offers a promising option by demonstrating what *pro*-Black pedagogies and curriculum can look like in K-20 settings.

The need to address anti-Black racism in educational settings is on the radar of professional organizations. For example, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Society of Research on Adolescence (SRA), and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) have collectively committed to advance research that addresses anti-Black racism in education. Typically, research which captures pro-Black epistemologies has been marginalized and underfunded because it does not fit the narrowly-defined *evidence-based* research. Funding is often awarded to studies with positivistic methodologies which focus on Eurocentric content outcomes rather than projects which use authentic assessment measures and assess mastery of pro-Black

content (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019; King, 2005). Thus, the cycle of eurocentrism and anti-Blackness continues. ADL has broad implications as most K-20 curricula do not currently include this content in substantive and continuous ways. Findings from this study can be instructive for P-5 schools in terms of what ADL can look like in elementary classrooms.

Drawing from antecedent works on Black education (Dubois, 1903; King, 1992; King & Swartz, 2014; 2016; Woodson, 1933), Boutte et al. (2017) explained that African Diaspora Literacy is a means to help students: (1) identify and name oppression and its constituent components; (2) learn about their own histories as a healing antidote against oppression; (3) imagine possibilities for a better world; (4) take reflective actions to interrupt ongoing oppression; and (5) organize and collaborate with others who are seeking to dismantle oppressive structures. These components should guide instruction for K-12 teachers as they teach required standards and interact with their students. Regardless of the grade level, students can become critical of the taught content if given the tools and opportunity. Using the elements provided by Boutte et al. (2017), educators should evaluate their instruction style and the content being taught. Educators will not always bring forth information that interrupts current systems, but through critical analysis, students often critique systems and inequities. These elements are woven through the studies analyzed below.

Review of Related Research

While few studies have been done specifically using the terminology, *African Diaspora Literacy*, I review both conceptual and empirical works from the academic literature to synthesize what has been studied and to identify potential gaps. All were

either conceptual pieces or used qualitative research methodologies in which the authors were active participants. All focused on African Diaspora Literacy in K-12 classrooms.

African Diaspora Literacy Background

Applying King's (1992) and Boutte et al.'s (2017) conceptualization, Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) examined the role of ADL in classrooms in a qualitative study of a collaboration between a teacher and teacher educator. They asked, "What are the affordances of teaching from an Afrocentric stance in a first-grade classroom?" (p.409). The study was conducted in a first-grade classroom with seven boys and eight girls, all of which identified as Black. Situated in a southeastern United States city in a historically Black neighborhood, students were from multigenerational families. That is, eight of the parents and grandparents attended the same school.

The co-researchers, a university professor and first-grade teacher, were a part of a team of university professor/elementary teacher dyads, which included professional development with schools on culturally relevant teaching (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Both researchers identified as Black women vested in the humanization of Blackness in educational spaces. Together, they co-developed and co-taught a curriculum that focused on countering anti-Blackness. They did not allow district-mandated pacing guides[2] to confine their teaching. Rather, guided by standards and required essential skills, they taught in culturally relevant ways that affirmed Blackness. For example, they used various forms of literacies to reflect the experiences of the students while teaching essential skills.

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[2] Pacing guides outline the order in which standards are to be taught and how long teachers should spend on each standard or unit. These are designed usually at the district level and is expected to be followed district wide.

Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) summarized ADL's role in classrooms as the teaching of Africa, and its diaspora histories to establish a knowledge of self for Black children and knowledge of the strength of Blackness to non-Black students. They emphasized that ADL rejects colonized curriculums and resists hegemonic lessons learned through the eurocentric curriculum and other anti-Black policies and practices in schools (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). They explained that teaching ADL does not impede the teaching of standards (Long et al., 2011); rather, it enhances learning for all students. These scholars concluded that teachers have a responsibility to create equitable and anti-racist education for students. This type of education leads Black students towards liberation, a key goal in ADL.

Drawing from Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011), Wynter-Hoyte et al.'s (2020) study took a Sankofa methodological approach. Sankofa represents the act of going back to get or learn from the past. With such, the researchers sought to relearn and reteach histories resisting hegemonic dominance and anti-Blackness.

As I reflected on teachers in the study, I examined how they addressed mandates such as district pacing guides. In the Wynter-Hoyte et al. (2020) study, for readers' workshops, they incorporated books that included mirrors (cultural affirmation) for the African American children represented in their classroom instead of using books dominated by white characters and animals (Sims-Bishop, 1994). Evidence of Wynter-Hoyte and Smith's usage of ADL while also teaching standards can be found in Table 2. I compare their use of the ADL to teach standards with traditional means of teaching standards.

Table 2.2

Evidence of African Diaspora Literacy

Subject and Standard	Traditional teaching of standards	ADL approach
• English Language Arts: Make connections to personal experiences and other text	• Reading a text and making surface level connections to self. Text may or may not reflect students' experiences or values.	• Using the Ma'at principles, students engaged with text (Nebthet, 2015) and made connections to their personal lives; the students wrote and drew connections which were compiled in a PowerPoint.
• Social Studies: identify types of maps, map features, and purpose; locate students' state	• General learning about maps with a brief overview of the world and heavy emphasis on home country and state.	• Students learned about the entire world with an introduction to all seven continents using the *Seven Continents* video. Students focused heavily on the continent of Africa and its 55 countries to learn about the features and purpose of the map while learning about the various countries on the continent of Africa.

(Adapted from: Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020)

Over the course of a school year, the researchers engaged in gathering data which included "student artifacts (writings and drawings), audio-recorded lessons, interviews with students and family members, district pacing guides, lesson plans, and all written communication" (p.417 - 419). From the analyses of these data, the researchers, with a commitment to Afrocentrism, analyzed through the lenses of BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) and Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995). Agreeing with Boutte et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of the benefits of ADL, Wynter-Hoyte et al. (2020) suggested that African Diaspora Literacy is a way to dismantle anti-Blackness by providing "(a) positive racial and gender identities, (b) community, and (c) positive linguistic identities in the work to help children to love themselves, their histories, and their peoples" (p. 421).

Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) provided a glimpse into the use of ADL with young children. I sought to understand how similar pedagogical approaches can be used with older elementary students. Younger grades typically have fewer state-mandated tests. Does the incorporation of state-mandated tests impede educators' ability to incorporate ADL? Acknowledging that ADL is not prescriptive, I sought to provide scholarship on additional ways educators may implement ADL in their classrooms.

Similar to Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020), Collins et al. (2019) explored the use of African Diaspora Literacy in both first and fifth-grade classrooms as teachers. As teacher-researchers, these scholars documented their implementation of ADL. Both teachers had been involved in a Fulbright-Hays Project in which they spent a year studying and four weeks in Cameroon exploring connections between Cameroonian and African American history and culture. In turn, they developed a related curriculum which they taught to their students. Their inquiry was led by their desire to include typical omissions in their curricula regarding African and African American histories. In their approach, the researchers focused on the histories and cultures of Cameroon. Their pedagogical approach aligned with Shockley's (2011) process of Afrocentric teaching, which suggests that teachers immerse themselves in a particular African cultural group(s) and engage in practices from these groups. This study integrated the learning outcomes from two classrooms rather than examining a single classroom like in Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020). Their work included integrating their first and fifth-grade class as they learned about Cameroonian history and culture. The teachers engaged students through music, dance, literacies, and interactive games. Each fifth-grade student was paired with a

first-grade student, called Cameroon Buddies, and together they conducted further research about Cameroon.

While Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2021) incorporated ADL by adapting the district's pacing guides for first grade, Collins et al. (2019) demonstrated how they used ADL to supplement their regular instruction while still weaving in required standards for first and fifth graders. In this way, students used skills they previously learned to deepen their understanding of ADL topics covered. For example, standards require students to know all seven continents. In session two of their 15 sessions, students learned a song about continents and studied the difference between a country and a continent—a topic that many students struggle with. Learning the difference between a country and a continent was done by debunking the common notion that Africa is a country. Students were able to take a deep dive learning about Africa's 55 countries and unique characteristics. Additionally, in session seven, students learned and refreshed skills on interviewing and poems as they interviewed their families and prepared an autobiographical poem. This assignment required students to engage with their families to uncover some of their family histories, connecting to the African communal principle. For some students, this may trigger conversations amongst the family as parents or guardians may not know some of the information themselves. As a result, students are relying on and engaging their community, the majority of which are Black, and providing an opportunity for their family to learn more about themselves which could provide healing (Boutte et al., 2017).

Collins et al. (2019) offered a few key points on ADL instructors for educators and researchers. First, the power in collaboration could be seen through the teachers'

working together and the students' working together. That is, rather than focusing on the individual, they collaborated as a collective African family for liberation (King, 2005). ADL serves as a tool to collaborate and to disengage from hegemony (Boutte et al., 2017). The teachers, positioned as learners, grew and gained new information about Cameroon. Students not only grew in their knowledge of Cameroon but also in African cultures. Students mentioned their increased knowledge about Africa and the value of working together instead of working alone.

Collins et al. (2019) challenged educators to push the limits on accomplishing the goal of teaching and learning to build students' literacy of Black histories. Although resources may not be readily available to travel to Africa as these educators did, teachers can find innovative ways to teach students. The skills that students learned included new knowledge of Africa and extended to both academic and life skills, including interpersonal skills, collaboration, reading, and comprehension skills.

Both studies (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020; Collins et al., 2019) provided insight regarding how ADL looks in classrooms. Both studies reflect the researchers' personal experiences. As I incorporated interviews and observations from a different perspective, I was interested in what new insights might arise. Collins et al. (2019) provided some vital insight on time constraints that informed my research. They shared that they felt limited with their number of sessions and wanted more time to engage with students. My study looked at daily instruction. My study, situated in the same school as Collins et al.'s study, took a deeper look at implementation in traditional instruction, considering how ADL is woven through curricula using the state-mandated standards. As some of the first-grade students are still at the school, I will have the opportunity to see how students'

understandings may have been impacted on a long-term basis. I will have the opportunity to see if my research leads to similar ideas or how they might change.

Teaching Black Histories

Unlike the teachers in the previous two studies, in many K-12 classrooms, the study of Black history, people, and culture is limited to Black History Month. It is often mistaught by educators and frequently perpetuates negative stereotypes and whitewashed renditions of Black history (King & Brown, 2014; Tosolt, 2020). King and Brown (2014) lamented that teaching during Black History Month has become performative and spreads misinformation and glorifies a limited number of Black heroes and heroines. In some senses, it is a race to shove the study of everything about Black people into one month.

Recognizing that Black history should, in fact, be taught beyond the confines of Black History Month, King and Brown (2014) studied three middle school teachers who used Black History Month as an opportunity to intensify the studies of Black histories. Located in the southwestern United States in a metropolitan area—the schools represented three different geographical areas—rural, urban, and suburban. King and Brown (2014) explored how these teachers integrated Black histories throughout the year, even where state testing mandates were largely eurocentric. Data, including interviews and observations, were coded, analyzed, and presented as a multiple case study. This multiple case study examined cases first from within, then cross analyzed to identify themes across cases.

Like other scholars discussed about ADL and Afrocentricity (Akua, 2020; Asante, 1993; Boutte et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2021; King, 1992;), the study by King and Brown (2014) showed that there are many ways to approach teaching and learning. The

three teachers studied in their project, one Black woman, one Black man, and one white woman, critically engaged their students in Black histories. All three teachers chose to take the minimized renditions of Black history in the curriculum standards and expand them beyond the typical narratives. This pedagogical process helped students understand Black history from the standpoint of who was involved, what led to particular events, and how events impacted history.

Interestingly, none of these teachers taught at schools where Black students were the majority, yet they committed to teaching these histories. Their commitment stemmed from recognizing the absence of Black histories in their own schooling. King and Brown (2014) noted that the teachers aligned their teaching with Woodson's (1933) three elements of effective teaching: (1) going beyond the traditional ideas of education to be relevant, global, and critical; (2) making a connection between Black history and students' learning in a practical and relatable way; and (3) understanding the global aspect of Black history. While the teachers touched on Woodson's elements, they struggled with the depth of content needed to teach beyond traditional ways. The researchers suggested that the teachers "missed opportunities to provide students with a deeper contextual and historical understanding" (p. 36). King and Brown (2014) commended participating teachers for their commitment but also stressed Woodson's (1933) recommendation for comprehensive education and preparation for teaching Black history.

King and Brown's (2014) study provides insight for teacher preparation; it is more than teaching the content. It is a commitment from educators and a pedagogical commitment toward anti-racist teaching. While they framed their thinking around

Woodson's (1933) recommendations of teaching Black history, I was interested in knowing what other skills are foundational for teachers to be successful in teaching Black histories. Is this commitment personal? Professional? Or is it a holistic commitment? Furthermore, beyond anti-racism, what truly is the commitment needed? With a keen eye on teacher qualities, I sought to provide some insight for teacher preparation programs.

Teaching Black Children

Nearly four decades ago, the scholarship of Janice Hale-Benson (1986), a preeminent scholar, provided examples of pedagogy from a Black cultural frame of reference for young children (preschool). She asserted that liberation-seeking educators battle against the educational system that *mis-educates* Black people or what she called "education for struggle." Combating this, she suggested Black people should be instructed about the realities they face in a comprehensive way that includes: (1) learning about who they are; (2) who they are fighting against; (3) what are the systems of oppression and how they are impacting them; and (4) what is needed to move forward.

In the struggle for liberation, Black people must be highly aware of the ways oppression is impacting them in order to fight against it. It should not be the goal to become the oppressor in an effort to no longer be oppressed; rather, one should focus on the collective notion of moving forward communally. Hale-Benson (1986) suggested that Black students should be aware of the system that has oppressed them to dismantle that same system to find liberation.

Addressing the needs of Black students, Hale-Benson (1986) provided three components that strengthen curricula for the experiences of Black children: (1) political/cultural (ideology); (2) pedagogical relevance (method); and (3) academic rigor

(content). The goal is to achieve Black excellence, and that excellence is achieved in various forms. As with ADL, Afrocentrism, and pedagogical approaches seeking Black excellence, educators should seek to provide an additional perspective in addition to the traditional eurocentric lessons taught in school. The centering of Blackness does not erase other peoples' stories but provides students with opportunities to engage with and critique the content taught. Hale-Benson (1986) suggested that features of classrooms for Black children should include: high affective support, self-concept development, creative expression, arts and crafts, activities, African culture, Afro-American culture, extracurricular experiences, and holidays. Further, she provided teaching strategies that allow educators to accomplish this: body language, equal talking time, group learning, various learning activities, and music in the classroom.

Drawing from Hale-Benson's (1986) understanding of what is needed for Black children, I sought to understand how her principles show up in ADL instruction. Her extensive research in Black children's ability gives guidance in understanding the tools that are needed for teachers teaching Black students. Positioning my study participants as expert teachers, I looked for how Hale-Benson's components showed up in their instruction and which, if any, of the necessary classroom features aforementioned were present in their classrooms.

