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A Black Curriculum for a Black School: A Case-Study Exploring Black Students' Attitudes Towards Culturally Sensitive Curriculum and Its Impact on Black Student Engagement

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A BLACK CURRICULUM FOR A BLACK SCHOOL:
A CASE-STUDY EXPLORING BLACK STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
CULTURALLY SENSITIVE CURRICULUM
AND ITS IMPACT ON BLACK STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

2022

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement is increasingly viewed as one of the keys to addressing problems such as low achievement, boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates (Martin & Torres, n.d.). Even if the school has predominantly Black teachers, one must not assume that the students will have an automatic academic advantage (Gay, 2010). When teachers lack cultural understanding of their students, negative impact has been the result for their students' academic achievement (Lin & Bates, 2014). This dissertation explores the perceptions of students at an all Black high school who are taught a United States History course using a culturally relevant curriculum. The Afrocentric curriculum employed centers the students' African and African American heritage and culture in the content being taught. Findings from this research highlight students' positive feelings toward learning and increased engagement in United States history class, after learning about and appreciating their own history and culture. Toward the end of the semester, the student's engagement leveled equally, accounting for student life issues outside of the United States History class, but did not falter below engagement prior to the insertion of the Afrocentric Curriculum. This research shows positive support for the use of an Afrocentric curricula as a strategy to gain interest of Black students in U.S. history and thereby increase their academic engagement, which may in turn have positive effects on their academic success. This study also offers data to refute the common criticism of Afrocentric curricula that it is too narrowly focused and thus fails to teach students about other cultural, scientific or economic influences on U.S. history. This study also provides an example of a practical use for an in-class instructor to use an Afrocentric curriculum, because a lot of studies prior to this research provided a definition of Afrocentric Education, yet they hardly provided clear and practical examples of what it looks like in a classroom.

CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT, PROBLEM, AND PURPOSE

Context

Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS) in Tallahassee, Florida was founded in 1887, the same year that FAMU was founded. The purpose of the school was to serve as a lab school for teacher training, a role it fulfilled throughout the 1920s. During its early years it served only as an elementary school, but as enrollment increased, junior high and high school grades were added (Florida A&M University, 2019). Today, FAMU DRS is a predominantly African American, self-contained school district with one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school.

The vision at FAMU DRS is to prepare and motivate students for a rapidly evolving digital world by instilling in them critical thinking skills, a global mindset, and a respect for core values (About: Vision & Mission Statements, n.d.). The mission of FAMU DRS is to conduct research, demonstration, and evaluation of the management of teaching and learning. FAMU DRS places curriculum emphasis on mathematics, science, technology, and foreign languages. FAMU DRS is committed to providing a quality education for students by promoting rigor and innovative strategies for teaching and learning (About: Vision & Mission Statements, n.d.). In addition to providing other instruction in non-specialized courses, the DRS fosters educational opportunities that encourage each student to develop personal responsibility, respect for individual differences, and an inquiring mind so that each student will continue to learn, develop, and apply skills to become a productive citizen in an ever-changing society (About: Vision & Mission Statements, n.d.).

At the secondary level FAMU DRS is led by a single principal for middle school and high school. There is one guidance counselor and one curriculum coordinator for the secondary level. There are two additional middle school administrators that deal with behavior and school activities. There are also 166 students, primarily Black, in the high school (Florida A&M University Developmental Research School, 2020). Of the 18 students identified as exhibiting early warning signs of being retained district wide, 6 of them were in high school (Florida A&M University Developmental Research School, 2020). All the teachers and administrators are Black on the secondary level (Florida A&M University Developmental Research School, 2020).

Although FAMU DRS has made great strides in approaching and executing its mission and vision, like many schools, FAMU DRS is lacking in certain areas. FAMU DRS students score low, on average, for state assessments. One might think that student attendance trends may be one cause of low student achievement, but FAMU DRS students attended school just about the same as any school in the state of Florida. The state's daily average attendance during the 2019- 2020 school year was 94.4% while FAMU DRS' average daily attendance was 94.3% (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). So, attendance is not a part of the problem. One might also think that misbehavior in the classroom leading to suspensions may be a cause, but the Florida average of students with in-school and out-of-school suspensions for the 2019-2020 school year was just above 5%. FAMU DRS' was just below 3% (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). So, discipline is not a part of the issue. Alternatively, one might think that the problem lies within the teachers and their expertise on the subjects they teach, but as of 2019 the state of Florida had roughly 7% of its teachers teaching outside of their certification, while FAMU DRS had just below 4% (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). So, what is the problem? If students are in school regularly, they are not being suspended from school excessively and their teachers are appropriately trained, then what may be causing students to perform poorly on state assessments?

As a teacher of 9th-12th grade Social Sciences, and as the department chair of Social Sciences for grades 6th-12th, I speculate that one cause of low test scores on state assessments across subject areas at FAMU DRS is not poor attendance rates, poor student behavior, or lack of experienced teachers, but it is a lack of student engagement. Student engagement is increasingly viewed as one of the keys to addressing problems such as low achievement, boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates (Martin & Torres, n.d.). My problem of practice is, therefore, the problem of student engagement in social studies that may be caused by the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy or culturally relevant content in the curriculum. Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning (Roberts, 2021).

In my experience, some students are unprepared for class, which leads to low academic performance. Additionally, when some students get to class, they are not engaged in the lessons. This may be because they do not find school important because the lessons do not reflect who they are culturally. When teachers lack cultural understanding of their students, it may have a negative impact on their students' academic achievement (Lin & Bates, 2014). I postulate therefore that the lack of a culturally relevant curriculum is an important contributor to the problem of student engagement and subsequent academic achievement at FAMU DRS.

Arguments for Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Low academic achievement at FAMU DRS and in my classes may be a symptom the type of curriculum and teaching strategies used by teachers. A curriculum and its standards are a byproduct of an institution of people and their ideas. Though the curriculum and its standards may not be an obvious program, it can be evaluated based on its inclusivity, and it can be evaluated based on what it includes or excludes. Since FAMU DRS is a lab school of the College of

Education at Florida A&M University, one of the freedoms that it enjoys is that the secondary level teachers can choose their own curriculum if they teach the state standards (Florida A&M University, 2015), which in this case are delineated in CPALMS. CPALMS is the State of Florida's official source for standards information and course descriptions (Florida State University, 2019). However, most teachers that are new to the district are evaluated by the Marzano Curriculum, which stresses classroom management, planning, and teacher reflection (Gavin & West, 2016). Therefore, the curriculum that only emphasizes how to teach instead of what to teach may contribute to the problem of student engagement. Such a curriculum may undermine ethnic pride and self-worth, thus contributing to low academic achievement and low levels of teacher efficacy.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative website defines educational standards as the following:

“Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Education standards, like Common Core are *not* a curriculum. Local **communities** and **educators** *choose* their own curriculum, which is a detailed plan for day-to-day teaching (What are educational standards?, 2019).”

In other words, the Common Core is *what* students need to know and be able to do, and curriculum is *how* students will learn it. (What are educational standards?, 2019). Since this is the driving force behind how school districts determine what drives their curricula, which transcends subjects taught, then what regulates the content taught, to what degree is that content taught, and is there a measuring tool besides assessments that show the impact it has on the student, family, and community? As for subjects that may deal directly with the social development of a student, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) states that, “the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Introduction, n.d.). If this is true as the NCSS say it is, one must assume that it must be the intentions of the state and local

educational leaders to choose the standards and content that reaches the student population of their respective locations, which is the case at the secondary level at FAMU DRS.

Teaching Students of Color & Student Achievement

To be effective, teachers must gain the students' trust and become significant to them despite their cultural background or socioeconomic status (Payne, 1994). One way to gain students' trust is to show a genuine care for the students and teach about their cultural background, which could provide teachers and students with a sense of cultural pride and self-efficacy. When teachers are more confident and at ease in their classrooms, they demonstrate more positive communications with their students (e.g., praising, smiling, etc.) and are also better classroom managers, less defensive, more accepting of student disagreement and challenges, which produces greater student achievement (Payne, 1994). An educator that teaches a curriculum and employs teaching strategies that align with the student's cultural background in their class may make it easier for students to learn. For instance, in a study conducted in the 1990s, student performance improved in urban schools as the non-African American teachers became more familiar and comfortable with these settings and improved their relationships with their African-American students (Payne, 1994). This suggests that understanding of the culture of the students can play a role in student achievement.

Participants in a study of teachers conducted in 2016 showed that both self-ignorance, or lack of awareness of one's own cultural background, and ignorance of others' cultural backgrounds caused conflicts in the classroom (Deckman, 2017). This reinforces the idea that a culturally relevant curriculum—an Afrocentric curriculum in the case of FAMU DRS—that does not marginalize the students' culture could benefit not only students, but also teachers, even if the teacher belongs to the dominant culture of the society. All too often however schooling tends to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that

support those arrangements (Shujaa, 1994). If teachers do not use culturally relevant content, they may fail to ignite students' connection to learning, and thus continue the perpetual cycle of low academic achievement in schools for Black students by not doing so. In other words, if the educational curriculum stays the same, America will continue to undermine the achievement Black students. Educators must seek to understand how opportunities for some are systematically limited by their identities and backgrounds and work in partnership with classroom teachers to bring about meaningful change (Deckman, 2017). Meaningful change can start by providing a culturally relevant curriculum that fosters student engagement and supports their academic achievement.

Argument for and Definition of Afrocentric Curriculum

I propose to explore how an Afrocentric curriculum and teaching strategies can positively influence student preparedness and student engagement in class, which may lead to improved academic achievement. I define academic achievement as not simply having a high-grade point average, good school attendance, and low behavior infractions, but also student preparedness and student engagement in the classroom setting. Unlike the Marzano evaluation system used at FAMU DRS to evaluate teachers, an Afrocentric curriculum stresses the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African worldview (Asante, 1991). An Afrocentric curriculum for a social studies department could improve African American student preparedness and student engagement, both of which are integral parts of what is measured in teacher performance in the Marzano evaluation system. Moreover, as Joyce King (2015) argues, "African-centered pedagogy encourages students to find continuity with their ancestral heritage by creating instructional opportunities for them to build on and expand their heritage knowledge, which should not interfere with the existing curriculum already provides but rather adds to the current curriculum

used” (King, 2015, pg. 107) I hope to find out whether an Afrocentric curriculum will have an influence on student classroom readiness and student engagement factors at FAMU DRS.

To understand an Afrocentric curriculum, one must understand what it means to be Afrocentric. The concept of Afrocentricity was introduced in the 1970s as a response to the historical oppression of Black people, recognizing the negative and destructive consequences of 400 years of oppression, developing the theoretical concepts for social change (Bakari, 1997). Such a curriculum stresses the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African worldview (Asante, 1991). There are many sources that advocate for Afrocentrism in the creation of curricula. One of the most prominent of these is Molefi Asante, Professor of Africology and African American Studies at Temple University. I will use his model of *The Njia*, which stresses inner strength, pan-African pride and unity, reverence for ancestors, and other values as both a fulfillment of African Americans’ yearning and their most potent path to mental and intellectual freedom (UTNE Reader, 1995), as the basis of the Afrocentric curriculum I propose to teach to my students at FAMU DRS.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice is to determine whether a more culturally relevant curriculum such as an Afrocentric curriculum at FAMU DRS would have a positive impact on student classroom readiness and student engagement. FAMU DRS is a predominantly African American or Black school and many of the high school students are low performing, which may reflect the lack of culturally relevant content in the curriculum. I am suggesting that a change in curriculum could improve student engagement and in turn positively contribute to the students’ academic achievement.

According to Akbar (1998), a research associate and Professor of Clinical Psychology & African American studies at Florida State University, “The function of education is to provide identity” (Akbar, 1998, pg. 2). In promoting excellence in educating Black students, researchers suggest that successful teachers of African American children (a) draw on African culture and history, (b) promote the location of self in a historical and cultural context, (c) help students create new knowledge based on life experiences, and (d) treat knowledge as reciprocal (Love & Kruger, 2005). Rickford (2009) found that 25 low-achieving African American middle-school students became very engaged in a lesson that contained African American folk tales and that they were able to successfully answer higher ordered level questions (Rickford, 2009). Instances like this show that student engagement in the lesson can improve academic achievement. Students that are academically engaged in learning exhibit an effort to succeed in school (Li & Lerner, 2011)

With this in mind, I implemented an Afrocentric curriculum at FAMU DRS in two sections of my 11th grade United States History Classes. I introduced the Afrocentric curriculum in the beginning of the 2021-22 school year in August when my United States History class began. I taught the Afrocentric curriculum through the fall 2021 semester, interviewing selected individual students and conducting focus group discussions before, during, and at the end of the semester. The data gathered address the following research questions:

1. What are students’ perceptions of the Afrocentric curriculum?
2. How does the Afrocentric curriculum improve student engagement as evidenced by students’ self-assessment and teacher observations?

