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Africentrism, Leadership, and Human Rights at Indiana University's African American Dance Company

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Abstract

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MAT, Columbia College Chicago, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The need for educational leadership to prepare multicultural students for 21st-century careers in a global economy is high; however, there is scant research on the right to culturally relevant education and its potential to foster the dispositions required of individuals and society in this context. Critical race theory, human rights ideals, and distributed leadership theory provided the conceptual framework for this interpretive qualitative study to explore the experiences of those who participate in African-centered arts education and to investigate its possible benefits as a reparative human rights tool. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 9 former and current members of the Indiana University African American Dance Company's academic course and performing ensemble. Results from hand coding and thematic analysis indicated that participants identified leadership and shared responsibility for group success as core influences that enhanced their development as artists and global citizens. Participants perceived the dance company as historic, essential to campus and community, and life changing. Social change implications include increased understanding and collaboration across races and cultures through sustained African-centered teaching and learning.

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Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, the late Dr. Mabel Jones Henderson, PhD, esteemed HBCU professor and administrator, former Dean of Humanities at Lane College, Director of Freshman Studies at Kentucky State University, and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Tougaloo College. Words cannot convey my love and respect for this scholar, activist, higher education leader, and incomparable lady…the ultimate role model. Thank you for giving your all to your family, students, colleagues, and community. You sacrificed so we could achieve. This is for you.

Acknowledgments

I wish to recognize and express my sincere appreciation to the many individuals at Walden University and Indiana University whose contributions and/or inspiration made it possible for me to complete this study. I owe endless gratitude to the scholar-artists of the IU African American Dance Company who provided the information from which this study was developed. To Professor Iris Rosa, asante sana.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Alice Eichholz, doctoral committee chair, for her encouragement, patience, confidence, expertise, and formal and informal guidance throughout my dissertation process; and to Dr. Cheryl Keen, methodologist, for her vision, continued interest, and technical skill shared throughout my doctoral studies. Their mastery of excellence in distance learning and concern for my professional development helped create a sense of dignity that enabled me to overcome the hurdles in the program with ease. I also wish to thank Dr. Beate Baltes, university research reviewer, for her interest and dedication to supporting the highest standards of quality for this dissertation. Appreciation is extended to those faculty and staff who deepened my knowledge during doctoral residencies. I also thank my Walden peers from across the globe who consistently inspired while persisting, especially Dr. Loretta Ragsdell.

Last but far from least, I am forever indebted to my husband, Standish “Stan Kwame,” and my children, Reyna, Carlos, Ricky, and Charis. Their devotion, sacrifice, resilience, and moral support during the course of my graduate experiences made this doctoral quest and completion possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

More than a half century after the groundbreaking Brown v. Board of Education (1954) legislation mandated fair and equal opportunities in education for African descendants in the United States, educational access and lack of equity in schools remain problematic (Asante, 2011). For non-European-descendant students, particularly African Americans, who do matriculate into higher education, the systemic barriers to success, both cross-culturally within the United States and internationally, remain an impediment (Harper, 2012). This compromises the ability to provide global leadership in an era that requires mutual respect and collaboration among disparate cultures to resolve critical issues such as climate change, global warfare, pandemics, and systemic racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The topic of this study was the leadership and participatory experiences of the Indiana University African American Dance Company (AADC) as a means of understanding the role of culturally relevant academic and performing arts education from the perspective of its current and previous conveyors and recipients. This study needed to be conducted because there was no research on the AADC's 45-year history as the first and only academic and performing arts entity of its kind at a major U.S. university (Indiana University, 2018). Data from interviews with current and former AADC participants yielded insights regarding how the experience influenced leaders, participants, and society. The study was relevant given the current United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), which may heighten awareness of human rights issues and opportunities for improvement including those

within the field of education (United Nations, 2013). Potential social change implications of this study extend beyond the AADC campus and community to include educational leaders' and policymakers' awareness of and sensitivity to the need for inclusive, culturally relevant education as a tool for advancing humanity in the face of divisive, discriminatory, and inhumane treatment of minoritized peoples worldwide. Additional social change implications include identifying and articulating possible human rights reparations exemplars beyond financial redress for human rights violations, such as those forms of reparative justice that may be provided by culturally relevant education. In this chapter I articulate the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of the study. The balance of this chapter is devoted to providing the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study.

I reviewed the literature to examine what scholars asserted about critical race theory (CRT), human rights as a part of CRT, and distributed leadership along with the perceived link, if any, between individuals' affirmation and exploration of various cultures and dynamic environmental influences, and their successful intellectual and identity development (see Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2011). Perspectives articulated by Asante (2011); Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011); Delgado and Stefancic (2012); Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, and Arellano, (2012); Torres et al. (2011); and Yosso (2005) generated significant discourse on the topic of culturally relevant education, particularly that which challenges the Eurocentric status quo. Each of

these researchers considered the manner in which the context and content of teaching and learning impacts students and their overall development academically and beyond.

Background

The global economy has long relied on exploiting Black labor, creativity, and resilience to sustain itself (Asante, 2011; Bowles, 2014; Harper, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Segregated and often inferior educational systems have played a central role in this dynamic (Ford & King, 2014). Messaging via cultural arts and education has alternately affirmed African people's humanity and has served to image Blackness in a negative manner, sustaining a distorted view of a subordinated people (Museus & Harris, 2010). Research showed that the imposition of Whiteness as the measure of worth has been deeply imbedded in curricula and praxis as part of institutionalized racism across the globe (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Museus & Harris, 2010). This has created erroneous low expectations, prejudices, and resistance to the "other" in disciplines including the arts (Bowman, 2010; Yancy, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Conversely, research supported the benefits of instruction that facilitates students' cultural sensitivity and emotional development, and arts education plays a role in this (Stephan & Stephan, 2013; Stephens & Hermond, 2009).

During the period described as the civil rights or Black liberation era in the United States (1960s, 1970s), pressure from Black students and professors and their allies led some colleges and universities to develop programming to address the lack of culturally relevant educational content about African descendants and other populations (Nicol, 2013; Rojas, 2007). The AADC was part of that movement when founded in 1974 and

has operated since that time (Indiana University, 2018). The AADC is one of three ensembles of the Indiana University African American Arts Institute that "is committed to promoting and preserving African American culture through performance, education, creative activity, research, and outreach" (Indiana University, 2018, "Mission"). My literature review revealed a knowledge gap in the discipline regarding participants' experiences with sustained instruction designed to counter the predominant hegemonic narrative in Eurocentric education. My study addressed this gap by illuminating student, alumni, and leader perceptions of their experiences with this academic and arts ensemble over the course of its four and a half decades. This study also addressed an important need by serving as the first to document the history and participant experiences of the AADC.

Problem Statement

The need for educational leadership to prepare multicultural students for 21st-century careers in a global economy is high. Despite this, there is ample evidence that inclusive educational content is lacking, and that the current curriculum emphasizes a Eurocentric worldview that devalues other cultures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Picower, 2009). There is a dearth of research on the human right to culturally relevant education and its attendant benefits to individuals and society (Donnelly, 2013; Thésée & Carr, 2012). Researchers had not addressed the experiences of those who participate in African-centered academic and arts education to explore its benefits as a reparative, human rights learning opportunity. A basic interpretive qualitative study addressing the

AADC credit-bearing course and performing ensemble was conducted to provide a better understanding of the benefits of that approach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the experiences of those who have participated in the AADC academic and performing arts program, through the lens of critical race theory, human rights ideals, and distributed leadership theory. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with former and current participants in this Africentric educational program.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQs) for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?

RQ2: What methods have AADC leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The guiding principles for my research were grounded in CRT, human rights ideals (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and distributed leadership theory (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) considered the manner in which educational context and content affect students, including their academic and cocurricular development. CRT, according to Delgado and Stefanic, asserts that the overarching effect

of institutionalized racism confers significant privileges to some human beings while significantly disadvantaging others based on their racial heritage and historical experience. The tenets of CRT assume a social justice and human rights frame that validates the need for understanding racial affirmation versus subordination to begin repairing the damage of generations of human rights abuses and attitudes. This conceptual framework provided a means to develop the interview protocol and a lens to interpret responses to understand the experiences of participants chosen from a diverse group of students, alumni, and educators studying and expressing the human condition through research and performance expression exploring the African aesthetic in a university program.

Donnelly (2013) described the applicability of human rights theory and practice to explore a cross-cultural educational experience with the complexity of the AADC, which requires an understanding of the unique role of cultural and artistic expression in addition to traditional classroom lecture or interactive discussion formats for academic instruction and assessment. The human rights lens provided a broader context consistent with and expanding on the civil rights origins of CRT.

Leithwood et al.'s (2009) distributed leadership model contributed to the conceptual framework for consideration of leadership and stakeholder interactions and collaboration among participants in my study. This framework helped me identify how the experiences in this program are designed and implemented to foster collaborative problem-solving and appreciation of Black people's rich heritage, humanity, and

contributions to the world. A more detailed description of the conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A basic interpretive qualitative research approach (see Thorne, 2016) was selected to explore participants' and leaders' perceptions of the AADC course and performing ensemble. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), "in-depth qualitative interviewing" (p. 3) facilitates researcher exploration of complex topics with individuals who have the most experience with or knowledge of a topic. The founding director, student leaders, and current and prior participants have diverse backgrounds and disparate perspectives on the benefits and challenges of mainstreaming a culturally specific academic and arts entity at the college level. Racial and political dynamics at the society and local level, regional attitudes toward civil or human rights advocacy, perceptions of the performing arts generally and dance specifically, and campus or community receptivity to Africentric education were addressed in this study (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Through in-depth interviews with a voluntary sample of current and former participants, I explored the methods a leader, assistant instructors, and students used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis in defiance of what research suggested is the continuing prioritization of a Eurocentric worldview (see Asante, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Definitions

Following are definitions of key concepts or constructs used in this study:

Africentric or Afrocentric: The ideology and practice of seeking to unite society based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all its peoples, utilizing an African-centered worldview to counter empiricist epistemologies (Asante, 2011). The Afrocentric idea holds that pluralism without hierarchy is both possible and required to respect the cultural origins, achievements, and prospects of all peoples. Asante (2011) summarized the concept as "placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (p. 2).

Distributed leadership: This idea ranges from the normative to the descriptive in its meaning and focuses on the concept as sharing, democratic, and dispersed leadership as opposed to a strict, hierarchical process (Leithwood et al., 2009). For purposes of this study, distributed leadership referred to the sharing or dispersing of leadership throughout the organization being researched.

Human rights: The United Nations's (1948) definition and Donnelly's (2013) related articulation of human rights as universal rights that all human beings inherently possess. These rights include 30 economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948) to which all people are entitled irrespective of whether these are currently recognized in policy and praxis.

Assumptions

There were three assumptions in this study. First, I assumed that participants would respond candidly, insightfully, and truthfully to the interview questions because I assured participants of their confidentiality and the ability to withdraw from the study at

any time without ramifications. Second, I assumed that participant responses would represent a diversity of experiences and viewpoints because the sample was drawn from a diverse group of people who live in different parts of the world and who participated at some point in the more than 40-year history of the AADC. Finally, I assumed that participants had some knowledge of the social justice, human rights, and global awareness aspects of the AADC mission because it was explicitly and implicitly communicated in the published materials and artistic products of the department and ensemble throughout its more than four decades of existence.

Scope and Delimitations

This study's scope included only current or former leaders and participants of the AADC. Those chosen for participation were self-selected members of a closed Facebook group for AADC current students, alumni, and present or former instructors. Participants were stakeholders who had maintained a connection with the AADC for purposes of receiving or exchanging information and updates to remain aware of how and what other alumni and current researchers were doing, and how their alma mater and AADC were faring, including performances, reunions, and the like.

This study did not include another group of key stakeholders, the audience members, who could have provided meaningful and unique perspective. These stakeholders would have provided reflections on their experiences as recipients of the artistic performances, cultural outreach, and messaging rather than as insiders of the AADC leadership. Including other stakeholders in a future study would be appropriate;

however, the current study was bounded by participants with direct experience of the leadership and educational training process.

This study was also delimited in that analysis of the leadership or themes in the work product was likely to reveal trends and outcomes for effective teaching or mentoring in culturally relevant educational praxis. However, the time-limited nature of this study did not lend itself to a robust case study of this four-decades-old institution within the university. The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of leaders and participants in the AADC to understand their impressions of the experience relative to CRT, human rights as related to CRT, and distributed leadership.

Limitations

This basic interpretive qualitative study was focused on a particular setting, and findings cannot be generalized. Results had limited usefulness to other researchers who would like to consider the impact of multicultural arts and academic programming in other settings. The transferability of any findings identified in this study to another institution may depend on the specific characteristics of that institution. This study included the dance company of the first and only African American academic and arts institution at a major U.S. university.

The personal characteristics of artists and academic leaders can vary from college to college. Some artists and leaders may be more visionary in terms of global unity, may be more risk averse in terms of teaching and presenting sensitive topics, or may have different relationships with campus and community allies. The unique personal characteristics of study participants may limit this study's usefulness to other researchers.

The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of leadership and participation in the AADC. The data collection process for this study included recruitment and interviews conducted via social media and telephone. The absence of nonverbal indicators may have limited the data obtained.

Significance

There is value to the academy when a project achieves its founding mission and attains a measure of sustainability, which may be instructive to others seeking to build educational models that fill gaps in the curriculum. The institution and its stakeholders also benefit when the accomplishments of one of its historically significant programs or departments are researched and documented for posterity. At the micro level, individuals and society may benefit from a greater understanding of the experiences or strategies that promote positive attributes of leadership and culturally relevant education. In the context of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), findings of the study may be used to advance knowledge in the discipline, expand practice, and inform policy decisions.

Other implications for positive social change include the possibility of new or renewed funding and other support for Black studies, ethnic studies, and/or arts education programming, which have been declining and under attack in recent years across the United States (Nicol, 2013). From a human rights perspective, increased awareness of the role of culturally relevant education in harming or healing individuals, campus communities, and social organizations may encourage other educational leaders to replicate this model or develop their own. Another potential human rights reparative

implication could be increased interest in research addressing the potential benefits for all learners when Africentric curricula are mainstreamed rather than suppressed. Any potential outcomes that contribute to increased understanding of marginalized peoples' contributions advance the discourse in academia relative to what is possible and what is necessary for more equitable pedagogy and praxis in education.

Summary

The preceding chapter introduced my study and provided the background, problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. This chapter also included the conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. In Chapter 2 I provide a review of recent literature pertinent to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The global economy has relied on exploiting Black labor, creativity, and resilience to sustain itself (Asante, 2011; Bowles, 2014; Harper, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Segregated and often inferior educational systems have played a central role in this dynamic (Bailey & Zita, 2007; Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Daniels, 2005; Picower, 2009) by providing tacit permission to treat African descendants as less than human in their experiences throughout society (Thésée & Carr, 2012), on campuses (Bowman, 2010), in the workforce (Bailey & Zita, 2007), and in their own communities (Asante, 2011). Messaging via cultural arts and education has alternately affirmed African people's humanity and imaged Blackness in a negative manner, sustaining a distorted view of a subordinated people (Museus & Harris, 2010). Research has shown the imposition of Whiteness as the measure of worth has been deeply imbedded in curricula and praxis as part of institutionalized racism across the globe (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Museus & Harris, 2010). This has created erroneous low expectations, prejudices, and resistance to the "other" in disciplines including the arts (Bowman, 2010; Yancy, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Conversely, research has supported the benefits of instruction that facilitates students' cultural sensitivity and emotional development, and arts education has played a role in this (Stephan & Stephan, 2013; Stephens & Hermond, 2009).

The need for educational leadership to prepare multicultural students for 21st-century careers in a global economy is high (Colman, 2006; Donnelly, 2013); however, there appears to be a dearth of research focused on the human right to culturally relevant education and its attendant benefits to individuals and society. Furthermore, awareness of

the experiences of those who participate in African-centered arts education and its possible benefits as a reparative human rights learning opportunity is limited (Bowman, 2010; Nicol, 2013; Yancy, 2004). My interpretive qualitative study focused on the AADC credit-bearing academic course and related performing ensemble to provide a better understanding of the benefits of that approach. The AADC is one of three ensembles of the Indiana University African American Arts Institute that is committed to promoting and preserving African American culture through performance, education, creative activity, research, and outreach (Indiana University, 2018).

The current study contributed to the discourse by addressing how culturally relevant educational praxis can advance the understanding of experiences of participants and leaders in the AADC academic course and performing ensemble. This study was timely because the United Nations (2013) declared 2015 the beginning of the International Decade for People of African Descent. This benchmark in the international human rights framework represents a call to action for critical assessment of the current reality of African descendants in the global diaspora, including the application of a human rights lens for educators responsible for pedagogy and praxis (International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, 2016; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). A thorough critique necessitated the inclusion of cultural arts and academic models as part of the analysis given their role as expressive, transformative components of Black life (Daniels, 2005) inseparable from individuals' stories and struggles despite historical efforts at disruption or erasure (Nettleford, 2009; Nicol, 2013; Skelly, 2009). Black performance art remains a powerful mechanism for healing and educating to resist

oppressive and racist constructs that promote one dimensional perspectives of humanity (Asante, 2011). The International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) presents an opportunity to investigate the educational context of Africentric arts and academics and to synthesize findings related to best human rights educational solutions and praxis (Thésée & Carr, 2012).

In my review of the literature, I analyzed recent studies and articles on critical race (Delgado & Sefancic, 2012), human rights (Donnelly, 2012), and distributed leadership theories (Leithwood et al., 2009). Consistent themes in the literature reinforced the idea that the lack of a culturally relevant and inclusive educational system sustains racial discrimination and social justice inequities in U.S. society (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015; Harper, 2012; Picower, 2009). Other themes supported the concept of culturally relevant and equitable educational content as a means of achieving human rights for all (Bishop, Kavanagh, & Palit, 2010; Bowman, 2011; Donnelly, 2013). Study of African-centered cultural arts revealed shared leadership approaches to exploring themes of decolonizing the mind and the academy (Bailey & Zita, 2007; Daniels, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In the following sections of this chapter, I present my literature search strategy, conceptual framework, synthesis of key studies, and a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a literature search on African-centered education benefits, barriers, and issues using the following key words: *culturally relevant education*, *culturally relevant teaching*, *culturally relevant learning*, *culturally relevant curriculum*, *Africentric*

education, *Africentric leadership*, and *human rights in education*. I also executed these searches using the alternative term *Afrocentric.* I used Google, Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest and SAGE search engines, and key words served as a guide to finding peer-reviewed publications related to my topic. Publication dates ranged from 1960 to 2017. Older sources were needed to capture the origin and guiding principles of CRT, human rights theory as part of CRT, and distributed leadership theory. It was also important to capture the historical perspective of African-centered education and CRT successes, challenges, and evolution over the years.

Conceptual Framework

The guiding principles for my research were grounded in CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), human rights as it relates to CRT (Donnelly, 2013), and distributed leadership theory (Leithwood et al., 2009). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) considered the manner in which educational context and content impact students, including their academic and cocurricular development. CRT asserts that the overarching effect of institutionalized racism confers significant privileges to some human beings while significantly disadvantaging others based on their racial heritage and historical experience (Delgado et al., 2012). The tenets of CRT assume a social justice and human rights frame that validates the need for understanding racial affirmation versus subordination as a means of repairing the damage of generations of human rights abuses and attitudes (Delgado et al., 2012; Donnelly, 2013).

Donnelly (2013) suggested the applicability of human rights theory and practice to the exploration of a cross-cultural educational experience in the AADC, which requires

an understanding of the unique role of cultural and artistic expression in addition to traditional classroom lecture and interactive discussion formats for academic instruction and assessment. This human rights lens provided a broader context consistent with and expanding on the civil rights origins of CRT. This conceptual framework provided a means to develop the interview protocol and interpret responses to understand the experiences of participants recruited from a diverse group of students, alumni, and educators studying and expressing the African aesthetic in a university program.

Leithwood et al.'s (2009) distributed leadership model provided the conceptual framework for considering leadership and stakeholder interactions and collaboration among participants in the study. This model helped me identify how the experiences in this program are designed and implemented to foster collaborative problem-solving and appreciation of Black people's rich heritage and contributions to the world.

Critical Race Theory

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) highlighted race as central to U.S. policy and practices. Delgado and Stefancic's theoretical focus included a race-based systematic analysis of institutions and practices to understand the foundational aspect of race-based discrimination that impacts individuals and groups to their benefit or detriment. I applied Delgado and Stefancic's analysis to educational approaches and content and to systemic issues within educational institutions. CRT evolved from the legal civil rights framework and developed into a broad long-term movement "of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). The CRT lens is used to look at educational structures and

outcomes from a vantage point that considers history, economics, cultural context, group- and self-interest, perceptions, and the subconscious rooted in the construct of race as a primary delineator of entitlement and lack thereof. CRT is used to challenge assumptions of equity, fairness, and neutrality in systems including the field of education, despite the historical denial and downplaying of the prominent role that race plays in educational culture and outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Race and racism. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that U.S. society is preoccupied with race based on skin color, but that systemic racism is difficult to address because it is multifaceted and includes a high level of denial. Despite the myriad negative and discriminatory experiences of people of color (Picower, 2009), there is a refusal in U.S. society to acknowledge all but the most blatant incidents of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This creates a serious challenge to eradicating something so problematic because resistance to acknowledging the phenomenon is pervasive (Davis et al., 2015).

The second aspect of CRT beyond the issue of color-blindness, is the concept of interest convergence. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and other CRT theorists identified disincentives to eradicating racism because of the material ways in which racist practices benefit White elites, as well as the psychological manner in which the dominant segments of society also benefit. This feature of CRT means that often changes that seem to be made to curtail anti-Black racism are undertaken only if they simultaneously advance the interest of one of the dominant groups, such as when a person of color is hired to accrue benefits to the corporation due to quotas or minority status benefits.

Another key element of CRT is that race is a social construct that actors downplay or elevate at their convenience to manipulate situations or outcomes (Delgado &Stefancic, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also recognized "differential racialization" (p. 9), which refers to the fact that different racial groups are profiled and characterized with varying stereotypes at different times throughout history to fit certain narratives of the dominant group at the time. Examples of this are shifting views of Muslim people as terrorists, whereas they were previously viewed as exotic or repressed, or the trend toward labeling Mexican people as illegal immigrants, criminals, and rapists, whereas in prior decades the same bigoted group may have characterized them as harmless, shiftless, and lazy. Another example of differential racialization cited by Delgado and Stefancic, is how the social climate varies to target or disfavor Black people with a contradictory range of negative stereotypes at key historical junctures, such as imaging the happy and childlike enslaved African descendant-servant personality, which transitioned to that of a dangerous monster or menacing animal requiring violent control and severe oppression. Similarly, the narrative changed for a disfavored Asian group during the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

A related CRT feature concerns the intersectionality of race and other descriptors such as Black and female and/or gay Latinx, which implies overlapping and sometimes conflicting identities. A final tenet of CRT holds that minority status confers a unique "presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). This is the idea that living in Black skin and experiencing life through this cultural lens in a society where race matters ensures that there are things people of color would

know that White people would not. Sharing those perspectives, to the extent one chooses to do so, can be helpful in illuminating participants' perceptions of the impact of racism in society (Robinson, 2004). My interview protocol included questions designed to capture feedback related to the experiences of participants of many races and nationalities participating in the AADC, a unique arts and academic component of an internationally recognized mainstream Midwestern U.S. university. This interview protocol was designed to add to the body of knowledge documenting counternarratives to expand on the status quo of mainstream Eurocentric storytelling, that does not affirm nor include the positive attributes of Black experience and cultural capital as a central focus.