The presented studies formed the foundation of my understanding of African Diaspora Literacy and provided guidance as my study extends scholarship in this area. From these studies, I have identified some areas for expansion as we continue to

understand African Diaspora Literacy. Those *areas for expansion*[3] guided my inquiry and formed my research questions.

Conclusion

This study is a response to professional organizations' call for research that addresses anti-Black racism (American Educational Research Association, 2020), and in this case, antidotes for it. Scholarship related to anti-Blackness and pro-Blackness has gained traction, and its relevance was amplified during the 2020 recognition of a national racial pandemic. While conceptually teaching about ADL makes sense, empirical data are needed to understand successes, challenges, and student outcomes in actual classroom settings. Thus far, little research has been conducted on the implementation of African Diaspora Literacy in elementary classrooms. Existing studies have provided an understanding of ADL and some of its benefits in schools (e.g., increase in Black children's racial literacy). Additionally, studies have begun to share insights into classroom implementation of ADL (e.g., Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020). The present study was designed to complement the extant literature as well as add insights into how ADL intersects with school standards and families' perceptions

ADL has broad implications as most K-20 curricula do not include this content in substantive and continuous ways (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, in press). This study will contribute to a small but growing and powerful body of work (see, for example, Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017; Busey, 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; King, 2005; King & Swartz,

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[3] I use the phrase areas for expansion rather than the traditional "gaps in research" to honor the work proceeding scholars have done in this area. "Gap" constitutes inadequacy, while I present expansion as a notion of continuing the ongoing conversation.

2014, 2016, 2018). Findings from this study can be used to inform ADL teaching in

elementary classes and to identify subsequent scholarship on ADL.

CHAPTER 3: PREAMBLE

The remaining chapters present manuscripts for three manuscripts that will be submitted for publication. To fully understand the following manuscripts/chapters, I provide readers with additional contextual information, including an overview of the three articles; the selection process of participants; and their unique school attributes. I also give an overview of my positionality as a researcher, reflecting on considerations I encountered throughout the study.

Overview of Manuscripts

For the first manuscript, *Toward an African Diaspora Literacy Classroom,* I studied two elementary teachers at the same school, one who taught African Studies to grades K-5 and another who was a fifth grade teacher. I spent approximately three hours collecting data in each class weekly from August to September 2021. Data sources included classroom observations, teacher interviews, and a review of curriculum standards, teacher lesson plans, and instructional materials. I also was given access to results of a parent survey and interviews regarding their perceptions of African Diaspora Literacy instruction.

The focus was on two of the research questions (*What does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content look like in elementary classrooms?* and *How, if at all, does African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content intersect with the required fifth-grade S.C. social studies, mathematics, and English language arts standards?*). After three

months of observation of the teachers using African Diaspora pedagogies, I identified four characteristics of ADL instruction: (1) Communalism; (2) Empowerment; (3) Intentionality; (4) Interdisciplinarity. Required curriculum standards were met using ADL content. Families in the school expressed satisfaction with their children's learning about African Diaspora Literacy.

For the second manuscript, *I'll Take You There: Envisioning and Sustaining African Diasporic Educational Spaces* (a conceptual piece), I address the first research question further by explicating how ADL instruction and content look like in two elementary classrooms. Data analyses revealed that while similarities among teachers using ADL pedagogy are readily apparent, the needs of the students are different; therefore, teachers approach instruction in different ways. I described both classrooms using a theme that represents the classroom overall based on analyses of the data collected during the semester.

The third manuscript, *Adinkrahene: Sustaining African Studies In Elementary Schools,* summarizes the findings for the third research question: *In what ways, if at all, are elementary students' understanding of African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content evidenced in their academic work and conversations at school and home?* Here I co-wrote with the principal, the African Studies teacher, and my dissertation committee chair to examine survey results and interviews with families in the school. Using an Adinkra symbol as an analytic metaphor, we chose, *Adinkrahene,* the chief of all the symbols to represent the greatness, charisma, and leadership of the principal and superintendent. Acknowledging that the uniqueness principal's and superintendent's willingness to require a course on African Studies, we document the processes that were

taken to make it a reality. We call attention to the importance of educational leaders having the courage to enact structural and sustained changes. Based on responses to the survey, families noted that their children want and need to continue to build their literacy of African diasporic histories and culture.

Participants and Context

Making it abundantly clear, the school district (Richland School District Two), the school (Jackson Creek Elementary), and the two teachers (Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson) involved in this study are atypical in comparison to most public education in the United States. Most powerful within this situation is the alignment of culturally relevant priorities and expectations that start from the district level drifting to the classrooms. Richland School District Two (Richland Two) presents itself as the *premier* school district aligning its values, strategic planning, and day-to-day operations congruent with that designation. Richland Two is the fifth largest school district in South Carolina, serving 27,965 PK-12 students. Of those students, 61% are African American; 18.7% white; 12% Hispanic; 5.6% additional races; and 2.8% Asian. Among the student population, 38 languages are spoken other than English. Approximately 56.2% of the student population lives in poverty.

Richland Two is led by Dr. Baron Davis. Dr. Davis, a graduate of the district, has a vested interest in the success of the overall district and in each of the stakeholders, including the teachers and students. He was named the 2021 *Leader to Learn from for Leadership in Equity* by *Education Week*. Dr. Davis describes his approach as courageous leadership. He notes that courageous leaders do not operate in the absence of fear, yet it's often fear that makes one more courageous. He recognizes his intersecting identities that

impact his role as the district's Superintendent. As a Black male, he is constantly on alert

to ensure that each move is intentional and purposeful as his identity creates a target for

scrutiny. He shares that the presence of fear and scrutiny are not unique to his experience;

many Black leaders face these issues consistently, being viewed under a microscope.

Rather than allowing the fear and scrutiny to hinder his work, Dr. Davis has allowed

them to fuel his work with the well-being of the Richland 2 students at heart.

Under Dr. Davis's leadership, several initiatives have been implemented,

including revamping the district's mission, goals, and strategic planning. The district

strategic plan, *Pathway to Premier,* highlights its core values, universal goals, and

principle practices. Amongst those is an emphasis on diversity, inclusion, community,

culture, and environment. Keeping students at the center of its focus, the district has

moved beyond words to include action-based practices to support their students and

employees. While the initiatives are too many to note, I highlight the district's efforts

toward making every school and classroom culturally relevant, sustaining, equity-

centered, and anti-racist. Aside from financially supporting teachers' and administrators'

attendance to culturally relevant pedagogy, equity-centered, and anti-racist professional

development, the district sends a number of its' teachers and administrators, including

district-level administrators, to the annual conference sponsored by the Center for the

Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS) Equity in Education. In

addition, the district has hosted scholars such as Dr. Gloria Boutte for ongoing

professional development sessions with teachers from all of its 40 or so schools. Richland

Two has provided year-long professional development for the past five years, including

one teacher from its 40 schools and centers. These teachers take back the information learned to their respective schools and serve as support facilitators for their colleagues.

In order to sustain culturally relevant teaching, individual schools and centers are expected to uphold the district's *premier* expectation of doing so. Of the 20 elementary schools, Jackson Creek Elementary is one that is leading the *pathway to premier* in reference to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Having opened during the 2017-2018 school year, Jackson Creek, led by principal Dr. Sabina Mosso-Taylor, has been a culturally relevant focused school. Teachers are provided with ongoing support to implement culturally relevant and sustaining classroom practices. This support includes not only monthly workshops but in-class support from scholars. Three of Jackson Creek's teachers are model teachers for CEEAAS. These teachers also provide in-school support their colleagues when developing culturally relevant instruction.

Among the unique opportunities at Jackson Creek, Dr. Mosso-Taylor wanted to include a deep content understanding of African and African Diaspora studies, particularly since approximately 78% of the school's student population are African American students. Acknowledging this reality, Dr. Mosso-Taylor wanted to ensure that students have an opportunity to build a knowledge base on a topic that is often excluded and misrepresented in schools. Thus, Dr. Mosso-Taylor tapped Ms. Saudah Collins to design and implement an African Studies class. A cursory search reveals that this class is among the only or few of its' kind in the district, state, and nation in public elementary schools. Ms. Collins was selected because of her deep content knowledge of the African diaspora and the inclusion of that content knowledge and other supporting practices in her first and second-grade classes.

Ms. Collins is not only an award-decorated veteran teacher, but Ms. Collins's classroom feels less like a class and more like a community. She considers herself an Africanist and includes African knowledge and ways of being in her classroom, such as communalism. My first time visiting Ms. Collins's classroom was while she was teaching first-grade. I vividly remember how the classroom environment was mellow, loving, and full of love, joy, and learning. One of the first things I saw on the wall was a tree that exhibited photos of students and their families. The images were taken at the beginning of the school year and reminded students and families of the interconnection between the classroom and their homes. This tree was a metaphorical living thing and grew as families grew, and events happened within the individual families, such as birthdays and other celebrations. Families were invited to add photos to the tree throughout the year. Instead of a traditional alphabet wall, Ms. Collins' alphabet wall included cultural aspects of the students represented in the classroom, including food, countries, and practices. Additionally, students danced and sang to various alphabet songs, such as that from Hip-Hop scholar Dr. Anthony Broughton, known as Mr. B. Rather than unrealistic, inhumane expectations for students to be still, quiet, and mere recipients of knowledge, Ms. Collins included students in the learning process and acknowledged their humanity and need for movement and engagement in learning. Her motherly nature causes her to be loving yet firm with her students. She is gracious with her students but still requires students to rise to the expectations of being *premier* scholars. That is, ready to be world citizens and culturally and academically successful. These examples provide a little insight into the type of teacher Ms. Collins is and the qualities that Dr. Mosso-Taylor wanted all students of the school to experience.

African Studies is a class that every student in kindergarten through grade five takes, visiting once a week for approximately 55 minutes during their related arts period. In African studies, students develop a keen understanding and awareness that their ancestors were kings, queens, architects, scientists, doctors, common people, etc. They see the many contributions that emerged from Africa that we continue to use today. They see brilliance and innovation, creativity, and resourcefulness. Students are learning about the continent of Africa and its' countries, and the connection to their lives and content learned in their general education classes. Students are learning that we are all connected, with Africa since it is the birthplace of civilization. Having being involved in study tours in Cameroon and Ghana, Ms. Collins uses her insights gained from the continent to teach her students. She implements cultural practices and knowledges from these experiences in the African Studies class.

Among the Jackson Creek teachers with evident success of culturally relevant pedagogy and African Diaspora Literacy instruction is Mr. Valente Gibson. Mr. Gibson is a fifth-grade teacher who started his teaching career at Jackson Creek. As a Black male educator, Mr. Gibson takes a unique approach to his class, removing traditional hierarchal practices. He sees his class as a family and strives to make his class relatable and valuable for students' current and future lives. Mr. Gibson seeks to make school make sense for students, so they can find joy in learning rather than coming to school out of requirement only. He focuses on building solid relationships with students and families, evident through the many students who stay in contact with him years after being in his class. For him, the classroom is larger than the four walls and requires interconnection with all aspects of the students' lives. While typical hierarchal standards

are not used, students maintain respect for Mr. Gibson because of the attention and care he shows for each of them.

Though Mr. Gibson has only been teaching for five years, he has been recognized nationally for his work in his classroom. In addition, he was named the current District Teacher of the Year. These recognitions are evidence of the intentionality in ensuring students' cultural and academic success in his class.

Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson are in a unique place at Jackson Creek, and both are exceptional teachers. Their focus on students' cultural and academic success and the use of African Diaspora Literacy is why they were selected as participants in this study. Since ADL literature is growing, I felt it was essential to show some of the best examples available. Both teachers were pre-identified using purposeful sampling (Creswell et al., 2007) based on two criteria: 1) their self-identification as teachers of ADL; and 2) their designation as effective teachers of Black students by the Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS) www.ceeaas.com. As a graduate assistant for the center, I have ready access to the teachers' online and/or on-site classrooms since they (and their administrators) have agreed to participate in ongoing research by the center (CEEAAS).

Researcher Positionality

As a Black male, I admit that I did not embrace my Blackness until embarking on my journey to obtaining my Ph.D. I account this for a few reasons. While I have always been proud in a sense to be Black, the pride wasn't shown outward as I was conditioned to think of being Black as being second best. I was told to enjoy it but remember that as Black people, we must work twice as hard to get what we need. The fatigue to keep up

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with my non-Black peers (*racial battle fatigue, see Smith et al. 2011*) also created this sense that made me just want to exist and not have to deal with the pressures of being Black. While I was raised around many Black people, there was not a sense of Black pride for the beauty and brilliance shown but just for how hard some people worked and were able to succeed.

Furthermore, I do not remember much, if any, discussion about past and present systemic inequities that Black people face beyond enslavement. I remember being raised with the mindset that one must pull themselves up by their bootstraps. There was never a discussion about the lack of boots, the condition of one's boots, or whether one's boots even had bootstraps.

As I began to engage in the race and equity work that I am currently engaged in, my perspective changed as I was exposed to some truths that were omitted from my learning of history. I was able to understand not only the systemic inequities that have always put Black people at a disadvantage, but also have been able to embrace the beauty and brilliance of Black people. This realization for me happened around the age of 24; in my opinion, that is way too late. As an educator, I am obligated to ensure that all students, especially Black students, have access to the his(er)stories of Black people. Through African Diaspora Literacy, becoming literate about Black people, I can engage students to be proud of who they are. This pride also translates into active activism for the equity we seek. One of the central premises of this study was to understand how ADL could be implemented within classrooms to expose students to a comprehensive understanding of Black histories early. My *becoming* of me as a Black person was rooted in my engagement with the research indicating that we are doing our students a disservice

by omitting Black his(her)stories from schools' curricula. The omission uplifts white supremacy and continues to disadvantage students of all races.

Noting my closeness to the topic must also address my relationship with the participants and how that impacted the research study. I first think about my identity and theirs. While all of our identities are Black, we have experienced and seen the world from different perspectives; therefore, throughout the process, I had to ensure that I was open to other expressions of Blackness. I did not find this to be an issue; in fact, although I was the researcher, I was more a learner, and I was exposed to many concepts and historical lessons that were unfamiliar to me. During my first observation of Ms. Collins's class, I learned about Africa's original name *Alkelbulan.*

Due to the nature of conversations about race and racism in the current climate, it was also crucial that there would be less tensions around the discussion of race and racism (Milner, 2007). Yet there were other considerations to ponder. I considered Milner's (2007) statement, "In the process of conducting research, dangers can emerge when and if researchers do not engage in processes that can circumvent misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentations of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems" (p. 388). To bypass potential misconceptions and assumptions, I spent much time reflecting on my observation notes early on to reflect upon aspects I included and things I overlooked as expected aspects. For example, early on, I did not note examples of relationships in Mr. Gibson's class because I was so familiar with his use of relationships in his classroom. Acknowledging this, I spent more time in subsequent observations being intentional about picking up on these examples. I returned

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to observations with the idea of viewing the classroom of strangers, thus opening my eyes to examples in all aspects of the observation.

