

PEDAGOGY OF THE FIVE PERCENT:  
EDUCATION IN THE NATION  
OF GODS AND EARTHS

A Dissertation

Presented to the  
Faculty of Argosy University/Atlanta  
College of Education and Human Development

In Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

by

Sujan Kumar Dass

December, 2006

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EDUCATION IN THE NATION OF GODS AND EARTHS

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## Abstract

The Nation of Gods and Earths and its pedagogy represent an understudied, yet significant area deserving investigation in urban educational research. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of members of the NGE on education in both the traditional school system and in the NGE. The researcher also sought to identify the pedagogical practices of the NGE within the theoretical framework of nonformal education. This qualitative study used semi-structured interview data from 13 participants situated throughout the eastern United States. The result of the subsequent analysis indicate that the educational needs of many at-risk Black youth are met outside of the education mainstream by the nonformal pedagogy of the Nation of Gods and Earths.

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## Dedication

To my family, both biological and extended,  
and to future generations, who may one day benefit  
from the ideas discussed in this work.

## Chapter One: The Problem

Unbeknownst to many Americans, an American subculture known popularly as the Five Percenters has flourished in urban communities for the past four decades. More appropriately known as the Nation of Gods and Earths, the term generally applied by insiders and members, the group and its pedagogy represent an understudied, yet significant and worthwhile area deserving investigation in educational research. Through its emphasis on self-knowledge and the *organizational habitus* of their culture, the pedagogy of the Nation of Gods and Earths [NGE] has instilled in many delinquent urban youth a heightened desire for learning and achievement (Allah, 1987; Mock, 2002; Tanner, 1998). Participation in the NGE culture is often transformative, resulting in formerly delinquent and underachieving youth attaining a number of the significant benchmarks of academic and societal success, including high school and college graduation, entrepreneurship, and employment (Alim, 2005; Aulen, 2005; Gathers, 1993; Gotterher, 1975).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Growing concern regarding academic and societal failure among young Black males has prompted a number of educators and curricular theorists to propose alternative and nonformal models of education that may better suit the needs of the growing numbers of high-risk Black males in severely distressed urban communities (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Narine, 2002; Neisser, 1986). The NGE, more commonly known to outsiders as the Five Percenters, represented the advent of a new dynamic in nonformal education during their rise to prominence in New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Currently a nationwide phenomenon (Smydra, 2003), the NGE's pedagogical practices and achievement ideology have remained mostly consistent and continue to generate significant improvements among formerly delinquent and disaffected youth, including gains in self-esteem, growth in academic interest and engagement, the avoidance of membership in gangs or criminal lifestyles, and the development of pro-social attitudes and behaviors (Mock, 2002). However, the NGE pedagogy has not been addressed in the scholarly literature on nonformal education, and the NGE itself has only been seriously studied by a limited number of independent researchers (Miyakawa, 2005; Nuruddin, 1994; O'Connor, 1998). An investigation of educational practices and attitudes prevalent in the NGE culture can potentially inform the effective development of alternative curricular models for high-risk Black youth in urban communities (Kipke, Unger, O'Conner, Palmer, & LaFrance, 1997).

### *Problem Background*

The history of the NGE begins with Clarence Edward Smith, later renamed Clarence 13X as a member of the Nation of Islam's Temple No. 7 in Harlem, who left the mosque in 1964 for unconfirmed reasons. Allegedly, Clarence 13X, described as both a gifted philosopher (Gardell, 1996) and a dynamic orator and leader in the Temple (Allah, 1987, Smith, J. I., 1999), was ousted for breaking Nation of Islam [NOI] prohibitions against gambling (Matthews, 1969; Noor, 2002). Conversely, others have argued that there is little evidence to suggest an expulsion ever occurred, citing both the NOI protocol that there first be a hearing for such matters (Cuba, 1995) as well as NOI leader Elijah Muhammad's support of and respect for the early Five Percenters (Allah, W., 2000). Insiders contend that 13X left on his own volition after an internal conflict arose

about the focus of his teaching: the godhood of the Black man (Cuba, 1992; Noor, 2002). During that time, the Nation of Islam and its most popular minister, Malcolm X, were reaching out to the generation of adults responsible for the Civil Rights movement. According to NOI researcher True Islam, this agenda left a “spiritual void” among the Black youth of New York, which Clarence 13X “stepped in to fill” (Islam, 1999, p. 438). Upon leaving the mosque, Clarence 13X adopted the name Allah and began teaching Harlem’s street youth, specifically those whom biographical accounts of Allah describe as “poor, delinquent and hard core street youth” (Allah, 1987, para. 7) and “some very tough kids” (Gotterher, 1975, p. 27). One insider account says of the early Five Percenters, “Many of them were drug addicts, drop outs, and incorrigible black youth that society had long since failed and given up on.” (Allah, 1987, para. 7) Similarly, McCloud (1995) records an NGE member who relates, “Our Father Allah taught the pimps, pushers, hookers to become the wisest people in the universe. He always taught the young.” (p. 59) Aulen corroborates this assertion, noting, “The NGE historically engages in outreach among troubled youth and gang members. NGE founder Smith launched this activist tradition.” (2005, para. 7)