Idealism and realism in CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggested racial justice activists are divided in their consideration of how racism manifests and what remedies there may be for such a deeply entrenched phenomenon. They proposed that there are two schools of thought, idealism and realism, which vary deeply in their stated opinions of what it will take to fully expose the depth of racism and how the damage it has wrought to humankind, including people on both sides of the color line, might be undone.

Idealism. The CRT idealists suggest that discrimination on the basis of race can be addressed by changing the system which shapes prevailing attitudes that confer superiority on the dominant group while deeming non-white people as "less than" across all positive measures from intelligence, to integrity, to work ethic and beyond (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 21). For this category of critical race theorists, it would conceivably be sufficient to update school curricula, media communications, public education, and

professional training generally, to include more positive stories of other races. The purpose of this approach would be to correct the omissions of diverse people's contributions and value to the human experience and collective wellbeing (Willis & Willis, 2015). Robinson (2004) stated CRT idealists suggest that providing more information to counteract the missing or even negative racial narratives, will have a corrective effect on the racial disparities and conflicts, essentially believing that then all will be well.

Realism. CRT realists are also known as economic determinists because of the connection they make to material gains or penalties accruing to groups of people based on race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). These critical race theorists in this category, viewed the potential to change deep-seated generational attitudes and discriminatory practices very differently. CRT realists noted the hatred and psychological harm evidenced in many manifestations of race-based positions and, in my view, they accurately characterized this as a more serious problem than just one of ignorance and lack of exposure to other truths. They acknowledged that descriptions and expanded narratives are important but stated emphatically that "racism is much more than a collection of unfavorable impressions of members of other groups" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 21). This segment of the CRT proponents focuses on the seminal role and function which racism serves in conferring status and privilege in our society. These racial hierarchies as highlighted by CRT realists dictate people's ability to thrive and succeed in life. It comes down to power and privilege based on skin color, and the

willingness of those who are born into it, to maintain that advantage while turning a color-blind eye to the serious negative effects on those who were not.

CRT realists identified the genesis of anti-Black prejudice at the point of chattel slavery's inception, as a result of the capitalist demand for (free) labor. Prior to this fateful occurrence, "educated Europeans held a generally positive attitude toward Africans, recognizing that African civilizations were highly advanced with vast libraries and centers of learning. Indeed, North Africans pioneered mathematics, medicine, and astronomy long before Europeans had much knowledge of them" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 21). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), by extension, conquering nations' universal practice has been to demonize and dehumanize those they seek to dominate and exploit (p. 21). The history books and popular media are full of narratives supporting notions of racial inferiority for non-Whites. These "facts" are then used to rationalize subordinating minoritized peoples and confiscating their land, property, intellectual property, and even their bodies. Against this backdrop, it is clear what is at stake when school curricula and teacher education praxis fail to include the perspectives, experiences, histories, and stories from, and of, non-European peoples as a core part of equitable, inclusive education.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and other leading critical race theorists centered their work on the idea that racism confers privilege and status to members of a favored race while disadvantaging others. CRT frames the impact of racial discrimination as having directly shaped institutional practices for centuries including lasting influences on current societal and educational praxis. These theorists argued that the systemic nature of

racism with its disparate treatment and outcomes, affects students, teachers, and the larger society negatively by forcing a contrived dominance and superiority via lived experiences and curriculum alike. CRT challenges this dominant ideology by refuting White supremacy and challenging its foundational influence on Western education as it is implemented globally.

Intersectionality of human rights and CRT. As noted, CRT originated in the field of legal scholarship before being expanded to other disciplines (Delgado et al., (2012). As a result, much of CRT analysis and theoretical discourse exists within the context of civil rights law, which is the prevailing framework for racial discrimination and redress in the US court system. Human rights theory and principles are inclusive of civil rights and political rights, but are much broader, including economic, social and cultural rights (United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 2012).

Distributed Leadership Theory

This theoretical frame supplements the CRT perspective to explore the ways in which an intentionally collaborative, shared leadership approach to teaching and learning may have impacted the outcomes of the AADC experience. The addition of distributed leadership to this study provides a specific focus on a leadership style that differs from the traditional Eurocentric authoritarian, teacher-centered praxis. (Day & Harris, 2002; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). This affords insight into a leadership model which also reflects the communal values of African culture and society that undergird the mission of AADC and its parent departments.

Leithwood et al.'s (2009) distributed leadership theory provides context for the universal principles of equity for all human beings which is a human rights concept, and the benefits to be gained from shared leadership and collective decision making respectively. They reviewed the research, explored these ideas, and claimed evidence of key themes in the internationalized arena of education for our increasingly global society. They also explained the necessity of re-visiting the concept of distributed, or shared, leadership as a necessary response to the complex challenges facing schools and educators in the new millennium. These theorists advanced the idea of tapping into the collective expertise of a wider range of stakeholders and contributors than most of the earlier educational leadership models have traditionally engaged (Mezirow, 2009). Leithwood et al. (2009) explored the idea that the stereotypical single charismatic or heroic male leader, who holds ultimate power over all organizational decisions, and in many sectors of society manipulates that power to his own advantage and the detriment of others, is the antithesis of the distributed leadership theoretical approach. Conflicting understanding and definitions of this theory range from the descriptive to the normative. Leithwood et al. characterized some goals of distributed leadership as seeking to change an existing leadership structure by broadening it in some manner, while others are focusing more on gaining a better understanding of the nature of leadership as it currently exists in a school or other organization. According to Leithwood et al., the concept of distributed leadership is as old as humankind, or at least extends as far back as the earliest attempts to organize people toward a common goal. They suggested that the recent renewed interest in an old idea can be attributed to: (a) disillusionment with bureaucratic

structures and authoritarian leadership models that invest decision making in one iconic individual, (b) increasing recognition of the productivity of informal or even invisible leaders from a range of sources inside organizations, and (c) the necessity of flatter, less hierarchical leadership models to build leadership capacity while sharing workload responsibilities and ownership of organizational success as complexity increases in the school or other institutional setting (Leithwood, et al., 2009, p. 1).

In this next section I explain the core elements of distributed leadership theory which include shared power or control, hybridization, collective work and responsibility, positive consequences, negative consequences, and leading from the margins.

Shared power or control. High involvement, or participatory leadership must be distinguished from merely consulting with one's non-leader co-workers or joint decision-making on an occasional basis. According to Leithwood et al. (2009), true participative or distributed leadership involves substantial access to the power and rewards connected with the organizations' work. Ritchie and Woods (2007) stated that control over aspects of decision making which directly impact one's own job was an empowering component of distributed leadership as a function of job enrichment. The most challenging aspect of this theoretical frame was identified as the conundrum that when implementing a distributed leadership model, it can be difficult to determine who does what. In the school setting, for example, Grubb and Flessa (2006) identified questions about whether select practices are best fulfilled by certain roles or people versus other team members. Leithwood et al. (2009) raised the question as to whether certain patterns of distribution are preferable to others in terms of productivity.

Hybridization. The idea of hybridization refers to adaptational leadership patterns described in the literature such as the range of options for how schools might configure their leadership model on a changing continuum to meet evolving site-based needs (Leithwood et al., 2009). Examples provided by Day and Harris (2002) included emergent leadership, individual driven, shared, self-led across a cooperative, and codified interdependent role sharing. At different times, the same organization might adopt a different primary distributed leadership model to suit evolving needs. The evolutionary view of distributed leadership, and the expectation of changing circumstances is a core assumption of hybridization in this context.

Collective work and responsibility. It seems intuitive that a shared workload would likely yield the ideal scenario for a high performing team as the solo leader model gives way to that of distributed leadership amid increasingly complex management demands. This does not imply that adapting to the participatory model is without challenges, however. As Leithwood et al. (2009) noted, there are both positives and negatives to consider when embracing the idea of distributed leadership.

Positive consequences. The numerous potential positive consequences of shared or distributed leadership include a more equitable and manageable division of labor. Another benefit is the likely reduction of errors given the multiple viewpoints and information which exceeds that available to a single leader. Other potential pluses are the increased capacity-building and utilization of talents from all levels in the organization as well as awareness of interdependence and possible increased commitment to shared strategies and plans. Finally, the job of leadership development, built-in succession

planning, and enhanced self-determination based on voice and input could lead to improved results and retention (Leithwood et al., 2009).

Negative consequences. Potential benefits notwithstanding, Leithwood et al., (2009) also found negative information on the student impact from shared or distributed leadership. The negative consequences which surfaced in Leithwood et al.'s research ranged from some students' confusion about purpose and mission, to exactly what needed to be done for productive action in the school. This could reflect a simple lack of clear communication about shared decisions, or an actual lack of clarity and agreement among the various leaders. These potential risks merit significant intentionality in terms of distributed leadership participants clearly agreeing to goals, strategies, and tactics for implementing plans, as well as consistent means of communicating those agreements to all stakeholders with specificity and clarity, according to Leithwood et al. These researchers also found the potential downside of increasing teachers' responsibilities without a corresponding increase in their power or influence. These insights highlight the need for additional research to further identify and dissect such findings with a goal of alleviating potential negative consequences of distributed leadership.

Leading from the margins. Leithwood et al. (2009) noted an increasing appreciation for informal roles in the educational setting as one factor behind the distributed leadership resurgence. This aspect of shared leadership taps into what is often underutilized or even unused capacity of individuals who typically have significant expertise and even influence, despite not being in formal positions of authority within the organization. In the educational setting, for example, this practice can more fully engage

teachers and even students in shared goal setting and collaborative team approaches to problem solving. Importantly, Leithwood et al. (2009) pointed out the benefit of accessing a wider range of diverse ideas, skillsets, and teaching styles to support organizational excellence in an increasingly diverse, rapidly changing multicultural, multiethnic, and multinational society.

Rationale for the Framework

In short, CRT recognizes the seminal role which racism plays in this society including omitting accurate positive reflections of minoritized cultures and advancing a world view which sustains White privilege in the academy and society at large. The human rights lens brings a broader context and intersectionality of CRT with economic, social, and cultural rights in addition to legal rights, which is important for this study of a cultural arts and education entity. Distributed leadership theory considers the merits of shared leadership and collective decision-making versus authoritarian top down leadership. The conceptual framework for this study is based on a combination of CRT, human rights as an extension of CRT, and distributed leadership theory, which worked together to provide the framework for my research questions.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

A review of the prevalent themes in this section of the literature review outlined the educational importance of the arts and illuminated how cross-cultural learning enhances individual and collective development. Within the final thematic area, I discussed challenges with human rights and distributed leadership in the context of the literature. In this section I also provided an overview of what is known versus what is not

yet explored in terms of students' and leaders' perceptions of their experiences of culturally relevant educational praxis. This assessment helped inform the relevance of my study to fill a gap in the research regarding the same.

Educational Importance of the Arts

Ample research has verified the educational role and significance of the visual and performing arts in both formal and informal settings (Arthur, Asante & Opoku-Asare, (2015); Bishop et al., 2010; Colman, 2006; Hains-Wesson & Campbell, 2014; Paltridge et al., 2012; Rossing, 2013). Whether providing information designed to commemorate or continue traditional processes and beliefs within a given culture or to diversify or challenge entrenched perspectives, the arts have been shown to be integral tools for dissemination of information and ideas. The motivational and educational function of music, dance, theater, visual art, and humor has at times been subordinated to the entertainment or revenue generation expectations for the arts and culture (Bishop et al., 2010; Hains-Wesson, 2014; Rossing, 2013). However, research documents the arts' far-reaching impact on the spirit and psyches of presenter and audiences alike, from exposing racial realities in pursuit of justice, to sharing and reinforcing cultural traditions among multicultural or non-western demographics, for example (Asante et al., 2015; Ferry, Kydd & Boyles, 2012; Frambach, Driessen, Chan, & van der Vleuten, 2012).

Arthur et al. (2015) emphasized the communications role of the arts in Ghanaian Asante society, which conveys and sustains the values and social norms in teaching religious traditions, historical record-keeping, and leadership development. In this context, performance arts were used as pedagogical tools to maintain the practices and

core processes for leadership development, decision-making, and socio-political interaction across generations. Arthur et al. underscored the motivational and educational function of the arts in politics and leadership development while emphasizing the integrated and interconnected nature of the arts. Similarly, Bishop et al. (2010), Hains-Wesson and Campbell (2014), noted the educational role and significance of visual and performing arts in both formal and informal settings. Importantly, Arthur et al. identified the integral nature of dance to daily living in Ghanaian Asante society in maintaining cultural values and norms. There was compelling evidence in Arthur et al.'s study of the positive impact of the arts on the psyche and human spirit.

In the university setting, Bishop et al. (2010) found that the arts serve as a bridge that connects across disciplines and links the campus community, with a positive impact on recruitment, engagement, and retention, and on students and staff alike. This reinforced the idea in Bowman's (2011) study that human interaction via personal experiences had an even greater influence than curricular changes on students' development both behaviorally and attitudinally, also supported by Rossing's (2013) findings on scholarly connections linking humor and racial justice arts activism. The Bishop et al., study also recommended the use of distributive participatory planning methods for campus arts or creative hubs to ensure full engagement and inclusion in programming.

Arthur et al. (2015) clarified and confirmed that certain global traditions serve functions of the arts beyond entertainment. In Arthur et al.'s study, the political and educational purpose of visual and performance art, including garments, was an integral

component of daily life and crucial for maintaining cultural traditions across generations. This study underscored the opportunity to use this non-Western experience to benefit all learners, reinforcing that dance and music are not only for entertainment, and Eurocentric cultural values are not the only measure by which to assess other practices. Like Arthur et al.'s findings, Bishop et al. (2010) highlighted the need to center culturally relevant practices and people given the sense that their voices and perspectives are too often absent. In the next section I discuss cross-cultural learning with regard to development of the individual and collective.

Cross-Cultural Learning in Individual and Collective Development

The artistic discipline serves an important personal role for individual participants or audiences, and a valuable social function in building community among people of different backgrounds (Arthur et al., 2015; Bishop et al., 2010; Colman, 2016; Hains-Wesson & Campbell, 2014; Paltridge et al., 2012; Rossing, 2013). Cross-cultural research provides a means to understand the opportunities for transitional educational development related to diversity and inclusion in our global society (Rose-Redwood, 2010; VanTassel-Baska, 2013). The human right to culturally appropriate curricula becomes more imperative as distance education internationalizes and exports a Western worldview (Nyoni & Butale, 2013; Rose-Redwood, 2010). This attention to the minoritized student experience rather than focusing on the benefits of diversity for developing the majority population, underscores an important motivation for improving on the Euro-dominant status quo, versus just discussing the existing cultural values and

norms (Bishop et al., Bowman, 2011; Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Colman, 2006; Davis et al., 2015; Gates, 2014)

Individual benefits. In this section, I analyzed the individual benefits of arts-based and general cross-cultural learning. The increasingly participatory nature of creative production has transformed how the arts are experienced and consumed by individual people (Bishop et al., 2010). This phenomenon situates audience members and arts practitioners in a new paradigm which engages everyone as potential creators of the arts, thus facilitating innovation and cross-cultural learning opportunities for all who have access to creative centers or tools. This ability for the agency of participants to assert themselves more readily at some level, creates the possibility for disparate cultural identities and expression to be showcased and explored. This, in turn, may allow a measure of self-determination previously unheard of in our historically Euro-dominant cultural spaces (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Colman, 2006). Bishop et al. (2010) for example, identified a missed opportunity in their case study of a New York university creative hub which failed to engage the multicultural community in which the campus is situated, while also ignoring the diverse student population in designing programming to encourage collaboration and cross-cultural learning. The students were perceived to be a captive audience to consume whatever arts and cultural education options were placed before them, yet no effort was made to involve students or the culturally diverse surrounding community in cultural arts programming decisions. This phenomenon of presenting the status quo and dominant cultural view follows the general operating principles and thought process of the academy, wherein race and culture-based

considerations have been largely ignored in school leadership standards, curricular, and co-curricular praxis (Davis et al., 2015; Nyoni & Butale, 2013; Paltridge et al., 2012).

Frambach et al. (2012) found that problem-based learning requires a cultural lens to effectively assess differences in mastery of teaching and learning. This supports the assertions of numerous scholars that rather than a deficit view, we should respect the fact that unique experiences, backgrounds, and norms of one's culture impact their responses and comfort level with paradigms from the dominant culture which may differ vastly from their own (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Davis et al., 2015; Nyoni & Batale, 2013; Rose-Redwood 2010; Rossing, 2013). Colman (2006) observed the significant benefits of contact and collaboration through art making, similar to the merits of direct human interaction espoused by Bowman (2011) in understanding diverse perspectives and cultures. Interestingly, Clifford and Montgomery (2014) and Ferry et al. (2012) also observed thoughtful reflection and increased understanding of social dynamics outside the traditional Western higher education mindset in online student discussion posts and videoconferencing by distance learners over time even without the proximity of in person shared experiences or co-learning.

Research verifies the support which participation in, or consumption of, the cultural arts can provide toward developing a sense of global awareness, appreciation, and citizenship (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Colman, 2006; Ferry et al., 2012). In this increasingly interdependent global society, the ability for each person to respect differences and promote peaceful interaction is vitally important which highlights the value of educational approaches geared toward breaking down stereotypes and

challenging the acceptance of privileged minority dominance of resources and power (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Colman, 2006; Ferry et al., 2012; Frambach et al., 2012).

Bowman (2011) found that well-designed college diversity experiences could broaden intergroup empathy and expand cultural knowledge, ultimately contributing to improved behavior. Clifford and Montgomery (2014) identified attitudes and perceptions of traditional western higher education and its historically elitist role in critiquing society. According to their study participants, this was found to potentially be incompatible with the recent reorienting of curriculum and expanding diversity of services globally. The concern was the assumptive practice of exporting existing courses to capitalize on a shifting market economy around the world with no effort to develop culturally relevant materials. Learnings from Colman (2006) echoed some of the same sentiments as Clifford and Montgomery's study implications, in that respondents' reflections on cross-cultural learning indicated that inequities made it difficult. Navigating the Eurocentric status quo in academia proved a challenge for those not of the dominant culture. Interestingly, students and researchers bridged the language and cultural divides, but it was noted that there is an opportunity to positively influence the perceived empowerment or lack thereof for various cultural or national groups. This they highlighted in the lesson content on human rights to life and dignity for all, which was not a reality for some participants, thus a contradiction.

Collective benefits. Collective benefits of arts-based and general cross-cultural learning also are noteworthy. Bishop et al. (2010) pointed out the potential benefits of college performing arts centers to engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni for myriad

purposes from recruitment to retention. New friendships and new knowledge as well as an increased understanding of different people were important measures of the outcomes from arts engagement on campus, according to that study. Cross-cultural arts experiences reflecting diverse content and participants can provide both practitioners and audience members with an internationalized frame of reference to expand their thinking about cultural capital, who matters, and why (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Colman, 2006; Davis et al., 2015). Cross-cultural arts engagement affords the opportunity to express and experience disparate ideas and worldviews, developing skills and possibly even the expectation of a more inclusive global society beyond creative development. This could conceivably influence a higher comfort level with participatory leadership or shared governance as described in Bowman, (2010), Frambach et al., (2012), Gates, (2014), Rose-Redwood, (2010), and VanTassel-Baska, (2013).

In addition to greater awareness and sensitivity to social and racial injustice with a presumption that groups might become more proactive about transforming such realities for a more equitable society, the collective benefits of arts based and general cross-cultural learning promise further potential benefits. Through a better understanding of others' experiences, values and beliefs, those with a dominant worldview who perhaps unwittingly block non-dominant cultures in macro and micro ways, can begin to dismantle the barriers to inclusion, equity, and justice in institutional cultures which they influence (Rose-Redwood, 2010; Rossing, 2013; Van-Tassel-Baska, 2013). This would comport with a human rights approach to education. Consequently, also, any internalized inferiority which marginalized individuals or groups may feel, such as students struggling

due to poverty and or lack of access, would ultimately be offset by the increased knowledge of their cultural capital, capability and potential gifted status despite the difficult race-based reality that counts non-dominant cultures as less worthy, across multiple measures of merit (Rossing, 2013; VanTassel-Baska, 2013).

In addition to considering the role of cross-cultural learning in individual and collective development, it is also important to explore challenges and opportunities deriving from human rights and distributed leadership principles. The following section explores these dynamics.

Challenges and Opportunities With Human Rights and Distributive Leadership

Resistance to change, systemic racism, privilege, and lack of equity across multiple levels such as gender, age, and class, are recognized as barriers to address in evolving toward a more socially just society (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Ferry, 2012; Bowman, 2010; VanTassel-Baska, 2013). Conversely, cross-cultural research and experiential learning affords the opportunity to enlighten and counter supremacist narratives through direct knowledge which challenges the status quo. From a human rights perspective, all people, cultures, and customs have the same level of value and entitlement to resources and full development to their highest potential (UDHR, 1948). The landscape of higher education and the halls of leadership, which it ultimately provides access to in capitalist society, too often appear to contradict the notion of human rights as a universal set of norms which applies equitably to all people irrespective of their race, gender, age, or economic status (Donnelly, 2013). The ideas of shared governance, inclusion, and distributed leadership are also more of an ideal than a reality

in too many institutions of higher learning, where power and privilege based on tradition are not easily relinquished (Leithwood et al., 2009).

Bishop et al. (2010) conducted a case study which identified key opportunities to leverage the assets represented by the campus' multicultural student body and host community as well as the creative arts hub which was ideally situated for interaction and co-created learning. The challenge of a status quo approach to planning and programming which was executed by staff and administrators independently of the various stakeholders, represented a serious challenge to mutual respect, participation, and non-discrimination which are core human rights principles (Donnelly, 2013). The valuable human resources may as well have been invisible, while the cultural arts programming continued to fall short of audience participation goals (Bishop et al.). By comparison, Arthur et al. (2015) recognized and affirmed the motivational and educational function of the performing arts in politics and leadership development and demonstrated both human rights principles and distributed leadership ideals in the process. This served to inform citizens in Ghanaian Asante society about the manner in which the arts are traditionally used as more than entertainment, to educate, train, and maintain culture norms.