Lastly, I considered the power dynamic involved as a researcher. I have established relationships with both participants, but I also serve in a leadership role with CEEAAS. This role requires me to work with teachers in various situations; in some respects, I am seen as an *expert*. I had conversations that reminded the participants that I was learning from them and that there should not be any intimidation during my visits. Likewise, I had to take time to build rapport with their classroom communities to release tensions that naturally arise when students see visitors. After a period of time, I was accepted into their classroom communities, and students were comfortable with my presence. This acceptance reified my insider perspective, being able to capture raw emotion and interaction from within the community. A plus of being an insider in this research is the knowledge to navigate race and culture, allowing me to interpret in ways others may not (Merriam et al., 2001). With this insider access, my role as a researcher is not to hold and use the power but to relinquish that power to the participants creating a collective response; thus, producing the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARD AN AFRICAN DIASPORA LITERACY CLASSROOM[4]

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[4] Jackson, J. To be submitted to *The Journal of Black Studies*

Introduction

"To be Black in Amerikkka. What does that mean? How does that feel? To have to

think about every step that you take, every word that you speak."

The above reflection is from an exercise in an academic writing course where we

were tasked to conduct a free write[5] on any topic. The expectation was to develop a

writing sample that we could apply some of the skills we were learning in this course. As

a doctoral student, my mind was crowded with a never-ending to-do list, so finding a

topic was difficult. Beaming through the many things on my mind stood the complicated

relationship of being Black in America. We were at the height of both the COVID-19

pandemic and the racial pandemic in the United States. In this free write, I reflected on

my position as a Black man living in the supposed land of the free: America.

In this reflection, I was brought back to DuBois's (1903) notion of double

consciousness-- two-ness. Exhibited as a denial of a true self-conscience but forced to see

oneself through the expectations of others. DuBois describes how the Black Americans

exist in two spectrums, one defined by eurocentric[6] standards and the other being their

Black identity—their self-conscious. I admit that I have some resentment about being

denied the opportunity to develop an authentic sense of self-conscious in which I can

fully embrace my Blackness. That is, I have not able to fully embrace my Blackness

because of ignorance key aspects of Black histories and culture. My schooling confined

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[5] Freewriting is a writing strategy as part of the writing process. It describes writing time to get ideas on the page. Usually, the writer writes without doing any erasing or editing.

[6] When defining and writing about white or whiteness, I choose not to capitalize it as it "does not describe a group with a sense of common experiences or kinship outside of acts of colonization and terror" (Dumas, 2016, p.13). When writing about europeans as a group of people, I choose to use lowercase (although it is a proper noun) to decenter the normalized and standardized experience of white people. I capitalize Black and Africa(n) to center the people and their experiences. I do capitalize Europe(an) when referencing the continent/countries.

Blackness to surface-level understandings from my early years through my first graduate degree. While I was well versed in knowledge about Martin Luther King Jr., Harriett Tubman, and Rosa Parks, I was a doctoral student before I learned of the contributions of Ancient Africa to the world, or even how folx[7] such as Septima Clark and Bayard Rustin transformed local and national policy. I have asked myself how life would be different if I were taught about African and African American histories early in my learning. Instead, I am faced with having to unlearn and relearn information about Blackness and work against internalized anti-Black stereotypes about Black culture that are ingrained in my psyche.

I know that my experience is not an anomaly. Children are implicitly and explicitly taught to internalize the supremacy of whiteness through media renderings, representation in professional careers, and the curriculum and curricula materials (i.e., textbooks, books, etc.) they engage with in schools (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Woodson, 1933). Thus, the perspectives of students of all racial backgrounds are distorted by missing and inaccurate information about the contributions of People of Color. Although the African diaspora represents approximately 20 percent of the world's population (Boutte, in press), curricula have neglected to provide accurate accounts of Black beauty and brilliance.

Schools were designed to uplift white supremacy is how U.S (Hillard, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Asa Hillard (1997) asserts schools have been designed not only to create and sustain domination of Africans by europeans, but also deny Black people access to comprehensive education. Roadblocks

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[7] Folx is used to honor those people and groups who are traditionally marginalized (DeCarlo, 2021).

and obstacles remain present to prevent educational *advancement* among African American students (Lomotey & Shockley, 2020). As I continue to develop a deeper sense of Black consciousness, I became interested in examining what happens when students engage in Black histories and knowledges that empowers their development of a positive self-conscious. For my doctoral dissertation, I   examined the implementation of African Diaspora Literacy and the impact of incorporating Black histories, knowledges, ways of being, epistemologies, and cosmologies on Black students in elementary classrooms. Using critical case methodology to examine two teachers' classroom for three months, I asked: (1) What does African Diaspora Literacy look like in elementary classrooms? (2) In what ways do African Diaspora Literacy content and instruction intersect with required fifth grade S.C. standards? and (3) In what ways are elementary students' understanding of African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content evidenced in their academic work and conversations at school?

I begin this paper with an overview of foundational Black Education and African Diaspora Literacy concepts and thoughts. While African Diaspora Literacy is the central focus, Black Education serves as a guiding framework for African Diaspora Literacy. Next, I describe the methodology for this study. Finally, I share characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy content and instruction using classroom examples which emerged from the study.

Black Education

In the United States, education has always been a contentious place for Black people (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). Yet, in the earliest civilizations, Africans led in education. For example, Mali is the home to three philosophical schools dating back to

the 12th - 16th centuries. One of which, Sankore University, had the largest library holdings, second only to the library in Alexandria—which is also in Africa. The school could accommodate up to 25,000 students and attracted students worldwide (Black History Studies, 2018). When Africans were stolen from their homes and forced to the United States, access to education was denied. Even when given access to education, Black people continued to face equality and equity issues compared to their white counterparts. Denying Black people equitable access to culturally-informed education continues the domination of society and maintains white superiority (Hillard, 1997; Woodson, 1933).

It is not a revelation to note that from their inception to now, schools have been designed to uplift whiteness, grounded in eurocentric schools of thought (Jones, 2020; Woodson, 1933). Even contemporary efforts to redesign educational systems rely on 'old plans' to rebuild a structure that should be completely redesigned (Smith & Chunn, 2017). Countering this, Black Education seeks to work toward educational excellence for Black students.   For example, DuBois (1933) pondered, *Does the Negro need separate schools?* Nearly a century later, Ladson-Billings (2006) inquired, *Can we at least have Plessy?*[8]   At the core, these queries center around what to obtain educational equity for Black people. Black education seeks to address who is taught, who is teaching, what is being taught, how is it being taught, and how can students use the knowledge gained to become global citizens (King, 2005). African Diaspora Literacy uses the fundamental principles of Black education studies.

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[8] Ladson-Billings' (2006) question references the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* which resulted in separate but equal schools. Although schools were desegregated, she argued that Black students were at least entitled to equal resources..

African Diaspora Literature

Drawing from Woodson's (1933) conception of "the miseducation of the Negro,"
King (1992) brings attention to the distortion, misrepresentation, and omission of Black
knowledges in schools. Calling for a remedy, King (1992) described Diaspora Literacy as
the act of learning about Africa's children and their knowledges in the world, whether it is
in Africa or the "New World." King's (1992) conception of diaspora literacy drew from
Abena Busia's (1989) and VèVè Clark's (1989) concept of diaspora literacy as an
indigenous perspective of the literature of Africa, Afro-American, and the Caribbean.
Busia (1989) described diaspora literacy as "an ability to read a variety of cultural signs
of the lives of Africa's children at home and in the New World" (p.197). King presented
diaspora literacy as culturally informed knowledge – situating descendants of Africa as
Africa's children– as they seek true human freedom (King, 2006). She describes diaspora
literacy as a source of healing and self-recognition. Emphasizing that her concerns are not
revolutionary or new, King (1992) analyzed how content, particularly lessons about
enslavement was presented in textbooks using California state textbook adoptions. In the
analysis of textbooks, King noted numerous inaccuracies about Black people's
experiences. She stressed that schools teach in a manner that disassociates the oppression
and trauma of Africans who were enslaved with the current racial inequities that Black
people experience. In reality, racial inequalities established during enslavement remain
evident in many areas today (Kendi, 2016; Bickford & Rich, 2014). King (1992) situated
students' engagement with diaspora literacy as a counter to the "struggle against
miseducation" (p.317).

Drawing from Joyce King's conception of *diaspora literacy,* Gloria Boutte added *African,* thus bringing forth the term, *African Diaspora Literacy (ADL)* (Boutte et al., 2017). Boutte focuses on   instructional and pedagogical aspects of African Diaspora Literacy (Boutte, in press; Boutte et al., 2017; Boutte et al., 2021). In this growing body of work, scholars such as Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) describe how ADL counters anti-Blackness in early childhood classrooms. Wynter-Hoyte and Smith (2020) demonstrated how anti-Black violence can be interrupted through the use of ADL pedagogy and content in a first grade classroom. These scholars determined ADL promotes "(a) positive racial and gender identities, (b) community, and (c) positive linguistic identities in the work to help children to love themselves, their histories, and their peoples" (p. 421). In general, scholars position ADL as a healing antidote to anti-Blackness in classrooms (Boutte, 2021; Boutte et al., 2017; Dillard, 2012; King, 1992).

Method

The overarching goal of this study was to examine and document what happens when African Diaspora Literacy (ADL) instruction is used in two elementary classrooms. Specifically, I explored how ADL is operationalized and translated into teaching and how its implementation intersects with students' cultural and academic outcomes. Using critical case study methodology, I focused on the implementation of ADL in two elementary classrooms. I examined common themes, challenges, and successes as perceived and experienced by teachers and students. Guided by critical case methodology, my goal was not to generalize to a larger population (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989); though certainly some of the findings may be cautiously extrapolated to elementary classrooms seeking to engage in ADL. Stake (1995) suggests that case studies

can be used to learn from a particular situation with queries such as, *what can we learn from their story and their interaction with the world?*

As noted by Ladson-Billings (2009), there are two types of readers, ones that wish to engage with the story told and others who want to move towards praxis, actionable change. The major distinction between case study and *critical* case study is that critical case study pushes toward praxis rather than just sharing the empirical findings. Freire (1972) asserts that it is not sufficient to just talk about issues and gain knowledge, rather people must come together and transform issues through action and critical reflection. This study aimed to activate praxis in classrooms and educational spaces in the hope of promoting wider use of ADL pedagogy in elementary classes.

Critical case studies invoke change for the greater good (Asghar, 2013). *Critical* case studies focus on issues that confront the reproduction of power, which problematizes hegemonic structures and practices. The present study focuses on ADL as a potential pedagogical approach for educators to interrupt the reproduction of anti-Black racism in schools.

Using case study methodology allows for a detailed view of cases that are pieces of the larger body; that is, teachers engaging in ADL (Stake, 1995). ADL teachers are not monolithic and cannot be defined by a single account. Thus, the collective story of ADL teachers can be metaphorically imagined as a completed puzzle with personal stories as each of the puzzle pieces, but all which contribute to the whole. While each piece matters, they are only complete when connected to others. Likewise, since teaching is a dynamic, ever-changing process, ADL instruction will remain a living entity. The

two examples that I provide, then, are not prototypic, but are samplings of what ADL can look like.

Participants

The two teachers involved in my study share the similarity of their commitment to the success of Black students. Using purposeful sampling (Crestwell et al., 2007), both teachers were identified as having met two criteria: (1) their self-identification as teachers of ADL; and (2) their designation as effective teachers of Black students by the Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS) www.ceeaas.com. Both teachers exemplify teaching that supports cultural and academic excellence for African American students (Boutte, in press). They have been locally and nationally recognized for their teaching.

Both teachers teach at the same school, Jackson Creek Elementary School (JCES). I also previously taught at this school and met the teachers there. Jackson Creek Elementary School serves students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. Located in the southeastern United States, the school's population includes 74% African American and roughly 50% male and 50% female students. Eighty-four percent of the students are considered to come from low-income families. JCES leadership emphasizes culturally relevant pedagogy, an expectation which mirrors the district's expectations. Teachers are provided professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy at both the school

and district levels. JCES is also an AVID[9] school and follows the Seven Mindsets[10].
These are noted as teachers are expected to follow both programs closely.

Ms. Saudah Collins. Ms. Collins is no stranger to education, assuming several roles over her 30-year career. She has taught grades Pre-Kindergarten to second grade. Most recently, she was named the National Council for the Social Studies Elementary Social Studies Teacher of the Year. Ms. Collins embodies a calm yet powerful persona in her classroom. On any given day, she can be found singing, dancing, or playing an African instrument to engage her students in a full African Diasporic experience.   Ms. Collins is currently teaching African studies, a required course that all students take each year. This course has been designed with the expertise of Ms. Collins, who has immersed herself in learning about African and African American histories. She has participated in two Fulbright-Hays Group Projects traveling to Ghana and Cameroon. This is the first time any elementary school in the district has offered an African Studies course. Ms. Collins states that her teaching has evolved over her career, but she foundationally hopes that her teaching inspires students to make the world a better place.

Mr. Valente Gibson. While early in his career, Mr. Gibson has been successfully innovative at providing an equitable schooling experience for his students. A fifth-grade teacher of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, Mr. Gibson seeks to make his classroom an experience that prepares students for their lives. While he is soft-spoken in nature, when he is teaching, the passion brings out excitement that ignites

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[9] Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college readiness program that emphasizes self-determination toward academic success. This program focuses on the areas of collaboration, inquiry, and organization.

[10] Seven Mindsets is a social emotional learning (SEL) program that focuses on solutions. Through the seven mindsets (Everything is Possible; Passion First; We are Connected; 100% Accountable; Attitude of Gratitude; Live to Give; The Time is Now), students work through self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills.

his students' engagement. Currently in his fifth year of teaching, Mr. Gibson was named the District Teacher of the Year. He uses this role to advocate for Black children's academic and social well-being.

Data Collection and Analysis

This examination of African Diaspora Literacy in elementary classrooms consisted of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and a review of curriculum standards, teacher lesson plans, and instructional materials. I visited both classrooms during the 2021 fall semester (August-December), detailing my weekly visits in field notes and documenting with photos and videos. I spent approximately three hours in each class weekly, typically on Mondays (Ms. Collins) and Wednesdays (Mr. Gibson). The observation protocol included a short description of the class (e.g., time of day; content area/subject; other information that might be pertinent); a description of evidence of ADL in a classroom (i.e., decorations, books, etc.); a description of evidence of ADL in the lesson being taught; description of standards being addressed; description of teacher and student, and student and student interactions; examples of student/teacher comments/actions related to ADL; and general observation notes (see Appendix A).

Teacher interviews consisted of an initial interview and two additional hour-long semi-structured interviews throughout the semester. The initial interview allowed me to understand the teacher's teaching philosophy and understanding of African Diaspora Literacy (see Appendix B). Ongoing interviews and conversations were used to clarify observation notes. The post-interview was used to obtain clarity and confirm my analyses and interpretations.