Allah imparted to the youthful recruits the imperative to go out and teach others upon completion of a mandated series of studies (Smith, J. I., 1999), resulting in the Five Percenters’ appropriation of the maxim “Each one, teach one” (Miyakawa, 2003a), and the inception of NGE motto “Save the Babies,” referring to the redemption of America’s youth. According to London NGE member Sincere Wise, “We stand for the education of the baby. The main focus of our group is to show youths the right way to self-improvement. We are about building not destroying.” (Quinones, 2002, p. 2) This

tradition of educative proliferation has continued for four decades and spanned nearly the entire United States in its scope. In the five-year span between October 10, 1964 and June 13, 1969, Allah oversaw the replication of the NGE pedagogy, spreading from the first nine Harlem adolescents, known as the “first born,” to nearly a thousand youth throughout the metropolitan area of New York City. Hundreds of former gang members and delinquent youth were enrolled in school or vocational programs, and many had been accepted into college shortly before Allah’s assassination in 1969 (Allah, 1987; Gathers, 1993). Regarding the present day scope of this study, it is useful to note Beloved Allah’s introduction to a biography of Allah:

Today there are thousands of young black men and women who are members of The Nation of Gods and Earths. There are even thousands more who are not members but whose lives have been affected in some positive way from learning the knowledge of themselves at an early age. Why isn't the man who is responsible for awakening so many black youth known to the masses of our people? Why has this man never been honored? Perhaps it's because his full greatness won't be realized until the world beholds the greatness of the masses of black youth whose lives he touched. (1987, para. 1)

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study is twofold: (a) to identify pedagogical practices within the NGE culture which may contribute to increased attainment of academic and societal success among high-risk, typically delinquent, Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, and (b) to explore the influence of NGE culture on the educational attitudes and aspirations of NGE members.

### *Research Questions*

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?
2. What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?
3. How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational achievement and post-school success?

### *Definitions*

The term NGE member, as used in this study, refers to any constituent of NGE ideology who identifies themselves as part of the Nation of Gods and Earths. It is important to note that the NGE has neither a hierarchical leadership that qualifies or recognizes members, a bureaucratic system for keeping track of individual members or population estimates, nor membership dues and obligations, thus making actual membership in the NGE ambiguous and open to debate even among adherents themselves (Ahearn, 1991; Allah, D., 2002; Black Apologetics Ministry, 2003b).

The use of the term “Five Percenter” was allegedly to be discontinued by members after 1967 (Allah, 1987), but remains in conventional usage in referring to members of the culture, which has since been known officially as the Nation of Gods and Earths. The terms “Five Percenter,” “Five Percent,” “Five Percent Nation,” “Five Percent Nation of Islam,” and “Nation of Gods and Earths” will be found used almost synonymously in the works of other researchers, all of them referring to the same group. For the purposes of this study, the member-preferred designation “Nation of Gods and Earths,” abbreviated herein as NGE, will be used for consistency. The term “Five Percenter” will otherwise be used sparingly, and normally only in instances referring to

activity predating 1967, or in cases where the term “Five Percenter” is more appropriate than “NGE member.”

It is important to note that NGE members do not view the NGE as a religion or belief system, nor as an organization, preferring to render the NGE exclusively as a nation or culture (Quinones, 2002; von Zielbauer, 2003). For further clarification, male NGE members are typically regarded, and referred to, as Gods, while female members are Earths. Male members normally adopt the surname Allah, to a great extent in homage to the founder of the NGE, Allah the Father, who was seen by early members, many of them from broken households, as a surrogate parent (Allah, 1987; Quinones, 2002; Miyakawa, 2005). NGE members frequently use insider language that, in many cases, appropriates standard English vocabulary and reinvents the words and their significance. Because some words of common usages may appear in a context that will appear unfamiliar to outsiders, a glossary of commonly-used NGE terminology appears in Appendix G.

The label “at-risk” will be used synonymously with “high-risk” to designate youth who present several factors for risk of academic or societal failure (Wells, 1990). “Disadvantaged background” typically refers to having been raised in a severely distressed neighborhood or community, as described by O’Hare and Mather (2003). “Post-school success” refers to employment, avoidance of incarceration, and navigating capably in adult society, and other variables not linked to formal academic assessment scores (Wood, 2004). The term “pedagogy” will be used in the context of “critical pedagogy,” as it appears in the work of Freire (1970; 1973; 1975; 1989) and, more recently, Giroux (1994). Sullivan (1987), as cited in Parkes (2000), defines critical

pedagogy as “a broad educational venture which self-consciously challenges and seeks to transform the dominant values of our culture” (p. 63). In the broad sense of the term, pedagogy literally refers to the activities of educating or instructing, and often is used as a synonym for teaching.

Nonformal education is defined by Coombs and Ahmed (1974, p. 8) as “any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children.” According to the definition provided by the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, nonformal education “tends to be held in locations of convenience, be participatory in nature, addresses specific topics in depth, focuses on individual and group development, and tends to be short in duration, making it more affordable” (Moreau, 2000, p. 965). In referring to formal education, especially as it occurs in America, the terms traditional educational system, traditional school system, and formal schooling will be used synonymously.