Colman (2006) provided evidence of the human rights experiential learning benefits that can accrue through direct contact and collaboration of youth for example. Colman noted however, that a temporary setting in which peace and equity are modeled, does not change the serious risks and reality when a marginalized group returns to an apartheid or war zone (Davis et al., 2015; Colman, 2006). However, even short-term educational experiences in formal and or informal settings can provide a sense of what is

possible over time, with enough interest in transforming to a more equitable human rights approach to valuing and mainstreaming diversity as globalization changes the nature of the field of education. As Rossing (2013) noted, the visual and performing arts, particularly humor, have a special role to play in humanizing people who have been historically marginalized or even demonized, just as Arthur et al. (2015), Gates (2014), and others highlighted the value of arts in education to address issues and experiences among students with vast cultural differences. This dynamic can be assumed to apply to faculty, staff, and administrators as well.

Multicultural Experiences in Higher Education

Additional research relative to studying multicultural and multiracial societies and curriculum development reflecting the experiences of divergent student populations emerged out of Nyoni and Butale's (2013) study. Recommendations for students both inside and outside the mainstream Western worldview were raised given the proliferation of transnational institutions (TNIs) and transnational education (TNE) dominating the field of education through technology and globalization. Recommendations to explore and preserve indigenous knowledge systems in higher education included questions about whether transnational education providers attempted to address diversity needs, how to address the dynamic of capitalist priorities for globalization in education in a business which elevates profits over expenditure with resulting questions about the impact to graduates' global competitiveness versus their local relevance, and concerns of uniformity and quality outcomes for transnational graduates.

Studying cross-cultural interactions involving international graduate students' perceptions of diversity initiatives at a single institution led to the recommendation of studies on structural diversity, diversity programming and initiatives, diverse interactions, and barriers thereto (Rose-Redwood, 2010). Such findings were anticipated to support "higher education faculty, administrators and policy-makers interested in improving an institution's diversity practices so that students have more meaningful cross-cultural educational exchanges" (Rose-Redwood, 2010, p. 389) and ultimately better prepare students for life in the multicultural global society of today.

In addition to the importance of international and cross-cultural experiences, as a well-documented positive praxis (Frambach et al., 2012; Gates, 2014), the specific nature or content of cross-cultural exchanges can have significance, as evident in Rossing (2013). Rossing provided an example of utilizing humor as an artistic style or technique to examine and expose possible resistance to racial realities. Rossing's study on the humanizing effect of using humor to open up more spaces to social and racial justice inquiry suggests further research could be useful to determine whether these findings extend across other artists, art forms, and venues including collegiate departments. I resolved to listen for this device during the interview process to learn whether humor was used in the curriculum or performance content and teaching practices as a specific tool within the AADC.

Assuming some of the interviewees in my study could have been characterized as gifted, I noted recommendations from VanTassel-Baska (2013) who explored cross-cultural research for gifted students, including what interventions best worked for them,

what their psychological concerns were in the program, and career path variables that surfaced for them in the program.

In terms of the post-baccalaureate time frame and career path variables, one specific recommendation was that more studies are needed of the process by which careers are presented, chosen, and adopted by gifted individuals. Also, given the importance of teacher efficacy for the overall success of gifted learners, VanTassel-Baska (2013) recommend more studies to track fidelity of implementation in the application of differentiated instruction. Specific recommendations included gaining data on successful models for developing teacher competency in teaching gifted learners. VanTassel-Baska raised the question of the extent to which outcomes could be documented in practice cross-culturally, which merits research.

None of the articles I reviewed presented insights into higher education student and educational leaders' experiences of culturally relevant non-Eurocentric curricula and their perceptions thereof. My study may help fill this gap in the literature and will extend knowledge in the field regarding how African centered arts and academic education factors into the stated need for such educational praxis as part of a more equitable approach to teaching, learning, and life itself, in a world where clashing cultures must learn to peacefully coexist (Bećirović, 2012). Direct feedback through qualitative interviews with participants and leaders of the AADC can yield additional knowledge for use in the discipline both now and into the future.

Research Gap and Recommendations From the Literature

The empirical articles reviewed included key recommendations for future research and practical application within the academy and community at large. Arthur et al. (2015) stated that additional anthropological studies regarding the function of performance art in the political structures of other cultures and ethnic groups would be extremely valuable. According to Arthur et al., such studies would have significant educational merit not only for the immediate groups who have been directly engaged, but also for anyone who is interested in the broader question of what role the arts play in the unique evolution of cultures around the globe.

Bishop et al. (2010) recommended that senior administrative leadership at a major university acknowledge the varied stakeholder pool for the creative arts and culture community on their campus. In expanding beyond the insular focus of planners targeting finite student audiences, Bishop et al. noted the university could lead a broader vision for a creative campus. They recommended this approach as a means of recognizing, embracing, and fully leveraging the surrounding community and the diverse multicultural influences of the campus constituents alike. In this way, the creative campus might become a hub that engages, reflects, and is intended for the entire community rather than just being geographically located in a city yet disconnected from it in reality. Bishop et al., further noted that administrators and faculty stated student engagement was important, yet they did not collaborate on how to achieve student connections to the creative offerings, nor were students themselves included in the ideation and planning process to resolve this disconnect. Bishop et al.'s recommendation to include the various

stakeholders in decision-making echoes other recommendations supporting distributed leadership thus strengthening the disparate parties' sense of ownership in the creative campus. Collaborative planning had not occurred in a decade at that site, but the idea of disparate satellite campus creative hubs' leadership sharing best practices, resources, cross-promoting, and even co-presenting cultural arts programming was well received. A study on the outcomes of such a process, if employed, could yield learning for applicability in other higher education institutions.

Bishop et al. (2010) further recommended the use of technology, electronic media distribution platforms, and social media to both create and deliver participatory arts experiences to leverage 21st century tools and learning styles. Bishop et al. recommended exploring the use of technology to provide greater access to arts programming by bridging the distance between multiple satellite sites of a city-wide commuter campus, supporting similar recommendations to harness technology to connect students in other countries to various live arts and education experiences in other cultures, and to each other (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Ferry et al., 2012). They also recommended exploration of various profitability models beyond the traditional kindergarten through 12th (K-12) grade arts education research focus to generate more information on the financial scenarios to support arts programming at the collegiate level, which they further suggested performing arts centers and college art departments themselves should lead. A final recommendation from Bishop et al. requires research into how to connect the arts to the core mission for colleges and universities which the authors acknowledged requires collegiate executive administration, arts department leaders, performing arts center

directors, interdepartmental faculty and students, empowered to explore the mutual benefits which can result from increasing arts participation across the academy. This latter recommendation encompasses several related topics such as distributed leadership, curricular and co-curricular benefits of culturally relevant education, and is closely aligned with my research interests.

Bowman's findings (2011) supported the need for further research to understand the positive relationship between diversity experiences and civic growth, the impact of which would likely extend post-graduation. Richard, Keen, Hatcher, and Pease (2016) explored this connection more fully, and noted that there is a link, and that an important component is dialogue and reflection across differences. Richard et al. further stated there is less existing evidence on alumni who had been involved in service learning (SL) in college, as well as a gap regarding the impact of co-curricular SL as compared to standalone SL activities. This opportunity to identify unique impacts for SL when connected with a course, could pertain to programs like the AADC. Bowman also observed that several studies have analyzed the impacts of diversity experiences for disparate racial groupings, but researchers had yet to fully examine outcomes based on socioeconomic status or gender. According to Bowman, the programmatic details or nuances or various interventions require further exploration and analysis given the potential for intergroup dialogue or other conditions that could aid practitioners in optimizing the interventions they develop for greatest institutional effectiveness on their various campuses.

Clifford and Montgomery (2014) noted the question of semantics versus actual practice wherein the academy is beginning to reference global citizenship in some policy documents but is very invested in the status quo of not preparing learners to concern themselves with a worldview and end goal of social equity and justice in a capitalist economy. This suggests further study is needed to ascertain the extent to which the global citizen concept may ultimately translate into actual higher education goals and curricula, either now or in the future.

Colman's (2006) recommendations included engaging students in art critiques of works within a context of human rights, to analyze attitudes and perceptions on "multiculturalism, conflict resolution, rule of law, and protecting minority and individual rights" (p. 56). Colman further recommended studying the extent to which such activities might help empower participants with human rights knowledge and any applicability to their daily lives including self-determination thereof.

Davis et al. (2015) recommended that educational reform through adjusting the standards avoids a color-blind concept of socially just school leadership rooted in clearly articulated terminology which could conceivably be established through further study. They provided recommendations for states and districts developing new principal evaluation practice and policy to use leadership standards that consciously address the politics of race and power imbalance as a significant variable. Davis et al. provided 10 recommended guidelines (half for policy standards, half for program standards) which could conceivably be used as a measure by which to evaluate any new or existing leadership standards studied.

Ferry et al. (2012) recommended further research about how best to provide a cross-cultural experience using videoconferencing with students destined for the global workforce. Ferry et al. noted limitations including self-reported data, suggesting additional studies collecting data that is not self-reported to supplement these findings and further reduce the possibility for common method variance. Ferry et al. also acknowledged their study's small sample size, which offers the possibility of researching with a broader sample.

Frambach et al. (2012) considered the cultural applicability of problem-based learning rooted in Western concepts and recommended further exploration of various processes and outcomes. Frambach et al. conducted this study exclusively in the medical school context suggesting studies are needed in other academic settings to determine any differences in findings. Frambach et al. also noted that culturally sensitive alternatives might be developed and recommended researchers from other backgrounds would be beneficial to provide analysis and interpretation from someone other than Western-trained educators and social scientists.

Addressing other experiential learning akin to problem-based learning, Gates (2014) indicated a need to better understand the dissonance between intellectual and applied teaching and learning experiences particularly in liberal arts colleges. Gates recommended additional research on how higher education can adapt to develop and sustain learning from multiple sources including short term immersion or internship experiences, not just classroom based theoretical learning. Hains-Wesson and Campbell (2014) provided recommendations geared toward advancing research on non-placement

work-integrated learning (WIL) higher education performing arts curricula. Additional research was recommended to expand beyond the single study university site to include other universities to compare findings and distinctions.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter included the conceptual framework of CRT, human rights relative to CRT, and distributed leadership and examined the literature related to educational importance of the arts, cross-cultural learning in individual and collective development, challenges and opportunities with human rights and distributed leadership, and multicultural experiences in higher education. The discussion of research gap and recommendations from reviewed literature leads to a conclusion that a study of participants and leaders of an African centered academic and artistic educational program could provide insights into the experiences and possible benefits of such a program. My study sought to help understand the experiences of leaders and students of the AADC.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the experiences of those who have participated in the AADC academic and performing arts program relative to CRT, human rights ideals, and distributed leadership theory. This chapter includes the research design and rationale for the selected approach and central concepts, the role of the researcher, and the methodology of the study including instrumentation and participant selection logic. The data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are also addressed in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design and rationale, including the central concepts, were chosen based on the two research questions:

RQ1: How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?

RQ2: What methods have leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis?

Central Concepts

Delgado and Stefancic's (2012) CRT, Donnelly's (2013) treatise on human rights, and Leithwood et al.'s (2009) distributed leadership model provided the central concepts used as the framework for this study. Delgado and Stefancic considered the manner in which educational context and content impact students and their academic and

cocurricular development. The tenets of CRT assume a social justice and human rights frame (Donnelly, 2013) that validates the need for understanding racial affirmation versus subordination as a means to begin repairing the damage of generations of disenfranchisement and oppression. Leithwood et al.'s (2009) distributed leadership theory articulates the benefits of an intentional mentor/leadership model including nurtured stakeholder interactions and collaboration. Together, these concepts formed the conceptual framework to explore how the experiences of study participants foster collaborative problem-solving and appreciation of Black people's rich heritage and contributions to the world.

Research Design

I selected the basic interpretive research approach to qualitative inquiry, as articulated by Rubin and Rubin (2011), to capture insights and perceived experiences of students, alumni, and faculty in the AADC. Rubin and Rubin's preferred protocol relies on three forms of questions including main questions, probes, and follow-up questions that complement each other. Rubin and Rubin described the goal of basic interpretive research as responsive interviewing or extended conversation. Although Rubin and Rubin advocated using an interview protocol and discussion guide, they rejected the idea of a predetermined set of questions as the antithesis of the conversational partnership. Rubin and Rubin's approach is consistent with the industry standards for credibility, validity, and systematic data gathering and analysis that are the hallmark of high-quality research. The research process is designed to gather data in a guiding or facilitating manner rather than a managerial one (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). A case study approach includes interview

data, but researchers also examine artifacts, documents, and observations when answering research questions. The length of time to complete a thorough case study was prohibitive for the current study. Quantitative methodology was not selected because of my interest in exploring participants' perceptions, opinions, and motivations, which was possible through the basic qualitative interpretive approach.

Role of the Researcher

My role was that of a participant in the interview process as the sole interviewer. Following the basic interpretive approach, I served as a naturalistic, qualitative researcher gathering information through talking with and listening to the interviewees and observing any materials they may have shared with me as part of their interview. There were no supervisory or instructor relationships between me and the participants. I am an alumna of the AADC and the academic department and was a student of the founding director over three decades ago. I was aware of the risk of personal bias in the study; however, I disclosed my background to participants and made every effort not to let personal bias influence the study. I did not have any predisposed opinions about participants' perceptions of their experiences.

There were no power relationships in this study. Any potential researcher bias was managed by strict adherence to the protocol for conducting interviews and analyzing the data. I was not aware of any ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this study, and no incentives were used.

Methodology

This section provides information on the methodology used for this study, including participant selection logic; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; the data analysis plan; and any potential issues with trustworthiness or ethics.

Participant Selection Logic

The population of this study consisted of more than 1,000 potential participants who were current or former members or leaders of the AADC. Of this population, 250 alumni, including five former or current leaders, were accessible through their membership in a closed Facebook group for AADC alumni, of which I am also a member. My projected sample size was 10-12 participants from this Facebook group. This number aligned with Rubin and Rubin's (2011) recommendation of a sample of 12 for doctoral studies. This sample size affords the doctoral student sufficient data when planning, conducting, and transcribe the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Rubin and Rubin considered more than 12 interviews impractical given customary time constraints for the dissertation. Patton (2015) noted that a larger sample size allows greater breadth of examination, whereas a smaller sample size affords greater in-depth exploration of an issue. Patton further suggested an interview containing open-ended questions would likely take more time, indicating the sample size should be smaller than for a more structured interview. Based on these suggestions and the nature of the study, I determined that 10-12 participants would be an appropriate sample size. This sample size also satisfied the requirements for data saturation and theoretical saturation given the rationale

provided by Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) based on the heterogeneity of the population, minimal selection criteria, limited nesting of criteria, use of interviews as the primary data collection method, and limited doctoral student budget and resources. Participants were contacted via a recruitment announcement approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which was posted in the closed AADC Facebook group. Participants were asked to volunteer for this study and sign an informed consent form.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a researcher-produced interview protocol designed to collect sufficient data to answer the research questions. The protocol was designed to help me explore participants' experiences related to African-centered teaching and learning through the lens of human rights ideals, critical race theory, and distributed leadership theory. The interview protocol (see Appendix) facilitated data gathering through the words of current and former participants in the AADC. The questions were designed to ensure the interviews would yield insights into participants' experiences related to the conceptual framework and the themes that emerged from the literature review. The interview protocol allowed for open-ended responses to reveal similarities and differences among the findings for analysis and reporting. The interview process was designed to expand on the theories and previous studies through exploration of the participants' perceptions of their experiences, and to provide recommendations and implications for positive social change.

Rubin and Rubin (2011) described the goal of basic interpretive research as responsive interviewing or extended conversation. Although Rubin and Rubin advocated using an interview protocol and discussion guide, they rejected the idea of a predetermined set of questions as the antithesis of the conversational partnership. Rubin and Rubin described the qualitative interview process as one of give and take. They further compared it to sharing with partners rather than extracting information from subjects or passive targets. Rubin and Rubin explained the choreographed flow of main questions, follow-up questions, and probes designed to gather data in a guiding or facilitating manner rather than a managerial one. This process involves speaking to interviewees in everyday language they can understand and allows respondents to share in their own way so that the resulting data reflect the knowledge and experience of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The instrumentation for my qualitative study was designed to explore leader, student, and alumni perceptions of participating in a unique Africentric multicultural arts and academic collegiate performance ensemble. Desired outcomes included information on culturally relevant education, human rights, and distributed leadership as a function of how this ensemble works. The interview protocol was designed to elicit data by using broad questions, focused questions, and verbal probes including continuation, elaboration, attention, clarification, steering, sequence, evidence, and slant probes (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interviewing protocol also included interviewer responses and follow-up questions as needed (see Appendix).

Content validity was established by using open-ended questions throughout the interview process, supported by triangulation through sharing and revisiting information with participants after data collection. Internal and external validity were addressed during the data collection process. Internal validity pertains to threats that may influence the findings of the study, while external validity refers to the applicability of results to other settings. There were no perceived threats to the internal validity because current participants' perceptions were expected to be positive; negative perceptions would have been perceived as information to act on, or as an anomaly of the parent department, with no negative ramifications. Threats to external validity included recruitment from the bounded setting of prior and current AADC participants who are members of a closed Facebook group, which limited the generalizability of results to other groups or settings (Patton, 2015). My interview protocol was aligned with the research questions to ensure relevant data collection to answer the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Finding interviewees was accomplished through a private, voluntary participation networking group that I belong to. In this closed Facebook group, I was able to recruit participants using an IRB-approved recruitment announcement inviting volunteers and providing details of the study. Participants provided formal written consent prior to data collection by responding to a consent letter which outlined research procedures and guidelines for my study.

To answer both research questions, data were collected by me. I conducted the interviews via telephone to allow for a real-time audio-recorded interchange. I followed

up with participants to review their responses prior to finalizing my written analysis of the study results. The data collection events were projected to occur over a 30-day period.

The data collection instrument for my interviews consisted of 15 primary interview questions in a self-designed protocol, including slight variations between the protocol for current participants and alumni. I developed the protocol in collaboration with my committee and have reviewed the interview protocol with professors and a colleague with professional experience in qualitative research. Upon approval of the Walden University IRB, I began the data collection which involved gathering detailed information from study participants and identification of each person's experiences and perceptions through in-depth interviews.

Interview participants met with me via telephone at a pre-designated time. The time frame for the interview of each participant was 45 to 90 minutes. During interviews, I wrote field notes and audiotaped each interview for transcription purposes pending participant agreement.

Had recruitment resulted in too few participants, the follow up plan was to invite participants through a second request via the closed Facebook group, using the same posting and subsequently to request permission to post the request for research participants in the student and alumni newsletter distributed electronically each month to the parent department of the AADC. At the conclusion of data collection, each participant was debriefed with a reminder that they would be asked to review a transcription of their interview to confirm its accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for my dissertation was conducted by hand coding including key word analysis. This allowed me to mine the data directly for major themes, concepts, and relevant research findings that address the research question at the heart of the study, as emphasized by Rubin and Rubin (2011). The data analysis synthesized learning from questions I composed to direct the interviewees' focus toward themes and concepts or issue areas which surfaced in a review of the research literature. Specifically, my study questions were formulated to explore themes elevated by the core tenets of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), human rights (Donnelly, 2012), and distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2013). My intent was to look for themes from these frameworks; however, I was also attentive to any emergent themes that may have surfaced during the course of this study.

Through this process of guided inquiry, my basic data collection provided insights from respondents in the form of perceived experiences for analysis of themes via coding. I simultaneously synthesized data to detect recurring patterns and then clustered similar codes to yield a reduced number of themes to provide categories for analytical meaning of responses and assertions. I then created a matrix to assist in organizing the compiled data into a manageable format to reflect, analyze, and verify, as suggested by Thorne (2016). Any discrepant cases were to be prioritized for follow up by email to ensure there was no misinterpretation or misunderstanding on my part. If not, those findings were to be reported as is with the clearest explanation possible.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A review of the theories I have researched revealed that critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2013) could be introduced in the protocol in very focused questions which I used in the data collection process. This approach ensured that respondents would provide their input on those inquiry areas without being led to any topic.

Credibility

This in turn, helped ensure that the research findings are credible because it is part of ensuring that the data is systematically and accurately collected regardless of whether there are contradictory findings or beliefs (Rubin & Rubin, 2013). The topics which emerged from the coding process were easily identified given the focused and structured interviewing protocol which shaped the inquiry while leaving room for me to follow up on unanticipated directions the study participants may introduce (see Rubin & Rubin).

Rubin and Rubin (2013) emphasized the importance of well thought out questions and flow, but also noted the importance of planning for who the research instrument will be implemented with. That is, as vitally important as careful design of the interviewing protocol is to ensure results that engender confidence, and trustworthiness, Rubin and Rubin further emphasized that recruiting and interviewing knowledgeable and experienced interviewees with a variety of perspectives is also key. This was a good reminder for me to use a range of available options to connect with the widest pool of interviewees possible within my proposed 10-12 participants, by offering potentially face-to-face, via email, via Skype, via telephone, and/or online options to participate. To

ensure internal validity and establish the required credibility, I used the strategy of interviewee review of their own transcript.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity refers to the applicability of research findings from one context to another (Creswell, 2013). This is also known as generalizing findings. While this basic interpretive study was not intended to generalize findings, its findings may expand the database of qualitative inquiry that can increase understanding of the need for culturally relevant education thus aiding future researchers, academic leaders, human rights practitioners, or policymakers.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability and integrity of the research process. Data collection and analysis may typically evolve during the interview process as insights can influence follow-up or probing questions and/or narrow the focus of my study (Patton, 2015). Utilizing memos and a reflective journal during the data-collection process may assist with establishing an audit trail of this basic interpretive qualitative study. My focus on participants' experiential learning and personal perceptions during the analysis phase, enhanced my ability to discern and avoid all factors that could affect the analysis process in undesired ways. This is consistent with Patton's (2015) assertion that research "design is not a mechanical, a set in-stone plan, but a process and a way of thinking that evolves during the research process" (p. 244).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the qualitative counterpart to objectivity and refers to a researcher's endeavor to corroborate data and affirm the interpretation thereof (Creswell, 2013). I applied appropriate strategies to establish confirmability, such as providing a detailed description of the study's purpose and content, corroborating reports from various sources, and maintaining an audit trail that may enable future researchers to understand and broaden the analysis. Finally, I included excerpts of participant's verbatim responses from the transcripts in Chapters 4 and 5 to maximize confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

To address potential ethical concerns, I informed participants as to the purpose of this research and their free will to participate, protection of privacy, and their right to opt out of the study at any time if they so choose. I further informed participants that they had the option not to answer any questions they perceived to be psychologically stressful or intrusive. Participants' identities were kept confidential and coded utilizing pseudonyms. Participants' identities are stored in a secure place ensuring that no other person will have access to the information they have provided to me as researcher.

For this study I developed a contingency plan to post a second invitation to recruit additional participants if needed. This allayed any potential ethical concerns related to data collection or intervention activities which could have arisen if a selected participant refused participation or withdrew early from the study, which did not occur.