Analysis of data was ongoing throughout the project. Early coding helped guide the generation of questions throughout the data collection process. This analysis provided insights into the use of ADL in classrooms and directed the research by generating questions for the teachers for clarification and guidance on things to look for during observations. To avoid distorting findings, I used: 1) triangulation; 2) reflexivity; and 3) member checking (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998). Triangulation will be achieved by comparing coded interviews, documents, and field notes (Merriman, 1998; Yin, 2009). The purpose of triangulation is to allow multiple data points to confirm participants' experiences. As a researcher, I engaged in reflexivity to ensure that I understood how my ontology and epistemology influenced the research design and my interactions with participants. Member checking with the teachers was used to verify my interpretation of data remained faithful to the participants' intentions.

As I manually coded the data, I became close to the data--dissecting what I was observing; reliving the observations and making connections to the literature. Initially, I coded data using what Boutte et al. (2017) identified as key components for helping students through the process of ADL:

> "1) identify and name oppressions and their constituent components; 2) learn about their own history as a healing antidote against oppression; 3) imagine possibilities for a better world; 4) take reflective actions to interrupt ongoing oppression; and 5) organize and collaborate with others who are seeking to dismantle oppressive structures" (p. 68).

Additionally, I used Wynter-Hoyte and Smith's (2021) findings of ADL use in a first-grade class. Saldana (2014) describes this coding round as protocol coding, which

allowed me to analyze the data based on established literature. Next, I turned to In Vivo coding to become more versed with the participants' actual words. This coding round was significant in elevating the participants' voices by removing the researcher's interpretation of the data (Manning, 2017). Using both coding sets, I looked for similarities that developed the final codes from the data. These codes are represented in the following section as characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy instruction and content.

Findings – Characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy Instruction and Content

African Diaspora Literacy is by no means prescriptive in nature. It requires careful consideration of the environment, classroom community needs, and content covering. While not formulaic, key characteristics can be seen that support the successful implementation of African Diaspora Literacy. Responding to research question one regarding what happens in classroom when African Diaspora Literacy is used in elementary schools, I focused on examples with teachers and students. For the teachers, I explicate four characteristics of ADL found in this study: (1) Communalism; (2) Empowerment; (3) Intentionality; (4) Interdisciplinarity (see Table 1). The ways that students are impacted by these factors are embedded in the examples that follow. On Table 2, I list the four characteristics and a summary of the characteristics and implications for teachers and students.

Table 4.1

Characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy Teaching and Content

Characteristic	Description	What I Looked For
Communalism	Drawing on the *Legacies and Dimensions of African Culture* (Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017; Boykin, 1994)*, communalism speaks to the shared interconnection among people. Moreover, it speaks to the obligation to rise above individual for the sake of the collective group. Communalism is an important dimension of Black culture.	(ex.) I looked for examples of teachers encouraging community development and maintenance.
Empowerment	I situate empowerment as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives" (Page & Czuba, 1999, p.1). That is developing agency amongst students in their academic and social lives. Empowerment refers to developing and sharing tools that support agency among students.	(ex.) I looked for how teachers empowered students through content and allowing students agency.
Intentionality	Developing knowledge bases to understand Black histories and culture does not happen by chance. It comes from intentions to disrupt hegemonic practices that plague educational systems. Intentionality in this context refers to the conscious efforts to create a space that supports cultural and academic excellence among Black students.	(ex.) I looked for teachers' actions for intentional changes to traditional curriculum and instructional materials.
Interdisciplinarity	The interdisciplinary nature of African Diaspora Literacy speaks to how it organically connects to many content areas. Regardless of the subject, African Diaspora Literacy can be used to support and enrich students' knowledge and understanding of the content.	(ex.) I looked for what subjects African Diaspora Literacy showed up in.

Table 4.2

Characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy Implications for Teachers and Students

Characteristic	Implications for Teachers	Implications for Students
Communalism	Teachers who engage in African Diaspora Literacy pedagogy create a sense of family, symbiosis, mutual care, and shared sense of responsibility among all class members. ADL teachers privilege group collectivity versus individualism.	Students in classes where African Diaspora Literacy pedagogy is used feel included in the instruction and curriculum. They understand that they are a part of a group that cares for them.
Empowerment	ADL Teachers relinquish some of the power that is traditionally held in their roles; thus, giving students more control in their educational process. Teachers assume the role of a facilitator empowering students to develop skills that will extend beyond their classroom.	Through the use of African Diaspora Literacy, students feel empowered to assume agency of their academic and cultural lives. They take pride in their academic and cultural success and actively engage in learning. Students become experts of sorts and share their knowledge with their families and others.
Intentionality	Under the guidance of state standards, teachers intentionally expose their students to African Diasporic texts and conversations to deepen students' knowledge of the diaspora. Key concepts are covered in iterative ways, capturing large ADL themes.	Student learn ADL knowledge on deep levels are able to extrapolate beyond specific examples.
Interdisciplinarity	Teachers find ways to connect ADL to their instruction across multiple subjects ensuring the relevancy to students' lives.	Students do not view ADL content in isolated subject areas and are able to make cross-curricular connections.

African Diaspora Literacy is Communal

"It's not about me just standing in front of them imparting some wisdom or knowledge,

but that we're going through this process of co-constructing knowledge together, so and

that I'm more of a guide than, as they would say, the sage on the stage."

(S. Collins, personal communication, March 10, 2021)

Describing his class as a family, Mr. Gibson prioritizes communalism. One of his teaching philosophies is represented by three R's: relationships, responsiveness, and reflection. Based on the developed relationships, everyone can be responsive to the needs

of each other. Reflection allows the classroom community to analyze how they can improve regularly. Building community is not reserved for the first days of school. It requires constant revisiting and nurturing; as with any other relationship. This is a collective responsibility among the class rather than solely on the teacher. In the beginning weeks of school, Mr. Gibson modeled communal expectations, such as when a student accomplished a goal, he stopped the class and said, "we are going to celebrate [this student]." The class roared in applause, giving standing ovations. While the student was seemingly shy, her face illuminated with a smile that lasted the rest of the day. Weeks later, the students were initiating celebrations of their peers and their teacher.

Both teachers display a sense of humility, removing traditional hierarchal structures in their classes. Rather than behaving as 'dictators', Mr. Gibson and Ms. Collins share their humanity and vulnerably, demonstrating to their students that even as adults, they are not perfect. Ms. Collins has various 'truth moments' with her students, sharing how she is still learning, *re*learning, and *un*learning information about African and African American history and culture. As shared in the opening quote, Ms. Collins sees her class as a collective journey that everyone is taking part in. She asked how many countries made up North America during a lesson on continents and countries. Eagerly students shouted "3!" Amused, Ms. Collins shared that she too learned that there were three countries in North America, an incorrect fact. North America is made up of 23 countries and over two dozen territories. Moreover, many of the countries and territories that are often overlooked are where African diasporic people are the majority. The students were stunned. This was an introduction to talking about other countries in which they heavily focused on Africa and its 55 countries. Ms. Collins used this as an example

that adults, too, are always learning. She asked students for grace as they learned together. If a student asks a question that she does not have the answer to, Ms. Collins makes a note on the board and later returns the found information to the class. Throughout the class, Ms. Collins encourages students to extend the community beyond their class walls and teach others, such as family members. As a result, the classroom community is extended, and families' interests in the course are piqued. Parents shared how their children would come home and share information that they never knew. For one family, Mansa Musa, ruler of the Mali Empire, became the topic an at-home research project. These examples provide insight into research question three on how ADL instruction and content shows up in students' conversations. Parents share the excitement students show when talking about the content and how knowledgeable they have become.

Emphasizing collective responsibility, Ms. Collins worked with students to discuss how they might handle issues that arise without the help of an adult. Since they are communally connected, she offered skills on how they could talk things out and come to a solution. For example, when a student could not see the board, Ms. Collins modeled steps the student could take to problem solve with her peers. Subsequently, there were fewer interruptions to discuss minor issues.

Beyond the classroom, the communalism of ADL extends to teacher communities. Building and sustaining a knowledge base about ADL requires teachers to find communities that allow their minds to grow. Teachers gather new understandings, instructional practices, and other insights within these communities while sharing with others. These are both micro and macro communities. While observing Ms. Collins, I saw a micro-community in action. The school's music teacher was interested in Ms. Collins's

use of Adinkra symbols. They had conversations about their origin and how he might be able to use them in music instruction. Ms. Collins provided him with literature and his very own Adinkra poster. Later in the year, Adinkra symbols were used in music class reinforcing school wide expectations and as an analysis tool for music lyrics. This communal support is encouraged by both school level and district level administration.

On a macro level beyond the walls of the school, Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson are teachers with the Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS). As model teachers, they are a part of a network of teachers, teacher educators, and community members. Amongst these networks, teachers partake in professional development; have access of a network of over 25 faculty researchers; co-publish; co-present; and travel to the continent of Africa to continue to build their knowledge base. More importantly, these networks are a support system for when things are going well and when teachers might have hit a roadblock.

African Diaspora Literacy is Empowering

"I really believe in these three words in which I live by: peace, power, and prosperity. And I really just believe that if you bring peace within the classroom, allowing your kids to realize their inner selves, you know, who they are, then it ends up leading to power and that power to believe that they can learn that it is possible that they are worthy. Which leads to the prosperity aspect in which they are achieving in the art of being successful."

(V. Gibson, personal communication, October 6, 2021)

Mr. Gibson stresses that his goal in teaching is to create a classroom where students feel free to be their authentic selves. He strives to make learning a full experience. He desires students to come as they are, and together, they build. One of the

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ways he empowers his students to be their authentic selves is by allowing the use of African American Language[11] (AAL). Although African American Language is under attack in schools (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020), Mr. Gibson finds value in students' home language, which affords a space where they can make meaning of the world (Jordan, 1988). Mr. Gibson honors their multilingualism by using AAL to help students make meaning and occasionally for comedic relief. Responding to a student being scared by a random noise, Mr. Gibson used an African American colloquial phrase he said his grandmother always used, *"you better start livin' right."* Many of the students chucked, some of them sharing that their parents and grandparents also use that phrase.

Similarly, In Ms. Collins's class, African American Language is honored. On occasion, Ms. Collins wears a t-shirt that reads, *We Be Lovin' Black Children*. The habitual *be* present in that phrase is a feature of African American Language denoting past, present, and future. Ms. Collins uses AAL in her classroom to counter respectability politics while providing a space where Black cultural expressions are welcomed. Students are also free to use AAL without fear of being 'corrected.' One student explained to Ms. Collins, "I ain't got no pencil," to which she helped him locate a pencil rather than forcing the student to use standardized English. Coupled with AAL, Ms. Collins teaches students other African Diasporic language phrases such as greetings and call-and-responses. *Akwaaba,* the Twi word for welcome, is how Ms. Collins greets her class. "Medaase" or "Yo" is how students were taught to respond; which means thank you.

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[11] African American Language (AAL) is a globally recognized, rule governed language. The language contains unique grammatical structure and is rooted in West African languages (Boutte, 2016; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020).

After the first few weeks, students begin to initiate the greeting, using is when there are visitors. Students are empowered to take pride in their multilingualism.

Empowering students to be critical thinkers, Ms. Collins offers students, "people won't always agree with opinions about Africa," informing them their class will explore perspectives that are not typically considered. This is increasingly important in the current political climate, where learning about the histories and perspectives of people of color may be viewed as un-American. Ms. Collins explains that she tries to prepare students for conversations that they may have outside of her classroom, empowering them to use their knowledge effectively in any discussion. She reminds students, "when some people tell a story, they don't tell it the right way," encouraging students to seek understanding from multiple sources. They discuss how to dissect information to determine its validity; a research skill she hopes they apply beyond her classroom.

African Diaspora Literacy is Intentional

Teachers are required to incorporate a litany of components in their classrooms, such as assessments, prescribed curriculums, standards, and more. For many teachers, it becomes overwhelming keeping up with the many things that are disguised as 'resources." With the many demands added to teachers' curriculum and instruction, them incorporating African Diaspora Literacy requires intentionality. Implementation of ADL should not be in isolation from teaching mandated standards. Acknowledging the many requirements that teachers have, Ms. Collins states she "just Africanizes it" (curriculum standards). For example, schoolwide rules and expectations are expected to be upheld. Reiterating the school's expectations, Ms. Collins pairs each expectation with Adinkra symbols. The schoolwide expectation, *solve problems peacefully,* the Adinkra symbol BI

NKA NI meaning *no one should bite the other* is used to symbolize and teach the values of peace and harmony. To gain the students' attention and provide space for self-expression, Ms. Collins also pairs the expectations with music. When reviewing the schoolwide expectation of respect, she displayed Adinkra symbols for respect, cooperation, compassion, empathy, and honesty. After a brief discussion, she played a music video created by elementary students who rap about respect (Hal Sandick, 2011). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOvZLOL9zd0)

A tremendous amount of pressure is placed on teachers to cover curriculum standards. Rather than seeing this expectation as a roadblock, Mr. Gibson considers it as a chance to incorporate African Diasporic texts in his lessons. One of the state's English Language Arts standards states students should be able to "analyze the relationship among ideas, themes, or topics in multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities" (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015, p.41). For this literary analysis unit, Mr. Gibson carefully selected texts to expose students both to African Diasporic text and provide an opportunity for students to engage with the text's historical, political, and social aspects, including that of the text's context and author. During the unit, the class read two literary works by Langston Hughes: the poem, *Mother to Son*, and the short story, *Thank You Ma'am.* Mr. Gibson selected these texts intentionally, remembering how impressed he was as an elementary student reading poems about Langston Hughes. He shared with his class that interaction of the text was simply memorizing the poems and not understanding what the poem meant. He wanted his students to understand all aspects of the works. His students were highly interested in many of the *why* components. For instance, one student asked, referring to *Thank You*

Ma'am, "Why he writing about this?" Another student asked, "Why he talk like that?" The student shared that some of her family resides in New York (where Langston Hughes is commonly associated), but "none of them talk like that." Mr. Gibson used these times as an opportunity to facilitate critical conversations that critique historical, political, and social aspects of the text; a key goal of ADL (Boutte et al., 2017). Additionally, Mr. Gibson's use of ADL texts and classroom discussion to teach a state standard demonstrates the connectivity of ADL and state standards, as inquired in research question two.

Since students' inquiries often invoke tough conversations, Mr. Gibson intentionally involves families in the classroom community. He seeks to build trust with families ensuring they are confident in the education their children receive. Starting at the beginning of the year, he opens communication with families using email, virtual meetings, letters home, and a mobile number that families can reach him on. Over the years, he has built a positive reputation among families that have played a significant role in building and maintaining relationships with families. Even families who typically take a more hands-off approach are engaged. For example, one parent explained, "I don't know what you're doing, but my child loves you so much, and they want to be in your class."