Significance

On a broad scale, this study will contribute to existing research about Black education by extending the already extensive conversation on such topics as Afrocentric curriculum and its

effectiveness, minority education, and student academic achievement. On a narrow scale, my research is significant to schools who struggle with teaching their Black students, schools whose teachers struggle with reaching their Black students culturally, and small predominantly Black schools with Black teachers that may also struggle with cultural gaps in the curriculum. Although research suggests that Black students who are taught by Black teachers are often more successful than their counterparts who are taught by teachers from different ethnic backgrounds (Bone & Slate, 2011; Hines & Hines, 2020; Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017), one must not assume that just because the teacher is Black that the students will have an automatic academic advantage if they are Black as well (Gay, 2010).

I believe that educators such as administrators and teachers can benefit from this research at FAMU DRS because it may reveal some of the reasons why students disengage in the classroom and why students come to class unprepared to learn. This study may also be useful to other teachers who may want to learn about another curriculum and may not be aware of its benefits. Readers will be able to learn how implementation of a new culturally relevant curriculum in their own classroom may positively impact their Black students.

CHAPTER 2

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY, AND AFROCENTRIC CURRICULUM

Summary of Proposed Study

Florida A&M University (FAMU) Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS) in Tallahassee, Florida was founded in 1887, the same year that FAMU was founded. The purpose of the school was to be a lab school for teacher training that lasted throughout the 1920s. During its early years it served only as an elementary school, but as enrollment increased, junior high and high school grades were added (Florida A&M University, 2019). Today, FAMU DRS is a predominantly African American self-contained school district with one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school.

The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice is to determine whether a more culturally relevant curriculum such as an Afrocentric curriculum at FAMU DRS would have a positive impact on student engagement. FAMU DRS is a predominantly African American, or Black school, and many of the high school students are low performing.

Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is defined as any identifiable success in the areas of scholarship or disciplined study (American Psychological Association, 2020). Engagement is the intensity of productive involvement with an activity, involvement encompassing behavior, emotions, and cognition (Morgan-Thomas & Dudau, 2019). So naturally, student engagement has an influence on academic achievement. Students who are engaged in their work are energized by four goals—success, curiosity, originality, and satisfying relationships (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995). Academic achievement is also linked to racial socialization, or the process by which an individual practices and perceives one's own racial background (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). On the college

level, environments that are culturally responsive, welcoming, challenging, and egalitarian are positively related to Black student engagement and achievement (McDougal III, Cox, Dorley, & Wodaje, 2018). And research has found that all students benefit more from educationally purposeful activities including, but not limited to studying, doing the reading for class, asking questions, meeting with professors to discuss grades, and working with other students on projects (McDougal III, Cox, Dorley, & Wodaje, 2018). So, it is reasonable to assume that activities which increase student engagement will have a positive effect on academic achievement. This claim is relevant to all students, regardless of ethnic background; however, one has to wonder then why so many Black students are not engaging in these activities if all teachers are providing them opportunities to do so.

School climate is a relevant factor to consider when examining Black student engagement and achievement (Milton, 2016). According to Ogbu, Black families should prepare children to learn what schools will later teach them, including social-emotional skills, language skills, cognitive skills, and motivational skills (Ogbu, 1981). One must assume that when this does not happen, that there must be some consequences for the learner, and that perhaps the school must make up for what the family did not accomplish. Culturally relevant teachers create classroom climates that are respectful and inclusive and that help students' value and understand the cultures of their peers and their own (Byrd, 2016). However, when a school is not equipped with the curriculum to encompass a school climate inclusive of Black culture, it could leave negative myths and stereotypes about Black culture to flourish (Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1990).

Teaching Students of Color & Student Achievement

To be effective, teachers must gain the students' trust and become significant to them whatever their cultural background or socioeconomic status (Payne, 1994). One way to gain

students' trust is to show a general care for the students and who they are. Teaching about their cultural background is one way to show respect for students and give them a sense of assurance that their teacher cares about them. Such positive relationships can make teachers more confident and at ease in their classrooms. When teachers are more confident and at ease, they demonstrate more positive communications with their students (e.g., praising, smiling, etc.) and are also better classroom managers, less defensive, and more accepting of student disagreement and challenges, all of which contributes to greater student achievement (Payne, 1994). Thus, when a teacher has a curriculum and teaching strategies that align with the student's cultural background in their class, it may make it easier for the students to learn.

Culture is a variable that is often overlooked as a function of student success because, in most contexts, the culture of the schools often mirrors the White middle-class norms and values evident in the greater U.S. society (Ware, 2006). However, in a study conducted in the 1990s, student performance improved for non-African American teachers teaching in urban schools when teachers became more familiar and comfortable with these settings and improved their relationships with students (Payne, 1994). This suggests that understanding the culture of the students can play a role in student achievement.

Participants in a study of teachers conducted in 2016 found that lack of awareness of one's own cultural background, and ignorance of others cultural background, is a cause of conflicts in the classroom (Deckman, 2017). This further supports the claim that teachers working in predominately African American schools, even if the teacher belongs to the dominant culture in society, could benefit from an Afrocentric curriculum, or at least a curriculum that does not marginalize the cultures of the students in the classroom. If teachers do not use culturally relevant content, they may perpetuate the cycle of low academic achievement in schools for Black students.

So, if the educational curriculum stays the same, America may continue to undermine the achievement of Black students.

Historically, schooling has been a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements (Shujaa, 1994). If educators intend to support the success of all students within the current educational system, then educators must seek to understand how opportunities for some are systematically limited by their identities and backgrounds and work in partnership with classroom teachers to bring about meaningful change (Deckman, 2017). Meaningful change can start by providing a curriculum that is culturally relevant.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings G., 1994). Zaretta Hammond (pg. 156) define culturally responsive teaching as the process of using familiar cultural information and processes to scaffold learning (Hammond, 2015). Educators using culturally relevant and responsive education teach to and through learners' diverse cultures, lived experiences, and interests by adjusting the curricular, pedagogical, and social supports of the classroom (Craig & Roehrig, 2020). In terms of academic outcomes, there is evidence that culturally relevant teaching promotes academic achievement and engagement (Byrd, 2016). Things as simple as reading texts written by members of the ethnic groups that are underrepresented in a school curricula improves the self-esteem of students of that ethnic group and can cause all students to have a greater appreciation for cultural difference (Washington, 2018). Given that FAMU DRS is a predominantly Black school and struggles with academic achievement and student engagement, a culturally relevant pedagogy for this context would be an Afrocentric curriculum.

Positive Effects of an Afrocentric Curriculum for Teachers

For teachers of African American students that may struggle with keeping students engaged, they may want to try Afrocentric teaching strategies. Students who have a sense of self-worth participate in school more, which increases the chances of academic achievement (Hernandez, Robins, Widaman, & Conger, 2017; Juvonen, 2006). Teachers that teach in an urban school with a diverse set of students and use an Afrocentric curriculum may show that a teacher will acknowledge the differences in their students and will incorporate those differences into the lessons (Menken, 1994). This may in turn improve student engagement.

For teachers who fear that an Afrocentric curriculum may alienate non-Black students, research has suggested that even for white students lessons that teach about culturally sensitive topics can improve their outlook on race (Sleeter, 2011). Culturally relevant teachers foster and support the development of cultural competence, which helps students to understand aspects of one culture while also facilitating their ability to communicate and relate to members of another culture (Ladson-Billings G., 2000). Teachers that are not of the same cultural background or even ethnic background can use an Afrocentric curriculum to improve the student's outlook on other cultures.

By including ethnic-racial socialization practices such as an Afrocentric curriculum that presents ethnic heritage and cultural pride, a teacher may foster better academic achievement for African American students (Banerjee, Byrd, & Rowley, 2018). It is not that students of African descent learn any differently from other students, it is just that often teachers are unaware of the cultural differences of the students that may create barriers between the teacher and the students (Lynch, 2006). Afrocentric educators emphasize culture because the substance of it constitutes precisely what is left out of textbooks (Shockley & Frederick, 2010). A teacher trying to reach students of a different cultural background using textbooks that marginalize or are completely devoid of their student's cultures could create frustrations for the student and the teacher, which

could decrease student academic achievement. In a study done in 2003 at Penn State University, children whose teachers exhibited higher levels of racial-ethnic trust and perceived fewer barriers due to race and ethnicity, showed more trust and optimism (Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003). This suggests that student academic achievement is affected by their teacher's knowledge of their student's culture.

Some teachers may think that using an Afrocentric curriculum will not be useful toward preparing students for state tests, so there is a lack of accountability to teach Black history and culture (Bourne & Powell, 2020). However, a critical pedagogy of race is rigorous and relevant in that it is centered within the everyday and historical experiences of young people and it pushes them to connect intellectual rigor with the pursuit of a fuller humanity (de los Rios, Lopez, & Morrell, 2015). Therefore, an Afrocentric curriculum is compatible with state testing requirements.

Positive Effects of an Afrocentric Curriculum for Students

An Afrocentric curriculum may induce feelings of ethnic pride and happiness in minority youths, positively affecting their behavior and academic success (Rivas-Drake, et al., 2014). African centered pedagogy encourages students to find continuity with their ancestral heritage by creating instructional opportunities for them to build on and expand their heritage knowledge (King J. E., 2015). Students who have achieved high levels of ethnic identity are more aware of the discriminatory treatment they may face in the United States than those who have lower levels of ethnic identity awareness; thus they have more appropriate coping skills in the face of inequitable treatment due to having higher self-esteem and more racial pride (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). If teachers can utilize a curriculum that encourages students to know their ethnic background, as stated above, there may also be an increase in their student's academic achievement.

For example, an Afrocentric school in Detroit uses elements of an African-centered philosophy and educates teachers about how the students' brains react in various social interactions in the classroom that can have positive effects on student learning. Our deep cultural values program our brain on how to interpret the world around us – what a real threat looks like and what will bring a sense of security (Hammond, 2015). At this school, the faculty and staff have training sessions that have been conducted in these areas and have had periodic trainings throughout the school year on these subjects (Warrington & Park, 2019). This creates a “happiness school” culture and infuses pride and self-determination in the students to promote character building. This is an example of an Afrocentric curriculum being used to educate students of African American heritage while giving them the tools to cope with racism and Eurocentric values that may be embedded in the overall curriculum.

Criticisms & Challenges of Afrocentric Curriculum

An Afrocentric curriculum is not a panacea. For instance, according to a document from the Michigan Department of Education website, the aforementioned Afrocentric school in Detroit is underperforming in core subjects on state assessments such as Math, English, and Social Studies (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). Afrocentric schools are closing due to state test accountability, low enrollment, and higher competition from charters schools offering comparable education, smaller classrooms and more opportunities for personal development but without the Afrocentric curriculum. (Cohen, 2016).

In addition, teachers may find it difficult to include an Afrocentric curriculum in their lessons because they may not align to the curriculum standards imposed by their state. Even for schools that have an African centered curriculum there is sometimes a lack of congruency between curriculum design and instructional standards (Giddings, 2001). Teachers may also find it difficult

to teach using an Afrocentric curriculum because in many cases it directly counters the dominant Eurocentric perspective presented in history, literature, and media (Alkebulan, 2007). This may discourage some from using an Afrocentric curriculum. Failing to consider and address all these issues may lead to less desirable results and a failure to realize the potential benefits of an Afrocentric curriculum (Hopkins, 1997).

Another challenge of schools that adopt full Afrocentric curricula is that they struggle to compete with public schools who may offer similar programming. Charter schools and public schools create competition with Afrocentric schools by stating that they are culturally affirming, which in another way of saying that their school is inviting to all cultures and ethnicities (Cohen, 2016). So, some parents and teachers may conclude that an Afrocentric curriculum has little to add to their students' educational experience.

However, a great deal of research suggests that an Afrocentric curriculum or approach to teaching can be effective for teachers and students (Asante, 1991; Boykins, 1994; Dei, 1996). Yet many predominantly Black schools do not use it; perhaps because they do not know what it is or do not know the key elements of it. In the state of Florida for instance, as recently as 2015, three classes have been created specifically to teach African American History, yet there have been reports in the news that that Black history is not being taught as it should be (Florida State University, 2019; Rado, 2019).