No confidential data was used as study respondents agreed to participate and to have their data shared publicly. No other ethical issues applied as there were no conflicts

of interest or power differentials, and no incentives were used in conducting this study. For participants referencing or sharing any archival data such as performance programs, photos, publicity materials or other ephemera to support their verbal responses, I have ensured that it is in the public domain or that they provided evidence of permission to share it if discussed in this study. The program being studied provided written permission to identify it by name in my published dissertation and this was reviewed as part of final IRB approval.

Summary

In this chapter I explained the research design and rationale for selecting the interpretive qualitative approach, central concepts, the role of the researcher, and methodology including instrumentation and participant selection logic. It concluded with a description of the data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the experiences of those who have participated in the AADC academic and performing arts program relative to CRT, distributed leadership theory, and human rights ideals. I examined experiences that addressed African-centered teaching and learning, as well as practices that fostered awareness of global diasporic cultural connections. Defining this focus was a catalyst for stipulating my objective for data analysis. In this chapter, I identify the research questions that guided this study. I then describe the setting for this study, the participant demographics, the procedures used for data collection and analysis, the processes applied to ensure trustworthiness, and the findings from my analysis of the data.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?

RQ2: What methods have AADC leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis?

Setting

Participants were given the option of interviewing via telephone, Skype, or Zoom, all of which allowed for audio recording. I interviewed nine participants by audio

recorded teleconference calls in a setting of their choosing. No negative circumstances were evident in the lives or situations of participants during data collection. No apparent personal or organizational conditions influenced interviewees at the time of the study. At one point during an interview, the participant paused to handle another matter but returned quickly to complete the interview with no further interruption. During another interview, my location became distracting due to background noise from other people entering an adjoining room, making it difficult for me to hear the participant's responses. I took action to improve this situation by moving to a quieter location to complete the interview. The audio recording of that interview was not compromised, and I and the participant were able to continue undistracted.

Demographics

In this section I describe participant demographics and characteristics relevant to my study. Table 1 lists the participants by pseudonym and includes their years of program participation, ethnicity, geographic location, and current role relative to the program (student, staff, alumni). Pseudonyms used are Swahili numbers from one to nine, in the order that participants were interviewed. This Swahili numeration is in keeping with the study focus on Africentric teaching and learning.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participants (pseudonym)	Years with AADC	Self-identified ethnicity	Geographic location	Population (student, staff, alumni, etc.)
Moja	43+ (1974-2017)	Afro-Latina	Midwest U.S.	Staff
Mbili	2 (1977-1979)	African American	Midwest U.S.	Alumni
Tatu	3 (2011-2014)	Mixed Black	Midwest U.S.	Alumni
Nne	7 (2012-present)	White	Midwest U.S.	Alumni/staff
Tano	5 (2014-present)	Filipino	Midwest U.S.	Participant/staff
Sita	43+ years (1974-2017)	Black	Western U.S.	Former staff
Saba	2 (1979-1981)	Black	Southwest U.S.	Alumni
Nane	3 (1980-1983)	Black	Midwest U.S.	Alumni
Tisa	3 (1984-1987)	Black	Southeast U.S.	Alumni, former student leader/ staff

Although my recruitment search extended internationally due to the population included in the closed Facebook group of past and present AADC participants, all nine participants were based in the United States at the time of the study. This proved beneficial for uniformity of the data collection because all nine interviews were able to be conducted using audio-recorded teleconferences via the same platform. Had recruitment generated any internationally located participants, I would have had to use WhatsApp or an alternative option that may not have worked as smoothly as the technology used for the domestic interviews. Although participants were onsite students or staff at the university's African American dance company at some point, they were dispersed throughout the United States at the time of the study. Six resided in the Midwest, one was on the West Coast, one was in the Southeast, and one was in the Southwest.

The diversity of this sample also was exhibited in their range of ethnicities, majors, career disciplines, roles, and tenure in the dance company. In terms of ethnicity, five of the participants self-identified as Black, one as African American, one as Afro-Latina, one as White, and one as Filipino. Their majors and careers included the cultural and performing arts, such as physical education dance, photography, instrumental music, and voice, in addition to non-artistic fields such as education, business administration, and nonprofit leadership. Six participants were alumni or former dancers with the company, five were current or former staff of the dance company and/or its academic or performing arts departments, and two were graduate assistants while studying and dancing as members of AADC. The number of years that study participants spent as active members of the AADC ranged from 3 to more than 43.

Although recruitment was open to current and former dance company participants as well as staff of the AADC, only one current company member participated in the study. This was likely due to the reflective focus of the study; the letter of invitation requested reflections of prior experiences with the program and ensemble. Another influencing factor may have been that the vehicle for reaching potential participants was a closed alumni Facebook group that consists primarily of former, not current, AADC members. Three additional current members expressed interest by responding to the initial recruitment outreach but did not return their consent forms to fulfill the participation requirements. This outcome possibly reflects the time frame of my study, which was conducted during the school semester when student workloads and performance schedules may have been an influencing factor. One individual indicated this via unsolicited feedback as their reason for lack of follow-up in time to be included in this study despite their strong interest in doing so.

The participants appeared to be cooperative and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the dance program. They also seemed eager to provide information that could enhance future teaching and learning about leadership and human rights through African-centered education rooted in the arts disciplines, particularly dance and music of the African diaspora. As the researcher, I endeavored to create a comfortable environment so the participants could freely share their perceptions of their experiences. All nine participants offered to provide additional follow-up if needed, encouraged me to share their reflections with others through some format in the future, and asked to receive the results of my study.

Data Collection

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval (Number 10-16-18-0371137), I initiated recruitment seeking 10-12 participants to achieve data saturation. This target number was identified based on Rubin and Rubin's (2011) assertion that 12 participants facilitate the experience of planning, conducting, and transcribing interviews to yield sufficient data. This range was supported by Patton's (2015) recommendation that collecting data in a limited time frame from a relatively small sample is one means for the researcher to obtain thick, rich, descriptive data. I thought I may be reaching saturation by the eighth interview when recurring themes and subthemes seemed to be emerging as participants reflected on their experiences in AADC. I recruited a total of nine participants following the approved Walden IRB process, and all participants completed their interviews as planned. I served as the sole researcher for the audio-recorded telephone interviews. All participants granted recording approval and did not hesitate to share their reflections and impressions of their experiences as members or former members of the AADC. My data collection tool consisted of a protocol of 12 interview questions (see Appendix) that yielded rich data from the basic interpretive qualitative interview methodology. The set of semi-structured interview queries were drawn from the research questions, the conceptual framework, and my review of the literature. Each participant was interviewed once and given the option to interview via telephone or Skype. Each interview was recorded via my conference call platform recording app. I then downloaded the recordings to a secure laptop and external flash drive before manually transcribing them.

Data collection was expected to occur during a 30-day period; however, it took 90 days to complete. This longer time frame resulted from delays due to the participants' schedules, school calendars, rehearsals, and performance priorities. Participants met with me via telephone for a single in-depth interview at a designated time. The time frame for the interview was projected to be 45-90 minutes and averaged 75 minutes, with most interviews taking the full 90 minutes. There were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. I sent each participant a transcript of the interview and requested any changes in their transcripts. No unusual circumstances were encountered in the data collection process. I took notes to capture my personal insights while interviewing the participants and reviewing their transcripts. This journaling allowed me to follow the interview protocol and avoid inserting bias in the process. Journaling also allowed me to note personal observations, questions, or reflections that seemed to emerge, which I could revisit during the analysis process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of hand coding, including key word analysis. Rubin and Rubin (2011) emphasized the benefit of employing this technique, which allowed me to mine the data for codes based on the major topics that emerged. I then categorized these codes as described in Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six step approach to analyzing data.

I began by implementing open coding of the transcript of the first interview. While reviewing that transcript multiple times, I highlighted words, statements, and experiences that showed commonality. These formed the basis of codes used to create categories to organize the codes. After subsequent interviews, I reviewed the transcript to

identify identical or similar codes to those found in the initial transcript. Each new transcript also provided an opportunity to identify new codes. These were sorted into new categories whereas similar codes were placed in the preexisting categories.

As noted in Chapter 3, my research questions were formulated to explore themes elevated by the core tenets of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), human rights (Donnelly, 2012), and distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2013). While my intent was to look for themes from these frameworks, I was also sensitive to any emergent themes surfacing during the course of this study. I synthesized my data to detect recurring patterns and then cluster similar codes to yield a reduced number of themes. This provided categories for analytical meaning of responses and assertions.

After reflecting on my codes and categories, I edited the final group by combining and or deleting redundant codes and/or categories. I revisited my research questions and interview questions, and further reduced categories. This process allowed me to combine categories into themes which resulted in five themes with nine subthemes. I then created a matrix to assist in organizing the compiled data into a manageable format to reflect, analyze, and verify, as suggested by Thorne (2016).

Themes, Subthemes, and Codes Related to Research Questions

In this section, I offer a summary and detailed description of the five themes, nine subthemes, and 37 codes which resulted from my data analysis aligned to the two research questions. These are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Questions, Codes, Themes, and Subthemes

Research questions	Codes	Themes and subthemes
RQ1: How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?	Vision, exemplary leadership, shared responsibility, personal sacrifice, cultural appreciation, inclusion, legacy, respect, African diaspora, exceeding expectations, life lessons, power, overcoming obstacles, confronting stereotypes, self-determination, identity, belonging, community, multicultural education, resistance, equity, racial justice, reparations, global understanding, commitment, transformation	Leadership via Africentric teaching and learning in AADC • Visionary leadership • Distributed leadership • Community-building engagement Creating a Legacy Understanding Human Rights as a way of life • Cultural appreciation • Social justice • Global citizenship
RQ2: What methods have leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis?	Academic credit, artistic commitment, sharing, collaboration, exploring difference, experiencing our culture, continuous learning, professionalism, discipline, international lens, historical perspective, diaspora	Black Cultural Excellence Culturally Relevant Education • Curriculum • Praxis • Lasting influence

RQ1 was focused on how AADC participants and leaders perceived their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an African centered academic and performance arts learning community designed to foster positive cultural, social justice, and global understanding related to African diasporic contributions. Key words and phrases were used as codes to develop these themes and subthemes. These codes were a part of categories that subsequently became emergent themes and subthemes. The three themes and six respective sub themes that emerged for this question were *leadership,* expressed in the subthemes *visionary leadership*, *distributed leadership,*

and *community building engagement; legacy* which derived from the historical continuum of the program's groundbreaking role; and *human rights,* which included sub themes of *cultural appreciation, social justice*, and *global citizenship.*

RQ2 was designed to discover how participants perceived the methods their leaders and peers used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis. The two prevalent themes that emerged for this question were *Black cultural excellence* and *Africentric education,* which exhibited subthemes of *curriculum (content and materials)* and *praxis or methodology*. Words and expressions that depicted the participants' descriptions of experiences related to African centered teaching and learning content and methods were coded as reported in Table 2.

Discrepant Cases

No discrepant cases emerged in the process of conducting this study. All nine participants' interviews represented saturation of data with consistent and complementary responses to the interview questions. Notably, this outcome indicates that none of the demographic differences resulted in differing data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

High quality qualitative research requires that multiple steps be explicitly followed to guarantee that the study being conducted achieves credibility of data, transferability of findings, dependability of the results, and confirmability of any bias on the part of the researcher. The processes of collecting and analyzing the data for this study, required several procedures and adherence to strict protocols to ensure trustworthiness of this research study. The following section describes the

implementation of and/or any necessary adjustments to the various strategies required to provide evidence of trustworthiness for a well-executed research study.

Credibility

To ensure credibility for my study, I wrote notes during and after interviewing each participant and transcribing each interview. I also maintained a research journal in which to record any additional reflections, thoughts, and impressions I might have during and after interviewing each participant. My objective was to provide credibility through the practice of reflexivity. I further provided the opportunity for study participants to verify the accuracy of their interview responses through the process of interviewee review of their transcripts. Finally, I also established credibility through a review of the data with a goal of screening for discrepant cases. This process facilitated identification of negative cases in the data analysis process by scrutinizing the data itself and considering the participants' background to contextualize their responses.

Transferability

To enhance potential transferability of my study I used pre-planned interview questions and supplemental probing questions to gather thick, rich descriptions of key themes. These descriptions in turn could yield vivid details of the findings for readers so that the transferability of any findings could be evident and thus considered. I also provided similarly thick, rich descriptions of study participants and the procedures for transferability of research findings.

Dependability

To protect the dependability of the results, I reviewed all components of my study with my doctoral committee. I further kept detailed notes, journaling the procedures for the study and coding thereof, and then creating an audit trail regarding the findings. Relative to the study processes, I wrote notes while interviewing prospective participants as well as prior to, and after, interviewing participants to be certain I followed my study protocol. I took copious notes about coding during the data analysis process and developed categories as well as possible questions anticipated, based on those which came to mind for me during data analysis.

Confirmability

In terms of confirmability, this was part of the purpose of reflexive journaling. My journal allowed me to record personal reflections and impressions on the processes required for recruitment, scheduling interviews, interviewing study participants, transcription and review of the interviews, and thorough consideration of my interpretation and data analysis outcomes. I recorded questions and responses about my role as researcher in order to avoid bias. I documented questions, beliefs and assumptions I held while conducting this study, to avoid any potential negative influence on the objective nature of my study.

Results

The results of my study derived from my analysis of my research interviews with nine self-identified students, alumni, or staff of the university's African American Dance Company course and performing ensemble. Participant responses exhibited several

similarities. I synthesized these commonalities into themes which respond to each of the research questions. There were two research questions, which were created to understand the experiences of participants of the AADC academic and performing arts program relative to critical race theory, human rights, and distributed leadership, especially noting insights on African-centered teaching and learning, and global diasporic cultural connections. I organized the data results by research question. Pursuant to each research question, I have highlighted the themes and related findings.

Research Question 1: Perceptions of Leadership and Culturally Relevant Africentric Learning

RQ1 was "How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?" Regarding this research question, the following three themes emerged: *leadership* described through the positive experiences participants had concerning their Africentric teaching and learning pursuits which were overwhelmingly credited to leadership; *legacy* expressed via participants' perceptions of being part of something historic and essential on their campus and in the community as with a legacy, and *human rights* articulated through the participants' lifechanging experiences in overcoming challenges encountered as AADC scholar-artists and student leaders, articulated in human rights terms. These three themes were further distinguished by their specific subthemes: *leadership* included visionary leadership, distributed leadership, and community-building engagement

experiences; *legacy* expressed as a function of the historic continuum of AADC's groundbreaking role in culturally relevant Africentric education; and *human rights* encompassed cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship.

The participants' reflections provided rich, descriptive narratives of their overall teaching and learning experiences as members of the AADC academic and arts ensemble. Participants' narratives proved insightful, and not surprisingly reflected the creative language of the cultural arts and dance genres as performing artists. Excerpts from my interviews illustrate each of the three core themes that emerged in response to RQ1.

Leadership via Africentric teaching and learning in AADC. The first theme in regard to RQ1 was leadership, which emerged as a driver of the positive experiences participants had concerning their Africentric teaching and learning pursuits. Participants' reflections on engagement experiences were mostly positive although more than one study participant also reported negative, even emotionally painful experiences. This theme centers on the events and activities planned by visionary leadership which contributed to individual and collective accomplishments of the participants, often through intentionally designed distributed, or shared, leadership opportunities. These positive experiences were juxtaposed with the challenges which participants faced during their tenure as AADC members, and ultimately epiphanies, for all, regarding life lessons learned from their community building engagement experiences, viewed through a human rights lens.

Visionary leadership. Mbili explained that the original founder hired the educational leaders for the ensembles of the Institute:

> From what I remember, there was a founder of the overall institute. And I only saw that man twice the whole 2 years I was there...And as far as activism is concerned, and rights, he knew our university needed this. Because that was right after the time…you know there were, what do you call the Civil Rights '68. At that time, we didn't have a voice. Even though we were on campus. Brilliant as we were, we didn't have a voice. We were just there. A number. And he was like, "Nope. Uh uh. Uh uh." And this was before I got there…from what I remember reading. So, he made sure we, not only did we have a voice, but we were very visible.

Nne pointed out the selfless view of sharing credit and leadership, as modeled by the founding director:

> [Even] today when [the professor is] being honored and people are putting her name on plaques and crediting her for her profound work and influence over her 43-year tenure, she will still point back and encourage people to look first at the original vision and to the original visionary, [the department founder]. So, I think that says a lot about her as a leader that she will never claim that she did this alone that, like I said, even though she has been the sole director, was the sole director for 43 years, she will never [take sole credit].

Tano also emphasized the vision behind the community building leadership model which is described in greater detail in subsequent subthemes.

> I think that starts from the beginning. Like at auditions, the last thing that [Professor] asks is what can you do? Show me what you can do or show me what

> *you* want to contribute to the dance company. So right from the beginning it feels like it's that kind of space.

Sita spoke to the role of visionary leadership in ensuring the current longevity and legacy against many odds:

> I mean you know, we've been a part of a unique…if you think about it there were not many experiments like this that took shape in America in the late '60s and '70s. Two of the most significant ones are AADC and [a program at another university elsewhere in the same state]. And they're still existing. So, [if] you were to go look at that national thing, the whole, [what] you're going [to see] is that there aren't. So, then the question that they asked me all the way back in '82 really becomes more relevant which is this: HOW did such a thing happen…in such a place, you know? And that's in a community that is, I don't want to use the word...hostility [but the geographical location] is that this is…nonproductive ground for such African American style expressions and things. That's one of the last places that you would expect for it to have taken root and been successful. So therefore, in reflection, you have to say, "well what was different here versus anywhere else?" And that's where we have to say, the Institute [department founder] and all those people who were involved.

Memories of AADC leadership influences remain present and palpable for participants, with reflections making it clear that leadership training is etched in participants' memories.

Saba shared:

> When I joined the Marine Corps, I realized that the discipline that I learned in being a [dance] company member was very easily transferred to what I had to do as far as discipline in a military environment. We had to be there on time. You know, in the dance company we had to be properly attired. We had to learn routines. We had to work as a team. We had to respect authority. So, all of those lessons were transferred into that next career, which happened to be military.

Mbili vividly recalled the experience of auditioning for the professor, 4 decades later:

> You say movement, right? What moved you...the process, and what moves you to the next part of life, this was new to me, but I thought about it and I was like, nowadays I'm like, "Oh my God"...I was a hot mess performing that night! Performing. *Performing!* [laughter]. You know? And it's a joy to think about now, it really is. But I noticed that she did watch. She was looking, and there were dance company members with her. Sitting there on the floor with her. . .She would walk around and look.

Mbili pinpointed his most memorable AADC moment by recalling that after an injury cut his audition time short, he wondered what would happen to his dreams:

> Went to class the next day and after lunch, went to the Black culture center, went downstairs to the basement. And on that far right wall...Remember how they had the windows there and you could watch people's feet go by as they were walking to the classes? Right there? Yeah. And I looked and my name was on the sheet. Wow. I'll never forget that, and I thought "Wow, this woman saw me." She saw Me. She saw me. So that's my moment.

Other participants recalled specific responsibilities of the various formal leadership positions previously referenced, as well as informal leadership roles. Tatu gave one example of a formal student leadership assignment:

> I was a part of the dance company because of doing graduate studies at IU, so being the road manager was like my graduate assistantship if you will, during my master's degree [program] in African American [and African Diaspora]…studies. And then also my second master's at a nearby university in the next city, which is in social work. So I would like race down from that school to make it [to AADC] for rehearsal that last year. It was kind of crazy.

The head leader articulated the expectations behind her instructional design to develop leaders as well as academic and artistic professionalism for students as team members:

> Well as, you know, a leader. As the director, one of our charges was also to perform at various locations either community, other colleges, and universities, [to] give the students experiences with formal dance concerts. And, so, as a…it's interesting now that I can see [laughter] your language you know as a "leader"…as a director is not only to orchestrate the creative part of a course like [AADC]. Because it was also, it's also a performing ensemble. But outside of that, being a director and a leader is to help students understand that when they do this type of service, they're not professionals. But I expect them to be professional in what they do. So, I was "professionalizing" them [paused for emphasis] in the way that they acted, in the way that they performed, in the way that they delivered their performance. In the way that things had to be set up…for example, the road

> manager had to prepare all of the costumes in the costume bags for me, a particular way. Then the students who were performing got the costume bags from the road manager and they had to hang them up, after a performance. Everything had to be back in the bag, the way that they found it. You know, those type of steps and, first of all, it's about organization, right? It's about how you can keep everything organized that doesn't go kind of crazy [laughter]. But it also teaches them discipline and protocol. Because the way that I have always said this is that, when you go out into the world after you graduate, if you go into a corporate structure and they want you to wear a blue suit and you come in with a gray pinstripe suit…you have broken protocol! So, when you come in and your hair is not what I want for this performance, you are breaking protocol. If your costume is not correct, you are not following protocol. You have broken the rules and regulations and policies of what I have set for you. And this is the only way that we can keep organized for a performance, for an audience [pause] that is adjudicating you at every turn. You will always be adjudicated.

Interactions with faculty, peers, and audiences were recalled often and fondly by study participants. While there were many poignant reflections provided by interviewees with regard to interactions with faculty, peers, and audiences, one stood out as an exemplar of why this leader was elevated so high in the view of this learning community across more than 4 decades.

Tatu shared a story of caring and academic leadership with a personal touch, that exemplified many of the participants' overall perceptions of nurturing and positivity within the AADC experience as modeled by the leader:

> Very personally, [Professor] was the graduate studies chair when I started so she like did our orientation, and...she was kind of the first face I saw when I started grad school. And I realized after the 1st semester that because of the passing of my mom I was going to need to go down to part time. Like I just couldn't handle grieving and grad school. And so, she was who I talked to about what that looks like and you know her concern, and rightfully so, was that if you go down to part time are you going to be able to finish in a timely manner? Is that going to be supportive of your goals...? And through that conversation, we like formed this amazing, beautiful connection because she shared with me that her parents died when she was about my age [paused] at the time I was 22 and I think her parents died when she was like 23 or 24…and I hadn't met anyone really, I had met very few people who had lost a parent so young. So [Professor] was able to share this experience with me and I think it, I latched on to her [laughter]. And she also was helping me navigate credits and what, you know like trying to map out my next 2 years. She was the person that did that for me. So that's like a very practical, pragmatic thing, like how are you going to complete the degree. But then also she shared this like extremely personal thing that, she didn't have to share, you know? She just opened her heart to me in a way that I... like was more important than I

> could have ever realized because it made me feel like less alone to be perfectly honest.