African Diaspora Literacy is Interdisciplinary

Ms. Collins's entire class exhibits the interdisciplinary nature of ADL extended beyond the core subjects (mathematics, science, social studies, and English Language Arts). Her classes cover music and visual and performing arts, all while covering African knowledge that is absent from standards, while also using the curriculum standards as a

starting point. Science and geography standards are covered as she discusses the seven continents with a specific focus on the 55 African countries and the diasporic countries. The students learn small bits of information about African countries from a segment of Arthur entitled, *In My Africa* (Bailey, 2011). This video covers languages, cultures, religion, and food, among other aspects of life in African countries. When they talk about the African game, *mancala*, Ms. Collins covers math skills, critical thinking, and fine motor skills. While Ms. Collins is in a unique position not bound by standards, she seeks to make the standards that students are learning in their general education class relate to African Diaspora Literacy. Even without required standards, Ms. Collins' students show their understanding of ADL concepts in a one-pager. Shown in Figures 1 and 2, a one-pager summarizes key concepts learned. In these third-grade examples, students integrate reading, writing, social studies, math, and art as a sign system. Students demonstrated their understanding of specific geographic information about African countries, values of African people, the abundance of natural resources, and other information such as languages and currency.
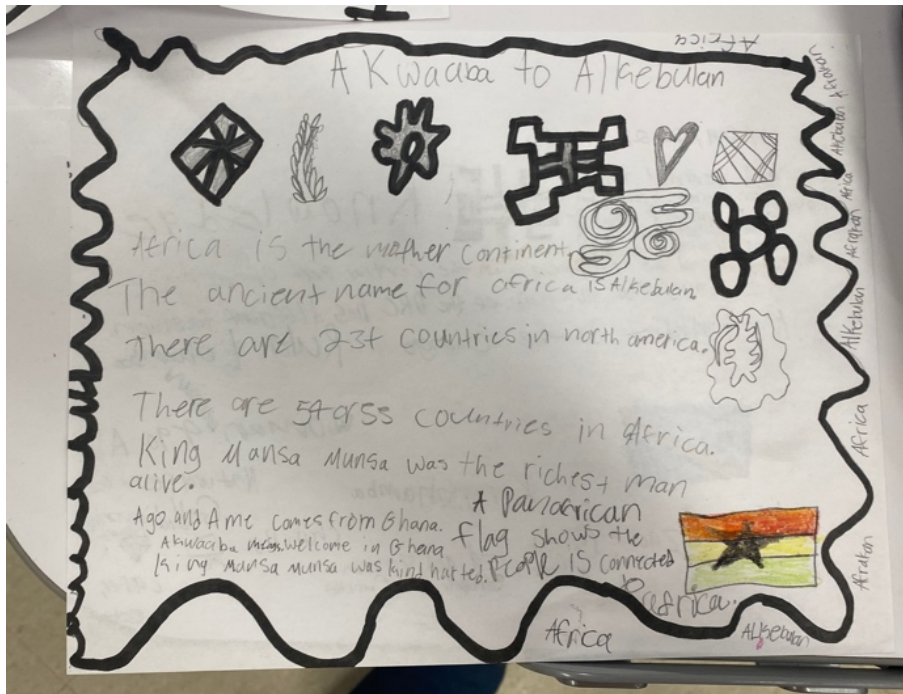
Figure 4.1

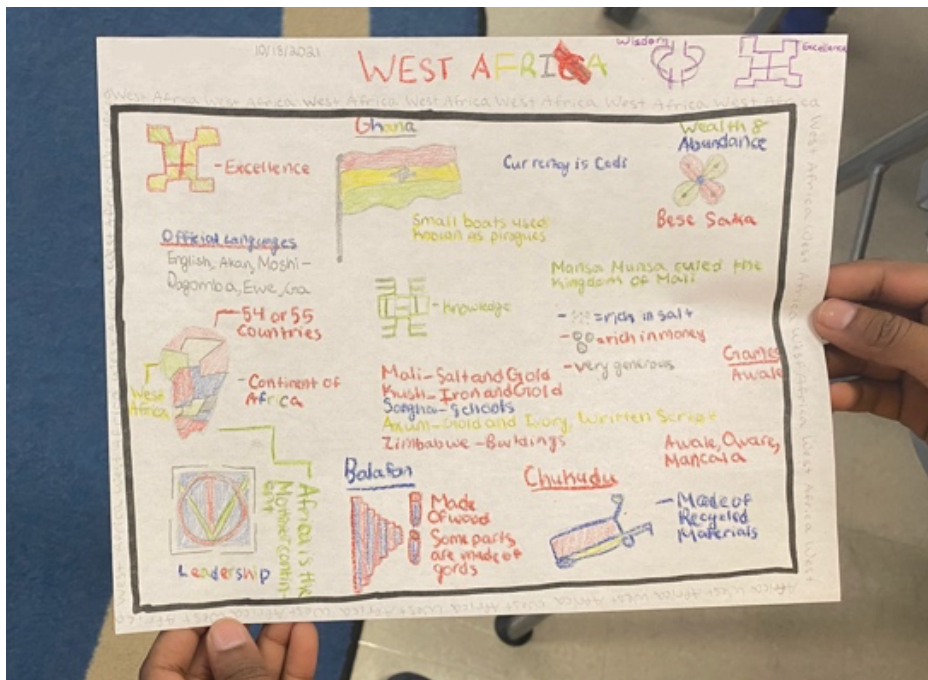*Multidisciplinary Sample of Students Academic Work Related to ADL*

Figure 4.2

Multidisciplinary Sample of Students Academic Work Related to ADL

In contrast to Ms. Collins, Mr. Gibson is bound to academic standards, a space where most teachers find themselves. He describes teaching as *harmonizing*. Each subject supports the other resulting in a comprehensive understanding of concepts. Recognizing that life does not happen in disciplinary capsules, Mr. Gibson intentionally integrates the subjects that he is required to teach: English Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science. African Diaspora Literacy shows up in unique ways in each subject, individually and across content areas. Mr. Gibson emphasizes that he seeks to support his students socially, culturally, and politically in addition to the standards. In Table 3, I share examples of how Mr. Gibson applies African Diaspora Literacy in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Social Studies, an inherently integrated content area, is masterfully woven through all subjects. The interdisciplinary examples shared in Table 3 attests to research question two probing the connection between standards and ADL.

Table 4.3

Interdisciplinary Examples of African Diaspora Literacy

Standards	Example
• (Writing) Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. • (Reading – Informational Text) Standard 11: Analyze and critique how the author uses structures in print and multimedia texts to craft informational and argument writing. • (Social Studies) Standard 4: Demonstrate an understanding of the conflicts, innovations, and social changes in the United States, including South Carolina, from 1950–1980. • (Social Studies) Standard 5: Demonstrate an understanding of the contemporary global economic, social, and political roles of the	During the informational writing unit, Mr. Gibson purposefully selected historical events and people students would research to develop their final writing. These topics were selected based on historical eras covered in Social Studies standards, but topics that were relatable to students and those that are frequently overlooked or include surface-level understanding. Topics included: the Civil Rights/Black Nationalist Movement; #BlackLivesMatter; and the Voting Rights Act. Students were guided to research information that was new to them and was not allowed to write about people or ideas such as Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks who tend to be overemphasized in K-12 schools. Instead, students were introduced to people such as Claudette Colvin and Bayard Rustin. Mr. Gibson included articles and other activities during whole group

United States and South Carolina from 1980–present.

instruction that supported the topics that the students were researching.

- (Math) 5.MDA.1- Convert measurements within a single system of measurement: customary (i.e., in.,ft.,yd.,oz., lb.,sec.,min.,hr.) or metric (i.e., mm, cm, m, km, g, kg, mL, L) from a larger to a smaller unit and a smaller to a larger unit.
- (Science) 5.P.2A.1 Analyze and interpret data from observations and measurements of the physical properties of matter (including volume, shape, movement, and spacing of particles) to explain why matter can be classified as a solid, liquid or gas
- (Science) 5.P.2B.1 Obtain and communicate information to describe what happens to the properties of substances when two or more substances are mixed together
- (Science) 5.P.2B.3 Develop models using observations to describe mixtures, including solutions, based on their characteristics.

While discussing the properties of substances, standards require students to describe what happens when two or more substances are mixed. Mr. Gibson helped students think about this using a conversation about hair and hair products. Students shared they knew family members who mixed/created their own hair products. This conversation also included understanding math concepts of measurement and volume.

- (Math) 5.MDA.1- Convert measurements within a single system of measurement: customary (i.e., in., ft., yd., oz., lb., sec., min., hr.)or metric (i.e., mm, cm, m, km, g, kg, mL, L) from a larger to a smaller unit and a smaller to a larger unit.
- (Science) 5.S.1A.5 Use mathematical and computational thinking to (1) express quantitative observations using appropriate metric units, (2) collect and analyze data, or (3) understand patterns, trends and relationships between variables.
- (ELA) Standard 7: Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.

Students are required to understand various measurement systems as part of both math and science standards. Introducing the lesson on measurement, Mr. Gibson shared the Lebombo and Ishango bones. These African bones are known as the oldest mathematical objects in the world. The students researched information about the bones and shared with their classmates, practicing research and presentation skills.

Where From Here: Discussion and Implications

The four characteristics of African Diaspora Literacy (Communalism; Empowerment; Intentionality; Interdisciplinarity) provide direction for educators to consider when implementing it in classrooms.

In many ways, the characteristics of ADL teaching are overlapping and sed in conjunction with other instructional practices like Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, guided by the three tenets, academic achievement, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence aligns with the goals of ADL with its focus on the academic and cultural excellence within children. There is no prescription to follow, yet students' social, emotional, physical, cultural, and intellectual needs should be considered. Both Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and ADL involve teachers' responding to students' dynamic needs and interests.

Implementing and sustaining an African Diasporic classroom requires intention and efforts. Educators should first begin by assessing their knowledge and dispositions about ADL. Developing accurate understandings of Black histories, epistemologies, and ways of thinking is an ongoing journey for Black educators and for teachers from other ethnic groups as well. School curriculum has omitted, distorted, and decontextualized African and Black histories; therefore, many teachers have learning and unlearning to do as Ms. Collins acknowledged. For me, my expedition begun in my post-graduate career and continues today. Teacher educators would benefit from finding ways to include African Diaspora Literacy in programs of study. For example, the Early Childhood Education teacher education program at the University of South Carolina requires a course on African Diaspora Literacy in Early Childhood (G. Boutte, personal

communication, May 20, 2022). Wynter-Hoyte et al. (2020) assert teacher education

programs should provide preservice teachers with the tools to fulfill their responsibility to

"dismantle and replace inequitable and inaccurate Eurocratic pedagogies" (p. 2).

Furthermore, educators can seek support through organizations that exist to support their

learning and efforts toward an African Diasporic classroom, such as The Center for the

Education and Equity of African American Students (www.ceeaas.com); The Center for

K-12 Black History and Racial Literacy Education (https://ed.buffalo.edu/black-history-

ed); The Center for Civil Rights History and Research (www.civilrights.sc.edu); The

Center on Race and Public Education in the South (www.education.virginia.edu/faculty-

research/centers-labs-projects/crpes-home-page); and the Initiative for Race Research and

Justice (www.vanderbilt.edu/rrj/).

Additionally, educators will find it difficult to engage in sustainable teaching of

ADL without the support of administration. Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson have full support

from the school level and district level administration[12]. Their district and school offer

internal professional development that supports teacher growth in the areas of educational

equity. They also support teachers' and administrators' participation in external learning

opportunities. In a time where it has become increasingly difficult to include these

materials in the classroom, teachers more than ever, could use all the assistance they can.

As this body of work continues to grow, additional research will continue to

broaden the understanding of student outcomes in African Diasporic classrooms. As an

evidence-based healing antidote (Boutte et al., 2017; Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020),

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[12] Special acknowledgment to Dr. Baron Davis, superintendent of Richland School District Two; and Dr. Sabina Mosso-Taylor, principal of Jackson Creek Elementary for setting a standard of culturally and academic excellence, supporting teachers and administrators fully for the sake of the students.

African Diaspora Literacy is a powerful tool that could dismantle harmful systems. Even though the emphasis on the present study was on elementary education, educators across the P-20 spectrum can extrapolate the four characteristics of ADL to support the academic, cultural, and social excellence of Black children.

This study demonstrated that when students are engaged in African Diaspora Literacy, they made connections to their lives while eagerly engaged in coursework. Both teachers exhibited all four characteristics of ADL instruction (Communalism; Empowerment; Intentionality; Interdisciplinarity) and provided examples of how content can enrich the classroom experience and the students' literacy of Black histories and knowledges. In my free write that I opened this article with I closed with, "To be Black in Amerikkka where you are longing for home, and you just can't find home." It is through the implementation of African Diaspora Literacy by teachers like the ones featured in this study where I hope that African descendant people around the world find *home.*

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CHAPTER 5

I'LL TAKE YOU THERE: ENVISIONING AND SUSTAINING AFRICAN

DIASPORIC EDUCATIONAL SPACES[13]

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[13] Jackson, J. To be submitted to *Pro-Blackness Early Childhood Education Settings*

I know a place

Ain't nobody cryin'

Ain't nobody worried

Ain't no smilin' faces

(The Staple Singers, 1972)

In the 1970s hit, *I'll Take You There,* The Staple Singers (1972) envisioned an oasis where there is a break from the cares of the world. As they sang about this place, many of us smiled and envisioned what it would be like to visit this idyllic place. Indeed, during my education experiences in K-12 schools and in my undergraduate program, I yearned for refuge in such a place where no one was worrying or crying. In this article, I revision and extrapolate the theme and lyrics of *I'll Take You There* to guide my reflections on educational spaces that honor Black children's culture.

I know a place

Black students are learnin'

Black students are loved

Black students are proud to be BLACK

I share classrooms where the vision of cultural and academic excellence among Black students is a reality. These are places where Black students learn to be racially literate about themselves and other African descendant people. I invite readers to join me on a virtual field trip as I chronicle two classroom examples in elementary school settings. I want readers to return from this mental excursion renewed, refreshed, and willing to make or facilitate changes in elementary classrooms. On the first stop of this virtual field trip, I describe my dreams of this place and my positionality. Next, I share

descriptions of two classrooms that embody the joyful Black place I envision. Here I focus on a K-5 African studies teacher and a fifth-grade teacher. I conclude with a call to action for readers to work towards the facilitation of transformative, affirming instruction and classrooms for Black children.

Dreaming of a Place: Researcher Positionality

As I reflected on my discomfort during my teacher education program coursework, I realized how uncomfortable Black students must be in K-12 classrooms. No different than most teacher education programs in the U.S., my program contained limited representation of Black people's perspectives and experiences. It felt like I needed to fit into this place to achieve success, even though my Black soul was not at ease. Supposedly, we were learning how to teach *all* students; yet, the only thing we learned about teaching Black students was how they were not reaching benchmarks that other students met. Rather than addressing the educational debt owed to Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2006) or the opportunity gap (Milner, 2013), teacher education programs and K-12 schools continue to hide under the guise of an 'achievement gap' that problematizes Black children (Ford et al., 2008; Howard, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013; Singham, 2003). Few, if any, strategies for liberating and honoring Black students' culture are shared.