There is a law to mandate the teaching of African American history, or at least infuse the achievements of African Americans into school lessons, yet many teachers across the state of Florida have not complied with the mandate (Commissioners of Education's African American History Task Force, 2020). Some Florida teachers may know of the mandate from the state, but they may not know how to implement the learning standards supporting the state mandate to improve student academic achievement and cultural awareness.

Summary

So, state law in Florida mandates the teaching of African American history, and educational research shows that culturally relevant pedagogy, such as an Afrocentric curriculum, can have a positive effect on student engagement and, consequently, academic achievement. It is therefore a reasonable hypothesis that utilizing an Afrocentric curriculum in a predominantly Black, low performing school like the FAMU-DRS can lead to improved student engagement and, perhaps, higher academic achievement. Teaching Black students using Black history also has a positive impact on their academics and the teachers as well (King L. J., 2016). Therefore, the intent of this study is to determine whether a more culturally relevant curriculum such as an Afrocentric curriculum at Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS) would have a positive impact on student engagement.

CHAPTER 3

INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the research design, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis I propose for my dissertation in practice research. I will also describe the role that I play in my research, ways I ensured trustworthiness and credibility, and discuss the limitations of my research design. My exploratory qualitative research focused on the implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum, examining the influence that it may have had on my students' classroom engagement.

Research Design

I used an embedded single case design to study how the students in my class are influenced by the implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum. The embedded single case design is used when more than one unit of analysis is incorporated into the design (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In this instance, the social unit that I plan to study via case study are the students in my 11th grade U.S. History class at FAMU DRS and their classroom engagement and how it may be affected by culturally sensitive teaching strategies and curriculum (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This research is a case study bounded by the focus on one classroom which is encompassed primarily in one building on the FAMU DRS campus. There were 21 boys and 22 girls enrolled in the United States History class. All of them are Black. FAMU DRS is also a Title 1 school, receiving funding from the state for intervention services in reading, mathematics, science (Florida A&M University Developmental Research School, 2021).

Data Collection Procedures

My problem of practice is low student classroom engagement among 11th graders at FAMU DRS. My decision to choose the 11th grade students is both intrinsic and academic. The 11th grade students are usually near and dear to me because we both go through the struggle of the End of Course Exam for U.S. History, which is a test mandated by the state of Florida that counts for 30% of the students' overall grade in the class (Verges, 2013). By the end of the year, we have fought, argued, laughed, and even cried sometimes about the content we learn or the experience of learning it. As a teacher, it is just as much of a learning experience for me as it is for the students. Regardless of how the students perform on the state test, I know somehow that they left the class with more knowledge about a subject than they came in with. If I taught the curriculum properly, the students become better citizens because of it.

I believe that poor student engagement among 11th graders at FAMU DRS might be influenced by the lack of culturally relevant curriculum. My exploratory qualitative research therefore focused on the implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum in order to understand the possible influence that it may have on my student's classroom engagement in my U.S. history class. Before gathering data, I reviewed the content in the Florida curriculum that may or may not be culturally relevant. The Collaborate, Plan, Align, Learn, Motivate and Share standards, or CPALMS, is the State of Florida's official source for standards information and course descriptions, which drives curriculum and instruction by all teachers at FAMU DRS, the setting of this study (Florida State University, 2019). Although there are specified standards that exist in CPALMS regarding which content relates to various cultures, how to utilize those standards in order to make one's lessons more culturally relevant is not discussed at great length on the website. However, the Florida African American History Task Force has criteria for school districts to follow in order to be deemed "Exemplary School Districts." These include instructional standards

guide (Commissioner of Education's African American History Task Force, 2014). Using this guide, I infused the content that the task force suggests into my United States History lessons.

After obtaining IRB approval, I gathered qualitative data through focus group discussions, individual semi-structured interviews, student journals, and researcher field notes. I conducted a focus group with both sections of my U.S. History class, which is roughly 20 students in each class from year to year. The first focus group was conducted during the first week of school with the purpose of gauging how the students have felt about their history classes in the past and how it made them feel.

Over the course of the semester, I asked students to write individual “reflective journals” at the end of each week, for which I asked students to reflect on what they learned during the previous week. Students were asked to discuss what they enjoyed, what they did not enjoy, and what stood out to them the most about the previous lessons that week. I also kept my own field notes reflecting on the memos that I made of my own observations of in classroom instruction, student engagement, and other experiences about teaching while using the Afrocentric curriculum. Finally, the second and last focus group discussion was conducted at the end of the semester in December. This focus group provided an opportunity to share my analysis of the data with them and check my conclusions against their intentions. It also provided a final opportunity to dive deeper into some of the reflective journal responses. The final focus group also helped gauge the impact that an Afrocentric curriculum had on the students’ classroom engagement.

I gathered focus group data and saved this information via Zoom, an online teleconferencing software that generates automatic transcripts of video and audio recording. I will also use Zoom to save all my recordings to my Zoom cloud account so that it will all be in one safe place downloadable from anywhere that I can access the internet. For the weekly journal entry data,

I used an online software called Google Classroom, a platform where students could type their journals digitally.

Description of Focus Group

The type of focus group I will be conducting will be single focus group. The key feature of a single focus group is the interactive discussion of a topic by a collection of all participants and a team of facilitators as one group in one place (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). The goal of the focus group is to allow for students to discuss their attitudes about classroom engagement before and after being exposed to an Afrocentric curriculum in their United States History class. These will be conducted during the entire 50 minutes of class. As the teacher, I will also be the moderator.

Weekly Reflective Journaling

At the end of each week, the students did a non-graded writing assignment where they had the freedom to write as little or as much as possible about what they learned in class, how they learned it, and their perspectives and opinions about what was learned in class. They were not criticized on grammar, for I wanted the students to feel free to write how they wanted, full of self-expression. This information was used as another source of data to learn their attitudes and feelings toward an Afrocentric curriculum. I also was able to determine their engagement in class based on their answers. Humanizing writing pedagogies such as journaling for Black students support the development of critical consciousness and center their everyday lived experiences (Johnson & Sullivan, 2020).

Data Analysis

The approach to my data analysis was a mixture of the constant comparative method and thematic method. My emphasis is on the student's perspective of an Afrocentric curriculum to

enable me to seek the meaning of the curriculum for my students by letting them tell their story. I also listed/wrote/and described my interpretation and meaning of the data collected (Howell Major & Savin-Baden, 2013). I analyzed the data collected after each set of focus groups and the weekly journal entries. While carefully reviewing all of my transcripts, I took notes on the impression that each focus group made on me, noting what stood out, and examining the outlier responses. I labelled relevant pieces (indexing) while keeping track of repeated phrases, exciting statements, or statements related to acts of engagement in class, preparing for class, or African-centered learning content. An index is a code composite of blocks of data organized categorically (Saldana, 2016). This is a form of attribute coding or logging essential information about the data and demographic characteristics of the participants' responses for future management and reference (Saldana, 2016). Next, I categorized the indexes by importance and nature. Then I drew connections between these indexes and wrote a summary of each category. Finally, I interpreted and discussed the findings, which I connected to other relevant literature.

To answer the research questions, I started the semester in August with two focus group discussions with a total of 40 students across two sections of United States History to gather data on their prior experiences with and perceptions of history courses and how that experience influenced their level of academic engagement, perceptions of historical agency and their perceptions of themselves. Then, over the course of the semester, I implemented an Afrocentric curriculum designed to connect with Black students' experience by foregrounding African American history, the agency of Black historical figures, and local history. I did this by elaborating on what the textbooks and state standards suggest is Black history in the framework of United States history, and I added content from several books and other resources that included local and state history of Black people Florida. I also included a significant amount of material on other minority groups in the curriculum to show how the successes and struggles of one group of people

can be related to other groups of people in America. This focus is somewhat different than the traditional United States History curriculum which, though it does highlight some contributions of minority groups to American history, it has tended to foreground the dominant White cultural history and marginalize minority cultures. Thus it does not encourage Black students to understand and embrace their own cultural history or that of other minority groups.

During the semester I asked students to write weekly journal entries in order to gather data on how they were responding to the Afrocentric curriculum, how the curriculum was influencing their class engagement, and whether it was having an impact on their perception of Black historical agency and their own self-perception. At the end of the semester, I conducted a second focus group discussion with the same students in both of the two sections of U.S. History class to gather data on their perceptions of the impact of an Afrocentric curriculum on their academic engagement and understanding of themselves and American history.

Role as the Researcher

As the researcher, I was also the teacher in the classroom. I was the moderator during the focus groups, and I was the reader and analyzer of the journal entries. As stated before in the section above titled “Data Collection Procedures,” my motivation in conducting this research is intrinsic. As a Black male that barely matriculated through public schools, I also wondered why I was not taught certain things about my heritage and culture in school. I remembered having arguments with my social studies teachers throughout grade school and feeling as though there was something essential missing from the lessons. But I could not figure it out. But that something, perhaps, was me and my lived experiences as a Black person in the United States. As a teacher, I now have the chance to teach all of my students, regardless of their ethnic background, about Black history. Despite my subjectivities, such as being a Black man teaching Black history in a United

States History class, I maintain that this research is for all educators of all ethnic backgrounds looking to get higher classroom engagement out of their Black students.

As the researcher, it is also important to know my background as an educator. At the time that this research was conducted, I have had been teaching twelve years (Mississippi and in Florida at two predominantly Black Schools) in the social sciences, ranging from teaching regional American History, United States History, African American History, World History, Principles of Economics, Economics: Financial Literacy, Personal Financial Literacy, World Geography, American Government, and Psychology. I hold a dual Bachelor of Science degree from Rust College in Social Science Education with a minor in African American Studies and Research and a Master's Degree in Social Science - History from Florida A&M University where I concentrated in African American Education (pre-colonial era– to Brown v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas). I have also been a docent and/or interned at various museums, such as the Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum in Holly Springs, Mississippi and the Meek-Eaton Black Archives Research Center and Museum in Tallahassee, Florida.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To be sure that this research can be trusted I generated thick descriptions of student's perceptions. I presented detail, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships that connects me to the students as they are taught through an Afrocentric curriculum (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 83). My intent was to foreground the voice of my students rather than what I had to say as a researcher. I was a part of the setting of the research because I was the teacher of the 11th-grade students being researched at FAMU DRS. I was more concerned with the process of conducting the research rather than the outcomes of the research.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness and credibility is established through a variety of strategies, including triangulation, member checks, and peer examination. Triangulation refers to using multiple investigation techniques and multiple data sources to confirm emerging findings to establish validity through pooled judgement (Merriam, 1998). Member checks refer to taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible (Merriam, 1998). Peer examination is asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they are emerging (Merriam, 1998). I utilized all three strategies in my research to establish its trustworthiness and credibility.

My teaching experience adds credibility to my research. My experience teaching Black students and U.S. History class is an example of my prolonged engagement in the field I am studying. At the time of this research, I was in my 12th year teaching overall, and would be in my 8th year teaching at FAMU DRS, where I was certified to teach 6th-12th grade social sciences. I will leave an audit trail of raw data, such as the recordings of the focus groups via Zoom to a cloud-based software, and I will make field notes weekly on the progress of my research.

I protected the data by saving all the data to a cloud-based service through Florida A&M University. No one had access to this other than me, for it is under my system login information. There was also an audit trail of the transcribed interviews via Zoom software. I did member checking and informant feedback through allowing students the opportunity to review their responses of the weekly reflective journals. I also checked to make sure students of different learning levels were represented.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of my research include the duration of the study, the size of the school, and the environment of teaching online. The duration of this study is only one semester, yet

the class is a year-long course. In the future, I would like to study not only classroom engagement but also academic achievement levels, such as the passing rate on the U.S. History End of Course Exam state test after being introduced to an Afrocentric curriculum for an entire year. Some critics might not think that one semester is enough time to see thorough outputs of classroom engagement, but it is enough time to see students' attitudes and perspectives of being introduced to an Afrocentric curriculum.

A clear limitation in my research is that I am studying my own classroom, which may present bias. My students may want to provide what they feel as the “correct” answer instead of answering in an unfiltered answer during the focus groups and interviews.

As stated in chapters 1 and 2, FAMU DRS is a small school, and the participants in the study will be approximately 40 high school 11th graders. The environment of teaching online might yield different results than that of conducting research in the actual classroom. Also, there might be technological failures such as software shutdowns and internet outages.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research design, the data collection procedures, which included focus groups, and reflective journal writing, and the data analysis, which will include a mix of thematic and constant comparison methods. I also described the role that I play in my research, such as my teaching position and the motivations behind me conducting this research and the ways I will ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Finally, I also discussed the limitations of my research design, such as the time restraints, small sample size, teaching online complications, and limits on generalization.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

Study Summary

My problem of practice was low student classroom engagement among 11th graders at Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS). My decision to choose the 11th grade students is both intrinsic and academic; intrinsic because I am the teacher of these classes and I naturally want my students to care as much about history as I do and academic because I am concerned about their academic success.