Tatu went on to reflect on the cultural and artistic connection that resulted from the initial relationship with this educational leader:

> And then, at the same time she's the director of this dance company that is *calling my name*! I mean, I danced from when I was like 6 years old, through all of high school and through college. I choreographed, I did tap, jazz, ballet, modern… I had not really dabbled in African dance that much. So, I'm in grad school and I'm looking at this woman about my credits and talking about my mom passing, and I'm like *wait a minute,* she also has this amazing company. How do I become a part of this? So that was kind of the way that I was able to, "by the way, I also have danced my entire life, and would love to continue to dance"…And so that's how the opportunity came about. So that I started in the Fall and, you know, by that time I was back up to a full-time course load…you know she took me under her wing. But I also like, put myself under her wing and…at this time when I was experiencing a lot of trauma, and loss... she just gave me a safe space to grieve. You know, that's also like very separate from school, and The Company. Not many people know that about my intro to this leader because you know, that's not a story I share.

Distributed leadership. Mbili reflected on how this leader inspired AADC students to stretch their skills as well as their bodies through sharing leadership:

> [One] year she did the tribute to Cab Calloway. And, Minnie the Moocher. And I remember she came up to me and she said I want you in a white tuxedo, you're in the middle, it's a tap number, come to tap class. That was it. So, it's on tape somewhere [laughter]…We're all out there... [Despite not knowing how to tap dance initially]. For that, it was space and opportunity and learning. And she wanted me to do that, so…We had a student who would bring the tap. And you know, [Professor] was good at "you teach me; I don't know this but you're my student and you teach me." OK? And we'll teach you this.

Tano also recalled the distributed leadership method as central to teaching and learning in AADC.

> I think, what I would like to talk about with leadership in the Dance Company is that even though there were established leaders and hierarchy in the group, it felt as if everyone had a responsibility to lead. It wasn't just one person's job to, you know, keep the group focused. Even though the Director does such a great job of that, or [founding] Director. And I think that is so much in the way the students and participants saw their role in The Company, is that it was a shared thing. It was a shared leadership. Everybody just had the same amount of responsibility as everyone else, perceived responsibility, everybody had different responsibilities. Like I had to make costumes and all that stuff, but...I think the way [Professor] kind of included everyone in decision making, in ownership of the creativity, was such a great way of leading. And I think, she gained so much respect because of that. You know you can have a leader that is strict, that professionalizes, and she

> is all that. But in the way that made it seem like everybody had the communal responsibility and dedication for the group. It made it such a better space for creating. And I think some of the assignments that she created, like that example that I brought up, the Collaborations, breaking the community larger group into smaller groups, without an assigned leader…again it becomes…you know everybody has the same responsibility for the purpose of the group.

Tisa discussed a range of important leadership training opportunities designed by the director:

> [The director put] young people in leadership roles like there was a costume designer. There was a road manager…there was a graduate assistant. And then, there were…some students were allowed to contribute to the choreography. So those were all leadership types of things that I saw, like the road manager. That was that person's position. Somebody was brought in and hired, be it through graduate assistantship or work study as the costume designer/coordinator. So…I was definitely able to see that. And…she offered me…my first leadership position in dance as acting director of, at the time it was called Afro-American [dance company]. She offered me that experience and that, in and of itself, was a world of experience. And I could also see the amount of work that went into it. I also could see the, you know, some differences in terms of collegiate dance [how various groups were valued differently]. And in terms of really guiding what I wanted to do, you know with my dance career, with me performing, with my

> choreography. Like I could assess some of my strengths as well as some of my weaknesses…things that I needed to improve upon.

Tatu fondly recalled one humorous interaction in AADC's distributed leadership practice:

> You know, I will never forget that, oh my gosh, one day, one of these [young people]…because you know some of these students are like 17, 18…and she looked at me and goes "you're bossy"! [laughter] and I said, you're right! I am bossy [laughter] and I was like, I'm not sad that I'm bossy, I'm good with being bossy because [Professor] does not need to deal with these like, shenanigans in the dressing room. Or like "where's my leotard, or where's my..." you know? So, I got to, I think take some of that load off of her, because I was so willing to corral people, and I'm kinda loud and not afraid to use my voice to get things done. So, you know, I thought...this little girl is pretty bold, looking at me like "you're bossy" and I'm like "yeah, you're right I'm bossy. And what are you doing, and where do you need to be? Because [Professor] doesn't have time to be dealing" [laughter].

Community-building engagement experiences. Participants reflected on engagement in classes, rehearsals and performances both on campus and off, leadership examples and opportunities, interactions with faculty, peers and audiences, and experiences related to their pursuit of culturally relevant African centered academic and artistic studies. They articulated detailed examples of situations, encounters, descriptive thoughts, and feelings in reflecting on this question. Although nearly every participant

recalled some negative situations experienced while members of AADC, all participants recollected having more positive than negative incidents.

In addition, reflecting on the dance company space both literally and figuratively, participants identified the classroom and studio space as a special leadership tool for building community. They unanimously described the physical meeting and practice space, as well as their community of dance company learning partners, as a unique place of belonging which facilitated and nurtured artistic, academic, and personal excellence. As Tatu stated:

> I'm biracial. So, I have a White mom and a Black dad, and they were married until my mom's death, but a lot of my social interaction and peer group was very White. So, for me it was important to stay committed to [AADC] not only because I had been dancing since I was six, so dance has always been part of my life you know, as something I do. But also, the dance company provided for me a space of Blackness and Black community and belongingness that I had not necessarily had growing up as a girl in a small midwestern college town. It provided a safe space for me to explore what it means to be a Black woman, what it means to be biracial, what it means to have this history and this legacy. Because you know, my great grandfather was born [enslaved], so that history is like, yeah, it's very close for me. [Only] three generations.

Tatu further conveyed a strong sense of appreciation and realization that the AADC experience was managed so as to be a special phenomenon on multiple levels:

> I mean it was just an honor and a privilege, and at the same time I'm pursuing my graduate degree and just, you know, kind of redefining who I am as a native of [that college town]. But also, not being stuck in some of the same friend groups or pockets of community that were amazing and wonderful but limiting in a lot of ways as a Black woman. So, you know I can't say enough how much of a safe space the dance company felt for me…how much of a welcoming space it was. A place where I could identify, where I could be free to express, to move, to feel embodied, and at the same time explore all these very personal things for myself. Because I, you know, most kids that I met and danced with weren't from [here]. I had a kind of unique perspective to bring to the table.

The original dance class and rehearsal space from the first decade of AADC was described as a leaky basement, with low ceilings and linoleum tile floors on cement. Despite the challenges and potential injuries from working in such a dance studio, AADC study participants who were alumni of that era recalled adapting and overcoming the logistical issues to participate in something affirming and respected.

Mbili reflected on that physical space and how AADC and its head leader rose to the challenge:

> Well you know what? In the Black culture center downstairs, we shared it with [the rhythm and blues ensemble]. And what I remember, the dimensions were about maybe about 30 feet long, 20 feet wide…when you're facing the front, you're actually facing the mirrors. Because it was a wall of mirrors…and they had ballet bars everywhere. All along the walls. But again, that was a basic list,

> cement floor with some tile on it. And then, height wise it may have been 15 feet? If that. 10 to 15 feet. So, we're running across doing our grand jetés…a leap or a jump where your legs split open. It's beautiful when it's done just right, you know with a good split. Toes pointed and yeah, yeah. But she would always tell us, "Watch your height", [laughter]. She didn't want no marks on it, and from what I remember, it was the, I can't…what's the name of that when it's like the tile ceiling? [Drop ceiling]. That's what I remember. So, you know, but at the same time that was good, because we were always, she always talked about "lifting" and "space". Your space. So that was the perfect exercise for us to [learn] "spatial awareness." When you're going up, when you're kicking, when you're in your space standing next to other dancers...be aware. And that helped when we got onstage because, by the time we got onstage we already practiced how high the lift should go, or how high the jump should go. How high you should lift your partner. It was all contained, and it all looked perfect.

Moja described the significance of the AADC space as follows:

> Well it's interesting. Physical space. In the Fall of 1974, [we] had the basement of a fraternity house that was the Black culture center. We had no other space in which to work. And so, that was the basis. That was the foundation of the very early work that had to be completed you know, and for the dance company it was a challenge. I ultimately asked [the Chair], I said you know, we can't...we can't be in a basement on a cement floor anymore. And so, he made a pact with the person who was a dean [and] we used the dance studio there that I had danced in for

> years [before graduating] because I was a dance major. It was just a studio. And then, the original founder had a vision of creating a new culture center, and, where a new dance studio was ultimately built. Opened in the Spring of 2002. And so, for I guess what…the last 16 years? 16 to 17 years...we have been using the new space. Which was built really, on top of the old Black culture center. So, I call it "sacred space." So, space is very important I think, in the way that you feel about your own production. Creative production. So, you know it was quite a journey. You know, the physical space. But I think it also gives validity. It's interesting that space gives validity to a group. But also, it gives opportunities to be bigger and better. Yeah. So, I've always thought that we, The Company, did great work. But we were also able to expand in so many ways when we had a bigger space.

Tisa stated clearly what initially drew her to the program, and what bound her to it, as she articulated her most memorable experience overall:

> Well, for me it was feeling a part of a community. Being from [the Southeast] and going [away] for school, that was a pretty long distance for me. Because I knew I couldn't go home on weekends. So, being with the company, I had an opportunity to do what I love to do. I went to IU looking to dance. And that was it. So, actually feeling part of a community, feeling part…that I had a home and that I was able to participate in something that I love.

Mbili recalled a sense of belonging after bringing his unique drum major skills to AADC:

> I had my little batons out there…and then we talked about it afterwards. And she found out that I used to be a drum major at my high school. And it wasn't one, but it was two (batons), but so I was doing my thing so... She was worried about the ceiling; she didn't want to mess up the [low] ceiling either. In front of the whole company, she very delicately said, "I like it, but I need something..." and she used the word "stronger." She wasn't questioning my masculinity. She wasn't questioning that guys twirl batons. But her thing was, from the audience's eyes. This is a boxing number. I need masculinity here, more masculinity. So, when I came back Monday…you know, those high-end Hawaiian swords that the guys use with the fire on the end? OK? That's what I came back with…I didn't use the fire, but I had the swords, because I'd used those at my high school too. She was happy with that. Bottom line, that was my first "moment" of...of, what's the word I want? Connection. Family. Acceptance. Getting it right...Gettin' my beats in order...And lifting. I felt lifting.

Several participants felt that rehearsal time left an indelible impression on them beyond the practice aspect. It was top of mind for Nane:

> The most memorable experience in the Company? I guess the rehearsals. The rehearsals that we had preparing for the different workshops and concerts we had. We were a very close-knit family and that was my family at IU. Those were my friends. That's who I hung out with. Those were the people that I made the most connections with and still have very close connections with to this day. I'm always flashing back to Company experiences; [It] was what, 2 or 3 scheduled

> days a week but then we also had evening rehearsals and did stuff on our own. So you know, that was my life, that was my love. So I still dance, and that's where I got my training, so yeah.

Creating a legacy. The second theme relative to RQ1 reflects participants' perceptions of being part of something historic and essential on their campus and in the community…a legacy. Interviewees conveyed a sense of legacy and the Sankofa spirit which is an Africentric custom of looking to the past to inform the future. This seemed to instill in AADC members a deep appreciation for what they learned and experienced in each successive cohort or generation, and a sense of responsibility to both sustain and advance that legacy. This is consistent with the stated mission on the parent organization's website which notes that it is the nation's first and only university-based program dedicated to the performance and promotion of Black music and dance.

Tatu described two challenging yet triumphant and ultimately memorable times in AADC:

> [One] was helping her put together the 40th [anniversary] concert. I mean that was, and it was also my last year. My last semester...I knew I was leaving, the Spring show, her 40th was my final show...and so you know I also just felt like "Oh my God, I'm a part of history." You know and then she got a day honored for her, I mean I just got to witness all of those things happen at my last hurrah. And just being able to help her through that because she was stressed out [laughter]. I mean she holds herself to a higher standard than anyone else could ever. Right? So, it wasn't ever about what others expected or what the university expected, or

what the Institute expected, it was always about her own expectations for herself. And they were sky high! [Said with emphasis]. And I think that's why she was able to do, you know, 43 years of the same company. I just think it takes a special person and personality to be able to continue to set the bar high for yourself and not just become complacent and like "Oh I do this thing really well and its well received, and we'll just leave it at that." You know? Never, never. And especially for the 40th. I mean she was reaching for the stars and then…and then, I…you know... I just hope we all...and I think we did, we honored her as much as she'd let us [laughter]. She can be like super humble sometimes too, it's like, yeah, I think she doesn't always give herself enough credit for what she has done. Or doesn't understand maybe the influence that she truly has made because she's always like, "I can make it better, I can make it bigger..." So yeah. It was powerful – it was a powerful send off. My own send off, to help her fulfill her 40th concert....And then just seeing the community that rallied around that weekend, and how many alumni came in and how you know just how many family and friends and community members and IU faculty, staff, students, just rallied around her on that weekend it was just spectacular. … And for the Spring Concert and then, you know she was given a whole day in honor of her! [in 3 cities]. I mean I don't know, I just, I'm not close with anyone else who gets their own day! [Laughter]. So, those are my highlights. I mean, any day with her is a highlight, right? Because her spirit and her energy is just so positively contagious but, yeah.

Nane reflected on participating in AADC again years later as an alumna, from a different perspective:

> I think a challenge that I faced and overcame was actually preparing for the 40th Anniversary Reunion piece. It was challenging because I'm quite a bit older and just the process of driving down [4 hours each way several times for weekly rehearsals leading up to the 40th Anniversary concert performance] and wanting to, you know, be there for every single rehearsal because it meant so much to not only the [alumni] group that performed, but as well as the celebration of the 40th anniversary [of the founding of the AADC] and the expectation of what was going to happen. And it turned out beautifully and the reception of us old dancers, us old school dancers so to speak.

Sita explained the impetus behind one of several seminal works contributing to AADC's legacy:

> Everything is relative. [The professor] and I have always talked over the years. I don't think there has been any year that we have not communicated. But probably the most significant piece that we ever did together to me was the one that's called *Prelude to Swing*. And the reason why it would up being so significant, is that it was an hour and a half piece [90 minute long performance] [laughter]. Now, of course there I start with time, because that's the first place where I start, and it involved all 3 of our ensembles at the Institute. And the piece is based on an old work that was discovered through the Smithsonian Institute. It was a Work Progress Administration (WPA) piece, that was brought back to the university

> ‘cause [another key interdisciplinary professor] said, “Oh [department founder], I think your ensembles could do this.”

He went on to describe the major collaborative production with AADC and its sister programs in the parent institute:

> Now for *Prelude to Swing* we had a living griot [essentially a traditional African oral history storyteller]. A young man who was, he might have been a graduate student. He spoke in both French and in one of the Ghanaian [or Senegalese] dialects and so we started out there. And we [professor and I] really coalesced all of the things that we had. You know, the university was there, but then we had like 90 some students around us to create this piece. And [in my mind] I can see some images of the video tape. I know that that one [performance piece] was taped and preserved. It was a significant piece. It was another one [of our original productions] that was on PBS, Public Broadcasting System. That was on PBS for almost 10 years after we created it. They kept airing that piece.

Mbili reminisced about AADC’s long time legacy of inclusion and diversity while honoring the African-centered mission:

> Yes, Yes, Yes, to be down in the basement and to see the life that I knew. And that was just multicultural, multi-ethnic, to see that OK? But at the same time, everybody’s celebrating “Afro”. Everybody. From all walks of life. And they’re learning, and they’re there because they want to be there. Not because of a scheduling conflict. They want to be there to learn. That made me feel very comfortable, and it was a reflection of my high school. That was a multicultural,

> multi-ethnic high school. Our whole thing back then was human relations. “OK y’all, let’s figure all this out now. White, Black, Latino, Native American...we’re all up in here. Let’s figure this out now; let’s be the model.” So, that’s what I felt then too. Let’s figure this out. With steps, with leaps, with kicks, with our bodies, with our eyes, with expression, with projection, with lifting…and I’m also back to that word “lifting” because it’s what [Professor] would always talk about: “lift, lift, lift.” And I use that in my life to this day.

And Tatu spoke also about the high level of excellence and commitment required to uphold the legacy along with the opportunity to learn and contribute to the same:

> I have a very detail-oriented personality and a very organized, a little Type A, but in a good way, personality. And, I think that served her really well. And she and I work together really well because we could just live in the details, and get lost in the details but you know it mattered when it came down to the show, and the way the body is being looked at or presented, you know depending on where you are on the gauge. Whether you’re behind the lens or in front of the lens…all of that was intentional. She didn’t just slap some stuff together willy nilly and call it a day. So, as much as those late nights, I mean, [Professor] and I would be up in the costume closet at like 2 a.m. [laughter] you know, a couple of weeks before a show just trying to iron everything out. But it mattered then, when it came down to a performance or even a showcase. I mean even the stuff [service-learning outreach] we did in schools, it mattered aesthetically, what we looked like. So that was kind of my area and then also like organizing students.

Understanding human rights as a way of life. The third and final theme with regard to RQ1, is human rights which was expressed through the subthemes of cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship.

Cultural appreciation. Generally, all participants strongly identified as co-creators in a shared leadership community under the guidance of a visionary head leader and expressed perceptions of great appreciation for the knowledge and experiences gained in AADC, and also with their overall experiences on campus and in the community. Despite these accolades for their primary leader and the unique educational experiences she provided, all participants reported there were some apparent systemic barriers to being recognized as highly valued contributors on campus. In addition to this, two participants recalled similar obstacles in a community outreach setting, however, none of the participants expressed any major influence on their overall positive perceptions of their experiences in AADC. This may be attributed to the fact that the negative encounters or experiences, primarily race related, were not limited to their status as AADC members, while their overarching gratification with AADC came directly from their identity as part of the culturally relevant academic and artistic content and community they specifically sought to connect with.

Mbili described his experience as an audience member which influenced his decision to switch universities in hopes of becoming part of AADC:

> I saw the performances and I knew that dance was the part of me that was waiting to be nurtured. I had the singing, I had the acting; I needed the movement piece to

> complete my life. So, I went to the [AADC] concert and right then and there I knew: I [had] to transfer [to that university].

Mbili further reflected on the series of experiences which affirmed his decision to join AADC, starting with the audition:

> Walked in, memorable moment. I saw this woman walk to the front. Maybe about 5'2", 5'3", 5'4." And then I'm like, "Wait a minute, that's that lady that I saw in the Black cultural center. That's the lady who walked up to me and said, do you dance?" and I told her "I move", and she laughed, OK? She said, well, come to this audition and she handed me the flier. No idea that was [Professor]. THE [Professor]. NO idea. OK? So right then and there when I saw her, I remember what my mother had said, and she stressed this, time and time again: "always be respectful to people 'cuz you never know who you're meeting. You never know." Moving forward... We started [the audition] and I was paying attention to everything. Everything. And taking everything in. Warm ups. OK, this is how dance works. This is what dance is about. You do a warm up. OK, I can do this. Not looking at everybody but... Feeling. And I thought, this is what dance is about. Memorable moment. You hear the beat, everything is in 8s, the count of 8. If she says move to the left, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, she's saying lift and lean over, lift…and lean over. Don't just waste everything by just bending over. Feel it. Pull up, and over. I got that. To the right. Same thing. I remember when it came time for the actual movement across the floor. I had the technique down. Memorable

> moment. Grand jetés, I was good with that right leg, [laughter] Good! OK, and I was hoping she was watching that. Cause the split was perfect!

All participants reflected that engaging in dance classes, rehearsals, on campus performances and community engagement via touring, comprised an essential part of their involvement in AADC and thus in their collegiate careers and beyond. These experiences were recollected as some of the fondest memories, and participants' reflections indicated these teachable moments helped them develop discipline, professionalism, collaboration skills, and appreciation for the complexity of effective positive leadership. Tisa recalled the classes in dance and dance history as a big part of the AADC experience for her along with the other memorable components:

> Well I definitely participated for the classes. You had, I believe there were 3 or 4 hour rehearsals twice a week. And then if it was something big you would have additional rehearsals. And then during the touring season, you know we would tour, so sometimes many times that would entail a bus ride of some sort.

Saba described her most memorable experience as a specific performance piece:

> I would say *Lemonade Suite* [a live performance and public television production] was the highlight, because it's enduring the test of time in a way that I wouldn't have recognized when we were rehearsing or doing it over again because you made a mistake or the lighting wasn't right so you have to do it again even though you all were perfect. Just seeing that type of commitment. But I would say that the pure joy of being on stage and performing…there was no performance that ever lacked that same joy. Hitting the stage was probably the most joy that I've

> ever had in my life and could not have anticipated. And this is from someone who was not trained in dance, not a person who wanted to pursue dance as a performer after college, but The Company showed me what the performing arts has to offer, not just the community but the world.

Multiple participants reported being transformed by and during their performances while also providing outstanding audience experiences. Tatu recalled:

> The "Ring Shout" piece, I mean, for me, I felt, I just felt the ancestors in the room. Every time we did it and every time…like I just got chills telling you that. I connected with that piece in a way that…you know I connected with all of her pieces but something about being in that Ring Shout and telling that slave trade story, you know, the Middle Passage story... The experience of enslaved Black bodies, putting that on the stage... something in me connects to that like at a core level, whether you know, it's a previous life that I'm remembering or it's my ancestors reminding me, or maybe a combination of both those things. I mean there would be times when I would be so overcome dancing that piece, I was just like weeping onstage. And also exerting all of this physical energy and emotional energy. I mean it was a whole-body experience for me that, I think at the time, it was easy for me to be like "woah, what's going on?" …But now, you know, years later debriefing, thinking about it, thinking about that lived experience I mean – something real happened to me every time I did that piece. It brought the ancestors and it wasn't just me; other people in the piece were helping to create that atmosphere and that honoring you know, of our ancestors and of the departed,

> so that for me, was one of the most intense experiences I've had as a dancer. The most rewarding, the most powerful, the most exhausting I mean full, full on.

Tano also described a transformative group experience while performing the Africentric storytelling through dance that is AADC's mission, referencing the study travel in Asia experience:

> It was so memorable because we were worried that the audience wasn't going to understand our expression. You know, it's something that seemed so foreign about an African American, African diaspora [presentation in another culture] and we couldn't seem to be further away from the people that we should be performing it to. Beijing. In China. And we were at a host university. And so, we had a joint concert with them. And so, each one of our pieces for lack of a better word, was "interrupted" by one of their pieces [and] I think it takes a lot to get into a head space and into a body space where you can express emotion. And when that's interrupted, it's kind of hard to bring it back. And so, at the end of our long piece, there's a number to Sam Cook's "A Change Is Gonna Come"…and its such simple choreography. We were just walking around the stage. And reacting to each other. And giving each other hugs. But everybody got so emotional during that part. On the stage! Right? We didn't – for me it felt like we weren't even like onstage performing.

Tano continued:

> I could care less what the audience was doing or what they're seeing. Well, we were all kind of like in tears. I remember hugging [a peer] for just like half of the

> song. I don't know, I think it was just a culmination of our experience in China together and the song, and the expression, and then just being in each other's energy. You know. That was definitely memorable, energy wise, that our emotion had gone beyond the performance.