### *Importance of the Study*

Few outside researchers have initiated studies on the actual culture of the NGE (Knight, 2004; 2005a; 2005b; Nurrudin, 1994; Westervelt, 1999a; 1999b). Besides a handful of limited summaries of the NGE’s history and culture within the greater context of American Islamic movements (McCloud, 1995; O’Connor, 1998; Smith, J. I., 1999) or Black Nationalism in America (Allen, 1996; Miyakawa, 2003b), even the most recent literature on the topic has typically only covered the group’s influence in Hip Hop music (Ahearn, 1989; 1991; Aidi, 2001; Allen, E., 1994; Allen, H., 1991; Eure & Spady, 1991; Gibbs, 2003; Miyakawa, 2003; James, 1992a; 1992b; Swedenburg, 1997) or the NGE’s

presence and predicament in the prison system (Buchwald, 2003; Smydra, 2003; Tanner, 1998; von Zielbauer, 2003).

The physical presence of NGE members in urban communities is widespread. Tanner (1998) notes that although few academics study the group and government agencies long ago ceased keeping track, it is evident that thousands are involved in Harlem alone. Smydra (2003) writes:

And then there's the mystery of just how many Five Percenters there are, and who really is one. (DC sniper suspect John Muhammad was briefly, mistakenly identified with the movement on the basis of his written claims to be "God.") The official Nation of Gods and Earths' website, [www.ibiblio.org/nge](http://www.ibiblio.org/nge), lists regular parliaments in almost three dozen cities in 17 states and Canada, and hundreds of Gods and Earths have linked their personal webpages to the site. (para. 17)

Nuruddin (1994) has cited the loose-knit nature of the NGE and the presence of offshoot and cognate groups that espouse similar ideologies as further complications for any accurate numerical estimation. It is important to note that many of the cognate groups that possess similar teachings or lessons appropriated them directly or indirectly from NGE sources (Allah, M., 2005).

At any rate, Nuruddin has estimated that, in 1994, the NGE population in the New York City metropolitan area alone was at least in the tens of thousands (Nuruddin, 1994). Members are presently spread in great numbers throughout the United States, resulting in the recent creation of a regional system of governance and communication (Mock, 2002). Outside of the United States, NGE members have recently been cited in England, Japan

(Wise, 2003), and Puerto Rico (Nuruddin, 1994). Worldwide, the total population of the NGE has recently been estimated at over 100,000 members (Quinones, 2002).

The influence of the NGE in contemporary urban youth culture is pervasive and extensive. Swedenburg (1997) argues the need for serious studies of the rise of esoteric Black cultures like the NGE from “heretofore obscured places of origin, to the center of global culture” (para. 40). Noting the popularity of NGE ideology with Black youth today, Swedenburg urges readers and fellow academics to avoid sentiments of shock or fear regarding the racial overtones of many teachings and instead begin “bringing these views and their significance into visibility...to try to understand them, to engage them, and to try to work to change the conditions that produce them” (para. 41).

Regarding the proliferation of NGE culture in disadvantaged urban communities, Nuruddin (1994) observed that “the ‘righteous’ ideology of the Five Percent Nation has become a dominant, pervasive and potentially permanent feature of the black adolescent subculture” (p. 110). Nuruddin explains that impoverished urban communities are fertile grounds for the flourishing of an ideology that “speaks directly to disenchanting youth” (p. 110) and describes communities like Brownsville, Brooklyn where the NGE has flourished as a result. According to an Internet blog promoting *A Nation of Gods*, a forthcoming documentary on the positive impacts of the NGE:

The Nation of Gods and Earths have a unique history that influenced most of us who grew up in the ghetto – whether or not you converted or agreed completely....

At the height of the crack epidemic and failed social services systems, the messages offered by Father Allah; Clarence 13X Smith, were far-reaching for a

Diaspora of people ignored by the mainstream....This documentary goes inside an urban political faction that has essentially promoted itself for more than four decades solely through the channels of self expression and urban youth.

(Perrineau, 2005, para. 3-4)

Aulen (2005) describes NGE culture, at its inception, as a “radical belief system that would reshape America” (para. 1). Regarding the NGE of recent years, Allen (1996) remarks that the NGE continues to “exert influence not only upon inner-city youth, but college students as well” (p. 3). In fact, throughout its history, the NGE’s proliferation across urban society has even resulted in points of notable contact with a number of American cultural icons, including Malcolm X (Haley & Malcolm X, 1992), Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin (Rustin, 1967), Rev. Adam Clayton Powell (Allah, I. A., 2006), Jean Michael Basquiat (Reichling, 1999), and Amiri Baraka (Gooding, 2001), not to mention the countless musicians who are or were either members of, or somehow influenced by, the NGE (Miyakawa, 2005; RZA & Norris, 2005; Swedenburg, 1997). However, as Aulen continues, “Few Americans in the mainstream have any idea what The Nation of Gods and Earths is. In fact, many Americans don’t even know the Five Percent Nation exists at all” (2005, para. 3).