The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice therefore is to determine whether my students would find a more culturally relevant curriculum at FAMU DRS, such as an Afrocentric curriculum, more engaging. As stated in chapter 2, an Afrocentric curriculum may encourage student engagement as it promotes an educational device for Black students who either recognize that there may be bias in the overall curriculum, or for students who suffer from low self-efficacy from years of being taught by a curriculum that excludes their cultural identity (Jarvis, 1992). An increase in student engagement has also been linked to academic achievement, as well (Quin, 2017).

FAMU DRS is a predominantly African American or Black school and many of the high school students are low performing, which may reflect the lack of more engaging and culturally-relevant content in the curriculum. As discussed in chapter 1, other factors, such as attendance, misbehavior, or lack of teacher experience, are not significantly different from state-wide averages; therefore, it is worth exploring whether students might find a more culturally-relevant curriculum more engaging. Based on the literature on culturally relevant curricula (Hammond, 2015) and student engagement (Morgan-Thomas & Dudau, 2019), I hypothesize that a change in

curriculum to a more culturally relevant one could improve student engagement and perhaps influence the students' academic achievement. Broadly, this study will contribute to existing research about Black education by adding to the already extensive conversation on such topics as Afrocentric curriculum and its effectiveness, minority education, and student academic achievement (Giddings, 2021). More specifically, my research may be significant to schools who struggle with teaching their Black students, schools whose teachers struggle with reaching their Black students culturally, and small predominantly Black schools with Black teachers that may also struggle with cultural gaps in the curriculum (Frank, 2018, Payne, 1994, Deckman , 2017). Although research suggests that Black students who are taught by Black teachers are often more successful than their counterparts who are taught by teachers from different ethnic backgrounds (Bone & Slate, 2011; Hines & Hines, 2020; Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017), one must not assume that just because the teacher is Black that the students will have an automatic academic advantage if they are Black as well (Gay, 2010).

I asked two research questions, with associated sub-questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of the Afrocentric curriculum?
2. How does the Afrocentric curriculum improve student engagement as evidenced by students' self-assessment and teacher observations?

Findings

To understand whether an Afrocentric curriculum would have an impact on my students' engagement I had to first understand their prior experiences with a non-Afrocentric history curriculum and their perceptions of it. So, during the August Focus Group, I asked both sections of my United States History classes the following questions:

- What do you expect to learn in U.S. History Class this year?

- Who are some important figures you expect to learn about this school year in United States History class?
- How did previous social studies classes make you feel about yourself?
- How do you know that a class is engaging? In other words, how do you know that a class or lesson has your undivided attention?
- What is it about a lesson that will grab your undivided attention?
- When a lesson has your undivided attention, do you learn more? Why or why not?
- When a class or lesson is not engaging, what do you do to try to pass the class or learn the lesson?
- What would motivate you to learn more in class or learn more about a particular lesson?
- How were you engaged in your previous social studies classes?

Prior Experiences with U.S. History and Its Impact on Black Student Engagement

These students at this all Black high school said they did not learn as much as they thought they would in their prior history classes, and that they knew that more history existed beyond what they were being taught from the textbook. On the whole, however, the responses I received when I asked how students engaged in their previous social studies classes were mixed. Students stated that they watched cartoons and prepared for their civics state test. One student stated that they enjoyed watching the history cartoons that the teacher showed to their class. Other students stated that their previous social studies classes were not engaging, which contributed to misbehaviors such as sleeping in class, playing around in class, or skipping the class altogether.

When teachers use culturally relevant teaching, they show the student that they intentionally notice and admire the uniqueness of their culture (Hammond, 2015). In one student's previous social studies class, they completed projects, one of which was culturally relevant. The student stated that, "We did projects. We did one where you could like dress up like a Black person." In this case, the student describes how they were to dress up like a Black person from a particular historical period. Either way, the student remembered the project enough to mention it, the meaningfulness of the assignment.

At the other end of the spectrum, one student indignantly stated that in their previous social studies class, "usually it's like the same ole stuff and you usually learn about White people doing

the most to be successful.” Though she did not have the words for it, she was describing Eurocentrism which is manifested in educational practices, textbooks and curricula prioritizing White men’s history and a narrative that they have advantages in politics, education, and economics (Durden, 2007). It is unsurprising then that a young Black student in high school exposed to enough of her cultural history to know that there is more out there, would be disgruntled at the fact that only a small portion of her history shows up in the lessons that her teacher presents to her.

According to the students in my study, this prior experience impacted their level of engagement with the course and influenced their in-class behavior. When asked when a class or a lesson is not engaging what they did to pass the time, the most common answer from students was to “sleep” or to “cheat.” Some students said they would look up the answers on the internet, which is a form of covert misbehavior. Sleeping in class is also a form of covert misbehavior. Such misbehavior can be interpreted as a form of communication by students to the teacher that the student either does not like what is taught or is not interested in what is taught (Seidman, 2005). It is also a sign that the student may not understand what is being taught and, instead of asking questions, the student covertly does something else that won’t interrupt the teacher or disrupt the class. Cheating on assignments and assessments may not only be a reflection on the teacher, but may also reflect how the student feels about the system of grading in the class (Simmons, 2018).

Students’ Perception of History and Historical Agency

When asked in the August focus group who were some of the important people they expected to learn about in the year, most students spoke of different groups of people instead of any particular person. For instance, students from 1st and 5th period said that they expected to learn more about slaves, a particularly telling expectation for a class that was almost entirely Black. Clearly the dominant impression of their own history was slavery. This is perhaps somewhat due to the fact that this particular level of United States History begins usually in the 1850s, which is a

time when the nations was in peril over the issue of slavery, but it is heartbreaking that this is the first thing that comes to mind for many students about Black people in America (Rainone, 2020).

As a history teacher, I know that middle school American history covers the period from the age of exploration to the 1850s (and the High School United States History class starts in 1850 to cover the causes of the Civil War as a review), so students learn that Blacks arrived in America as slaves in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia. In that same middle school American History class, they may also learn of some key Black figures such as Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, or Sojourner Truth, and a few other prominent Blacks that served in positions of government immediately after the Civil War (Florida State University , 2019). The issue with this is that for a course that chronicles roughly 300 years of the establishment of the United States of America from a colonial society to a republic, students may only learn about 4 free key Black people while the rest of the Black people are in the backdrop as slaves or newly freed slaves. This is a narrow view of Black historical agency. An Afrocentric curriculum endeavors to expand students' understanding of Black historical agency by teaching them more about their ancestors and thus demonstrating the mediating power of their ancestors in creating a better future for all American people and better understand their own position in America today (Spring, 2015).

Another interesting aspect of the response to this question was that students from 1st and 5th period were interested in learning about the slave owners rather than just the slaves. This may reflect that they are learning from other sources, such as the news and social media, that some of America's founding institutions were erected and or funded by slave owners (Hopson, 2021). And it may be what one student referred to as "pretenders," those people who claimed to help America but were actually doing things, by today's standards, to hurt America. But again, prior to the implementation of the Afrocentric curriculum, these Black students' perceptions of where Black people should be placed in the context of American history is almost entirely subsumed in the

history of slavery. Very few students expected to learn about their ancestors outside of the context of slavery.

Thus the data from initial focus group discussions suggests that these students' prior experience with history and social studies classes left them with a truncated perception of the historical role of people who looked like them, a perception largely framed by the history of slavery. While some students did suggest that they expected to learn about other groups of people and their ancestors, they largely expected to learn more about slavery. While slavery is certainly an important part of American history that a teacher must address, teaching history in its entirety means that a teacher must also enable an understanding of people and events from multiple historical perspectives (Harmon, 2012). One of these perspectives should be the cultural history of the students themselves. Therefore, when the students in question are Black, the teacher should foster the desire and provide the opportunity to learn more about their Black history and heritage. This is the purpose of an Afrocentric curriculum (King, 2015).

How did this make them feel about history and about themselves? When asked in the initial focus group how their previous social studies classes made them feel about history some students said they felt they did not learn anything. One student said, "I feel like we learned the same thing over and over again." Another student mentioned that civics was not that bad, but it was "taught from the book," suggesting little effort to link it to student experience. Another student stated, "I feel like a lot of the time our history as Black people is suppressed, and so a lot of what we learn in our textbooks, is the same." This student further explained that when they do learn about Black people, "it's always the same ones." Another student chimed in that, "With the black history, all we learned about was the negative things and not enough about the positive things." Another student stated, "A lot of the time, in some cases when we're learning about our history, we were always meant to look like the bad people. We were always made to look like Blacks were in the wrong

situations.” Anger can be heard in the voice of one student from my 5th period class who said, “I feel like I been taught a lie. Like, everything I’m learning now is pretty much the opposite of what I’ve been taught. And I’ve learned that they pretty much filter our history and they teach us one side without the full side of our story.”

Previous history and social studies classes made the students feel like they did not learn anything new. They felt that Black history was suppressed and that when they did learn Black history it was the same figures they always learned about or the negative parts of Black history, such as slavery. Some students knew that there was a different history of Blacks that could be taught and felt angry that it was not taught to them, leaving some students with the suspicion that they were lied to in previous history classes. This combination of boredom with what seems like the teaching of material over and over again, and anger about what is not taught to them, are potent sources of student disengagement.

Students’ reflection on their prior experiences with history courses however also offered interesting insight into what they found academically engaging and dis-engaging. When asked during the August focus group how they know that a class is engaging one student stated that they know that a class is engaging when, “you remember all of the things that were taught or at least some of the things that were taught.” Another student stated “we feel like we’re learning not just with me but when my friends and peers also understand the lesson.” It’s one thing for students to recognize that they are learning, but it’s another thing for students to recognize that other students are engaged and learning as well. Engagement is a reflection of how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes (Groccia, 2018). One student expressed an intuitive understanding of this when she stated that she knew that a class is engaging when students are not just “sitting there.” In this case, the student knows that she is engaged in class by actively participating and being energetic.

When asked in the initial focus group discussion what grabs their undivided attention in a lesson, one student replied “something that we didn’t already didn’t know.” In other words, learning something new. The same student went on to say, “when you teach something that’s new, that’s what gets our attention.” Another student answered what grabbed their undivided attention in a lesson was when the teacher “incorporates things that we can relate to.” Yet another observed that “it all depends on the subject” whether the lesson grabs their attention. This student went on to say that it also depends on the way the material is taught. One student from 1st period answered that the energy of the teacher is what attracts him to the lesson. He stated,

“I think it also depends on like the energy of the room and the energy of the teacher. Like, you come in and the teacher has positive energy, like everybody is gonna feed off that positive energy. But if you come in and your teacher got negative energy, they gonna feed off that negative energy.”

Most of the students answered “yes” in unison when asked if a lesson that has their undivided attention helps them learn more. When asked why, their answers were straightforward and simple. Some students answered yes because “it’s interesting” and that “you’re going to remember something you like.” When students are interested in what they are learning, they learn more (Harackiewicz, Smith, & Priniski, 2016). When asked about what they do in a class that is not engaging, one student quipped, “if your students are not engaged, you should do something to spice up the lesson or something.” Another student stated, “we got teachers who don’t care.” One student indicated that they become more motivated in a class if the teacher, “genuinely cares about... Like if a person care about you naturally they’re gonna care about your facts.”

In summary, students generally described their level of engagement with prior history courses as low. They stated that they slept, skipped class, cheated on assignments and tests, and looked up the answers on the internet. The factors that students pointed out to explain their generally low level of engagement included boredom with material they perceived as having been taught before, the perception that history was about what other people had done rather than what

people who looked like them had done, and the feeling that some teachers didn't care about them or were not energetic in their presentation of the material. The factors that students said that would increase their level of engagement in class included open discussions, more activities and cooperative learning games, introducing new material and making lessons more culturally relevant to them.

The Intervention: Implementing an Afrocentric Curriculum in 11th Grade U.S. History

In the next section I will describe the curricular changes, along with my rationale for certain modifications. As the implementer of the curriculum, and researcher in this study, I found my reflections helpful to provide more context for the student learning experiences and environment I attempted to create. My experiences and reflections and students' comments on what they found to be engaging and disengaging was insightful. These data suggested that an Afrocentric curriculum could be an effective tool to foster the academic engagement of Black students with U.S. History, but it also suggested that I needed to pay attention to how that curriculum was delivered. Therefore, over the course of the semester, I implemented an Afrocentric curriculum, which I describe as focusing on Black students' experience and history as it relates to the places, events and people that they are connected to. These features of my curriculum also had to be consistent with the existing United States History state standards covered in textbook and other resources. Simply put, I taught what was supposed to be taught and did not deviate from the traditional curriculum, some of which already featured some Black History. However, based on what students said about their prior experiences with U.S. history, that material was not engaging because it seemed redundant and did not seem relevant to people like them.