Mbili took time to emphasize the importance of AADC audiences to their experiences:

> This is what I noted in the planning. When [Professor] would schedule an event where [we] had to travel, we were always going into schools. She made it a point to make sure we were going to schools that were predominantly African-American and Latino. But she also made sure that we went into schools that were predominantly White. It was the balance there…exposing them to us. To the diaspora. And she would always come out before and explain, "this is what you are going to see, and this is the history behind it. This is why they have on what they have on. This is why they're moving the way they're moving. There's a narrative here." And then she would walk back off [stage]. And we would always have a Q & A afterwards.

Mbili continued reminiscing about the commitment to educational and cultural outreach:

> She [also] made sure during the summertime that the students who were still on campus…some us found ourselves [upstate] teaching a summer school class [laughter] You know? That's just the way it was. She would jump in a car, all of us in a car, on our way somewhere…Oh, and we even found ourselves in a prison! Yeah, I *remember* that…it was very tight, very structured. So, we performed and our brothers, yeah, our brothers thoroughly enjoyed and

> understood. She prepped us. "This is *life."* Yeah, she went so far as to say, "And, we all got somebody in here." And we were like, yeah. And it made us all think. Do it well. 'Cause your cousin's proud. Or your uncle's proud right now. Yeah, yeah. So, she always made sure we balanced who saw. And again, it was about rights. Everybody's got rights. The right to see, yeah. Oooh, thank you [researcher]. Thank you from me. This is a wonderful reflection for me. Just wonderful.

Social justice. Mbili experienced academic challenges during his time in AADC, without knowing what he now understands based on his knowledge as an educator 40 years later. AADC helped him survive the serious challenges in other aspects of his collegiate tenure:

> I really didn't have much to say. To anybody. Because academics were my struggle. Nowadays everybody says "IEPs, differentiation"...they use all these terms. And I'm not negating. I'm just saying those are the terms that are used now. Then, I had no idea that I [needed] an IEP. Then I had no idea I needed assistance. So, I was actually struggling in academic classes OK? Because it was a faster pace. So, I felt very left out. But…I would always be filled or be filled in, when I got to the Black culture center, went downstairs. Because for about an hour and a half, that was my salvation, that was my release, that was my blessing...that was my…I always called it the gas station, my fill up [laughter]…and then I'd go back out again and deal...it was like church! You know it was like Sunday morning church to me. Get it all out right then and there.

> So that was another challenge, but socially, I really felt that I wasn't/didn't have a vehicle for expressing myself around campus when it came to classes. I was the quietest person. In the dance company, the quietest person. But in the Dance Company, once I figured out when she says, "Go Right", this is how you go right, OK? Then, I felt "OK, this is my expression right here, that we're all family and everybody's watching, and everybody gets it, and I'm cool here. I'm good here. I'm safe here."

Tatu summed up the lifelong influence of her AADC experiences which continue to extend beyond dance, and into her professional social work career:

> I think it certainly has affected the way that I practice as a therapist now. So, my work now is with children and families involved in the probation and department of child services like government agencies. So, kids in foster care, parents trying to get their kids out of foster care, parents struggling with addiction. Largely substance abuse issues and neglect of children due to substance abuse issues. So, I think while I was getting a degree while I was dancing, and I think the Africentric teaching method or model, for me again, focuses on communal learning and communal experiences. And how do we together shape and create our own lives, how do we influence one another, how do we affect one another, how do we help one another? You know, all of those ideas, I think are embodied in an Africentric teaching model which [Professor] certainly used. And then I think that has helped translate into my professional life because I'm dealing with people in community. I mean, and I'm dealing with really hurting, traumatized people in community.

> And how do they shape and affect me, and how do I shape and affect them and...You know it's not just necessarily always about like this one family or this one child I'm trying to help in therapy. But what am I doing to contribute to a healthier [municipality level] community as a whole? What am I doing in my work to help contribute to the whole…?

In reflecting on the human rights influence of their time in AADC, Saba stated:

> OK. So, the first was I would say that it affected my thinking, and I talked a little about this before, in human rights is, when we choose to tell a story…if we only choose to tell the stories that we feel are valued, to me that's a human rights issue because you've rendered people invisible. And when you render people invisible, there's no investment in that community. And so, if there are issues of human rights, there may not be a concern for that community to correct it….But I was also one – of 230 in my [military] company, I was the only African American woman in my company. So, the education that I learned, not just in the dance company but in Afro-American Studies, allowed me to be confident that I was as valuable as my peers who may be White. Because the majority, basically, says "this is the standard." So I [paused thoughtfully] one, internally, I could reflect on "I have value." But my history and my education allowed me to help my peers understand inclusivity.

Tisa stated it thus:

> Well I think that within the exploration of African [and] African diaspora dance, the AADC always was inclusive, and always had a global aspect to it. So, within

> that, you know, the works could explore various issues. Other social issues, that may or may not have been related to civil rights but just to the right to *be*. The right to be treated fairly, the right to have equality, the right to know that you're in a space with equity, so there were dancers representative of that and there was an openness I think, when you're thinking about human rights, it has to be an openness to be able to see other worldviews. And so I think the works that were done, the approach that was taken, it [human rights education] was there. Because she encouraged us to go and see other artists, other performers, other types of dance, other cultural exhibitions. All of that was a part of it because not only do you gain an appreciation of other cultures, you can also gain an even a stronger appreciation for yours…because if their history is just that rich, then my history must be just as rich as well.

Tano described an epiphany prompted by social justice and human rights reflection:

> Yeah. Well, so, coming into the dance company, I was never really interested in history. I was never really interested in government, or politics, or current events. I wasn't even a dancer [laughter]. I was a performer, but I would not have called myself a dancer. And now, as an artist, I am creating work that is political, that is about human rights, that is about equality, and about history. So, I have to give props to the dance company for that [laughter]. It's not that it just sprouted out of nowhere, and that all of a sudden I was aware, you know; that was something that was a process and something that I had to be open to…And I think, what I really want to attribute to the Dance Company is just everything about it: the way it's

> structured, the way it's perceived, the way communal ownership of it feels right, and the way we create together and the space…gives room for somebody to be open, you know? To be open to understanding other people, to be open to understanding other perspectives, to be open to hearing about problems, and then, thinking about it. And then making it your own, and then sticking to it.

Tano remained in deep reflection:

> And, I think, really, another thing that I learned is that I have responsibility, not just responsibility that I had for the company but responsibility to be a citizen of the world, to be aware of things, to listen, to listen to other people's perspectives, to have my own point of view. And, then, to interpret those feelings, and then to share that right? As an artist that's the most important part. That I do my research and that…I listen, and then I make something, and then I share it. And, I think that has to do with everyday things, like when I see something pop up on Facebook that has to do with rights and human rights and anything, I will share it now. Before the dance company, I never felt the responsibility to speak or to inform other people. But through the ways of movement and community and learning and dancing... that has become part of me. And, I think that is so true of everyone that goes through the dance company, just because I don't think there's any other space [like it].

Tano went on to say:

> You know, again, coming into The Company I…thinking back now, I chose to not pay attention, right? It's not that I wasn't aware. I had the privilege to choose

> not to be aware. And, you know, being a person of color, I think I chose to live in a bubble where it was all nice and pretty and flowers and sunshine [laughter]. But, I think that what I really learned from The Company about race and kind of the politics behind that…is that it can happen anywhere to anyone and at many different magnitudes. So, the slightest look could mean something, or the smallest gesture, or choice of words, or the choice of movements could be perceived as something else…What am I trying to say here? Yeah, I think what I learned about racism is that it does exist, and that people have awareness of it…I think everybody has awareness of it, but some have the privilege to choose not to have awareness of it and not to see it. And that it happens at all different magnitudes.

Moja reflected on some of the struggles and victories over 4 decades in AADC in the context of human rights:

> Well that's a good question because I think that just being in Afro-American Studies, The Institute, [and] the AADC, you're always fighting for human rights. Because we have always been marginalized. And so, human rights it's you know, I mean I feel I was fighting for human rights just to make the company visible. Because we were, again, like I say, marginalized. And that, in turn, I think led the students to understand human rights because they were in the middle of much of the marginalization. As we know, Black and Brown people are marginalized all over the world. And so, when we talk about human rights...it's a deep and complicated issue... well I worked with human rights all my life. Right? With The Company. Trying to make sure that they got what they deserved [on campus].

Moja went on to say:

> You know...it's still a fight. It's [still] being dealt with now. But you would think that [by now], this type of stuff would not happen. But we would be fooling ourselves to think that, right? So, you know, the right to come in to an audition, and not be ridiculed because you're AADC, 'you're not good enough' you're not this, you're not that. So it's a testament about how we still have to fight at many different levels.

Moja's reminiscing on the early days of her groundbreaking work with AADC revealed the long trajectory of hurdles overcome in creating this enduring educational entity.

> I think that looking back, as a woman of color, and in the arts, and also in the department, I didn't even realize how much of a challenge that was. Because I wasn't looking even towards staying that long, now that I have 43 years [laughter] I was the first tenured Latina woman here. But [that] was not an easy year because there were a lot of questions about what I did, who my students were, preparing the dossier... No one had really prepared a dossier in the College of Arts and Sciences in my discipline and in the role I played as Director of the AADC at that time. So, I do remember a lot of challenges with the committee from the College of Arts and Sciences questioning a lot of what I did as a Director.

Moja explained more about the hurdles she overcame to earn tenure decades earlier:

> Of course, it's publish or perish, as a professor...hands down. It's publish or perish at the university. But my argument was, this is the College of *Arts* and Sciences and then I guess I could…and I never thought about it this way…but I

> could see myself you know, [as] one of the first persons that also challenged the system about being a choreographer in the College of Arts and Sciences, AND also being a person of color. There were racist types of passages in letters from the committee questioning my work and the type of students [I taught]. So, although I did get tenure [it] was a really rough road getting there, because I also didn't have the mentors in the department because I wasn't a writer, you know? My work was artistic. So, there was no one that really could assist me in navigating what the tenure and promotion process was, At that time. And, so, I did have at that time a couple of people that finally said, well, this is what she does, let me redo the research statements and what not. It was, it was a real challenge because they also thought and saw how the university was sort of biased.

Participants also shared their reflections on reparations as the remedy for human rights violations. When asked about the international human rights concept of repair or reparation as a remedy for righting wrongs and healing, participants' thoughts were creative and varied. Sita's perspective on the nuances and semantics of racism and reparations was this:

> Well, [sigh] part of that issue [is] we don't want to get into a *counter intuitive* discussion, but when we talk about racism, first we always talk about the idea of the prejudicial side of it. And the discriminatory side of it, and [then] it is when you move from the word *race* [to] *racism, racist*, and you're trying to just talk about the word…like which word and how do you want to talk about it? So, as

> long as someone is not trying [to be a racist] to stop me or prevent me from doing a certain thing [racial or cultural expression] that I know that I have a right [to express], then we really don't have a problem.

Sita also articulated an historical perspective on actions related to racism and reparations, specific to the question of centering Black culture whether on PWI campuses or HBCUs:

> This is what I always come back to – we don't have to talk about the UN. We don't have to talk about people from South America, from Canada. We can just talk about whoever is standing right next to us, in the same building, or down the street. We don't have to go looking for issues and problems…I can appreciate your question. But this is why I reflected on the fact that you're asking me a question [how to equitably elevate Black culture in academia], that really somebody asked me 30 years ago [at an HBCU, and now today]. And you know what? [The] real answer to it was, as I said…it was the person [hired to start the Africentric education programs] who was responsible for really answering the question. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Sita further explained the implications of his perspective:

> And so, for me to even begin to talk about HBCUs where I was initially asked this question, if you didn't have people with a *mindset* that had gone beyond these kinds of words and ideas, it's like…that's the reason why you have the problem and you continue to have the problem. And even with the most soft and intellectual anglophile you know, person, if you feel like this question [of dealing with racism] still has some level of relevance for whatever pedagogical or

> andragogical reason to still be discussing it, well you know, you just... You just haven't really been paying attention...And that was always one of my problems with [our university] which is why I always applaud [Professor] for staying there as long as she did. Because I could not go through another year or more of those, racial intensity [said emphatically] discussions. What were they called? Those... I can't. I'm holding my head now. It's because these questions…they are the same old questions. The question goes back to the 1960s. It's like as we look at what's going on in our national framework you know? It didn't take our sitting President probably half a day to raise up some of these old ideas because they've never left.

Regarding reparations as the human rights remedy for historical wrongs, Moja stated:

> That's a good question. Because you know, when I think of reparations you know there's so many levels. There's so many different types of things that can be done and ideas about reparations. And basically, I don't think that reparations are about giving individuals money. I think that reparations also, is giving money to organizations, and schools, and education...those type of places that can help repair our youth. And strengthen, give them a sense of history, give them a sense of empowerment, give them a sense of how they could get better economically, educationally, socially. That, I think that there are so many souls that are broken…that it's hard to you know…one has to repair a soul to repair another one. And so, it doesn't necessarily always have to be about money, but it also can [include] other ways of communicating to our folks HOW to repair.

Tano articulated a similar perspective on reparations as a broad concept of repair:

> I think being in the space alone and creating [culturally relevant performance art], in lieu of human rights or thinking about history…I think that was reparation or seeking reparation. And, I mean the only thing I can think of, is that there has to be room or space for reparation to happen, and it happens, not immediately, like hey 'I'm asking for reparation, here it is', there's no way. So, I think yeah, "little" things like learning about history and then, making it your own and expressing it and doing it in community…that culminates to this room for reparation, and I think, without even knowing it, that was bodies asking for it or wanting that, you know, not even…yes, sure, in the whole community, but maybe individually, like a cathartic experience for each person. You know, I have attained some sort of reparation for what I have learned about. Or for certain things that I felt has inflicted some pain or has infringed upon my human rights, or somebody else's human rights. And, I think that space and asking for it and doing it, has provided some sort of repair, individually.

Sita's opinion was clear regarding the role of financial redress as central to reparations:

> …reparations, for me, has something to do with a financial repayment, compensation to African-Americans [for the holocaust of African enslavement]. So just saying that you're giving me an opportunity to participate and do what I would have done on my own anyway, but then I got paid for doing it...you've gotta start evaluating some other things.

Global citizenship. Moja was uniquely qualified to help her students and peers cultivate a global mindset:

> Well, number one, I am from the diaspora, I am from the Caribbean. So, that was a very interesting dynamic, to go into a department that was based really on a history from the continental U.S. So, my learning…because I'm culturally from the Caribbean and my experiences were really surrounded in the African diasporic Caribbean culture. When I became Director of The Company, I actually took courses in African American history and music to help me understand how I could connect my own experiences with continental U.S. Blackness. Right? [I'm Afro Latina], so, in the Dance Company, what I wanted them to understand [was] that Blackness extends outside…of the continental U.S. Also, my research was like going to churches because I was not used to the gospel genre, and so I would actually show up at different type of places to actually learn the cultural differences from my own upbringing in continental U.S…And so, I think I might have been, if I venture to say, I might have been one of the first ones [at our university] that actually dealt with the African diaspora investigating how dance operated outside of the continental U.S. [I] bridged in my early work, choreographic work, [and dances], dance movement also that reached outside of the U.S. base. And also studying about people like Katherine Dunham for example, that did her work outside of the U.S. I was [in] the early years comparing, and also experimenting and also trying to educate students to have a broader global view.

Moja described the extensive preparation required to provide primarily undergraduate scholar-artists with global study travel and performance experiences:

> I took students [initially] to New York. And then [a few years later] we flew to Vermont to do a couple of performances that were very successful. And then later on, taking them to Jamaica, China, and Cuba. Yeah, truly international and I actually had…how do you call it…sessions, orientation sessions, especially when we went international. Orientation sessions with the students to let them know what to do, what not to do. And I had the people, I had Chinese students...I had two Chinese students, one of whom was a professor at a university in China which we visited for a cultural exchange. And of course, in Cuba. And so, orientation sessions [were] very important to let students know about what to do, what not to do. You know I've been doing that all of my [whole] career [laughter]. And I do have students that you know, still thank me about that.

Nne reminisced about the global exposure of touring internationally with AADC:

> Certainly, the most memorable experiences were our international travels. I went to [Kingston, Jamaica; Beijing, China; and then Santiago de Cuba]. So, all three of those were unique experiences. Just engaging with people in these other cultures and seeing the commonality we had through dance and the opportunities that we had to learn from one another through this art form was really powerful. And to see the AADC in a space so different from ours but still being so relevant was, I think, says a lot and was very important. The fact that the AADC in Beijing, China was so well received: the students, the faculty that we worked with at [host university] in Beijing…the fact they were so open and so eager to learn from us, I think, said a lot about the dance company. And the importance and

> presence of Black diaspora dance beyond America, beyond the campus space, beyond the academic setting was really significant. And to see that in action with [our] professor and her instruction and the way that she lectured and presented the work, that will always stick with me. That's just so memorable, to see the [our] dancers, you know, many of them who had not left the country before, you know this was their first opportunity leaving the states or even going on an airplane. The fact that the AADC, its parent Institute, [and] Professor made that all possible is all very significant, and for not just one international experience, but thus far, three.

Moja also shared positive perceptions of the value of this global outreach:

> I think I influenced them, yeah, I do. You know those type of experiences they will never forget. They still remember them, they're still appreciative. But more than that is being able to say that they learned something. They were…you know being able to engage in another cultural experience and being accepting. I do see that the students that traveled abroad are, they just seem to be a little bit more, I don't know…confident.

Research Question 2: AADC's Africentric Content and Methods

The second research question for my study was designed to ascertain participants' perceptions of the methods used within the AADC program to express the excellence of Black culture through African centered pedagogy and practices. The prevalent themes that emerged for this question were exploring and expressing *Black cultural excellence* and *Africentric education* which contained subthemes of *curriculum (content and*

materials) and methodology or praxis. The first theme discussed relative to RQ2 is understanding and embodying the excellence of Black culture.

Black cultural excellence. A majority of participants uplifted the African cultural values exemplified in the communal approach to AADC governance and community-building as a positive example of experiential learning as well as evidence of the feasibility of applying a broader worldview in educational praxis here in the United States. Participants' reflections revealed a sense of deep respect gained or reinforced as a result of their AADC experience with regard to Black culture. They also expressed a corresponding sense of responsibility to accurately portray this excellence in their own academic and artistic expression, and even their future lives and careers. Study participants articulated benefitting themselves from an overall environment and mindset that was part of the AADC core values, in addition to the instructional methods. Together these components fostered a greater awareness and appreciation of Black cultural excellence generally rendered invisible by Eurocentrism in the academy and performance art arena. Saba reflected on the knowledge gained in AADC beyond dance itself, in gaining broader perspective and life lessons:

> I would say the spark was ignited for me to have a lens to think about who's telling the story, whose story is being told, and how is that story being told. And so I'll go back to…most of my Eurocentric education, K through 12, told my story from the aspect of slavery through the present. It didn't tell me the story of the diaspora or the global connection, for me to value *all* the humans that I'm connected to, that are part of my racial identity.

Tatu's reflections of experiences in the AADC, like other study participants, credited their professor with maintaining an authentic focus on building a learning community rooted in equity with respect for all participants and authentic awareness of African cultural excellence.

> Our professor was just not about perpetuating that harmful rhetoric for any of her dancers or students. And again, just empowering all of us to find our truth, and live our beauty, and let it shine and not apologize for being…for having a big butt, and for having dreadlocks down to my waist, [laughter] and you know, and for being Black and Brown! You know, so, yeah. And I think she did that in a way that wasn't about who are the best dancers and let's put them in front. Or who's the skinniest one and let's shove her up there...you know, give her the solo. It was never that. She wanted the dance company to reflect real life, and real life isn't about...you know none of that is real when it comes down to real people, and real experience. It's all just perceptions that we've been taught from you know, from the beginning, from when we were little so... yeah, I just can't say enough about her. Well, I'd never thought about it as much, so thanks for asking. I'm reflecting and like, Oh my gosh. Yeah, this has been pretty profound.

As Tatu reminisced further:

> Our leader also just has this way of convincing you as a person that you are so much more miraculous and amazing than you could ever think of yourself. You know, she has this way of helping you see yourself as the beautiful you, you are. That sometimes I think, especially as Black women we struggle with seeing,

> because of society's pressures and norms and politics that get mixed up when you're in grad school, in a predominantly White institution, in a predominantly White town, and predominantly White state…[laughter]…you know? You don't ever realize sometimes the psychic attacks that happen without you being aware, and she just had a way of helping. At least for me. For me, personally, she helped empower me in a way that few teachers I have had, have been able to do. Empowered me in my own choices, in my ability to lead, in my ability to know that I am in charge and I am bossy, and that's a good thing. And we're going to do something special and everyone needs to line up and get in your leos [laughter]. And then hang all this stuff back up!

All participants also described their growth in global and cultural knowledge through the required academic component of the AADC curriculum, which participants described as African American and/or African diasporic worldview and historical background for their artistic research and expressive performances. This global perspective provided the impetus for greater appreciation of self and others, and clarity about the importance of the African diaspora, according to a majority of participants. Tano reflected:

> My family immigrated here when I was 11, and so it wasn't like I was learning about [African Americans or the African diaspora] in my birth country. And so, what I learned about it comes from fourth grade to high school. You know, basic brushing on slavery and civil rights, and that kind of stuff. Nothing about the humanism of it, you know, like the actual human experience. And I think that's what I take away [from AADC] the most: History has a way of demonizing

> history, the stories…and giving it from a certain perspective. What I think I really learned about the diaspora is how wide it is and how connected you can be to it, even without the direct embodiment or the direct lineage. And our professor had a way of including people and not providing a separatist, kind of, point of view. Never at any point did I think that we were talking about someone else's history. It felt like it was a part of mine. Just because of that focus of humanization, and it felt like we were listening to the real stories or thinking about the people, as opposed to the point of view or the group.

Nne spoke to the diversity within the AADC which she noted as an "outsider" when she came to observe auditions in order to do a feature story in the campus newspaper. She later auditioned and became an integral part of the AADC, herself. Her initial experience left an indelible mark on her:

> Walking into the dance studio was major. First of all, I had never been to the Black Culture Center, up until this point. So, walking into [it] was a new space, a new world for me on the campus. Walking into the AADC studio, which is, you know, a gorgeous space and such a professional space and, of course, I had probably my assumptions of what I thought the [AADC] would be or would look like or the space that they would inhabit…and then seeing…the diversity in the room, you know, because I thought I was going to see all Black people, and so when I saw Latinas, Latinos, Asian students, White students, Black students, people who were nontraditional students, so older. That made such a big impression on me and so immediately I was drawn to the company and, then, after

> interviewing some people …so that was my first exposure to the dance company was as a reporter and, then, I was determined to be a part of the dance company. You know watching the audition, watching them do the across the floor, watching the combination. I, actually, was really jealous at that moment; because I was like I wanna be *in* this audition, I don't wanna be reporting it…Yeah! So that was the beginning of my journey and then I went to the AADC Spring Concert, and that sealed the deal for me.