Some authors have attempted to account for the absence of published literature on the NGE, given the scope of its membership and the influence of NGE culture on many facets of contemporary American society (Cuba, 1995; Gooding, 2001; Miyakawa, 2003; Swedenburg, 1997). Gooding (2001) argues that the omission has been deliberate, and is consistent with practices stemming from the FBI’s attempts to repress public awareness

of the Five Percenters in the 1960s onward. Trina Love-Perrineau, executive producer of the forthcoming documentary *A Nation of Gods*, has commented:

On all points, it is my intention to bring this position to light for general consideration by the masses - the focus of Clarence 13X and the NGE to educate, encourage critical thinking, self-evaluation, advocate for literacy - the pedagogy - it was/is groundbreaking ideology amongst black youth - at the very least deserves mention - merit - especially considering the times...it amazes me that it has gone so unrecognized for so long...but as I'm moving forward and meeting more folks I'm learning perhaps the how and why. (Personal communication, October 24, 2005)

This study investigates the nature of the NGE's influence. Specifically, the study aims to describe what the NGE has often accomplished with wayward youth and how this "transformative force" (Alim, 2005, p. 266) is related to pedagogy and education. Several authors have attested to the significant impact made by the NGE on Black urban youth, in many cases alluding to improvements in aspiration and achievement among NGE members, who are most often minority adolescents and teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds (Allah, 1987; Gotterher, 1975; Noor, 2002; Nuruddin, 1994; Smitherman, 1986; 2000). The fact that both outsider perceptions and self-perceptions of these youth construe them as high-risk, delinquent, and academically disengaged until their involvement with the NGE calls for a comprehensive investigation of NGE pedagogy and practice.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The Nation of Gods and Earths has had a pervasive influence on urban youth culture in America since the late 1960s, and has since been influential in positively redirecting the lives of thousands of disadvantaged minority youth otherwise at risk for academic and societal failure (Allah, 1987). Little empirical research has been done on the NGE with the exception of brief ethnographic reports by Nuruddin (1994) and Campbell (1991), and there have been few, if any, studies conducted to investigate the pedagogy intrinsic to the NGE culture.

The purpose of this study is to identify the educational practices of the NGE and the related educational attitudes of NGE members using the context of the theoretical framework of nonformal education. For the purposes of this study, this framework will be defined as being comprised of an environment-based system of educational activity conducted outside the framework of the formal system that focuses on individual and group development, particularly among disadvantaged subgroups (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Fordham, 1993).

The NGE, most popular with Black male adolescents and young adults, has become a staple of disadvantaged urban communities across the country. The youth who join its ranks would have typically been considered high-risk for academic and societal failure due to a number of factors, many of which are common to minorities in disadvantaged urban communities, including (a) lack of father figures or male role models, (b) low socio-economic conditions, and (c) high prevalence of crime and drug usage in the surrounding community, as well as (d) issues with the school program itself

(Allah, 1987; Black Apologetics Ministry, 2003b; Nuruddin, 1994, Shirk & Strangler, 2004).

Young Black males growing up in these circumstances often become involved in antisocial behaviors including gang involvement and juvenile delinquency (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Little & DiSano, 2004; Menard & Elliott, 1994; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003; Winfree, Vigil-Backstrom, & Mays, 1994). In addition, the academic performance of disadvantaged, delinquent Black youth is typically far below that of their low-risk peers, either due to a school curriculum or model of instruction ineffective in meeting their unique learning needs (Delpit, 1995; Jordan & Cooper, 2000; Noguera, 2003; Smith, 2005; Thornberry & Krohn, 2003) or to the defiant or disaffected stances that these youth take towards the formal educational system (Blair, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Solomon, 1992). Eventually, in-school disengagement gives way to students fully disconnecting from the formal education experience and becoming youth out of the education mainstream (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997). The nonformal educational practices of the NGE pedagogy have fostered literacy, mathematical and scientific ability, oratorical prowess, and engagement in self-directed research as a leisure activity among previously illiterate and criminally at-risk youth (Cuba, 1995).

### *Literature Review*

#### *At-Risk Black Youth and Traditional Education*

It is not unfamiliar to the average American layperson that the overall academic achievement scores of young Black males in public schools are well below both those of their white counterparts and Black female students as well (Jordan & Cooper, 2000;

Kleinfield, 1999; Lee, 1991; 2003; Noguera, 2003; Reed, 1988). There is a growing body of literature negatively correlating race and school performance for Black youth, and Black males in particular (Hare, 1988; Noguera, 2003). Several studies have also identified causative factors for the underachievement of Black males in the traditional school system (Gibbs, 1988; Hare, 1988; Noguera & Akom, 2000; Ogbu, 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Osborne, 1995; Reed, 1998).

Black youth, primarily males, are disengaging from the formal educational experience as early as third grade (Fashola, 2005; Fremon & Hamilton, 1997; Lee, 2003, Magar, 2003). Nationwide, the problems Black males endure have become endemic and have called for governmental solutions (Hare, 1988; Jones, 1989; Jordan & Cooper, 2000). One example, the Indiana Commission on the Status of Black Males (2001), reports, “Social issues facing young Black males such as fatherlessness, poverty, lack of positive role models, and lack of self-esteem make traditional learning styles difficult to adapt to within local school corporations statewide” (p. 15). These are the youth who generally become truant in later years and eventually contribute to the alarming dropout rates among minority populations (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Clark, 1992; Crane, 1991; Garry, 1996; Kerka, 2003). Many of these youth are also out of the education mainstream because they have been expelled from the traditional school system (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997). On the growing trend towards expulsion of at-risk youth, Giroux (2004) notes:

[S]tudents are being pushed out of schools like never before... Within such a climate of disdain and intolerance, expelling students does more than pose a threat to innocent kids, it also suggests that local school boards are refusing to do the

hard work of exercising critical judgment, trying to understand what conditions undermine school safety, and providing reasonable support services for all students—and viable alternatives for the troubled ones. (para. 3.3)

Wood (2004) also cites the growing number of students “pushed out of school” and increases in dropout and retention rates among the negative consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Some researchers have asserted that school-based interventions can be effective in meeting the academic needs of low-performing minority and economically disadvantaged students (Cobbs & Enger, 1992; Neisser, 1986; Slavin & Madden, 2001). Although some school-based interventions have succeeded in producing assessment gains in at-risk Black youth, the majority of these interventions typically ignore race, culture, and class as significant contexts. In effect, measures that are academically effective typically produce the most gains in minority students with lower levels of cultural affiliation (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Spindler, 1987; Whittler, Calantone, & Young, 1991). Conversely, programs designed around Black students’ ethnicity may often raise self-esteem and promote cultural affiliation, but negatively affect or have no effect on attitudes towards school or academic achievement (Cobbs & Enger, 1992; Harvey & Hill, 2004). In *Shame of a Nation*, Kozol (2005) portrays various public school reform programs as ineffective, inconsequential, and in many ways, counterproductive to actual learning.

An explanation for these trends may be found in works like Hernandez-Tutop’s *Oppressor: The Educational System* (1998). The author’s critique of the American school system argues that the traditional American school curriculum and assessment

program has, since its inception, been geared to the cultural norms and attitudes of white males and has thus historically failed to meet the needs of minority youth, and continues to do so. This sentiment is echoed in the works of a number of other authors on the topic (Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1970; Hale, 1982). Freire's classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) addresses the oppressive nature of the dominant majority and the means by which the oppressive mechanisms are transmitted in the schooling system. More recently, Delpit (1995) has described the "culture of power" present in most traditional American schools, a system of values, beliefs, rules, and styles fashioned by the dominant social class of white, middle-class males.

Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) oppositional-culture construct explains characterizations of Black youth as disaffected or defiant in traditional school settings. The authors argue that Black youth perceive schooling as a repressive apparatus of the white power system that runs counter to their racial and cultural identity. As a result, Black youth disengage from the European-dominant educational system and adopt oppositional stances to both their educators and the instruction (Akom, 2003; Blair, 2001; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Solomon, 1992; Williams, 1988).

Further, Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1992) and Delpit's *Other People's Children* (1995) describe how low-income minority youth are relegated to attend the worst of these schools. Citing the inadequacies of the public school system in meeting the critical needs of disadvantaged Black males, numerous advocates now contend that a viable alternative is needed to meet the increasingly critical needs of young Black males (Burrell, 2001; Narine, 2002; Noguera & Akom, 2000; Wilson, 1987).

### *Environmental Factors for Risk*

A growing body of literature has described the young Black male in America as alienated, at-risk, disconnected, vulnerable, marginal, in crisis, and an endangered species (Anderson, 1990; Cook, 2005; Gibbs, 1988; Hare & Castenell, 1985; Lee, 1991; Mincy, 1994). Research suggests that race alone places the Black male “at-risk” in both a social and educational context (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Frieman, 2001; Noguera & Akom, 2000). It is important to clarify the specific factors that place the child at risk for societal or academic failure. Some of the factors Frieman (2001) identifies include: (a) being alienated, (b) having incarcerated parents, (c) having an absent father, (d) living in poverty, (e) living with violence, (f) being raised by grandparents, (g) having substance-abusing parents, and (h) engaging in antisocial behavior. Disadvantaged Black children, that is, those growing up in severely distressed communities, typically cope with a combination of these factors at once (Anderson, 1990; Crane, 1991; Gerard & Buehler, 2004; Glasgow, 1980; Jones, 1989; Noguera, 2003; O’Hare & Mather, 2003; Slaughter, 1988; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1993). A more comprehensive list of the factors that can place youth at risk for academic or societal failure, adapted from Wells (1990), can be found in Appendix C.

It is a well documented fact that school performance is linked to both race and socioeconomic status (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger; 1994; Cain, 2002; McDonough, 1997). Almost a quarter of all Black children in America live in disadvantaged communities, known alternately in the research as “severely distressed neighborhoods” (O’Hare & Mather, 2003). Severely distressed communities are those that possess at least three out of the four following traits: (a) high poverty rate, (b) high percentage of female-

headed families, (c) high percentage of high school dropouts, and (d) high percentage of unemployed working-age males.

Research shows that, from 1942 to 1966, the Black-white wage gap had begun narrowing, when it suddenly halted. Recent research has reevaluated the factors behind the coinciding decline of SAT scores and Black-white wage equality in the US.

According to Card and Krueger (1992), until the late 1960s, grade level was a roughly adequate measure of educational attainment. This congruity changed beginning with the sharp educational decline of the late 1960s and the introduction of the soon widespread practice of social promotion. Coleman's 1966 study found that in this new educational context, disadvantaged children, particularly a disproportionate number of Black students, began falling even further behind their more advantaged peers in actual educational attainment. The sudden standstill in Black-white wage equality can be attributed to the fact that Blacks, since the late 1960s, have been on average less well educated by the school system (Card & Krueger, 1992; Bound & Freeman, 1992).