To supplement what the textbooks and state standards suggested was Black history in the framework of United States history, I included lessons on a more Black historical figures such as Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, Madam C.J. Walker, W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells. I also

added content from several books and other resources that included local and state history of Black people in Florida. I also used an African American History textbook as a guide for my lessons to be more inclusive of Black history. I also included a significant amount of material on other minority groups in the curriculum to show how the successes and struggles of one group of people can be related to other groups of people in America.

My Afrocentric Curriculum was different than the normal United States History curriculum because, although the U.S. history resources highlight a few minority people, it hardly encourages Black students to embrace their culture, and as a byproduct embrace the cultures of others; it tends to focus students on the struggles and successes of the dominant White American culture. I made sure to mention that the first few Blacks to come to America came before 1619 and they were not slaves or indentured servants but free people of African descent. I made sure to talk about key local and state figures that were Black and played a significant role in the development of American society and the formation of our republic. I also made sure to share the stories about the hardships and accomplishments of Black people that helped shape our American identity as a whole. I did this by including this history in my notes and lectures, adding more reading passages from sources on Black history that would not be found in the textbook, creating cooperative learning games for easier review, and using the vernacular of the students and, more importantly, allowing them to use their own vernacular in our class discussions. I also made sure that the students could compare their culture to other cultures of American people so that they can empathize and even identify with other peoples' adversities and successes.

The Influence of an Afrocentric Curriculum on Black Student Engagement at FAMU DRS

The overall reaction of the students to the Afrocentric curriculum was positive. According to the December focus group and the weekly journal entries, Black students enjoy learning about their own cultural background and history. Some things that stuck out to one student was a female

slave turned free slave owner in the state of Florida named Anna Jai Kingsley, who was granted land and property ownership of Florida's largest plantation (Jones & McCarthy, 1993). In lessons about the different ways Blacks resisted the institution of slavery, open discussions were key to students enjoying and engaging in the lesson. As one student said, "I am used to and most comfortable learning when I am able to openly ask questions in relation to what is being taught to me." When learning about local Black history pertaining to the Civil War, one student made it known that, "when I leave school I leave knowing much more than before I came. I even talked to my friends and parents about what we learned." Studies have shown that when students can discuss what they learned in school with their families, it can increase academic achievement (Fine, 2011).

Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies

One element of a culturally relevant curriculum is the use of familiar language. Therefore, one practice that I used and allowed was the use of the vernacular of my students. The dialect and vernacular of Black students in America has often been criticized and used as a way to suggest that they may be less intelligent than the average student (Love, 2019). One student commented on this aspect of the course, saying "I like how the lessons are ran and taught in a way where I can understand it in a vernacular way. Also, to add on to the first part of the question, it opened my eyes showing me not everything is what it said to be about slavery." This highlights the fact that any curriculum, including an Afrocentric curriculum, is more than the sum total of the material taught. It includes how that material is taught as well as how students are allowed to be in the classroom.

Students seemed to find the use of video clips to introduce material not covered in the text engaging. One student pointed out that they liked when "the lesson was true black history, and I liked the Kevin Hart video titled Henry Box Brown." Successful Black comedian Kevin Hart did a series of videos on important Black historical figures which can be watched on streaming services.

I showed a video on Henry Box Brown, a former enslaved Black man that with the help of other white abolitionists, shipped himself in a large box to freedom (Walls, n.d.). Not only did the students learn about an important Black figure, but they also learned that there were Whites willing to risk their freedom and rights to help Blacks earn theirs. One student noted that, “I think it was pretty interesting to learn about other people who were apart of the Underground Railroad, and that there were a few Whites who helped knowing the dangers. I liked that I learned less watered-down version of my history.” If taught properly, teaching the history of race relations can bring students of different backgrounds together in their learning experiences (Love, 2019).

Emotional Responses to Learning

Although the students’ responses to an Afrocentric curriculum were positive, they did express a range of emotions pertaining to what they learned. When learning about the free Blacks that lived in Tallahassee before the Civil War and the lives they led, one student stated that, “From the things that we have learned in class this week I think that it was very informational as well as emotion sparking.” Tapping into students’ emotions means that you can connect with the student on a personal level, which can increase learning and engagement (Darby, 2018). In the December focus group, the students spoke of being more engaged with a lesson that they knew was centered on their own cultural history and topics of interest to them but also fostered their achievement on the test. When lessons are more relevant to the student, it can increase the student’s intrinsic motivation to learn (Sutton, 2021). This is evidence that a more culturally relevant curriculum, such as an Afrocentric curriculum, can change the motivational factors in how Black students view the content they are attempting to learn, which can increase engagement.

Some students expressed in their weekly journals that they felt anger after learning more about the atrocities that other minority groups faced in America beyond the treatment of Black people. One student concluded that the U.S. government forced Native Americans off their

homeland and went on to say that “It just adds on to the ongoing list of unfair treatment from the U.S. against minorities.” Regardless of political affiliation, when students learn more about diverse cultures in America, they learn more about the common struggles of those groups and can sympathize with them, which is a practice rooted in teaching with a culturally relevant curriculum (Hammond, 2015).

Most students agreed that there was nothing that they disliked about the initial lessons. There were statements made about what they disliked about some of the early lesson content that stood out. Some students expressed that they did not like how some enslaved Blacks were treated during slavery. However, these events have to be addressed in order to understand the challenges and achievements of Black citizens today. The history classroom is the very best place for Americans to engage in the process of coming to grips with our complex story of slavery and freedom, racial exclusion, and participatory democracy (Dorsey, 2007).

Even if students don’t like how the lesson makes them feel, they can still be glad that they learned about it. One student stated that, “The information we learned is sad, but it is important to learn, and I still enjoyed it.” Another student was disappointed that they did not learn earlier any of the lessons I taught about Reconstruction Era, stating that “I feel like it should be covered as early as middle school.” In my experience as a social studies teacher and being a social science chairperson at two different schools in two southern states, I know that slavery is a topic that is discussed as early as middle school. So, perhaps what this student was expressing was a wish that he had had the opportunity to learn about more liberatory aspects of Black history earlier. Some believe that the topic should be brought up earlier in a child’s educational experience so that the proper conversations can be had with teachers about the institution being both a horrific circumstance and a building block of American society (Hiem, 2019).

One student stated when learning about the Reconstruction Era, “It made me feel bad for how black Americans were treated back then and some of them were killed for no reason.” A Latino student had very similar sentiments when it came to studying the Reconstruction Era. She said, “The KKK thing made me feel uncomfortable, and I hate these people.” Another striking response came when the students were learning about the treatment of people of color, particularly Black people, by some racist Whites. Some students were angered by these lessons. Most of my students got angry or ashamed when I taught them about the treatment of not just Black people, but of any group of people that had been oppressed in America. Some students felt cheated out of learning their own history when they learned some state history about Black peoples’ response to racism in the entertainment industry, stating that “Black vaudeville because you see on the internet about blackface, but you never hear about how Blacks reacted and created their own form of entertainment.”

Another emotion students felt when taught this Afrocentric curriculum was pride. Being able to inspire students in the classroom can not only increase their self-esteem, but also increase their academic achievement (Anyaka, 2017). While teaching about the Industrial Revolution, students expressed in their weekly journals that they enjoyed learning about Madam C.J. Walker. “My favorite thing I learned this week was Madam C.J. Walker. I already knew about her, but her story is always inspiring to me considering that I am a young Black female.” One student summed up her sentiments in her journal entries, stating that “I like how the lessons we learned brought some knowledge to me about my history. They also made me feel like me and my culture deserves a lot of respect.” Self-respect is crucial to self-pride.

Many students felt gratitude and appreciative for learning more about their Black history and the history and culture of other minorities in America. A part of that history is learning that there are groups of people that hate minorities because of the color of their skin. In a discussion

about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) that went on during the lesson on the Reconstruction Era, students proclaimed that the KKK was their favorite topic in the lesson. This didn't mean that they liked or identified with the KKK, but rather that they learned things about the Klan that they never knew before. One student stated,

This week's lesson was very interesting in terms of the different white supremacy groups. Usually, people talk about the KKK but, I never knew that there were other organizations worse and more secretive than they were/are. For example, the Knights of White Camilla whose goal was to gain power through public office being a very secretive organization which they held bad intentions for African Americans.

Another student simply stated that, "What I liked about what I learned this week is about the white supremacist groups and how they are still around today, just undercover." With the resurgence of hate crimes in America, my role as a social studies teacher is critical in not just discussing who committed the hate crimes in the past, but how to recognize hate crimes in the present (Flanagan, 2017).

Teaching Hardship, Teaching Black History

Teaching more Black history also meant that sometimes I had to dig deep into the hardships that Black people faced in America. Sometimes current events in America can be approached by teaching about the past (Gonchar, 2018). In closing one week's lesson before the review, I discussed the 1866 Memphis Riots, which were the first of many violent altercations between newly freed Blacks and White Americans (Ryan, 1977). I taught this lesson to show that sometimes racial violence does not stem from an organized hate group, but it can come from people who are prejudiced. One student stated that, "This week my favorite part was learning about the 1866 Memphis Riots. With regards to the Memphis Riots, it was sad seeing that no one was ever charged and served time seeing that if that same thing would have happened now today it would have been a different outcome." This is an important revelation for my student, because not only are they learning the content, but they are able to make their own assumptions about the world around them based on the knowledge they have acquired.

I also taught the Plessy v. Ferguson Court case, which made segregation legal (Duignan, 2021). I taught this lesson as a requirement of the state history standards, as I have in the past, but also to show that Black people's freedoms were limited soon after the Reconstruction Era ended. One student's response to this lesson was that "I was surprised because most of the time you hear about Rosa Park's being the first person to do that but really, he was the first person, and I don't know why people tried to hide that story." This student was able to connect one newly introduced historical event to another they were already familiar with, thus expanding their historical awareness.

After learning about the ups and the downs of life for Blacks during the Reconstruction Era, many students had different feelings about what they were learning. One student expressed surprise at the realization that Blacks were not treated much differently after the Civil War. Another student stated that the lesson "made me feel like I'm blessed to be in these times and not then." This is a good thing. Some people feel that teaching too much of the truth about what happened to different groups of people is going to make kids of different ethnic backgrounds hate each other, but when lessons can teach any student that times are better now than they were back then, that's a positive learning experience (Peoples & Foster, 2020). The clear pattern in how the Afrocentric curriculum made the students feel was largely based on the nature of the content to which they learned. When they learned about Black achievement, the students felt pride, but when the students learned about the hardships, they felt sadness and even anger. They were clearly emotionally and intellectually engaged with history.

Improved Engagement, Then Tapered Engagement

The level of that engagement increased and decreased at times over the course of the semester however. The weekly journal entries, and data from the December focus group, shows that there was high engagement in the beginning of the semester, then towards the middle of the

semester the engagement began to wane only to increase again and even out towards the end of the semester. Signs of higher levels of engagement could be seen very early on in the implementation of the Afrocentric curriculum. The most frequent responses that students gave in their journal entries when asked about the ways they engaged in class every week were taking notes, asking questions, answering questions during the class discussion, participating, doing their work, playing cooperative learning games, and paying attention. These are all typical answers of what one would expect of being engaged in any class. The atypical responses were related to learning about various Black people and other minority groups in America and sharing what they learned in class with family and friends.

Data from the journals suggests that learning more about Black history and learning it through cooperative strategies increased student engagement. The evidence for this engagement offered in their weekly entries and the final focus group discussion included helping others, speaking out more in class discussions, doing their own personal research, and talking with family about what they learned.