Nne described her experiences with AADC as profound, starting with the spring concert:

> When I saw the student choreography, it blew me away. It was not what I expected, and then this was actually the year that Professor created a piece with [a renowned musician from Ghana] where he composed all the music and performed it live on the [balaphone] and the dancers told a story from Africa through the Middle Passage, the Americas, and it was just…I had never seen anything like it, and it just changed my entire perspective of dance. It changed my understanding of what is possible through a group of dancers who may not have the same background in performance and training, also different backgrounds ethnically, racially, academically…it just blew me away…my world shifted. And that opened this pathway to where I am today. And so I know this is a long story, but I kind of have to tell the story, because I was thinking about kind of what I learned, because it's more than just what I learned in the classroom, because all my touchpoints, all my exposures, and encounters with the dance company, from like I said like the very beginning through being a student, through being an [alumna],

> being an employee…has taught me so much every step of the way...about life, about African diaspora, about Blackness, about myself, about embodiment, about education.

Tatu emphasized that AADC filled a gap in the field of education with regard to curriculum:

> I think having done an undergrad degree in African American studies certainly gave me a little bit of a step or two ahead you know, of some of the concepts. But...so my lens as an undergraduate student was really "who am I in the context of all this craziness?" You know, I'm mixed, but I'm Black. I'm identifying as a Black person whether I like it or not. You know, 'cause for a long time I was like, "I'm mixed" and that's what I was sticking with, and then the world was like "yeah, but..." OK. So, I had this very... you know the Black experience in America is that of the legacy...you know we're all descended from slaves…you know? You know. And then that's that story that they teach you in high school, right? It's like, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Civil Rights, and now we're at Oprah and Michael Jordan. Here we go. And obviously, my undergrad degree helped me debunk a lot of that but my focus in undergrad was still very much, you know, slave trade, middle passage, slavery in America, you know the whole...learning that history. So that's where my focus was [thoughtful pause] just like how in the world did Black people end up in America and what has been our journey, and how do I fit into that personally, right?

Tatu articulated how her education in AADC expanded her understanding:

> I think for me, what I learned from AADC was: Blackness is not this unified experience and I obviously knew that right? But it's like, oh, okay, here I am, I'm going to expand my view of what it means to be "Black" (in quotes) in America does not necessarily always mean this, you know, from Africa slave trade experience. That people can come to Blackness from all sorts of different angles, times in history, places around the world, and can live that experience that just enriches what is Black identity, Black culture, Black politics, in America. It's not just this one thing. And I think she helped me open up my view on that and see what do I, what do we really mean by diaspora? Because my degree in undergrad was African American and African Studies. It didn't have a look into the Diaspora, right? So that was a new...I'm coming to grad school like I know what diaspora means. I'm like what, what does this mean? Aren't we just talking about slaves? And we're all descended from slaves, right?

She went on to say:

> So, I think you know I attribute some of that opening up to my, to the African American and African Diaspora studies program obviously, because that was a huge focus. We're not just talking about this one experience of what it means to be Black in the world, we're talking globally. But then I think [Professor] really incorporated that in the education that she provided, in the music choices she picked, in the outfits...again where is this fabric from? What does it harken back to? You know what ancestors are we calling forth when we do this movement? Where did that originate? What religion, you know. And reminding and teaching

> all of us that the Black experience is global and is many shades, and is many languages, and you know we need to like honor and pay tribute and learn about all of them. So, I think she really did an amazing job of that and just helped me, you know, just incorporate new knowledge in what the Black experience is and can be on like a global scale not just focus so much on [just] the African American experience.

Sita clarified the challenge of bringing diverse educational experiences into protected spaces despite the valuable cultural sharing which ultimately benefitted all learning partners on the university campus:

> We had an opportunity for the Company to perform for a half time show at a major basketball game. And here, again, these are things that most people don't understand, is that we're talking to a person [the head coach] that of course in his mind, he's elevated and everything, he's next to God, whatever [laughter]. I'm asking him for permission to bring 20 or 30 some people over to his house and have them dance on his floor. OK, but the whole issue here, is really about culture and sharing. What I've learned is, is that it's sort of like, how do you talk to people about doing things they hadn't done before? How do you entice and help people understand why they need to understand and participate in this? And, the level of participation can go very far, because…we have this bifurcated name: "African American." It's like, well, it's not so much what it means for me, but it's how do you interpret me through whatever it is that you have, especially if you're not a part of this experience. And then it's like, what do you do? Overall, we're

> all at the same university, so therefore we should all be…our arms should be open and ready to embrace and change. But some people, you know, they give you the stiff arm and say, "hold it, backup, why do I need to be part of this?" …So, you start sharing this and there's certain things that [are self-explanatory] when they happen, which is that this was part of …the basketball season, lays across Black History Month. So, because of this game, they were asking for an African/African American element of reflection during half time period. So, it was not us asking, it was somebody else asking [this famous coach] for us to come in there, but I was the one that was given the job to go talk to him. I had to walk into the lion's den and get permission. And, it was interesting, because all he basically said [was]: "there better not be one nick, scrape, scratch on my floor after you bring your people in" [laughter]. And, it's always been one of my funniest stories, because of people around the world who would like to know about and meet someone like [him], I have that story. And I say that that's really all he ever said, is that "you bet' not put a scratch on my floor" [laughter]. And, I said "Okay, thank you very much, Bye", and that was it, you know?

Sita reiterated how AADC leaders and participants advanced cross-cultural understanding through their performances and other interactions on campus and beyond:

> So, the argument there always is…it's in the level of sharing. Because if we were to go around the world, which The Company has done, now…when you go anywhere else, somebody's always got some level of stipulation or trying to understand what this is all about. And you just, basically say, "It's about the same

> stuff that you do; it's just that it's African American students that are doing it, or they're doing it through this particular mode of expression. It's not like it's a real different…or a big deal. The whole thing is that we're here to share with you, aspects of our culture and development, that's all it is. It doesn't have to be that deep. And, if you want to have additional questions, I am prepared to continue to talk to you about this until we get there."

Culturally relevant education. Of two themes that emerged for RQ2, Black cultural excellence and culturally relevant education, the latter exhibited subthemes of curriculum (content and materials) and methodology or praxis.

Curriculum or content. Following is a discussion of the methods and practices used in AADC to accomplish its goals, according to my study participants. For instance, Mbili reflected on "the honor of studying with [Professor]" and the authenticity inherent in her instructional design, delivery, and cultural practice:

> One of the first things mentioned in her class…in the academic class, and while we were on the [dance] floor. She kept referring to Arthur Mitchell. And the Dance Theater of Harlem. And how she and a number of students got the chance and got a grant, I had no idea what a grant was, so I didn't know what she was talking about. But then I went, "wait a minute, they went somewhere for free! ...[laughter] Wait a minute" [laughter]... and studied. And her eyes would just light up. And then there's that word again, she would "lift." At the time she was wearing the little elastic band around her waist, OK and she would lift on that. She would just reflect, and we would all sit there and listen.

He described the professor's instruction and choreography centering important African and diasporan cultural and spiritual entities like the Orishas, of which Elegua is one.

> She would mention that. And she would mention the [Caribbean] islands, and she would put on music and she would start…she would just go into her...into what she had learned, and she would show us. And so, I said [to myself], "wait a minute. This isn't ballet. This is, there's a little bit of jazz influence here. I can see that now, okay, I get this." But, bottom line…history wise, I realized that…and she mentioned this…about 3 years ago when we had a really long talk one summer: "Interdisciplinary." She was giving us the history lesson. Yeah. She was giving us the culture. You know? When she spoke, she wasn't [Professor] anymore. We heard the voice of the people that she had studied with. So, she was giving us the linguistic lesson right there too, because she, we heard her voice flip. What she had heard, who she had studied with…she was using their tongue. So, we knew it was authentic; that's the point, right? It was all real.

Tatu also spoke about the importance of AADC's historical and cultural focus:

> I had already had a year with The Company, and it had provided for me such engaging and emotional support and engaging intellectual experiences [through the] theories the professor brought to the practice of dance and the history and the culture. And you know I have an undergrad degree from [a respected] college in African and African American Studies. And I have a minor in Women's Studies. So, I wasn't like brand new to some of the history that she was teaching, and you know I had immersed myself already. But I had not done that necessarily in [this

> setting]. You know, people think its [enslavement] is so far away; well it's not in my family, it is right there, only 3 generations. So, for me to be able to talk about that and share that and dance those experiences, because I was a part of her "Ring Shout" dance, and that whole piece where she moved through the history of the Black [continental U.S.] experience and the Black diaspora experience. I mean it was just an honor and a privilege…

Moja illustrated one rationale of ensuring an African centered focus throughout the content, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of and diversity within Black culture, and thus the importance of Africentric curriculum following suit:

> You know, every day we deal with community, we deal with music, we deal with dance movement, we deal with sociology, [laughter], we deal politically, we deal socially, culturally…and its more, for me…it has to be more of a well-rounded perspective than just one thing. And that's why I always fought really hard. Even with my last piece, and I must say this: I think one of my successes was in 2012 when I did an historical narrative, but also in 2017 when I talked about White supremacy and...but using a Jamaican voice. Using my [choice of] very powerful percussive Indian music. Using an early Gospel. You know, so that the experiences and the voices were reflective of a wider range of experiences in Blackness, right?

Sita described how he and the professor collaborated to develop culturally relevant Africentric curriculum and projects as peers:

> Now this original piece from the archives…the U.S. archives; it probably suggested something that was about a half an hour maybe an hour, whatever. But when I was presented with the piece, the first thing I said was well we need to go on and bring it up to date. So, the name of the piece is called "*Prelude to Swing Plus 50.*" [We created, taught, and presented this] in the mid '80s, and it was originally done back in the '30s. And so, when we brought it up to date, and that was a very unique situation. [After that] I created at least 2 other pieces for the dance company, specifically. And the last [piece…*Death in Harlem*] that I did for AADC that I liked the most you know [used] the poetry of Langston Hughes. African American element. Now, that's something that was [intentional and consistent]…all the poems that I set to music for the dance company… all of them were from African American writers. So, when you asked that other question before, how did we keep that African/African American focus, well…that was there enough.

Methodology or praxis. Moja described her philosophy undergirding the AADC approach to student centered instruction as a function of Africentric pedagogy and praxis.

> This type of learning I think that, it just cannot be, for me anyway…just for me to stand in the front of the room and talk. It has to be sort of a shared experience with bringing other people and other perspectives, and other disciplines, so that the students could see more of a global type of view.

Moja specifically planned AADC's unique learning experiences emphasizing their importance and the necessity to intentionally design instruction to provide African centered learning opportunities. Moja articulated this motivation and methodology thus:

> I always wanted to make sure that when anybody came in town from a dance company, that we would be able to have let's say a dance workshop with them." I just felt that I wanted to make sure that my students were treated with respect and they had time *alone* with an esteemed dancer from the Black diaspora. That we would talk to them afterwards and they would be free to ask questions and free to be able to question them about being a person of color in their role as a performing artist in the dance company, because I wanted to give the [AADC] dance students space to be able to ask those questions without hesitation…and to feel like they could connect with a person. I also wanted them to experience also the way that a professional could teach. And a professional of color you know, that they don't see all the time. And so, that was really important to me to provide those types of experiences for the students.

Overall, Moja described structuring courses to include dance movement in a wide range of techniques from across the African diaspora, while also ensuring the historical, cultural and interdisciplinary context was understood by participants and ultimately, audiences. This was recalled earlier by Mbili, but also emerged in other aspects with this Professor's longevity, growth across many facets of cultural excellence and continued professional development as a scholar, researcher, choreographer and collaborator. As Moja explained:

> So, for example, what I learned to do, was to have students really recognize that, you know, OK we need to read this article. We need to discuss this article. We need to have somebody from the Black experience come to talk. You need to be exposed. I don't have all the answers, but we need to have somebody from the department talking about literature. Talking about history. Interdisciplinary projects that we did also helped me in getting students to understand the history and culture. So, for example I did an interdisciplinary project with [a colleague] because she researched farming in the South and rural types of experiences. So, having and doing an interdisciplinary project with her also informed me about her research. But also helped me to navigate a choreographic piece with the students who also had to read articles…but also experience that Black and Brown culture, now I'm saying "Black and Brown culture" is not only about one thing, right?

Tatu spoke eloquently of the positive outcomes of this experiential and performative learning approach:

> I just didn't have a lot of African dance knowledge, OK just pure steps. I mean getting to know [our guest instructors from the African continent] and learning, I mean I just had never been exposed. And then, I'm doing these movements and I'm like oh, yeah, I have a body for this that makes sense. I've been trying to do ballet my whole life and wondering why *this* feels wrong, you know, [laughter]. And then, I'm doing these African moves where everything's low [knees bent, many movements are low to the ground], and I can stick my butt out, and the bigger the better...and I'm like, Oh! I'm totally empowered in this movement

> whereas when I was on pointe shoes, I did not feel that way. I felt, you know I always had the wrong shape. And people told me that when I was little, "Oh, you're too short, you're too hippy and blah blah blah." So, I also just think on a more…less academic, just learning [level or aspect]…African dance was also a super empowering experience for me as a Black woman who can trace her lineage back to Africa and just feeling empowered in some movements that often get misrepresented in modern culture and mainstream society. And like, the butt as a body part being you know misrepresented and misused and used as this aesthetic thing for other people to enjoy instead of like the one who has the butt, and, getting to move it in a way that she enjoys, and it's not for other people. So, she helped me feel empowered in that way, in an embodied way. Not just like an intellectual way in terms of just African Dance as a study.

Consistent with the communal approach to learning in partnership with others as previously mentioned, notably a very Africentric approach, Tisa shared a poignant recollection of an interdisciplinary collaboration with sister ensembles of the AADC which influence ed her emotionally and intellectually:

> One of the biggest works when I was there, was a collaboration…it was with all of the ensembles. Soul Revue, the Gospel ensemble, the Dance ensemble and we did this musical. We did a musical. And the musical allowed us to go back in time and travel all the way through, at that time like up into the eighties [1980's]. And it was really nice. It was really nice so I would…I can say that that structure of looking at the African diaspora, not only dance but music, and culture, and

> heritage from Africa all the way up to that time period, I enjoyed that. I enjoyed doing the different dances that represented the different eras. Yeah and I think probably more than I kind of realized, being a part of that probably helped me later when I set up my arts and education residencies. Because I, too, took that journey beginning in Africa, on up to modern day time.

After this realization, Tisa explained the current career link to her AADC experience:

> I'm on my state's Arts and Education Residency roster, and it's where professional artists are selected by the statewide Commission on the Arts. Usually the arts, the [state wide] arts organization and its a process where you are vetted, so you send in your materials, you send in a performance, you have to have letters of recommendation. You have to have a program that you're going to have for the students and you also have to have been a professional performing artist.

In addition to the methodological insights noted in terms of content or curriculum, Tisa also credited her learning experience in AADC with the founder and leader as transformative.

> One of the things that I can speak to particularly with Professor and in working with her is, probably prior to coming to IU, I really did not understand what African American Studies was. Because I was African American, I assumed that African American Studies dealt with people who wanted to learn about African Americans. And because I was African American, I figured I knew about me... Yeah and I remember Professor asked me, why did I not take her…she taught [an] African American history class. And I was a [physical education] dance major.

> And I did manage eventually to take one of her Jazz classes. But I remember she asked me, and my response probably was, it wasn't on our curriculum, which it wasn't. [In the physical education modern dance program], it wasn't on our curriculum. But her asking me that question also made me realize that...it was more to African and African inspired, and African Diasporan dance than I knew. I just did not know it.

Tisa reflected on the attitude adjustment she received as a result of the leader's influence:

> Yeah. So I began to, you know, brush up on my reading and I started to look at more of the history of African American dancers. So that was that; you know I do remember that moment. I definitely remember that. But you know sometimes people have to stop you and ask. So, I'm pretty sure she understood my thinking a little bit better. But you know, in retrospect, that's where I was coming from. So not really realizing…I knew we had a rich history because I loved reading about the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age. I loved that. In high school…that's what I focused on and read. And, so, I could relate to a lot of the historical work that our leader did in The Company; and I attached to that. But the fact that it was so much more. Yes. [I learned] that I needed to study more and there was a lot more to learn.

Moja explained a course project she designed to cultivate cooperation, teamwork, and a shared creative learning skillset:

> Back in 1991, I constructed this class assignment that I called Collaboration. And not knowing how...you know the creation of that developed into shared

> experience by the way I put the groups together. Because what happened with that was that we would all discuss a theme that they wanted to explore. And so, the discussion really went into a lot of social and political, and cultural issues and challenges that were happening in their lives in the United States and, really, abroad. And then each group would take a sub theme of that major theme.
>
> And the reason I bring that up is, is because what they had to do is actually discuss within their groups, what their focus was going to be, as far as their story. And knowing that they had to work together, they had to collaborate and compromise, I think that for me that was one way to put students together, to really, actually [pause] give them an opportunity to deal with each other.
>
> And, also looking at ways they could deal with others after they graduated. So, I do know that some of them still talk about those Collaboration experiences and you know, some themes were really, very poignant to them…they still remember those conversations and what not.

Student reflections of the Collaborations and other group projects indicate they delivered on learning outcomes as the head leader intended. Tatu spoke in depth about this methodology:

> Being exposed to teachers from around the world at Professor's Annual Dance Workshop was also an amazing experience. There's a whole list of people [famous artists in residence] I mean just like people from literally all over the globe. So that was also an amazing educational piece to the experience every year. Because it wasn't just... and again I think that's about Professor focusing on

> the community. It wasn't just like I'm a Prima Donna, this is my dance company it's all about me. She wanted to expose her dancers to a plethora of dance types, of teaching types, of learning spaces. And so, you know I think that's why she's so committed to the workshop every year because it brought in all these amazing people, who are also professionals…in their zone with whatever they're doing…from Salsa to Vogue, to different African dance styles. It was just amazing. And Modern, I mean. All sorts. And she wanted you to, she'd make you change it up. You couldn't just take the same stuff. She would put you in different classes on purpose. We got assigned; that was always fun stuff to assign kids to a dance class because maybe they didn't want to or maybe they felt a little uncomfortable. She would push you outside of our comfort zones.

Tatu also appreciated the professor's commitment to creating diverse learning experiences which required personal challenges and teamwork.

> Absolutely, absolutely. Insisted on it. It was like you will not get through this experience without [teamwork and experiencing other educational leaders]. Absolutely. And then I think she also did that intentionally through the Collaborations because that was all student choreography and you know I'd never...I'd choreographed some stuff but being part of a Collaboration was also an exposure to different teaching styles. Because students had to teach themselves and learn from one another. Teach each other and learn from one another. And I think that was absolutely intentional. And she did that every semester.

Tatu analyzed the ideas and methods embedded in their leaders' teaching style and thus AADC's learning community, as culturally African in nature and positive, and contrasted them with Eurocentric ideas often presented and even internalized as the norm:

> I would say the Dance Company and Professor helped me dismantle the buy in I had had most of my life to Eurocentric standards of beauty. So that physically you know my body, I'm a pretty short, pretty hippy gal. And most of my life I've been trying always to lose weight, and be skinnier, and straighten my hair. And I started some of that dismantling work in undergrad by growing my hair into my dreadlocks that is the way my hair naturally is, and by beginning that process. But I think learning about the dance, engaging in diasporic studies, engaging in embodiment through movement education, community...you know because I took ballet for years and it's all about the "I". You know, ballet is all about the prima, you know? And the one. Whereas what I've learned is African dance and styles of teaching I think is more about community and about the together and about the "we" and about, you know it's not about just you out there. There's space for individual "shining" if you will, or showing off in a good way, right? But it's more about a community as opposed to the like, you know very one-person centered idea.

Tano expressed it this way:

> The most important thing that I learned about African centric teaching and learning, I think, which doesn't feel foreign to me at all, is, and I'm not sure if I learned it at the [AADC] space or if it was just reiterated there...is that it is done

> as a community. The importance of community, and like, coming from [another birth country], it was…education, wasn't so individualized. It wasn't a competition, who cares who got the best grade. We danced together. We sung together. It was that kind of learning space that I found again in the dance company. Yeah, that, it was community based and experienced based, right? So you do things with your body, as opposed to sitting and looking and gawking and learning. Right. And going back to that exercise, we started with one kind of learning from reading, to understanding and then, using that in application. As a group and hearing from each other, and then seeing what each other creates from it.

Nne noted the wider goal in the head leader's methodology of teaching students how to learn:

> [Stepping] into the studio space, because like I said I'm fortunate that I've gotten to see every perspective, you know, I see the office and how we engage in the administrative space. I've seen how we work on the stage. I've seen how we work on tour, on, you know, stages all over the world. On concrete floors, but then also seeing how we work in our home, in our studio, and, because I was a part of the Dance Company during her tenure, I'm most familiar with how Professor instructed and taught in that space. I have to say, that was one of my learning curves joining the dance company, was understanding her process and understanding her way of teaching, her way of choreographing and creating, because it was different from what I was used to. What I was used to, or what I

> had been taught [in non Africentric dance classes] was asking questions was a good thing. I thought that asking questions meant you were engaged, you cared, you were paying attention to detail, you wanted to attain perfection. I remember distinctly, you know, raising my hand, or I remember even once, I didn't raise my hand and just like shouted out a question [laughter]. She shut that down really fast and she goes, you know, "okay, okay, okay, okay. I need everybody to understand this, I need everybody to understand this: when I am creating, when I am in the process, your questions throw me off. They distract from this process…", and I remember [laughter] every time people would kind of like raise their hands, she just kind of like swatted them down, like, "wait, wait, wait, wait" you know, she says, "Watch. This is ethnographic research. This is ethnographic research. Watch with your eyes. Watch what I'm doing. Watch my hips. Watch my feet. Do the research on your own. Do the research before you ask me questions."

Nne continued to reflect:

> So, I think that is a key part of her teaching method, what made her unique as an instructor, as a professor, and especially when we had a guest in the studio. [As] an example, you know we had [an international lead professional dancer from West Africa]…come into the studio very often, and Professor…before [our guest teaching artist] would come into the studio, she would remind us, "Watch. This is ethnographic research. You need to observe every movement that [Guest] is doing before you try and do it yourself." You know, "watch how she drops her waist. Watch how her feet are planted on the floor. Watch how her upper back

> articulates, and the movement of her shoulders. Where are her eyes? Where is she looking?" So, teaching us to…yeah, teaching us how to learn. I think that is the most significant part of that experience in the dance studio, under Professor's leadership.