I frequently questioned what could and should be done to address the academic and cultural needs of Black students. The lack of viable solutions left me dreaming of a redemptive place where Black students found liberation through the honoring of their cultures rather than being traumatized by irrelevant curriculum, assaultive disciplinary

practices, and placement policies that negatively profile them (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; King, 1992, 2005; Jackson et al., 2021; Woodson, 1933).

Understanding that Black culture and histories were missing from what I was being taught, I was left dreaming of a place where Black students could succeed. This dream was a little more complex than a typical dream because it required something transformative. It was a dream of liberation from oppressive educational systems that continue to impede Black students' ability to reach academic excellence. While I did not have the words to describe my vision as an undergraduate student, I later understood I was dreaming of a place where African Diaspora Literacy was the foundation of teaching.

African Diaspora Literacy

Diaspora literacy, as conceptualized by Joyce King (1992), is cultural re-membering--putting together shared diasporic knowledge bases. Diaspora literacy is the reclamation of the stories of African diasporic people (King, 1992). It is a source of humanity, liberation, and healing (Boutte et al., 2017; King, 1992). Drawing from Boutte et al.'s (2017) conception of *African* Diaspora Literacy (ADL)[14] as becoming literate about Black people wherever they are in the world, Africa is the place that connects Black people throughout the globe.

ADL serves as opposition to the literacies that exclude and distort Black knowledges and histories by centering African knowledges (Boutte et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020). African Diaspora Literacy embraces the beauty and brilliance of Blackness without comparison to any other cultural group. Rather than constructing their lives based on Eurocentric standards and epistemologies, Black students, like any other race, should

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[14] Gloria Boutte added *African* to the concept of Diaspora Literacy to name Africa as the place that connects Black people worldwide.

learn about themselves first (Woodson, 1933). Yet, typical school curricula are filled

with Eurocentric centered ideas and beliefs (Baines et al., 2018; Boutte, 2016; Boutte et

al., 2017). African Diaspora literacy embraces Black home languages and other Black

cultural expressions such as dress, music, and so much more. While African Diaspora

Literacy focuses on Black knowledges, it also benefits students from other ethnic groups

since it is an antidote to inaccurate and distorted histories about African descendent

people.

In a place where African Diaspora Literacy thrives, students engage in curricular

and pedagogical practices that embrace their identities as Black people. Educational

excellence is achieved, and students can live in their divine purposes, uninterrupted by

ongoing cultural assaults. Descriptions of two African Diasporic Literacy classrooms will

illuminate my vision.

I'll Take You There – The People, The Place, The Happenings

This Black-affirming place I envision is not a singular place. In fact, there are

other classrooms that manifest this metaphoric place[15]. I share examples of two

exemplary teachers actively engaged in this pedagogy. In this place, students and teachers

harmonize in unique ways. I share two varied examples of teachers whose instruction is

steeped in African Diaspora Literacy--an African Studies teacher teaching K-5 and a

fifth-grade teacher. To be clear, these teachers provide exemplars of ADL instruction.

Both are teachers affiliated with the Center for the Education and Equity of African

American Students (CEEAAS) and were selected because of their consistent

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[15] see examples in Boutte (in press); Boutte et. al., 2021; Johnson et. al., 2018 for example of a cadre of
teachers engaged African Diaspora Literacy instruction.

demonstration of achieving cultural and academic excellence for African American students (Boutte, in press).

Context

Both teachers teach in the same school located in the southeastern United States. This school's demographics are comprised of approximately 77% African American students; 13%, Hispanic; 8%, two or more races; 1%, Asian; and 1%, White (Richland Two, 2021). The reported genders include males and females, divided by roughly 50% each. Approximately 82% of students live in poverty, receiving benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Some students are identified as foster children, homeless, or migrants. I observed these teachers over the course of the Fall 2021 semester visiting their classes weekly for three hour sessions. In addition, I conducted interviews with both teachers to gain more information about their teaching and to clarify my observations.

The school is within a district whose superintendent has prioritized culturally relevant and sustaining instruction. The district actively hosts professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy and supports teachers and administrators' participation in national professional development on anti-racist teaching and culturally relevant and sustaining teaching. Likewise, the school's principal upholds the same expectation of meeting students' needs through comprehensive and culturally relevant instruction that honors students' lives and pushes them toward academic and cultural excellence. The principal, Dr. Sabina Mosso-Taylor, initiated the implementation of the school's African Studies program, the first of its kind in the district and state at the elementary school

level. She handpicked Ms. Saudah Collins to teach the course because of her commitment to African Diaspora Literacy pedagogy. After observing Ms. Collins' teaching using African Diaspora Literacy in her first and second grade classrooms over a two-year period, Dr. Mosso-Taylor wanted all of the students in the school to benefit from this instruction.

While sharing the same goal of grounding African Diaspora Literacy in their instruction, Mr. Gibson and Ms. Collins have different approaches. In other words, African Diaspora Literacy instruction is non-prescriptive. While similarities among teachers using ADL pedagogy are readily apparent, the needs of the students are different; therefore, teachers approach instruction in different ways. Likewise, teachers bring their unique selves and vibes to their teaching. Below I describe the two classrooms using a theme that represents the classroom overall based on analyses of the data collected during the semester.

Ms. Saudah Collins

Ms. Saudah Collins is a veteran teacher of over 30 years. She has worked as a teacher in multiple roles in general education and special education classrooms; as a university liaison on a multi-million-dollar grant serving schools statewide; as a teacher interventionist; as a National Board liaison; and as a preservice teacher educator --among a litany of other things. She has been recognized nationally as a recipient of the Presidential Award for Mathematics and Science Teaching; Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History State Social Studies Teacher of the Year and National finalist; and National Elementary Social Studies teacher.

Working as a graduate assistant with the Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS), I had the privilege of observing teachers as part of ongoing research projects. While I met Ms. Collins during my time teaching at the same school, I never got to experience her teach. In my notes during my first visit, I remember writing, "I have never seen someone teach like this." I was seeing my vision of an empowering Black space. At the time she was teaching first grade. Ms. Collins, cool, calm, and collected in nature, commanded the respect of her students with such grace. She treated her students with love and they returned that to her and their peers. I was in awe that even with first graders, Ms. Collins engaged them in African Diasporic Literacy. From day one, she included families, and emersed both the students and their families in African Diasporic content and activity as they built foundational skills. Starting during orientation, she captured a photo of each family and placed it on a tree that extended across a wall in the classroom. As families join throughout the year, she asks for a photo to include. Students are reminded that their family is a part of the classroom community.

A Trip to Africa – A Journey of Blackness – Ms. Collins's Classroom

Akwaaba! This is the greeting one receives when visiting Ms. Collins's classroom. This Twi greeting from the Akan culture of West Africa means welcome. Ms. Collins teaches a a required course on African Studies for all K-5 students at her school. In her unique role, she can define her curriculum and content. With over 30 years of experience in the classroom, she is knowledgeable of the content covered in general education classrooms to connect with African Diasporic content.

Ms. Collins emphasizes cultural competence within her class. In many cases, it might be assumed that this involves becoming competent about cultures beyond the

students' world. However, in this case, the goal is for all students, particularly Black students, to understand Black culture and histories better. She states, "all pedagogy is relevant to someone's culture. "We just got to make sure it's relevant to those students who are often underserved and misrepresented," explains Ms. Collins. For students from other cultural groups, her class provides a sliding glass door (Sims-Bishop, 1990) to learn about and engage in Black culture.

Heeding Woodson's (1933) assertion that the education of any group of people should begin with themselves, Ms. Collins' classroom has multiple positive images of Black people since African American students make up 74 percent of the school. One glance of this classroom provides a taste of six historical periods described by Boutte (in press) as an overlapping timeline of Black history beginning with African history before European interaction through modern-day Black history: 1) Ancient Africa; 2) Enslavement; 3) Reconstruction; 4) Jim Crow/Segregation; 5) Civil Rights/Black Nationalism; and 6) Contemporary Life Among Africans in the Diaspora.

African fabrics line the tables and student spaces. One bookshelf is topped with enough African musical instruments to start a small band, and Adinkra symbol (from the Akan people of West Africa) stamps and coasters (shown in Figure 1). Above the bulletin boards, a golden silhouette of the continent of Africa is displayed. An "A is for Africa" poster starts the trail seen throughout the classroom. These posters include various African people, dishes, games, languages, and traditions. They serve as the anchor of the word wall[16] , often required by districts that continues to grow throughout the

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[16] Word walls are used to build children's vocabulary throughout the year. Many times, the walls are started with just the letters of the alphabet. Ms. Collins used pages from the *Alphabet of Black Cultures* (Daniels, 2020) as the starting point for each letter.

year. These are not mere artifacts or classroom décor, but they allow the lessons to become alive for students. These are active tools in the classroom community to allow students to experience the learning.

Figure 5.1

African Artifacts Displayed in Ms. Collins' Class

In one corner, bold colors display the emblems and mascots of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This corner includes photos of familiar faces to the students as various teachers posed receiving their degrees from HBCUs. In addition, there are photos of teachers meeting Black authors, such as Robert Constant, the author of Hey Tuskegee (Constant & Zeger, 2018). Other images show members of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) wearing their crests. Books by Black authors and illustrators are displayed around the classroom and used often. These books canvass Boutte's (2016) six historical periods from Ancient to Contemporary Africa and African Americans.

Ensuring that students receive a more accurate view of Africa, Ms. Collins tells them, "We are starting with the people, not the animals[17]." One student shared his perspective of Africa through experience with movies and other media. He emphasized

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[17] Many people focus on animals when talking about Africa. This focus exoticizes Africa and dehumanizes the people who live there.

his only account was of Africa as one big safari. This distorted view, along with others, catalyzes Ms. Collins' instructional efforts to correct miseducation about Africa and African diasporic people. Dillard (2012) referred to this as re-membering--the act of reclaiming African indigenous knowledges (King & Swartz, 2014).

Ms. Collins engages with the students in a comforting manner. She refers to the 700+ students as her children and relies on her 'motherly' intuition; evident through her soft but firm nature with the students, often kneeing to get on the same level as them yet being stern and having expectations. Ms. Collins greets every student by name and addresses the students as future lawyers, doctors, and other professionals as she explains how they might use the information they are learning in her class and their other classes. She connects with students using African American Language (AAL) throughout instruction. For example, when establishing the classroom expectations, Ms. Collins assures students that she "be lovin' black children[18]" (Boutte et al., 2021). Jordan (1988) explained that many Black children rely on AAL to explore the world and make meaning. As a result, Black children thrive in environments where they are not forced to hide their language identity (Baines et al., 2018). During some lessons, she asks for an amen from the 'amen corner', an African American church reference.

Ms. Collins' use of AAL, coupled with her frequent use of music and space for students to dance and express themselves, creates an environment of comfort and joy. During the first couple of weeks of the school year, Ms. Collins opened the class with Mase's (2004) song, Welcome Back. As the song played, Ms. Collins told students

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[18] The habitual be in AAL references doing something in the past, present, and future. Ms. Collins' message connotes that she has loved Black children in the past; she loves Black children presently; and she will love Black children in the future.

they could groove to the music. Students' bodies moved as if they were listening to a favorite and familiar song. One student could barely get through the classroom door the following week before eagerly asking, "We gonna listen to the welcome back song?" During a following lesson, a West African music video was playing as background music, one student made a connection to a pop culture dance, the 'stanky leg.' Ms. Collins allowed the student to demonstrate the dance for the class. While listening to music, students are invited to drum along on their desk or lap. Often, I would see students with enormous smiles as they drummed to the beat of the music. As I watched the students engage in the music and dance, I realized I was experiencing that place I dreamed of—a joyful, engaged Black classroom space. This was a place where students felt free to be themselves, which opened their minds to   learning. No frustrations and worries were observed among the students and, likewise, I was experiencing pure joy and learning African Diasporic content at the same time.

The use of dancing and music is one example of how Ms. Collins blends in the legacies and dimensions of Black culture (Boutte, 2016; Boutte et al., 2017; Boykin, 1994). These common, intergenerational cultural strengths and legacies are shared among people in the African Diaspora, including: spirituality; harmony; movement; verve; affect; communalism; expressive individualism; and oral tradition. Ensuring these legacies and dimensions are a part of classroom instruction is an aspect of the healing nature of African Diaspora Literacy through the re-membering of history (Boutte et al., 2017; Dillard, 2012; King & Swartz, 2014). Ms. Collins routinely integrates Africanized legacies and dimensions into her instruction. There are times when Ms. Collins revisits expectations. After being absent, she felt it necessary to have students engage in dialogue

about misbehaviors exhibited with the substitute teacher. Rather than reprimanding students, she engaged them in conversation to understand the behaviors giving them an opportunity to self-correct rather than being punished. This honors the communal and redemptive nature of their class.

Instead of teaching the African Studies class in isolation (disconnected from what students are learning in their regular classes), Ms. Collins weaves strategies from schoolwide programs in her   instruction. Referring to the schoolwide engagement in the AVID program, Ms. Collins explains, "I just Africanize it." Here she uses the strategies available through programs such as AVID and matches them with African knowledges, principles, and content. Students are used to AVID strategies from their general education classes; they can apply those same methods to the content in African Studies. For example, after a topic or unit in her class, Ms. Collins has the students complete an one-pager. One-pagers, an AVID strategy to summarize students' learning on a singular page, are used to synopsize each unit within African Studies. Students are encouraged to put key themes and elements that piqued their interest on one-pagers. These themes can come from videos, activities, readings, and lectures to summarize their learning. One student drew a fan with African designs that Ms. Collins shared from her trip to Ghana, stating that it reminded her (student) of 'church fans.'

Students in Ms. Collins' class use Adinkra symbols, connecting them to the various topics taught in the class. Students first learned about Adinkra symbols and their origin and traditional uses at the beginning of the school year and have continued since. Adinkra symbols, globally recognized, are created by the Akan people of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire (Jackson et al., 2021; Owusu, 2019). Ms. Collins introduced Adinkra symbols

using the symbol Gye W'Ani; meaning enjoy yourself or joy. She encouraged students to think about what brings them joy in their lives. Adinkra symbols visually represent values and principles that connect to a myriad of relatable values such as spirituality and courage. Adinkra symbols are one of many sign systems on the continent of Africa which can be used in elementary classrooms.