The Afrocentric curriculum I implemented did not neglect the experience of other cultural groups. During Latin American History Month I introduced material on the experience and historical contributions of Latin Americans in the U.S. A Latina student wrote in her weekly journal that she enjoyed learning about, “My project because I learned that Jose Guadalupe Gallegos doesn't like to take a lot of selfies, lol (laugh out loud).” It’s not because this student completed their assignment, but it’s because she could identify with someone in the curriculum. The person they did their poster project on was Jose Guadalupe Gallegos, a Mexican man that was a leader in the Union Army in the western front of the Civil War (Wilson, 2001). Not much is really known about him and his personal life, and there is only a sketch of what he might have looked like, hence the student’s joke about not liking selfies. “I like that you care about celebrating

the Latino month in the right way,” she wrote. After concluding the final focus group in December she told me, in tears, that she was moved by my effort to show appreciation for her culture and that she loved me for that. Though not specifically connected to the Afrocentric curriculum, her response reinforces the central idea of an Afrocentric curriculum that students must be able to see themselves in the curriculum and that doing so fosters emotional engagement with the material (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). As the teacher, this made me feel like I was on the right track to teaching. I felt that I was using the culturally relevant teaching strategies properly. I felt proud that the Afrocentric curriculum I was creating was inclusive and encompassing the culture of all my students.

One intriguing response to a weekly journal entry was when one student stated that, “ways I was engaged in class this week was going on my own and researching some more of the information that was being taught.” When learning about more significant Black people that played a role in fighting in the Civil War one student stated, “I was engaged in class this week because I actually enjoyed learning about some of these significant Blacks.” Another student stated that they were engaged in class outside of school, and not in terms of doing a project or homework. “The ways that I was engaged this week was I could talk about the class with my mom.” The more active the family, the higher chance of student engagement and academic success (Hall, 2020). Both responses show that when Black students learn from an Afrocentric curriculum, it can change their attitudes about what they are learning and how they engage with what they are learning.

Based on the data collected from the weekly journals and the December focus group, it is clear that student engagement was high when the lessons were centered on their cultural heritage. All of this is evidence of students expressing that they not only wanted to learn more Black history, but that they also wanted to learn something new and different from the same United States history that they were accustomed to learning in previous social studies classes.

According to the weekly journal entries, toward the middle of the semester students began expressing that they were not as engaged as they had been in the first few weeks of school. By this time the U.S. History curriculum is focused on the Industrial Revolution, which may have seemed less immediately relevant to their own experience. Students blamed the dip on being stressed by their workload, state testing practice for other subjects, and being distracted by extracurricular activities such as homecoming. I also believe that the engagement was less at this point in the semester because the students were more focused on doing their poster board projects, which was an extended learning assignment. They also had a poetry assignment due the prior week about a person of Hispanic heritage of their choice and a short five paragraph essay assignment where they had to explain their opinions on the importance of Hispanic Heritage Month and point out a key person of Hispanic Heritage. So, many students may have been stressed and or simply focused on keeping up with the assignments. All this came was simultaneous to them preparing to take their first test in my class as well. All this evidence suggests that engagement can be disrupted when too many other activities compete for the student's attention.

At this point in the semester responses were different from the previous weeks because some stated that they were not that engaged at all. One student stated that, "I wasn't really in class this week because of FSA Retakes but when I was in class, I took notes." Testing can sometimes take up so much time during a school day that it can disrupt instructional time, and if schools do too much test prep and testing, they may risk valuable instructional time (Santelises, 2015). Another student stated, "I'm not even going to lie, I was slacking in engaging this entire week but I was just a little off of my mood." This too, was due to testing.

Other students noted things that they disliked. For instance, one student stated "In last week lesson I wasn't so interested in none of it. I didn't like anything; I didn't dislike anything. I don't know, I tend to be more into it when I learn about African Americans more than any others but

learning other races do increase my knowledge.” This response seems to reinforce the assumption of an Afrocentric curriculum that students are engaged more when they see their culture expressed in the content of the lessons. Despite the recent debates about what should and should not be taught in schools, students of all ethnic backgrounds across the United States want to learn more Black history in school (Natanson, 2020).

During homecoming, which occurs in the middle of the semester, one student was probably more honest than their peers when they stated, “I wasn't really engaged in class this week due to Homecoming.” Due to homecoming week activities of Florida A&M University, the University that FAMU DRS falls under, I knew that there would not be a lot of classroom engagement. Many of the students stated that they were not engaged because they were trying to enjoy their homecoming week activities. This pattern in student engagement does not suggest that they were tired of learning Black history, but rather that there were external factors, such as school testing and extracurricular activities, that attracted the students’ attention.

Changing Perceptions of Important Historical Figures

After implementing an Afrocentric curriculum, most students’ perception of who they found to be important in American history changed to be more inclusive, even of people that were not Black. After a lesson on Westward Expansion that included Black and Mexican cowboys and their importance in establishing the American western frontier, one student stated,

“This week had to been about the cowboys from the 'wild, wild, west'. From movie and TV shows they tend to show us a different representation of what they are in terms of robbers and usually cowboy's being white. But this week we saw a whole different representation and saw the diversity within having cowboy's that were Black, White, and Mexican.”

Students stated that they enjoyed learning about Bass Reeves and how he was the first Black sheriff. Bass Reeves, another figure that was not in the textbook but was widely influential in the development of the American West, was born a slave but eventually became the first Black

Field Officer West of the Mississippi River (Burton, n.d.). “We don't hear that many stories about people like that,” one student wrote.

Students also reported being engaged by lessons on the local and state history of important Black people. One student stated, “I enjoyed this week’s lesson because it really hit close to home to know that there is such a history in the place that we live and how much of it we actually don’t get out of the textbooks. There were some very influential and interesting African Americans we learned about this week.” Connecting the curriculum to local history can allow for students to understand their role in society and foster engagement (Dillard, 2019). In the case for an Afrocentric Curriculum, teaching local and state history places the Black student geographically in the lesson.

When learning about the ordinary people and events that would typically come up in a United States History Class, the students generally had a more positive outlook, even if they were people they already learned about both Black and White. Some students spoke of Harriet Tubman. One student stated that, “What I liked about this week’s lesson is we learned about Frederick Douglass and his lifestyle. We also talked about Harriet Tubman and how she got her name.” A Latino student stated that they liked it when, “we learned about a lady who was very brave and she took a risk to free her friends and family.” Two students with two different culturally backgrounds that hardly speaks the same language shared an experience that could only have happened with a culturally that is culturally relevant like an Afrocentric one. Shared experiences in a diverse classroom headed by a culturally relevant curriculum also constitutes for increased academic achievement (Byrd, 2016).

Many students expressed that their favorite things they learned about during the lessons on the Industrial Revolutions was the inventions such as the telephone, the airplane, and the mass production of cheap steel. One student stated, “My favorite thing was the Bessemer Process which

made steel production easier and less expensive which was the cause of all these buildings today. Without steel they wouldn't have been able to [build buildings to] be made so high." I've taught United States history before without using an Afrocentric curriculum and I know that students usually think that the industrial revolution is boring, but for the students to be generally interested in the content even though it does not included people of color shows that students can further appreciate other people's hardships, struggles, and accomplishments, but only after they have been taught about the hardships, struggles, and accomplishments of their own culture.

Sometimes the students' perspectives of the typical United States History figures were not met with banalities. While learning about the Reconstruction Era, the discussion on the KKK did not leave some students happy with the lesson. One student did not like hearing about the KKK at all, but they also expressed, "you know you live and you learn." I think that this student meant that though the KKK did bad things to people in the past, we have to live and learn from it so that those bade things don't happen again, which is what I expressed in the lesson. The Latino student stated that, "KKK, I did not like learning about them because they do not deserve to be remembered after a long time for all the damage they did but I understand that it is important for understand the story." I went on to stress that history is more than a narrative of events, but something to learn from. When a teacher teaches that history is just a narrative, it shows that there may not be lasting effects of the events, and that the narrative itself can be polarizing people instead of bringing people together to learn from it (Helo, 2016). Simply put, my role as a social studies teacher is to teach the facts in its entirety without bias; but this does not mean that I can't cater my lessons to the students to which I am teaching.

Based on their experience with an Afrocentric curriculum, student's perception of who is important in history changed from learning about enslaved Blacks to learning more about other important Black historical figures. They also enjoyed learning about local and state history from the

Civil War to the Reconstruction Era. They sympathized with the treatment of Native Americans and likened it to the treatment of Blacks in America pre and post-Civil War. Due to their engagement in United States History overall, they were also engaged in other subjects outside of Black history like the Industrial Revolution and its impact on American Society; fore they were able to appreciate the hardships and successes of other people after they were able to appreciate the hardships and successes of their own cultural background.

The students also found that they were interested in learning about White supremacist groups like the KKK, though some students expressed that they did like learning about the actions they had done, they were interested in learning why they exist in the first place.

Teaching Key Historical Moments

While teaching about the Industrial Revolution, most of the student liked learning about the inventions. This week, I introduced an immigrant more and people of color. Students said they enjoyed learning about Nicola Tesla, Madam C.J. Walker, and Lewis Latimer. Nikola Tesla, a Serbian immigrant that did wonders in the field of electrical mechanics, was an interesting topic among students (Hunt , 2022). The students did not see him as just a White man, but they saw him as an immigrant from another country that came to America and tried to change the world for the better. The students already knew about Madam C.J. Walker, but they knew very little about her original story, being that she was the daughter of slaves and was born a sharecropper (Bundles, 2021). The same can be said of Lewis Latimer, who was the son of enslaved Blacks. Like Tesla, the students saw people take a chance on life and make something better of themselves and the world around them, which is more about learning to celebrate joy instead of dwelling in the hardships when it comes to teaching about minorities in United States history. Teaching about joy to Black students resonates more than constantly placing their culture and history in dismal but truthful heartache and despair (MacDougall, 2021).

Another interesting claim made by a student is that they enjoyed learning about the idea of social Darwinism, which is a sociological theory that was coined during the Industrial Revolution that applied the principle of evolution to societal matters such as business and race relations (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). The student stated they liked learning about social Darwinism because, "...it's interesting how it influenced things like discrimination." This is a conclusion that they drew up on their own, for the discussing the topic of the origins of racism and racist people is banned in the state of Florida, however, it is clear to see how a student would want to learn more about this topic, especially if they are Black in America.

After learning about the Industrial Revolution, one student stated, "This week something that stood out to me the most was the Homestead strike and the Pullman strike. They affected workers and the businesses until causing the decrease in membership and or workers being killed, which had a great effect on the industrial revolution." Another student stated, "This week, I liked learning about the riots. Seeing that people made an attempt to fight for a better lifestyle as well as seeing that people learned from the riots was something that was interesting to me." The Homestead Strike and the Pullman Strike were two events of protest during the Industrial Revolution where workers organized by labor unions fought for better working conditions and better pay (Carruthers, 2008). During the class discussion, students made comparisons on their own to the riots and strikes they saw in the news, such as the marches for Black Lives Matter and the riots that followed, and the teacher strikes, calling for better working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. They also made comparisons with the teacher strikes in some states, either fighting for better wages or to not teach or to teach this or that. Teachers and students must have a balanced and unbiased discussion on current events in order to create an atmosphere where students can form their own thoughts and opinions to be agents of change in their own communities (Swalwell & Schweber, 2016).

How the students saw themselves changed for the better after being introduced to an Afrocentric curriculum. Students felt empowered and felt that they could do what they learned other Black people in the past had done. After teaching about Black women played a significant role as spies in the Civil War, for one student, the history really came alive. She stated that, “I would be a very good spy and then I’d come back to the present and tell all of my classmates how I was a spy for the union army and how I got the meet president Lincoln. That would be pretty cool.” This may be more evidence that shows if students can see themselves in the lesson, that it could encourage classroom engagement. Using a culturally relevant curriculum, such as an Afrocentric Curriculum for Black students, centers the student’s experiences in the lessons, therefore allowing the student to not only identify with the lesson on a deeper level which can increase learning (Grasso, 2016).

One student said that the lesson on the Industrial Revolution made them feel like they could become an inventor, too. They said, “It made me feel like anybody can invent stuff but only if they have the mind to do it because all the inventors we learned about never stopped thinking.” Some students shared that this lesson made them feel good about themselves; one of which stated that, “It was fascinating when we learned about the black guy that built cars to compete with Henry Ford.” The guy that he was referring to was Frederick Douglass Patterson, the son of a former enslaved person who started a Car manufacturing company that competed with Henry Ford (Evans, 2021). This is just more evidence that Black students have a desire to learn more Black history that’s not in the textbooks. When a teacher uses content that connects with the student’s identity, it makes them feel more self-pride and have higher levels of student efficacy (Atkan, 2019). One student stated that they liked learning about W.E.B. Dubois, saying, “It made me feel as if anything is possible.” This student was probably impressed with Dubois being the first Black PhD graduate of Harvard University (Rudwick, 2021).