According to Coleman (1966), since the 1960s, poor schools have had a more negative effect on disadvantaged students than on advantaged students. Although there was a documented decrease in the number of children in high-poverty neighborhoods in the past decade, recent research has suggested that the number of children living in severely distressed neighborhoods actually increased from 1990-2000 (O'Hare & Mather, 2003).

#### *Responses to the Environment*

High-poverty urban communities also present another problem for adolescents raised there: the prevalence of crime (Miller, 1958; Thornberry & Krohn, 2003). Black youth growing up in areas of heavy crime, violence, and/or drug activity lend themselves

easily to appropriating these behaviors as they mature into adolescence and adulthood (Foney, 2002; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998; Shader, 2002; Winfree, Vigil-Backstrom, & Mays, 1994). The resultant trend of juvenile delinquency in such communities has prompted a number of public and private measures aimed to curb the ever-increasing rates of juvenile crime, drug activity, and incarceration (Krisberg, Schwartz, Fishman, Eiskovits, & Guttman, 1986; Shader, 2002).

Gangs are another feature of the landscape of such severely distressed communities, and are often tied intrinsically to the drug and criminal activity that characterize the area (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002; Howell, 1998; Howell, Egler, & Gleason, 2002). Miller's (1958) classic study on gangs and juvenile delinquency identifies impoverished communities and "lower class culture" as fertile breeding grounds for gang delinquency. Black youth often gravitate towards the "sense of belonging" offered by the gang's "surrogate family," and are most at-risk for gang involvement, and the attendant problems of delinquency and multiple risk-taking behavior, when they lack a sense of family elsewhere, either at home or at school (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1992; Gibbs, 2000; Menard & Elliott, 1994; Porter & Lindberg, 2000; Thornberry, Smith, River, Huizinga, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1999). Youth excluded from the education mainstream, for whatever reason, are especially at risk (Daniels, Cole, Sellman, Sutton, Visser & Bedward, 2003; Garry, 1996; Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997).

#### *Nonformal Education among At-Risk Youth*

Research on social affiliation and peer group configuration among rejected youth - who for a number of reasons fail to assimilate positively into "mainstream" society -

reveals how youth of similar social or behavioral traits group themselves into social networks (Hoff, DuPaul, & Handwerk, 2003). Peer clusters or youth groups often provide a much-needed context for rejected youth to excel or acquire heightened status not otherwise attainable in larger society (Kipke et al., 1997). The findings suggest that youth who have faced a history of failure in the traditional school setting may excel, or strive to excel, in other settings, contexts, and peer groups (Hoff, DuPaul, & Handwerk, 2003; Smith-Maddox, 1999).

Research on the peer group affiliations of street youth suggests that many disadvantaged youth engage in deviant group behaviors to develop peer relationships and social support and obtain access to material, psychological, or emotional needs that are otherwise lacking in the home, school, or community (Kipke et al., 1997; Osgood, Wilson, & O'Malley, 1994). The researchers explored the role of peer influence and social networking among urban street youth. The findings indicate that peer affiliation greatly influence street youths' behavior. The researchers suggest that street youth be offered preventative measures from deeper assimilation into deviant street culture through the development of street outreach programs and educational and vocational training opportunities (Kipke et al., 1997).

Blacks and other low-income minorities constantly face situations in their surroundings, often threatening environments, which require critical thinking skills. According to Irvine (1991), these nonformal proficiencies are ignored by educational reformers who advocate a deficiency model for explaining the failure and dropout rate among minority students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Researchers have found that even the most cynical and disaffected of gang members want to get an education, but feel

that circumstances in the environment or the school itself prevent them from doing so (Collum, 2001; Gentry & Peelle, 1994; Holloway, 1994). Holloway's (1994) dissertation on the educational attitudes of gang members explores a number of pertinent themes in nonformal education, including the acquisition of education through peer groups and voluntary neighborhood associations. Peer groups, including gangs, not only influence youth in their attitudes towards education, but provide a context for youth to develop a sense of self-identity, belonging, and responsibility, all of which are integral to intellectual and academic development (Blakemore & Blakemore, 1998; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; Taylor, Lerner, von Eye, Bobek, Balsano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; 2004). Also, adolescent group identity can become distinctive, salient, and likely to have motivational and behavioral consequences especially within intergroup contexts where membership is a privilege (Branch & Boothe, 2002; Oyserman & Harrison, 1999).

Similarly, Collum (2001) used semi-structured interviews with current and former gang members to investigate nonformal education as it occurs among teenagers and adults in street gangs. The findings indicate that street gangs possess educational systems that incorporate the acquisition of skills and knowledge through nonformal techniques that are often more rigorous than the curriculum of formal schooling. The implications suggest new approaches to developing curriculum and instruction for nontraditional urban youth groups and social networks like street gangs and out-of-school youth.

### *Nonformal Education*

The nonformal education movement emerged in the late 1960s as a redress to criticism of formal education practices and their apparent ineffectiveness (Coombs, 1968;

Illich, 1973). The movement was described by its founders as “any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8). According to Tight (1996), nonformal education is about “acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions” (p. 68).