As the year progressed, the students used Adinkra symbols in various ways. Each lesson begins with an Adinkra symbol and its corresponding value. As the classroom community was established during the first few weeks, Ms. Collins started the lesson with the symbol NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU – He who does not know can know from learning, displayed in Figure 2.
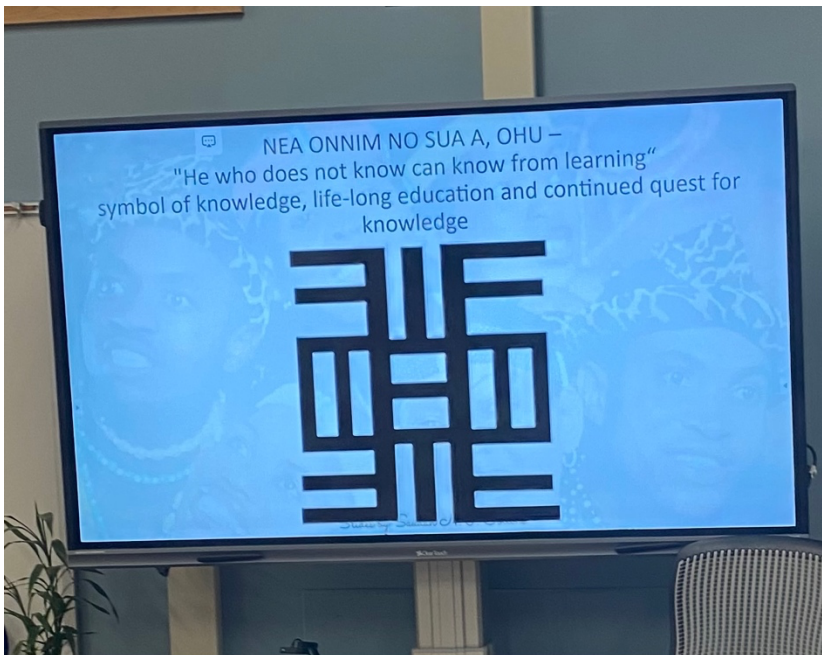

Figure 5.2

Adinkra Symbol, NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU

She encouraged students always to be ready to learn something new. Students decorated their name tents and learning portfolios using symbols representing personal values, classrooms' values, communities' values, and families' values. They also use Adinkra symbols when analyzing characteristics or traits of people, places, and processes discussed during various learning explorations in African studies. For example, when students analyze the lyrics to songs or the behaviors of individuals discussed or read about, they then use Adinkra symbols as a part of that analysis. The students use the symbols based on the meanings/values to describe the clear message.

Throughout the school year, Ms. Collins's students use a portfolio to organize their learning in her class. Students' notes may take the form of brief entries on index cards, drawings, maps, graphic organizers, and connections using adinkra symbols. The portfolios also include the one-pagers that students create throughout the year. The learning portfolio is designed to be a resource for students in the class and as they continue to learn and educate others about the African diaspora. Displays of students decorating their learning portfolios with Adinkra symbols can be seen on Figure 3. Students can add additional symbols, words, or drawings throughout the year; a place for their expressive individualism.
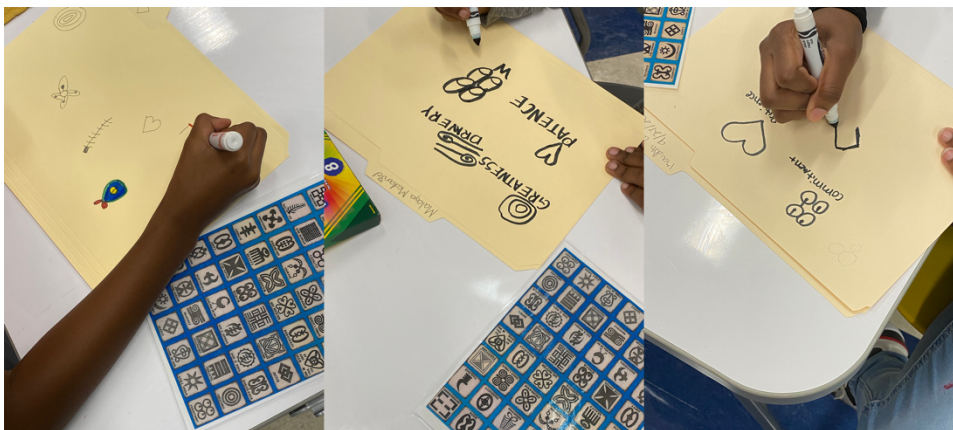
Figure 5.3

Students Decorating Their Learning Portfolios

This portfolio can metaphorically be seen as a passport of sorts as students journey from Africa to Columbia. Ms. Collins's class exceeds my imagination, as it takes students to a place I didn't even know existed. Students' African diasporic journey provides them with the opportunity to feel, hear, and sense Blackness all day long. The content that Ms. Collins uncovers represents a knowledge base that I was only recently introduced to as an adult and one that I am still learning.

Mr. Valente Gibson

Mr. Valente Gibson has only been teaching for five years. Still, the National Council of Teachers of English has recognized him with a Social Justice Award and an Early Career Educator of Color Leadership Award. In addition, Mr. Gibson is the District Teacher of the Year.

As Black male teachers, Mr. Gibson and I connected while teaching together, starting our careers one year shy of each other. Calm in nature, Mr. Gibson describes himself saying, "I am not the extra teacher that will have everything on the wall but I feel like I give you the content that helps you in life." While Mr. Gibson came to me for

advice, I often found myself taking note of how he interacted with his students in and out of school, applying it to my pedagogical practices. Mr. Gibson is especially relatable to his Black male students being a role model for them, maintaining relationships even once the student has progressed in their school experience.

Better and Stronger Together – Mr. Gibson's Classroom

In contrast to the array of décor and items in Ms. Collins's class, Mr. Gibson's class takes a more covert approach but is still filled with books that mirror his students' African American identities. Books that explore the Black experience are throughout the room, mainly covering the historical eras after enslavement matching the standards covered in the fifth grade. A poster on Mr. Gibson's door displays one of the class's affirmations. This affirmation, exhibited in Figure 3, serves as a daily reminder for students of who they strive to be and a proclamation to those who visit to inform them of who they will experience in their classroom community. Mr. Gibson and his students carefully curated this affirmation to be inclusive of all their voices. The discussion about the affirmation, coupled with a class reading of *Black Boy Joy* (Mbalia, 2021), inspired one student to create a personal affirmation at his desk which he says he uses as motivation toward personal goals.
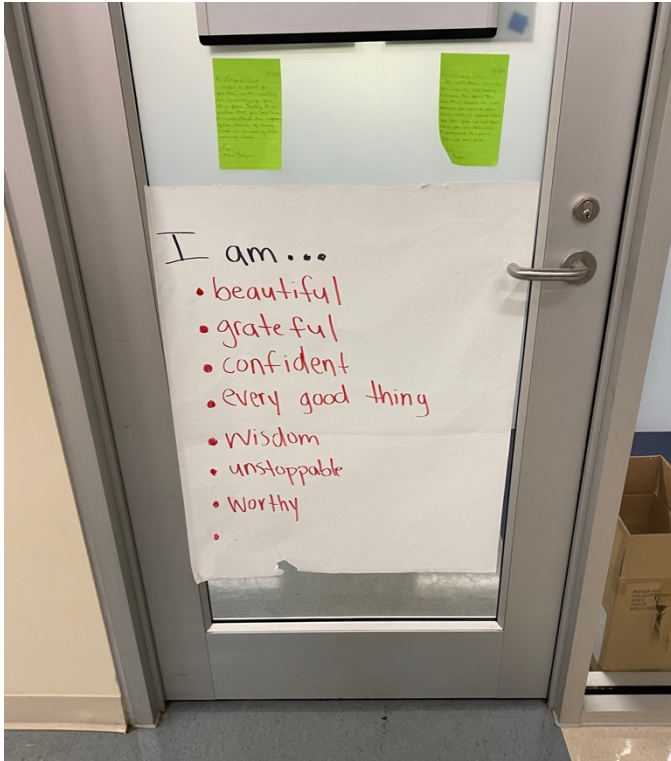
Figure 5.4

Classroom Affirmation Posted on Mr. Gibson's Door.

Referencing a quote from the movie, *Soul Food* (Tilman, 1997), Mr. Gibson describes his class as a tight-knit family: "one finger won't make an impact, but you ball all those fingers into a fist, and you can strike a mighty blow. Now, this family has got to be that fist." There is a focus on love and togetherness before and during the teaching of any content. The love present brings their community together in an unshakable way. The classroom community is all 'hands-on-deck'. That is, everyone is responsible for creating and maintaining the community. This space is filled with smiles and laughter but not shy of tough love. In Mr. Gibson's class, love in action includes the hard conversations when a student has harmed the community. In a restorative manner (Milner et al., 2018), Mr. Gibson and his class demonstrate love by allowing for the repair of harm through both conversation and actions directly related to the damage done. For example, when a

student was disruptive and refused to participate in class, Mr. Gibson calmly and privately asked her to check her energy. The student took a moment to reflect in her own space and returned to the group conversation, ready to be an active participant.

     Mr. Gibson models reflecting on his own behavior as a member of the community and shared an example which demonstrates that he is not beyond reproach. After being displeased with a transition from one subject to the next, he stated: "I don't like the transitions between subjects, but I will take that on me and be more explicit about what I expect." Rather than pushing the responsibility solely on the students, Mr. Gibson assumed his role in the *collective responsibility* among the classroom community. Collective responsibility is an aspect of the *communal* dimension of African Culture (Boutte et al., 2017). It requires everyone to take pride and responsibility for their community. It not only shows up when harm is done but is evident in the commitment to making sure everyone within the community is the best they can be. Encouraging peer tutoring is another way that Mr. Gibson encourages and promotes communalism. He emphasizes that "every moment is a teaching moment," urging students to teach each other rather than simply sharing the answer.

Daily, Mr. Gibson makes content mean something to students' lives. This provides what Shockley and Lomotey (2020) explained as "people's ability, empowerment, and entitlement to control and mandate the arenas of life around them" (p. xxiii) or *African agency*. African agency not only centers on African knowledges, a key point of ADL, but further allows Black students to connect their experiences to a curriculum that has traditionally excluded their understanding as ways to comprehend. In my vision of a Black liberatory space, I imagined a place where students could make

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school make sense for their current and future lives. I dreamed that students would find hope and be empowered by what they learned. In math, Mr. Gibson often asks students to think about how they might use the content in daily lives. For example, before teaching about fractions, he polled the class on where they might use fractions in real life. Students shared examples such as measuring cups, baby bottles, turkey injectors, tape measures, shoe sizes, food labels, and recipes. He continued that lesson by polling students to create a list of grocery stores where students typically shop. One particular store mentioned, Piggly Wiggly, allowed Mr. Gibson to share his personal experience working at Piggly Wiggly. He gave examples of how he used fractions and decimals in his role. Other conversations arose around respectability politics, food desserts, and discrepancies in grocery options and cost differentials between majority Black and majority-white neighborhoods. Mr. Gibson explained that these conversations that extend beyond the standards are essential as ADL requires students to critique social and equity issues (Boutte et al., 2017).

Mr. Gibson meets his students where they are academically and extends their learning from there. African Diaspora Literacy empowers students to not just learn *about* Black people but learn *from* Black people and Blackness (Boutte et. al., 2017). Instead of adopting many of the books and prescribed curriculum from the district, he uses the standards to engage students in African diasporic ways. For instance, he played the Negro National Anthem to introduce literary analysis. When he asked the students whether they knew the Negro National Anthem, many of their faces drew a blank. They were clueless as to what he was referring to. One student shouted out, "you mean the Star-Spangled

Banner?" Mr. Gibson then played the anthem for them. A few stated they heard the song at church or a Black history program, but they were still not very familiar with it.

Dissecting the song, including its background, allowed students to become more literate about Black people, a fundamental concept of ADL, and used it as a foundation to learn required English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies standards. Music is a commonly used tool for Mr. Gibson. He frequently uses music to reach students to make the material more relevant to them. These songs are ones that students are familiar with as well as those that have historical meaning to Black histories; again, connecting to their agency and improving their literacy of Black people.

Mr. Gibson also teaches in an African Diasporic content to gain and maintain his students' attention. When using commonly recommended texts, he found that his students did not engage as much compared to African diasporic text. In a lesson on informal writing, Mr. Gibson showed a video about Claudette Colvin. When asked who was familiar with Claudette, only two hands were raised. In comparison, all of the fifth graders knew of Rosa Parks. A student offered she had never heard of Claudette but knew of Rosa Parks since she was young. Students asked whether they would have the opportunity to learn more about Claudette Colvin, some of whom chose to complete their writings about her experience. Some students used the informational writing unit to write about other figures and Black historical events. Each day working on this assignment, students took pages of handwritten notes to support their writing, eager to share with their peers.

In my initial dream for an affirming Black space, I assumed there could be a formula that teachers could use that would be the remedy. As a vital takeaway for

educators, Mr. Gibson shares that teaching and specifically teaching African Diaspora Literacy is ever-evolving. It is important to note that African Diaspora Literacy is not prescriptive. There is no step-by-step guide that instructs educators on implementing in their classrooms; it is ever-changing. For example, while Mr. Gibson uses music frequently to reach students, he shared that there are times when there have been groups of students that do not connect to music as much as others. He adjusts his approach in those times, not the content. He still addresses the curriculum to include African Diasporic information, yet he uses other means and resources such as poetry, videos, and other forms of literacy to do so.

Replicating This Place – Implications

Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson are examples of my dream of teachers who create a place where Black students are *learning*, *loved*, and *proud to be BLACK*. Both teachers approach teaching in different ways but share similarities. There is something that readers can learn from each teacher, individually and collectively. Ms. Collins exhibits the full African and Black experience from décor to her use of the legacies and dimensions of African culture. Mr. Gibson demonstrates the use of real-world examples, creating the opportunity to critique social inequities, and the use of relevant texts engages students in the learning process. Their approaches are different to meet the needs of their students but are also reflective of their personalities and lived experiences. Observing the students in their classrooms, I saw engagement, joy, and their conversations and work are evidence of the development of literacy about Black people and histories.

Calling teacher educators and educators to action, I employ readers to examine ways to incorporate African Diaspora Literacy in classrooms beyond the examples

shared. Examples shared from Ms. Collins's, and Mr. Gibson's classrooms exhibit how African Diaspora Literacy is woven through interdisciplinary instruction and content. These teachers are experts who have spent countless hours studying and immersing themselves in African Diaspora Literacy scholarship, professional development, and communities of teachers doing the same work. This is an important starting point for educators wishing to create classroom havens where Black culture is deeply embraced as a routine aspect of teaching.

Engaging in this work requires independent study and reliance on literary works and histories beyond content taught in P-20 settings. As I have reflected, I was in my graduate studies before I engaged in learning about Black histories that extend beyond surface-level understanding. Reading texts such as *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Woodson, 1933) metamorphosed my thinking and understanding. Students who are fortunate to have teachers such as Ms. Collins and Mr. Gibson will be above par in their knowledge of Black histories, culture, and ways of being. Still, a significant number of students will not experience such learning in their P-12 experiences. Teacher preparation programs should be mindful of this deficit when preparing teachers, filling this gap with coursework that honors Black histories and culture.

I echo the call from scholars such as Carter G. Woodson, Joyce King, and Gloria Boutte, for a transformation of educational space so Black students can develop self-love opposing the hegemonic histories and perspectives traditionally taught in P-20 educational spaces. These classes are what I dreamed of. My metaphoric nightmares associated with trauma I experienced in K-20 educational settings have been soothed with dreams of Black affirming spaces like the ones created by Ms. Collins's and Mr.