In summary, the data from the August focus group, the weekly journal entries, and the December focus group reveal that the students said their prior experience with history and social studies classes were not engaging. However, their experience with the Afrocentric curriculum was positive, in that they enjoyed learning some of the key significant Black figures I introduced to them, and they also enjoyed comparing what they learned about their own Black history with that of other ethnicities and heritages in U.S. History class. The students shared that the lessons were emotionally charging and intellectually stimulating to the point where they were moved to share what they learned with family and friends. This is all consistent with the literature since most of the literature states that an Afrocentric curriculum has a positive overall impact on Black student learning (Ladson-Billings G., 1994, Rivas-Drake, et al., 2014, King J. E., 2015). Unlike previous literature that criticized an Afrocentric curriculum for not being able to fit into an overall curriculum (Giddings, 2021), my study shows that, with proper pacing guides and mastery of planning, the Afrocentric curriculum can work well.

Implications

In chapter 2, I reviewed literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. Within this body of literature, I found Zaretta Hammond's study, "Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students" (Hammond, 2015) to be most influential in framing my Afrocentric approach to teaching. Another book that helped me clearly define the direction of my Afrocentric curriculum was the work of Joyce E. King entitled *Dysconscious Racism, Afrocentric Praxis, and Education for Human Freedom: Through the Years I Keep on Toiling: The selected works of Joyce E. King* (King J. E., 2015). Other literature that inspired my curriculum choice was, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, by Lisa Delpit (Delpit, 2006), and *We Want To Do More Than*

Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom, by Bettina L. Love (Love, 2019). These studies influenced my decision to utilize a culturally relevant curriculum—in this case an Afrocentric curriculum—as a strategy to enhance student engagement in 11th grade U.S. History at FAMU DRS.

The data gathered in my study of the implementation of that curriculum clearly show that students felt more knowledgeable and proud of their cultural heritage while also identifying with and appreciating the culture of others. They were not simply engaged in African-American history but more broadly engaged in U.S. history as well. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 also suggested that student engagement and academic achievement were linked (McDougal III, Cox, Dorley, & Wodaje, 2018). Though my findings do not directly address academic achievement, based on this literature it may be reasonable to expect that the increased engagement exhibited in the data from the weekly journal entries and the December focus group discussion would have a positive impact on the academic achievement of some of my students.

Based on my students' responses in this study, I find that culturally relevant teaching—in this case an Afrocentric curriculum—can inspire greater intellectual and emotional engagement in U.S. history by showing students key people and experiences they identified with. The data suggest that they found the experience of an Afrocentric curriculum affirmed their self-respect while also encouraging their interest in the experience of others' who are different but who have perhaps had similar experiences.

Recommendations

Culturally Relevant Curricula

The results of my study suggest that teachers in small predominantly Black schools should adopt an Afrocentric curriculum for their social studies classes, especially if their students lack

engagement. Even larger predominantly Black schools should consider using an Afrocentric curriculum in their social studies classes, if to do nothing else but allow students to express their voice about what they are learning and how what they are learning makes them feel about themselves and the world around them.

White teachers and other non-Black social studies teachers may not want to do a full Afrocentric curriculum; however, they may want to take elements of the preparation and planning practices that I took during my research in their planning so as to ensure inclusion of the experiences of Black people thematically and chronologically in the content of their lessons. For White teachers at predominantly White schools, I would suggest the same thing, for even White students need to learn Black history if they are going to fully understand American history (Sleeter, 2011). A fuller understanding of Black historical agency may also help them learn to form an opinion on where they stand socially and politically on current events (Crowley, Smith, & Muetterties, 2022).

While this study focused only on the responses of Black students to an Afrocentric curriculum, it suggests that culturally relevant curricula more broadly are likely to elicit greater intellectual and emotional engagement from students. It highlights the need for teachers to not only pay attention to *what* they teach and *how* they teach but *who* they are teaching as well. The curriculum should be adapted to the students at hand. Therefore, I strongly encourage all teachers to pay attention to the histories and cultures of their students and to embrace their roles in the development of American society. I suggest the teacher of any minority group that has a mixed or predominant minority ethnic group of students must observe and know their students thoroughly when planning their curriculum. It is not enough to simply teach from the text.

Non-curricular Influences on Student Engagement

The results of my study also highlight how non-curricular influences can affect student engagement. School culture, extra-curricular activities, state testing mandates and the lack of coordination among teachers of different subjects can have a detrimental impact on student engagement in different classes. School administrators and teachers should, therefore, take care to plan such activities with an eye toward how they may distract students from their studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted over the period of a single semester. It may be that students were more engaged because the material was new to them. It might be useful then to extend the study over two semesters or across multiple subjects over multiple years to see if the enhanced intellectual and emotional engagement holds or if students get just as bored with an Afrocentric curriculum over time as they have with non-Afrocentric curricula.

In this section, I will discuss recommendations for further research to be conducted on this dissertation topic. The recommendations will be divided into two sections: recommendations for researchers, and recommendations for teachers. In these sections, I will discuss the appropriate issues related to either researchers or teachers.

Recommendations for Researchers

In the future, researchers should be careful of student burnout while conducting the second focus group at the end of the semester. Some of the students couldn't remember what they learned about, which is why the journals were an important aspect of data collection. Also, I think it would have been a good idea to have the students write down their answers to the focus group questions slightly ahead of time or during the focus group, because since we're dealing with high school students, their attention spans may be short or that they may miss the questions and the meaning of

the question. Another thing to do may be to type the focus group questions on a sheet and hand it out to them.

Some student journal entries were omitted with the purpose of their answers being incomprehensible, not related, or not answering at all. Outside factors, such as state testing is a contributor student engagement, regardless of the curriculum type. In this study, testing ruined my class alignment, where both sections of my United States history were on the same lesson but for two days they were not. In order to make sure they were on the same day; I just did other activities with them such as college and career searches online. This way the time wouldn't be a total loss.

Another outside factor that can have an impact on student engagement that the researcher may not be able to control is school extracurricular activities such as Homecoming.

Recommendations for Teachers

In future research that is conducted by a teacher, the teacher should be mindful of how adding culturally relevant content to their curriculum could elongate their lessons, which could take them off their pacing guide. For instance, the textbook that I used broke up the causes and effects of the Civil War into at least 3 chapters, which should take about 3 weeks with 50-minute class meetings at most; but with the added content it took me 4 weeks. The future teacher researcher should be mindful of other interruptions, too, such as district practice and baseline testing, which could pull students out of class or eliminate the meeting of classes altogether.

Having new students come to you class in the middle of collecting data can cause a riff as well. I had a new Black student from Canada after 3 weeks of school passed. Risking time and energy, I immediately added content about Canada's role in the civil war. I believe that it is important for students of all cultural backgrounds to see themselves in the lessons. The researcher conducting research at a predominately Black school like FAMU DRS should also take into consideration that they may have students who don't identify as Black in their classes.

In the future, I believe there should be a similar study as this research to determine whether enhanced student classroom engagement leads to enhanced academic achievement. I would suggest that this study be quantitative research that uses a triangulation of surveys and studying students' grades throughout an academic school. This study would also be a comparative study that compares two groups of students; one group of students that are influenced by a culturally relevant curriculum, and the other group not. The hypothesis would be that students who were exposed to a culturally relevant curriculum were more engaged in class, and that their grades were improve in the said class. Unlike my study, this study would be an entire school year.

In the future, I believe there should be another similar study to this research to determine whether these results of this research hold with other minority groups. Simply put, the study would ask if a culturally relevant curriculum such as an Asian-Centered, Latino Centered, or Native-American-Centered curriculum increase student engagement among the mentioned minority groups.

As for classes that are a majority White, I think it would be interesting to see if a multicultural curriculum would influence their classroom engagement in a history class. One may ask about an Anglocentric curriculum, but some researchers believe that this already exist within the common context of the modern curriculum used in schools across the United States (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). For this reason, I do not believe there is a need for this type of research. However, I do believe there should be research done to determine a concrete foundation of the attitudes of White students toward a Eurocentric or Anglocentric curriculum. I hypothesize that White students in a multicultural curriculum would be more engaged in class, and the other students in the regular class would not.

I would also suggest that further research like this one be done at non predominantly Black schools, to compare the results of the attitudes of the Black students while learning in non-

predominantly Black spaces. The results from these studies would further the literature needed to enhance the study the attitudes of students of a culturally relevant curriculum.

Significance

The impact that this study may have on the academic world pertains to furthering the understanding of Black student engagement, the use of more culturally relevant content, and the effectiveness of using an Afrocentric curriculum on Black students. This research is also important to understanding the attitudes that students may have toward what they are learning and how they feel about engaging in class. Small schools that have a large Black population might consider using this research to increase student engagement among Black students. Schools with larger populations may be able to use this type of research to gain a better understanding of how to attract their Black students to a lesson. Lastly, this type of research is valuable to the larger landscape of education because of its use of a teacher conducting research on his own students while reflecting on his student's attitudes about what he is teaching them. The iterative process of the triangulation of this research method would be intriguing to educators who seek to explore the attitudes of their own students.

The results of this study confirm the findings of previous studies that suggest that a culturally relevant curriculum—in this case an Afrocentric curriculum— may have a positive impact on academic engagement among Black students in a predominately Black high school U.S. history course. This research also adds important insight into understanding the attitudes that these students may have toward what they are learning and how it affects their engagement in class. This research shows positive support for the use of an Afrocentric curricula as a strategy to gain interest of Black students in U.S. history and thereby increase their academic engagement, which may in turn have positive effects on their academic success.

This study also offers data to refute the common criticism of Afrocentric curricula that it is too narrowly focused and thus fails to teach students about other cultural, scientific or economic influences on U.S. history, as discussed in chapter 2 review of literature, (Giddings, 2021). The data from this study suggests that students were more interested in other cultures and historical events rather than less interested when these topics were addressed in the context of affirming the historical agency of people they identified with. It helped them see the historical agency of others as well.

This study also provides an example of a practical use for an in-class instructor to use an Afrocentric curriculum, because a lot of studies prior to this research provided a definition of Afrocentric Education, yet they hardly provided clear and practical examples of what it looks like in a classroom. Sometimes the lack of engagement is not about course content or the class itself but outside factors, which should be considered by teachers and administrators.

Dissemination Plan

Title:

A Black Curriculum for a Black School: A Case-Study Exploring Black Student's Attitudes towards Culturally Sensitive Curriculum and its Impact on Black Student Engagement

Purpose of the Study:

My problem of practice is the problem of student engagement in social studies that may be caused by the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy or culturally relevant content in the curriculum. *The purpose* of this Dissertation in Practice is to determine whether my students would find a more culturally relevant curriculum at FAMU DRS, such as an Afrocentric curriculum, more engaging.

Research Questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of the Afrocentric curriculum?
2. How does the Afrocentric curriculum improve student engagement as evidenced by students' self-assessment and teacher observations?

Plans for Disseminating the Findings of This Research:

Research audience:

1. Social Studies Teachers
2. Teachers who wish to explore culturally relevant teaching content
3. Teachers who teach predominantly African American students

How to disseminate research:

1. Present to Students, Faculty, Staff, School Board, and Parents of FAMU DRS
2. Publish study in academic journals pertaining to Black Education
3. Present at conferences geared toward African American studies
4. Develop and teach professional development for teachers/ administrators that are interested in learning about culturally relevant curriculum and teaching strategies

What to accomplish with data:

1. Increased students sense of ethnic pride and self-efficacy
2. Improve student engagement
3. Provide an example of how teachers can be more efficient in teaching African American students
4. Add to the academic conversation about cultural relevant teaching strategies and curriculum

Findings I plan to share:

1. Share the results with students during this year and perhaps the beginning of next year?
2. Present your research during staff development days at FAMU DRS
3. Present your research for Leon County teachers, if that happens with FAMU DRS
4. Present at local, regional, or national teacher conferences
5. Write for a teacher magazine/journal

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP 1 (AUGUST QUESTIONS)

Script:

“What’s up students! Thank you all for voluntarily participating in this focus group. As you know I am your teacher, Mr. Thompson and I teach you United States history this school year. The purpose of this focus group is to hear your opinions and feelings toward learning and engaging in this class. Before we begin, we do have a few rules.”

- a. I want you all to do all the talking. I will only talk if I am asking a question or answering a question you may have.*
- b. You can respond to each and ask each other questions related to what ere are talking about.*
- c. Be respectful when other people are talking, try not to interrupt or talk over others.*
- d. Its ok to disagree with other people’s answers and you are encouraged to discuss your opinions.*
- e. Please provide this discussion you undivided attention, for you did volunteer to be here.*
- f. This session will be recorded and if your parents ask for this, they can and will have access to these recordings!*
- g. Be yourself! You are encouraged to answer however you want to answer for as long or as short as you want to answer and in whatever way you want to answer as long it is in a respectful manner.*

“Are there any questions?”