Fordham (1993) suggests that in the 1970s, four characteristics were distinctive of nonformal education: (a) Relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups, (b) concern with specific categories of person, (c) a focus on clearly defined purposes, and (d) flexibility in organization and methods.

Table 1 presents some of the characteristics that distinguish ideal forms of nonformal education from ideal forms of formal education.

Table 1

*Ideal-type Models of Normal and Nonformal Education*

	Formal	Nonformal
purposes	Long-term & general	Short-term & specific
	Credential-based	Non-credential-based
timing	long cycle / preparatory / full-time	short cycle / recurrent / part-time
content	standardized / input centered	individualized / output centered
	academic	practical
	entry requirements	clienteles determine entry
	determine clientele	requirements
delivery	institution-based, isolated	environment-based, community
system	from environment.	related.
	Rigidly structured, teacher-	Flexible, learner-centered and
	centered and resource	resource saving
	intensive	
control	external / hierarchical	self-governing / democratic

*Note.* Adapted from Fordham, 1993.

*Variants of the Nonformal Methodology*

The *Encyclopedia of Informal Education* ([www.infed.org](http://www.infed.org)) offers an archive of documents on nonformal education and a number of its variants. Some examples of alternate methodologies in nonformal education include community education programs; popular education; social action organizations; detached, street-based youth work;

voluntary associations; and a number of lesser known international alternatives (Beder, 1996; Davis, 1992; Kindervatter, 1979; Paulston, 1980; Smith, 1996a; Ward, 2001).

Voluntary associations and social movements, and the educative power they herald, have been the topic of considerable research since at least the early 1900s with the publication of the *1919 Report* on adult education (Cook & MacSween, 2000; Smith, 2000). A large-scale, six-year study by Eldson, Reynolds, and Stewart (1995) demonstrated empirically the educative tendencies of voluntary associations:

[There is a] great range of learning, change and satisfaction over and above those which are deliberate, inherent in the organization's objectives, and expected by their members. The one which was given priority almost universally, and reported as being of greater importance than the content objective of the organization, is quite simply growth in confidence, and its ramifications and secondary effects of self-discovery, freedom in forging relationships and undertaking tasks, belief in oneself and in one's potential as a human being and an agent, and ability to learn and change both in the context of the organization's objectives *and* in others. (p. 47)

The concept of animation, most popular in France and Italy, is often linked to socio-cultural work and work with associations, but also with the process of character-forming through experiences that are at once both educative and transformative. The nonformal educator, as animator, is oriented towards the development of individuals, small groups, and communities towards self-realization, self-expression, heightened awareness and "*conscientisation*," or critical awareness (Smith, M. K., 1999), much as in the tradition of Freire and education as liberation (Freire, 1970; 1973; 1975; 1989).

Similarly, the German tradition of social pedagogy is described ideally as “the critical conscience of pedagogy, the thorn in the flesh of official agenda, an emancipatory programme for self-directed learning processes inside and outside the education system geared towards the transformation of society” (Lorenz, 1994, p. 93).

#### *Nonformal Education with Disadvantaged Populations*

According to Fordham (1993) as cited in Smith (1996a), one of the most distinctive and fundamental characteristics of the nonformal methodology in the 1970s was its relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups. Nonformal education quickly gained popularity and prevalence in developing countries (Smith, 2000), and its rise to prominence fueled one of the most extensive debates in education’s history (Smith, 1996a), including the development of the social pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970; 1973; 1975; 1989). Freire’s ideal pedagogy was directed toward the needs of oppressed people and their liberation and achievement.

Freire emphasized the affirmation of dialogical action as a tool for liberation, in addition to the constantly alternating roles of teacher and student, writing in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, p. 74) that, “The dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the student-teachers in pedagogical situations, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself what he or she will dialogue with the latter about.” Freire also noted the importance of the peer group dynamics of such a learning community, using the term, “culture circle” to refer to a discussion group in which educators and learners use dialogue to build their understandings of the oppressive elements of reality, analyze its problems, and develop solutions (1970).

“Thematic investigation [culture circles],” Freire writes, “thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character” (Freire, 1970, p. 98). Freire’s critical pedagogy, though appropriated by secular and non-secular interests alike, speaks distinctly to the aims of nonformal education and its implementation among disadvantaged populations (Rodriguez, 2005). South American popular education draws heavily on the work of Freire, and is seen as a self-reflective and transformative approach that plays an important role in shaping the spontaneous resistance of oppressed subgroups into conscious, educative social movements (Smith, 1996b; Valentim, 2002).

After flourishing throughout much of the so-called “Third World,” the nonformal movement and its related debates declined into marginality by 1986 (Rogers, 2004). According to Rogers (2004), very little of its kind thrived in North America, and what did was relegated mainly to the community learning initiatives conducted by Christian groups like the YMCA and the Boy Scouts (Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983). Few writings on the subject of nonformal education emerged in the U.S., although some appeared to have affected community improvement initiatives and other youth work before the advent of Freire’s work (Bernstein, 1964; Kelley, 1959; Klein, 1971). Erickson (1986) espouses that, outside of a number of independent community-based programs, nonformal education as a systematized practice never truly took root in the United States. The reasons for this disparity, considering the number of alienated and marginalized populations that could potentially be better served, remain relatively unexplored.