Lasting influence of AADC experience. Tisa's closing reflection analyzed the overall instructional strategy and design of the AADC and its parent department as critical to the positive learning experience and lasting legacy:

> I think the structure of [the Institute], which is inclusive of the African American Dance Company was wonderful in terms of getting (academic) credit. [The Afro-American Studies Department as it was named at the time] and the Institute being there so we could learn more about our culture, share our culture, and have a community…a place to grow. And I do believe that our professor allowed for a vision to prosper. Just…she was the vessel, and the vision was able to develop and to continue to grow and grow. Because you really don't see people stay around that long with such professionalism and such growth. And so, it started off as The Company, and now it has developed into the Workshop and the intensive, traveling overseas to share the work and bringing in international artists. That is continued growth. And I think that that makes a world of difference, because again it shows again that…its so many more people that need to see our work and experience our culture. We can share it and we can still learn, we can continue to grow, and we can always remain relevant.

Nne identified her AADC experiences as the most important aspect of her college career:

> When I think about it, I can't remember most of my college experience, in the classroom. Most of my college experience was trying to finish papers, trying to keep up, always feeling behind that I almost didn't learn you know, I felt like I didn't learn that much because I was always trying to meet the standards. Whereas, the African American Dance Company was core, was central to my holistic learning experience in college and that's where I learned the most.

Nne reflected further on the life lessons the professor instilled:

> [Professor] really taught me a lot, not just about dance, but in life and in academics. To observe, to think critically on my own, and to not wait for a leader or an authoritative voice to say, "here it is, here it is, here it is", but to actually watch and analyze on my own and figure it out, and that actually asking questions is…because what she was saying is, "no, you're not actually paying attention. You're formulating the question in your head. You're worried about yourself, while I'm teaching. And you should be observing and doing the research."

Nane is another former student who credits the leader's teaching and learning influence as life changing:

> What did I learn? First of all I learned what the word [diaspora] meant! [You know] that wasn't a word that you heard, and I don't think it was even a word that was used while we were in The Company. We just were exposed to it through the different people that [Professor] brought in and the different genres of dance and the evolution of the moving toward the African Diaspora education, because some of the pieces that we did earlier in the 80's weren't necessarily tapping into that.

> [Then] as Professor became more knowledgeable and went on sabbaticals and reached out to different people in other countries, she was able to bring them in and expose us to different cultures as well as the [academic] class that went along with [AADC's arts performance component] exposed us to different aspects of culture. So much so that I just realized this at the [recent] Floor Naming Ceremony [dedicating the floor of the dance studio space in the founding director's honor], that she's the reason why I went into teaching and loving of social studies because I see it from a standpoint of culture and exposing students to different culture[s]. And every civilization that I teach, I always bring in the aspect of Dance and why did they dance and what was the purpose of the dance ceremonies and who was it, and what did the mask mean... And it just dawned on me recently that she was the person that facilitated that love of culture that I can express to my students.

With all the accolades and demonstrated influence of AADC on the lives and minds of students, peers, and the fields of arts and education, the head leader [Professor] still speaks of reaching and growing:

> I had an unknown trajectory [laughter]. I just kind of followed the spirit in what I felt I had to do. And, you know, looking back, hopefully I did a good job. You know, hopefully. And I know that I probably could have done more. But, within the circumstances that you're in you just do… I've learned that you just do as much as you can. And so, now that I'm retired it's just trying to figure out how to continue!

In response to my closing statement of thanks for participating in my study, the professor expressed appreciation in return:

> This is going to be a very important work for the future. Especially [in] that sometimes we look at performing arts as the bottom…especially dance…as the bottom of the totem pole. [But research like this, reveals] how we can really make a difference through that particular discipline, right? We really can.

Summary

This summary highlights answers to my research questions as conveyed through the data collected and analyzed relative to the participants' perceptions of their experiences in the AADC. The findings related to RQ1, "how do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?" are as follows. Findings were rooted in the following emergent themes: the positive experiences participants had concerning their Africentric teaching and learning pursuits as a function of leadership, participants' perceptions of being part of something historic and essential on their campus and in the community as with a legacy, and the participants' lifechanging experiences through overcoming challenges encountered as AADC scholar artists and student leaders viewed through a human rights lens.

This reiterates the findings related to RQ2 which was: "what methods have AADC leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through

Africentric pedagogy and praxis?" A recurrent theme in responses to RQ2 was the idea of the head leader's intentionality around creating a responsive and responsible community of co leaders with a broader understanding of Black cultural excellence. This research question also yielded clear recollections of the instructional methods experienced including expressive arts exploration of African centered values and culture vis a vis self and others, which yielded deep learning. Verbatim quotes also reveal the participants' perceptions that these teaching methods were positive, effective, and long lasting. They attributed part of the lasting influence of this educational methodology to the experiential learning strategy which included historical background, and cultural context ensured engagement and relevance plus retention.

In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis and my interpretation of study findings via the lens of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the conceptual framework, the stated social change implications, and potential recommendations for practical application and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the experiences of those who have participated in the AADC academic and performing arts program relative to CRT, human rights ideals, and distributed leadership theory. The findings of this study emerged from the participants' perceptions of their experiences as members or alumni of the program. The findings were represented by five themes: leadership, legacy, human rights, Black cultural excellence, and culturally relevant education. Analysis of the participants' responses to interview questions indicated that participants' culturally relevant experiences in this setting fostered greater understanding, empathy, and commitment, which led to a sense of community and responsibility for the collective. In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the findings, describe the limitations of the study, discuss the recommendations for future research, and present the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I explain ways that my research results confirm and extend the body of knowledge in the field of education when compared with findings from the peer-reviewed literature presented in Chapter 2. I also provide an analysis and interpretation of my findings in the context of the conceptual framework.

Interpretation in Relationship to the Framework

Analyzing and interpreting my study findings in the context of the conceptual framework supports the value of educational programming like that provided by the AADC given its more than four decades of short- and long-term benefits as perceived by

a diverse group of participants. My conceptual framework relied on CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Afrocentrism (Asante, 2011), which involve respecting the cultural agency of all peoples; distributed leadership theory relative to shared responsibility throughout the organization mirroring African communal norms (Leithwood et al., 2009); and human rights ideals per the United Nations code, which articulated the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights to which all peoples are entitled (Donnelly, 2013). The AADC "experiment," as Sita described it, fulfilled the promise of equitable treatment of African-centered educators, students, and content to expand the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of all peoples through intentional artistic and academic praxis.

Interpretation in Relationship to the Empirical Research

The findings relative to RQ1 revealed that participants perceived positive outcomes as a result of their Africentric teaching and learning pursuits in AADC, which they credited primarily to leadership. Each participant expressed a strong sense that visionary leadership created the model for this unique organization while the head leader, their professor and ensemble director, set the standard that participants sought to emulate and created shared opportunities to support their leadership development. Sita attributed AADC's multidecade success to visionary leadership: "it was the person [hired]…and that makes all the difference in the world." Several participants mentioned the lead professor's selflessness and modesty despite what Nne described as "her profound work." Nane stated "I don't think she actually realized her influence of leadership. I think she may now because you know 43 years later... all she needs to do is say 'Boo' and we are

there." Mbili expressed the idea that including "everyone in decision making [was] such a great way of leading," which also generated a high level of respect for their professor of whom Tatu observed "[it takes] a very special person and personality to continue to set the bar high [for oneself]." These findings corroborate the empirical research reviewed in Chapter 2, which revealed the value of participative or distributed leadership as an empowering and enriching function of organizations, which can also increase capacity, interdependence, and commitment to shared goals as represented in the studies of Bowman (2010, 2011), Leithwood et al. (2009), and Richard et al. (2016).

All participants' reflections indicated a strong sense of legacy and sustained value, which Tatu emphasized with the comment "I'm a part of history." Tisa marveled at the founding director's quality of work and longevity, noting that it was her commitment that facilitated the ongoing AADC legacy: "she was the vessel, and the vision was able to develop and continue to grow, and grow." Saba fondly recalled one of AADC's PBS performance productions as a "highlight…that has stood the test of time," affirming that the concept of legacy pertained not only to the organization itself, but also to the relationships and the body of creative work that it birthed. This echoes the literature that showed that the arts have served a key role for individual participants and artists, as well as a valuable community-building social function across diverse backgrounds (Arthur et al., 2015; Colman, 2006; Hains-Wesson & Campbell, 2014).

In addition, participants spoke of life lessons that framed both victories and challenges in human rights terms. Tatu emphasized the communal learning aspect of Africentric teaching and the professor's emphasis on working together, helping each

other, which “has translated into my professional life, [my] social work career.” Tatu noted this training fostered questions of “what am I doing to contribute to [the local] community as a whole?” Participants indicated these experiences influenced their engagement and their retention of the lessons learned. “I use that in my life to this day,” insisted Sita. Moja’s experiences as a scholar-practitioner exemplified the struggle for the human right to education and culture respectively, per Articles 26 and 27 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948). Mills (2013) had described a similar struggle to equitably value the arts, as one form of discrimination dancers face in the traditional academic system. Moja saw her work to provide the best experiences possible for AADC participants as “fighting for human rights just to make the company visible” amid attempted marginalization for its Africentric focus and diverse membership. Despite that reality, each participant, with the exception of Saba, enrolled in the academic and performance arts course expecting to participate in a vibrant dance community, and every participant expressed gratitude that experiences in AADC exceeded their expectations, both short term and long term. These findings confirmed Bowman’s (2011) findings that human experiences are more influential than curricular changes.

All participants expressed that formal and informal leadership from faculty and peers increased their engagement and learning, and also increased their perceptions of their experiences and the quality thereof. Participants credited their involvement in activities on campus and off campus and noted awareness of the importance of AADC’s influence with their lasting positive perceptions relative to participation in the educational program. This was true whether participants were recent alumni or had graduated four

decades earlier. Mbili provided detailed and animated descriptions of his experiences as a student in AADC's first decade and how they influenced him profoundly: "I use that in my life to this day." Sita appreciated the leader's "amazing job" that helped "incorporate new knowledge of what the Black experience is…on a global scale." Participants articulated epiphanies in their personal perspectives on social and racial justice, which they described as transformative and sustained, including their viewpoints on Black culture, leadership, human rights, and their status as global citizens. This confirms and extends the ideas found in the literature relative to the need for culturally relevant practices and people whose voices are often absent (Bishop et al., 2010; Harper, 2012). Through AADC, participants found their voices, explored hidden truths, and shared them via their artistry and scholarship and in their daily lives after graduation.

The findings related to RQ2 suggested that the intentional African-centered teaching and learning content, techniques, and participatory learning activities had a positive influence on the cultural and academic knowledge acquisition of participants. Most participants indicated that this collegiate educational experience with AADC influenced their thinking and behavior for the rest of their lives. Findings also suggested that these African-centered dance and academic interactions led to increased appreciation for other cultures and realities, irrespective of race and ethnicity, and influenced the evolution of the identity and perspective of learners regarding their future responsibilities to humanity. This expanded on the findings reviewed in the literature, which suggested that individuals should respect paradigms and norms from disparate cultures rather than taking a deficit view of anything other than the dominant culture, which is unfortunately

the practice in U.S. society including higher education (see Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Nyoni & Batale, 2013; Rose-Redwood, 2010). Mbili noted that prior to the creation of AADC, “brilliant as we were, we didn’t have a voice [on campus].” Responses to RQ2 were consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 regarding the arts’ strong influence on the psyches and spirits of presenter and audiences alike, from exposing racism in pursuit of justice to affirming cultural traditions for some, while educating and enlightening diverse constituencies (see Ferry et al., 2012; Frambach et al., 2012; Harper, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was achieved; however, a few limitations existed. First, the study site is a unique multicultural arts and academic institution with a specific setting, founding leadership, resources, and historical timing. Therefore, the transferability of practices identified in this study may depend on the characteristics of other institutions seeking to apply the findings or replicate the program. My study focused on the dance company and academic course component of the first and only African American academic and arts institute at a major U.S. university. Therefore, this program has a unique institutional culture.

Second, the personal characteristics of leaders and cultural artists can vary from one college or university to another, and from one decade to another, such that some may be more visionary relative to racial and social justice, cultural relevance, and human rights. Conversely, some educational leaders may be more risk averse than others regarding teaching and presenting sensitive or controversial topics; others may have

different relationships with their campus and community allies. This variability of personal characteristics may limit the study's usefulness to other researchers although the goal of this study, which was to understand the experiences of leadership and participation in the AADC, was accomplished.

Third, the sample population was self-selective. Study participants self-selected in response to the recruitment letter I posted to a closed Facebook group for current and former members of the organization. This recruitment strategy may have limited the sample to those who appreciated their experiences and connection to the AADC. These limitations may present challenges with transferability and generalizability to scholar-artists at other institutions.

Another limitation may have been my exclusive use of technology to field this research. The interview protocol included recruitment via social media and interviewing by telephone. I was unable to observe the nonverbal indicators and body language that accompany face-to-face interviews. To mitigate this limitation, I listened for any sign of haste or hesitation with answers and to changes in voice inflection and tone as indications of feelings, emotions, and levels of comfort with the inquiry.

Finally, there was a potential for research bias in this study as I shared some similarities with the participants given my status as a fellow member of the closed Facebook group and an alumnus of the AADC, having participated three decades ago. First, I ensured that each participant was aware that their participation was voluntary, that no ill will would arise if they chose not to participate and regardless of the perspectives they shared if they did participate, and that they could withdraw from the study at any

time. In addition, I endeavored to limit researcher bias by questioning my assumptions and following my interview protocol, including avoiding leading questions. I used researcher notes and a journal to capture and revisit my personal impressions, tangential questions, or private thoughts that arose during the interviews. Lastly, I provided each participant with a copy of their transcribed interviews to verify, question, delete, or change their interview responses. No changes beyond a few minor typographical or grammatical edits were requested, and only for two of the nine transcripts.

Some participants commented on how the interview questions led to deep reflection and epiphanies that they had not previously considered. As Tatu phrased it, "I'd never thought about it as much, so thanks for asking…this has been pretty profound." In Nane's words, "she's the reason why I went into teaching and loving of social studies…it just dawned on me recently that she was the person that facilitated that love of culture that I can express to my students." Mbili reflected "it's a joy to think about now, it really is." Most of the participants expressed gratitude and appreciation for this opportunity to reflect on their experiences in AADC, perhaps for the first time, and to share compelling spontaneous revelations that affirmed the trustworthiness of the data.

Recommendations

After reviewing the findings of this study, its strengths and limitations, and the literature review of Chapter 2, I have developed recommendations for future research.

- First, due to the highly selective small population. I recommend additional qualitative studies with larger populations within the AADC community and

unrelated populations with other non-Eurocentric missions. These studies will add to the current findings of this study.

- Given the performing arts aspect fundamental to the AADC experience, I recommend conducting further research to study the dance performances, classes, and rehearsals to extend the findings of this study. Participants shared vivid descriptions of the performance themes, culturally significant costuming, and embodied experiences of their on-stage, rehearsal, and audience engagement experiences. A case study or another methodology which could visually examine the cultural arts content and in-person presentation dynamics may be particularly informative.
- Expand the stakeholder pool of study participants to include audience perceptions of their experiences with AADC.
- Stimulate graduate students' interest in conducting evaluative research to describe and assess the influence of related culturally relevant teaching techniques and/or curriculum approaches to influence the academic and cultural arts learning of high school or post-secondary youth.
- Encourage research studies specific to the human rights aspect of African centered and other culturally relevant teaching and learning, to preserve indigenous knowledge and eradicate barriers to non-dominant voices in the literature.

Implications

This research study yielded in depth interview data from participants in AADC's rich Africentric educational program thus beginning to address the problem of scant research and a knowledge gap in the discipline, for this topic.

The academy benefits when a seminal project achieves its founding mission and is sustainable. It provides a model. The university and its stakeholders receive credit when historically significant programs or departments are documented. Individuals and society may benefit by learning strategies for positive leadership, human rights and culturally relevant education. In the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) this study may advance knowledge in the discipline, expand practice, and/or inform policy decisions for the United States. Any benefits could extend globally, given the widespread influence of Western education systems and increasing application worldwide through distance learning.

Potential implications for positive social change that are consistent with and bounded by the scope of my study include the possibility of new or renewed funding and other support for Black studies, ethnic studies, and/or arts education programming which have been declining and under attack in recent years across the United States (Nicol, 2013). From a human rights perspective, increased awareness of the role of culturally relevant education in harming or healing individual, campus, community, and ultimately societal issues may encourage other educational leaders to replicate this model or develop their own. Another feasible human rights reparatory solution could be increased interest in further research exploring the potential benefits for all learners when Africentric

curriculum is mainstreamed rather than suppressed. Any of these possible outcomes which contribute to increased understanding of the contributions and humanity of currently marginalized people is a positive step which advances the discourse in academia relative to what is possible, and what is necessary, for more equitable pedagogy and praxis in the field of education which ultimately affects the lived experiences of real people.

Potential social change implications of this study extend beyond the AADC campus and community to expand educational leaders' and policy makers' awareness of and sensitivity to the need for inclusive, culturally relevant education as a crucial tool for advancing humanity in the face of increasingly publicized divisive, discriminatory, and inhumane treatment of minoritized peoples worldwide. Additional social change implications resulted by identifying and articulating possible human rights reparations exemplars in addition to financial redress for human rights violations, such as those forms of reparatory justice which may be provided by culturally relevant education.

Black performance art is a powerful tool for healing and educating to resist oppressive, racist constructs (Asante, 2011). The U.N. International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) is ideal to investigate the context of Africentric arts and academics. This study could lead to strategies in human rights educational solutions and praxis (Thésée & Carr, 2012). Implications also may extend to professional development for faculty and could be presented to the department of the university, administrators, scholars, and to other institutions to replicate. The idea of reparations to heal historic wounds includes programmatic and curricular offerings as well as cultural truth-telling.

Documenting the AADC experience in this way, tells a story which has thus far been hidden as are many non “mainstream” accomplishments in the academy.

For this to be a possibility, I propose the following recommendations for others to consider, which are gleaned from the findings of this study:

- Develop oral history archives to capture participants’ experiences on a broader scale in AADC and other African-centered or non-Eurocentric educational models for historical documentation, and, also for further research.
- Disseminate the findings from this study to stakeholders and others seeking to increase student engagement, promote anti-racist praxis, and empower leaders at all levels of their development. Consider applicability within the academy as well as other disciplines.

Conclusion

There is value to the academy when a seminal project achieves its founding mission, and also attains a measure of sustainability, which may be instructive to others seeking to build educational models that fill gaps in the curriculum. The host institution and its stakeholders also benefit when the accomplishments of one of its historically significant programs or departments is researched and documented for posterity. At the micro level, individuals and society may benefit from a greater understanding of experiences or strategies that promote positive attributes of leadership and culturally relevant education. In the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) particularly, potential contributions of this study may advance knowledge in the discipline, expand practice and/or inform policy decisions.

Findings from this interpretive qualitative study reinforced the theorists' work which comprised my conceptual frame of critical race theory, distributed leadership, and human rights. Participants' candid reflections on their participation in the AADC described a nurturing collective learning partnership that expanded knowledge of the global content while creating a culture of unity and sense of responsibility for other human beings across cultures, race, and nationality. Notably, this has an exponential influence, as alumni unanimously described retaining and incorporating this training in their own lives and careers, which in turn changes society over time.

Their Africentric teaching and learning experiences were overwhelmingly positive; and participants highlighted leadership as a foundational part of their overall development as artists and global citizens. Participants perceived that they were part of something historic and essential on their campus and in the larger community, which expanded to include the entire world. Participants reported life-changing experiences through overcoming challenges encountered as AADC scholars and student leaders, including race-based challenges faced by individuals and the collective. A recurrent theme was the creation of a responsive and responsible community of co-leaders through participation in the AADC. Educational methods, including expressive arts exploration of African centered values and culture to enlighten oneself and others, yielded deep learning. Experiential learning, including historical background and cultural context, ensured engagement and relevance plus retention.

This study extended the body of knowledge in the field of education and bodes well for the idea of decolonizing education through the implementation of such entities. It

further provides encouragement for future scholarly exploration of African-centered teaching and learning as a tool for achieving equity for minoritized individuals and groups, at a time when global problems underscore the critical need for human beings to overcome man-made divisions thus allowing for global collaboration to co-create global solutions.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

RQ1. How do the participants and leaders perceive their experiences relative to shared leadership of and participation in an academic and performance arts learning community that seeks to foster cultural appreciation, social justice, and global citizenship through teaching about African descendants and their contributions to the world?

RQ2: What methods have AADC leaders and participants used to express the excellence of Black culture through Africentric pedagogy and praxis?

"Good day! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this confidential interview exploring student and alumni experiences in leadership and culturally relevant Africentric education with the AADC academic and performance ensemble. I will ask you 12 or so questions to learn about your perceptions of your experiences and will keep them confidential. Your responses and others will be summarized and used in my dissertation. I would also be happy to provide you with a copy of your interview. If you want to discontinue the interview at any time, please just say so, and we will stop."

Warm up conversation will include general questions to put the participants at ease for example, "where are you calling from, how is the weather there? Can you talk comfortably where you are? Can you hear me well enough; do I still have your permission to record this interview so I can refer to it for accuracy as I write the summary? "Thank you, let's get started."

1. What would you say is the most memorable experience you had as part of the AADC learning community?
    a. Can you share a little more about that?
    b. What else, if anything, stands out about your experiences there?

   c. How long were you in the program? How many hours a week do you think you participated? What was most challenging; the most rewarding experience with AADC?"

2. What did you learn about the African diaspora from AADC?

   a. Can you tell me more about that?

   Possible probes:

   b. What about Black cultural contributions to society?

3. Tell me the most important thing you learned about African-centered teaching and learning in AADC?

   a. What did that experience mean to you?

   Possible probes:

   b. What about cultural appreciation?

   c. What about social justice?

   d. What about global citizenship?

4. Can you describe some examples of educational leadership the AADC exposed you to or that you witnessed??

   Possible probes:

   a. Can you give me a specific example of that?

   b. What did that experience mean to you?

5. Can you describe the content and methods or practices the leader/s used to teach effectively?

   a. Can you give me a specific example of that?

   b. What did that experience mean to you?

6. What was the most meaningful performance you participated in as part of the AADC course and ensemble?
   a. Can you share a little more about that?
7. How did your experiences in an African centered arts ensemble and academic course affect your thinking about concepts like human rights which includes economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights?
   a. Can you share a little more about that?
8. How did your experiences in an African centered arts ensemble and academic course affect your thinking about concepts like racism?
   a. Can you share a little more about that?
9. How did your experiences in an African centered arts ensemble and academic course affect your thinking about concepts like reparations?
   a. Can you share a little more about that?
10. Can you describe any lasting benefit or benefits of your experience as a member or alumni of the AADC?
   a. What does that mean to you?
11. How do you self-identify your ethnicity?
12. Is there anything else you want to tell me before we finish this interview?

Closing Statement:

“Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and these important reflections with me. In reviewing our interview, I may have some additional questions to clarify one or more of your answers. If so, may I please contact you in the next week to get clarification if needed? I will contact you by email when the study is completed.”