“Ok let’s get started.”

1. What do you expect to learn in U.S. History Class this year?
2. Who are some important figures you plan to learn about this school year in United States History class?
3. How did previous social studies classes make you feel about yourself?
4. How do you know that a class is engaging? In other words, how do you know that a class or lesson has your undivided attention?
5. What is it about a lesson that will grab your undivided attention?
6. When a lesson has your undivided attention, do you learn more? Why or why not?
7. When a class or lesson is not engaging, what do you do to try to pass the class or learn the lesson?
8. What would motivate you to learn more in class or learn more about a particular lesson?
9. How were you engaged in your previous social studies classes?
10. Final question: is there questions, comments, concerns, or things you might have seen on TV or the internet that you would like to discuss before we end?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP 2 (DECEMBER QUESTIONS)

Script:

“What’s up students! Thank you all for voluntarily participating in this focus group. As you know I am your teacher, Mr. Thompson and I teach you United States history this school year. The purpose of this focus group is to hear your opinions and feelings toward learning and engaging in this class. Before we begin, we do have a few rules.”

- a. I want you all to do all the talking. I will only talk if I am asking a question or answering a question you may have.*
- b. You can respond to each and ask each other questions related to what ere are talking about.*
- c. Be respectful when other people are talking, try not to interrupt or talk over others.*
- d. Its ok to disagree with other people’s answers and you are encouraged to discuss your opinions.*
- e. Please provide this discussion you undivided attention, for you did volunteer to be here.*
- f. This session will be recorded and if your parents ask for this, they can and will have access to these recordings!*
- g. Be yourself! You are encouraged to answer however you want to answer for as long or as short as you want to answer and in whatever way you want to answer as long it is in a respectful manner.*

“Are there any questions?”

“Ok let’s get started.”

1. What were some of the things you were expected to learn in U.S. History Class this semester and how did it compare to what you learned about?
2. Was United States history class this semester more engaging than you expected? If so, how? If not, how?
3. If there was a lesson to do so, which one grab your undivided attention and why?
4. When a lesson had your undivided attention, do you think you learned more? Why or why not?
5. When a class or lesson was not engaging, what did you do to try to pass the class or learn the lesson?
6. What motivated you to learn more in class or learn more about a particular lesson?
7. Has this class changed how you view yourself? If so, how? If not, why hasn’t it?
8. Final question: is there questions, comments, concerns, or things you might have seen on TV or the internet that you would like to discuss before we end?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This form is used to provide information to the research participant (or parent/guardian) and to document written informed consent, minor assent, and/or parental permission.

RESEARCHER: Mr. Anthony Thompson

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Black Curriculum for a Black School: A Case-Study
Exploring Black Student's Attitudes Towards Culturally Sensitive Curriculum and its
Impact on Black Student Engagement

Dear Parents,

I am asking for your child's voluntary participation in my research project. Please read the following information about the project. If you would like to participate, please sign in the appropriate space below.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT: The purpose of this project is to determine whether a more culturally relevant curriculum such as an Afrocentric curriculum at Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (FAMU DRS) would have a positive impact on student engagement, particularly in 11th grade students.

IF YOU PARTICIPATE, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOLLOWING:

- Be in an interview in August and December via Zoom an online teleconferencing software
 - o Answer the following questions:
 - Could you tell me how you prepare for class?
 - How would you describe your engagement and participation in this class?
 - What makes a class engaging to you?
 - How do you feel when lessons include your cultural background?
 - In your opinion and experience, do you think my teaching style helps you become a better student? If so, in what ways? If not, how could I improve?
- Participate in an anonymous weekly journal entry activity (not worth a grade)
 - o Journal entry questions:
 - In what ways were you engaged in class this week?
 - In what ways were you prepared for class this week?

TIME REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION: The interviews would be roughly 10 to 20 minutes at a time in a group setting. The weekly anonymous journal entry is something they can turn in whenever they are done.

RISKS: There are no risk to the student's health or wellbeing.

BENEFITS: The students will have an opportunity to express their opinions about the direction of the class content while voicing their concerns about the best methods they believe they should be taught.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact:
[redacted]

Adult Sponsor: _____

Phone/email: _____

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

By signing this form, I am attesting that I have read and understand the information above, and I freely give my consent/assent to participate or permission for my child to participate.

Date Reviewed & Signed: _____

Printed Name of Research Subject: _____

Signature: _____

Parental/Guardian Permission (if applicable)

Date Reviewed & Signed: _____

Parent/Guardian Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL MEMO

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE of the VICE PRESIDENT for RESEARCH



EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

July 1, 2021

Anthony Thompson, 850-644-5260

Dear Anthony Thompson:

On 7/1/2021, the IRB staff reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Exempt (1) Educational settings
Title:	Black Student Perspectives of an Afrocentric Curriculum: A Case Study Exploring the Experiences of Black Students Perspective of Afrocentric Curriculum
Investigator:	Anthony Thompson
Submission ID:	STUDY00002434
Study ID:	STUDY00002434
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix A Informed Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;• AThompson Protocol IRB Application 3.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB staff determined the protocol qualifies for exemption, effective on 7/1/2021.

Your study conforms to FSU policy on COVID-19-related requirements and restrictions related to research activities that involve in-person interventions or interactions with human research participants.

Note that once the COVID-19-related requirements and restrictions are lifted and due to which you plan to replace remote interactions or interventions involving study participants (subjects) with in-person alternatives, be sure to submit a modification to the IRB for review of these substitutions; if however you only plan to discontinue other COVID-19-specific risk mitigation (e.g., screening; use of masks and personal protective equipment; social distancing) then no study modification request need be submitted to the IRB for review before your discontinuing these mitigations. For all other study modifications, see notes below.

You are advised that any modification(s) to the protocol for this project that may alter this exemption determination must be reviewed and approved prior to implementation of the proposed modification(s).

Modifications to the research may invalidate the exemption determination (because the research no longer meets the exemption criteria described in HRP-312 – WORKSHEET – Exemption Determination).

Examples of minor changes to exempt research that would *not* alter the exemption determination and should therefore not be submitted to the IRB for further review include the following:

- Making administrative (formatting, grammar, spelling) revisions to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising non-sensitive questions or non-identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Increasing or decreasing the number of study subjects—*unless* adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records
- Making study team/personnel changes—*except* (1) a change in Principal Investigator (PI) or (2) a change in other study personnel for whom regulatory approval of involvement in the study must be documented for purposes of institutional policy, sponsorship or funding, or other administrative purposes (e.g., graduation or manuscript clearance; addition of non-FSU study personnel).

Examples of changes to exempt research that *do require* prospectively submitting a modification to the IRB before implementing changes include the following:

- Making substantive revisions or additions (e.g., change in PI; funding source; sample; source of study subjects or their data; study sites or settings; procedures, interventions or interactions with study subjects; use of any drug, device, supplement or biologic; study subjects' time or duration spent performing or participating in study activities) to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising sensitive questions or identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records
- Obtaining, using, studying, analyzing, generating, storing or maintaining identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens in addition to or in lieu of de-identified or anonymous information or specimens
- Change in study risks (e.g., impact upon study subjects; impact upon students' opportunity to learn educational content or assessment of educators who provide instruction; any disclosure of study subjects' responses outside of the research may place study subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement or reputation)
- Change in Principal Investigator (PI) or (for students) faculty advisor
- Any involvement of a non-FSU institution or organization
- New or change in financial interest

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the applicable requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the Library within the RAMP IRB system.

Sincerely,

Office for Human Subjects Protection (OHSP)
Florida State University Office of Research
2010 Levy Avenue, Building B Suite 276

Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742
Phone: 850-644-7900
OHSP Group Email: humansubjects@fsu.edu
OHSP Web: <https://www.research.fsu.edu/hs>

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Anthony Thompson

Education:

Florida State University-

Ed.D. Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

April 2022

Florida A&M University -

Master's of Applied Social Science – History

August 2013

Rust College

B.S. Social Science Education

April 2009

Work Experience:

Educator

September 2013- Present

Social Studies/History Teacher

Tallahassee, Florida

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Developmental Research School

- Teach Psychology, African American History, World History, United States History, American Government and Principles of Economics 2013 – present
- Chairman of the Social Science Department 2014 – Present
- Summer Lecture Series “Let’s Talk” Lead Panelist Summer 2020
 - Self Esteem, Black Identity, and Emotional Health
- FAMU DRS District Macy’s Teacher of the Year 2015-2016
- Response To Intervention (RTI) High School Coordinator 2015 – 2018
- Black History Month Program Coordinator 2013 – present
- Hispanic Heritage Month Program Coordinator 2021 – present
- Assistant to the Marching Band’s Drum Section 2013 - 2015
- Coordinator of the FAMU Corp student portal program 2013-2014
- Assistant Track and Field Coach 2013-Present
- Senior Class Sponsor 2016-present
- Student Government Association Sponsor – 2016- Present

Online Teacher

Florida A&M University
Black Males College Explorers Program

June 2020-July 2021
Tallahassee, Florida

- Taught African American History
 - o Created lesson plans, assignments, and assessments
 - o Performed progress monitoring
- Set up online classrooms via Google Classroom, Zoom, and Canvas

Coordinator**Summer Camp Supervisor**

City of Tallahassee, Jake Gaither Community Center

June 2017- August 2019
Tallahassee, Florida

- advise camp counselors
- consult parent payments
- plan and deliver meetings
- plan special events
- orient camp rules
- pro-actively identify and solve problems concerning campers, counselors, and volunteers
- observe camp facilities

Lead Teacher and Curriculum Coordinator

Lincoln Center

August 2013- July 2016
Tallahassee, Florida

- Tutor children grades K-8th
- Create a curriculum in mathematics or language arts for each of the children to meet the needs academically
- Advised recreational activities including team sports, exercise, and dance

Counselor/Mentor

Florida A&M University
Black Males College Explorers Program

June 2013-July 2013
Tallahassee, Florida

- Assisted male students with housing, class registration and
- Assisted in conducting program orientation sessions for students
- Tutored students in general academic coursework

Graduate Curator/Archivist

Florida A&M University
Meek-Eaton Black Archives

August 2012-August 2013
Tallahassee, Florida

- Assisted with cataloging and archival materials
- Conducted Tours
- Gave historical presentations

Educator/Coach/Counselor

Holly Springs Youth Summer Camp
City of Holly Springs Council

Summer 2011 and 2012
Holly Springs, Mississippi

- Designed curriculum and lesson plans for a youth drug awareness class aged 6-12.
- Assisted coach of volleyball, basketball, and dance
- Assisted instructor of arts and crafts instructor

Department Chair of Social Studies

Social Studies/History Teacher

Holly Springs High School

Fall 2009 to Spring 2012
Holly Springs, Mississippi

- Taught Mississippi Studies, World Geography, World History, United States History
- Taught Keyboarding and Computers Application
- Coached track and field coach
- Implemented a Tennis club
- Started and Facilitated the *Young African American Historians Society*- students learning and conducting research in Mississippi studies of Marshall County
- Coordinated and implemented the *Youth Community Learning Center*- an after-school program for 7th -- 9th grade students
- tutoring and safe haven during high-risk hours for adolescence in Holly Springs, MS community

Summer Camp Councilor/Educator

City Camp Milwaukee Rescue Mission

Summer 2008 and 2009
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

- Facilitated remediation for elementary math, science, and reading
- Assisted in organizing field trips and other extracurricular activities
- Organized a curriculum for the enrichment of elementary math, science, and reading

Assistant Site Coordinator for Children Sports/Fitness

Minority Christian Coaches Association

Summers 2004-2007
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

- Created a curriculum involving games for children centered around physical fitness and good health
- Managed the instruction of teenaged assistant sports instructors at 5 sites at community centers in Milwaukee

Tutor/Peer Counselor/Residential Assistant

Rust College

School Year 2004-2009
Holly Springs Mississippi

- Tutored other college students in reading and writing preparing to take the teacher test Praxis 1
- Counseled incoming freshmen that needed assistants with getting accustomed to a college campus
- Monitored college student's cleanliness in the residential halls as well as provided presentations that involved student college survival and academic achievement

Assistant Instructor

January 2002- July 2003
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Summer Science Enrichment 2000 Program
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

- Assisted an in-class college professor teach high school students about resume writing and job etiquette
- made print-outs, passed out papers, read instructions, help students with problems in class

Community Affiliations:

- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.
- Prince Hall Freemasonry
- Alpha Phi Theta National Historical Honors Society
- Bethel AME Church Member
- Florida A&M University National Alumni Association
- National Association of African American Studies and Affiliates
- Southern Conference on African American Studies Inc.