Gibson's. In my dream, I smile as I envision classrooms likes theirs spreading like wildfire all over the world. It is my hope that African Diasporic educational spaces become the standard for classrooms, fully supporting the cultural needs of Black students.

I know a place

Black students are learnin'

Black students are loved

Black students are proud to be BLACK

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CHAPTER 6

ADINKRAHENE: SUSTAINING AFRICAN STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY

SCHOOLS[19]

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[19] Jackson, J., Mosso-Taylor, S., Collins, S. & Boutte, G.S. To be submitted to *Education Leadership*

The Akan people of West Africa have an abundance of symbols that represent principles and values that are important to their culture (Jackson et al., 2021; Owusu, 2019). Referred to as Adinkra symbols, the *Adinkrahene* is considered to be the chief of all of them, representing greatness, charisma, and leadership. As seen in Figure 1, the *Adinkrahene* symbol is made up of a series of concentric circles which symbolize the importance of playing a leadership role and having a broad sphere of influence.

Amid the full-fledged attacks nationally on ethnic studies via anti-Critical Race Theory movements (Sawchuk, 2021), there are promising examples of educational administrators and teacher leaders who exhibit *Adinkrahene.* They possess both savviness and courage by advancing an unrelenting focus on minoritized groups in P-12 curriculum and instruction. These educators serve as counternarratives to the image of bureaucratic administrators who simply maintain the status quo. Indeed, they channel the Akan value of *Adinkrahene.*

This article provides a brief glimpse of a principal and a teacher leader who demonstrate the essence of *Adinkrahene* by introducing and requiring a course on African Studies in an elementary school. In addition, we share parents' perspectives on the African Studies course. We briefly describe the process and deliberations that led to the course offering. We show how the leaders' sphere of influence, like the concentric circles of the Adinkrahene symbol, reaches both students and family members.

Figure 6.1

Adinkrahene

Prioritizing African Studies in Elementary School

Dr. Mosso-Taylor, the principal of Jackson Creek Elementary School (JCES) in Columbia, SC., was the inaugural administrator for the school which opened in 2017. The JCES family is made up of 77% African American students; 13%, Hispanic; 8%, two or more races; 1%, Asian; and 1%, White. Dr. Mosso-Taylor's vision was to ensure that culturally relevant practices were at the core of everything done with students and families. Dr. Mosso-Taylor interviewed each prospective teacher and hired those who displayed strengths-based perspectives, a willingness to examine personal biases, a desire to learn more about anti-racism in school settings, and a willingness to engage in critical conversations about race, culture, and language. Having concurrent goals for the district, the superintendent, Dr. Baron Davis, was fully supportive.

After the first few years of sustaining an agenda on equity pedagogies and culturally relevant teaching in her school and admiring one of the teacher's (Saudah Collins) deep focus on African Studies, Dr. Mosso-Taylor was convinced that this

content should be offered to all students. She envisioned African studies in the required rotation with other special areas such as music, art, and physical education. Recognizing Africa as the cradle of civilization and the vast omissions and distortions about Africa and African descendent people and culture (Jackson et al., 2021), Dr. Mosso-Taylor sought approval at the district level—even though she could find no other instances of offering it at the elementary level in public schools in the state and found only one or two in the nation. Her research and deliberations with the district happened over the course of an entire school year. With 77% African American students at the school, the significance of African Studies was evident.

Dr. Mosso-Taylor understood the importance of ongoing schoolwide professional development for teachers on culturally relevant practices (CRP)--including a focus on anti-racism and pro-black[1] studies for the 57 certified teachers in the school. Using Title 1 funds, she engaged two professors from the University of South Carolina who work with teachers in two cohorts: (1) Preschool- second grades; and (2) third-fifth grades. They met once monthly after school during the regular time scheduled for PD as well as provided classroom support to teachers.

As expected, some teachers readily found ways to apply culturally relevant, pro-Black teaching in their classrooms. Ms. Collins was already deeply committed to pro-Blackness instruction and curriculum as a result of her ongoing involvement with the Center for the Education and Equity of African American Students (CEEAAS) and the mentorship of Dr. Gloria Boutte, faculty member at the University of South Carolina. She utilized CRP and African Diaspora Literacy[2] as foundational to her teaching. Ms. Collins

enthusiastically took the lead as JCES' first-ever African Studies teacher, and Dr. Mosso-Taylor says that it has been one of the most successful initiatives at the school.

In the midst of a hostile political climate in which equity was under attack, some community members did not fully understand what Culturally Relevant Teaching involved and conflated it with Critical Race Theory. Because of an onslaught of pushback against Critical Race Theory at school board meetings, Dr. Mosso-Taylor proactively explained the difference to our families and community stakeholders through conversations. JCES received there was no pushback from families or teachers on implementing the African Studies course.

African Studies Overview: Akwaaba Means Welcome

During the year 2017, Ms. Collins had her first experience on the continent of Africa during a study abroad project. From that year forward, she centered the role of Africa, Africans, and African Americans in her teaching. The following year, she traveled to Ghana[3] and continued to deepen her knowledge and experiential base on African Studies.

Ms. Collins was overjoyed about being asked to teach students about African history as she says, *all day, every day*. She viewed this as a way to transform curricula that typically excluded African and African American histories. During the course development, she drew from her experiences in Cameroon and Ghana and spent a great deal of time researching the continent of Africa and the African diaspora, acknowledging that she still had much to learn. While always an outstanding teaching, the new African Studies content revitalized Ms. Collins who had been teaching for three decades.

African Studies is designed to give students a holistic experience of Africa. Beyond a litany of small details about Africa and African descendent people, Ms. Collins focuses on deep African values that can be reiterated across the year in all grade levels and content areas. For example, early in the year, Ms. Collins introduced civic dispositions of respect, honesty, compassion, empathy, and cooperation using Adinkra symbols. Students designed name tents and folders to identify important values to them, their families, and the community (Jackson et al., 2021). They also used Adinkra symbols as a tool to analyze characters in text and lyrics in music.

Ms. Collins began the year by introducing Africa as the *mother continent*. Using the name, Alkebulan*,* she explained that this was the continent's name given by its people. While many people hold narrowly stereotypical views about Africa (e.g., lots of poor, hungry people; governmental corruption), Ms. Collins' students often express a desire to visit or live in Africa after hearing agentive, African-centered perspectives. Students often excitedly share what they learn with their families; thus, extending the influence of the African Studies course beyond the classroom. In the section that follows, we highlight insights from three parents who share different perspectives; one white parent of multi-racial children; a Black parent who is also a teacher; and lastly a parent who recalls her African-centered upbringing.

Hearing and Honoring Families' Voices

"African Studies has become a conversation piece at our house…they want to know so much."

(A. Cash, personal communication, February 23, 2022)

At the beginning of this school year in 2021, families received a survey to share their initial thoughts about the new African Studies class. Results showed that 92% of families *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the African Studies class was essential. The opening quote is from an interview with one of many family members who have expressed gratitude for the implementation of African Studies. Ms. Cash, a white parent with multi-racial children, shared that the African Studies course inspired her family to learn more about the children's Black background and culture. Ms. Cash and other parents expressed confidence in Ms. Collins's ability to teach the class. Ms. Cash explained, "I was mainly excited because I know what type of teacher [Ms. Collins] is, and I know what the kids will actually get from [Ms. Collins] being the one who is teaching." Ms. Cash shared that her son refers to Africa as "mom's house." His excitement sparked her interest in learning more so that she could support her children's learning at home. Many parents echoed Ms. Cash's sentiments in the survey, admitting that they would enjoy learning more themselves.

There is Hope - Reflections of Ms. Christina Stout.

"I was sleeping all those years, and I am so excited my children are able to learn."

(C. Stout, personal communication, April 26, 2022)

Ms. Christina Stout represents the perspective of a teacher and a parent. As the mother of two JCES students (first and third grades), she stressed gratitude that her

children are learning about who they are and what they come from as Black people. She reflected on the absence of Black histories in her upbringing. As a military child, Ms. Stout experienced schooling in a few states. She learned rudimentary elements of Black histories, including a romanticized rendition of enslavement and of figures such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, but nothing about Africa. Stating this was a period of being asleep, Ms. Stout says that the African Studies course has sparked her interest in having more conversations at home about African and Black histories and culture and including it with her instruction as a kindergarten teacher.

Because of the African Studies course, Ms. Stout's first-grade son has come home and thrown 'African Parties' where he shares what he learned in class, including the songs and dances. Ms. Stout vividly remembers a day they looked up Black figures together, and her son stated, "I am the future Black president." This excitement for school and learning is in stark contrast to his earlier experiences in school. Before coming to JCES, her son did not enjoy school, and she struggled with ways to piqué his interest. By no means did coming to JCES change all of the difficulties with school for her son, but she began to see a tremendous change in how he engaged with learning. She credits African Studies for some of this renaissance, explaining that seeing his transformation gave her *hope.*

Ms. Stout's daughter, a third-grader, brings home similar excitement about the content learned in African Studies. While her daughter doesn't throw African parties, she makes connections to everyday life, such as when watching television or seeing billboards while driving. Ms. Stout recalls a moment when her daughter saw Amanda Gorman on TV. She went into an entire lesson teaching the family what she learned about

Amanda in African Studies. Ms. Stout acknowledged that the ongoing references from both her son and daughter are refreshing as she only learned about the negative sides of Blackness in school. The class has inspired her as a parent to do more research with her children. She is a firm supporter of African Studies, stating,

> If we just teach our children now to not stereotype, if we teach them the beauty and the brilliance of Africa, and how Blacks shouldn't just be looked at in a negative light; if we teach them all that how to accept everybody and just love on everybody; … if we teach them that now, just imagine the world that we live in. (C. Stout, personal communication, April 26, 2022)

Continuing the Legacy – Reflections of Ms. Keda DuBard

Ms. Keda DuBard spent her early years adorned in African fabrics. She and her family wore them so much that their family was featured in the local newspaper, and many assumed they were from Africa. Her family was heavily engaged in African and African American culture and history throughout her life and has tried to bequeath that same knowledge with her first-grade son, who attends JCES. Ms. DuBard explained that she was thrilled to hear that there would be an African Studies class at JCES as it would complement what she was doing at home. Like Ms. Stout, she said that the course gave her hope. She was encouraged that the school decided to implement this class even amid the current climate. She was honored that her child would be getting some context about his experience in America.

Ms. DuBard hoped that other families would receive the course as she did, hoping this could be the blueprint for other schools. She emphasized the importance of engaging

in cultures, especially Black culture as it is often overlooked. She reflected on raising a Black boy in America saying,

> Here in America, it hits a little different. I would love for him to grow up in a world where [race] is not an issue, not a concern [where] he doesn't have to constantly rework how he fits into society. However, that's not currently the fact of the matter. And so, I worry that no matter how much I can tell him, he's amazing, and other people can tell him, he's amazing; who he is, [is] a little brown boy --that he won't see that reflected in the media, and other aspects beyond ones who care about him. And so, with this class, I hope that it's just another source of information that he can use to build who he is and details I might not think to bring to him. (K. DuBard, personal communication, April 26, 2022)

While her son does not have strong opinions as a six-year-old, Ms. DuBard finds joy in hearing her son's retelling of content taught in school. She states that he more readily offers information about African Studies over any other subject. His remarks on the Kings and Queens of Africa, such as Mansa Musa, have generated conversations at home and encouraged further research. He is also eager to show off the dances and songs learned in the class. Ms. DuBard stresses her faith in the school, Ms. Collins, and the content in African Studies. She hopes that her son can apply these concepts to his life and use this knowledge to conceptualize his life. Ms. DuBard says, best of all, it's free information.

Using The Power of Leadership to Make Structural and Sustainable Changes in Schools

We call attention to the importance of educational leaders having the courage to enact structural and sustained changes. Dr. Mosso-Taylor did not advocate for simple add-ons to the regular curriculum and content. She *created* a new required course. Importantly, she provided teachers with ongoing support via professional development. Both actions represent *Adinkrahene* and strong leadership and vision.

At JCES, the African Studies course has had wide appeal and little pushback. This is not always the case, but we emphasize that Dr. Mosso-Taylor had no idea how the course would be received by the students, teachers, or families. She did preliminary groundwork and set the tone by intentionally hiring teachers who valued equity and engaging them in ongoing professional development. She was fortunate to have had a supporting superintendent and funds to support the professional development and a highly qualified teacher to implement the course. While these factors are instructive to others wishing to make deeply center equity, or in this case, African Studies, we want to be clear that Dr. Mosso-Taylor's commitment to equity is the impetus. In a recent conversation, she explained that her goal is to ensure that anti-Blackness is dismantled when possible. This does not mean that she neglects other minoritized groups. She does not. She simply recognizes anti-Blackness as the most dormant form of racism (Dumas & ross, 2016) and is countering it head-on since it intersects with all other social identities (Boutte, in press). Much like the *Adinkrahene* concentric circles, she knows that the impact of African Studies will have far-reaching extrapolation on other minoritized groups.

Based on responses to the survey, families noted that their children want and need to continue to build their literacy of African diasporic histories and culture. Though beyond the scope of this article, examples of students' engagement and cultural and academic excellence abound.

In schools where educators are not quite ready to dive into offering an entire course, administrators can support teachers with *ongoing* professional development opportunities on culturally relevant pedagogy and African Studies. A key part of professional development should include with teachers' assessment of their perspectives and dispositions regarding equity. Administrators can also consult some of the literature cited in this article. In the spirit of *Adinkrahene,* we hope that educational leaders understand and use the power they hold and find ways to substantively include African Studies content that continue to be distorted or omitted from curriculums.

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Appendix A: Observation Form

Observer _____   **Date** _____

Beginning Time _____   **Ending Time** _____

Name of School_____   **Grade Level** _____

Teacher's Name _____

Number of Children	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Number of African Americans	Number of Other Ethnicities (make notes)

Short Description of Class *Give background information of the class (e.g., time of day; content area/subject; other information that might be pertinent.*	
Environment *Describe evidence of ADL in classroom (i.e., decorations, books, etc.)*	
ADL Evidence in Lesson *Describe evidence of ADL in lesson being taught. List resources used.*	
Standards *What standards are being addressed? Is the ADL content present directly correlated to the standard?*	
Relationships *Describe teacher and student, and student and student interactions*	
Examples of Student Comments Related to ADL	
Examples of Teachers' Comments	
Assessment *If lesson is being assessed describe the way(s) the teacher assesses content.*	
Overall Observations	

Appendix B: Initial Interview Questions

1. What is your teaching philosophy?

2. What inspires you?

3. How do you define ADL?

4. Do you use ADL?

    a. Why or why not?

5. What benefits do you think ADL has on students?

6. How did you develop your curriculum?

7. Did you experience ADL as a student?

8. How would your experience differ?