“Today,” according to Rogers, “there is almost no discussion about the nature and role of nonformal education apart from a few articles which simply repeat the earlier debate” (2004, Non-formal Education in the Field section, para. 1). As much of the extant American literature on nonformal education has focused on adult education, such as the influential writings of Knowles (1970), little research has addressed nonformal pedagogy with American youth (La Belle, 1981; Pittman, 1994).

Today, nonformal education has remained most prevalent in the African, Asian, and Latin American nations of the developing world, where disadvantaged groups make up a large portion of the population (Erickson, 1986). Even as it occurs in these regions, nonformal education is implemented in a number of different formats, many of which have been more akin to traditional elementary-level schooling, while others have offered second-chance schooling to older youth and adults (Rogers, 2004).

#### *Nonformal Education with Black Youth*

In the United Kingdom, where research on nonformal education and community learning is a great deal more extensive than in the U.S., several works surfaced dealing specifically with the concerns of the Black minority there. The work of John (1981) is perhaps the most influential and extensive study of Black youth work as analyzed in a political context, examining accounts of local authority funded projects in comparison with those specifically aimed at Blacks. Jacobs and Popple (1994) have described processes for Black empowerment and community organizing within the nonformal context and Williams (1988) has addressed the formation and implementation of services for inner city youth, the role of youth groups in the Black resistance struggle, and the

shortcomings of approaches that are not relevant to the cultures or experiences of Black youth.

Journalist Kevin Powell summarized the recent mobilization of Black youth in America for a more culturally relevant education, observing that, “Afrocentric thinking is in vogue again, and many young people, roughly ages 15 through 30 but also younger, are demanding that it be incorporated into every aspect of their lives” (1991, para. 7). Swedenburg (1997) has noted the popularity of NGE-influenced ideology and theology among Black youth. Citing the NGE among a number of proactive youth groups geared towards community and school change, Powell remarks “from New York City to Oakland, many Black youths are beginning to reorganize their thoughts and organize their communities” (1991, para. 13). Black communities’ demand for culturally relevant education, when unmet by the formal system, is often addressed by social and cultural organizations and peer group associations (Kipke et al., 1997; Smallwood, 1999). Recent research has investigated the role of Malcolm X as a nonformal educator (Smallwood, 1999), with implications for the greater cultural aesthetic of the “Black Muslim” ideology in general, a view corroborated in the findings of Akom (2003).

Recent research on Black adolescent identity and academic achievement brings attention to the role of collectivism and group dynamics in increasing achievement and aspirations towards achievement (MacLeod, 1995; Oyserman & Harrison, 1999; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003). The interaction between gendered identity and racial identity suggests that collective focus on racial identity is particularly helpful for boys (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003). Oyserman and Harrison (1995) also note that “Positive in-group attitudes

and identification are correlated with higher self-esteem, less stress and less delinquent involvement” (p. 2). Oyserman and Harrison also hypothesize that when Black adolescent identity is composed of only the two areas of connectedness (belonging to the group or race and awareness of racism), academic achievement and disengagement are not affected significantly. Instead, the researchers proposed a tripartite model:

Youths able to conceptualize themselves in terms of a sense of connectedness with the black community and heritage, an awareness of racism and likely structural barriers, *and a view of achievement as connected to and an integral part of being African American* [italics added] are likely to both perform better at school and be at reduced risk of depression. (p. 4)

Research has also indicated that racial minorities are at greater risk of academic disengagement when either the individual lacks a racial identity self-schema, or perceives only an in-group self-schema without reference to membership in the greater society (Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003).

Involuntary minorities are those populations who were brought to or incorporated into the American diaspora against their own will, as is the case with Blacks, Native Americans, and many Hispanics (Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Research suggests that voluntary and involuntary minorities have vastly different attitudes and experiences regarding the American educational system (Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu found that Black students, unlike immigrant minorities, often perceive schooling as especially irrelevant when opportunity structures appeared limited to Blacks (Ogbu, 1991). As a result, Black students often refuse to accommodate the traditional school culture. Often this behavior is associated with a refusal to “act white.” Gibson’s (1998)

study of Sikh children in an American high school found that voluntary immigrant populations often find means of accommodating an otherwise conformist schooling without engendering assimilation. Sikh values and cultural knowledge were taught at home as supplemental to the formal educational curriculum. Conversely, Akom (2003) discovered that the cultural values and knowledge transmitted to high school students in the Nation of Islam resulted in a sort of oppositional achievement. Black students belonging to the Nation of Islam perceived the traditional educational system as Eurocentric and oppressive, but saw education itself as a means towards desired outcomes, including overcoming social obstacles like the school system itself.

Another way many community organizations nonformally engage and educate Black youth is through role models and mentoring. A number of studies have highlighted the importance of role models and mentoring in the lives of at-risk Black youth (Keating, 2002; Wilson, 1987). However, as one study finds, youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to role models in the form of family members or community members. Disadvantaged Black youth typically face a severe shortage in the presence of role models in their communities (Wilson, 1987).

A phenomenon that epidemiologists call the “tipping point” refers to the moment in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass. Gladwell (1996) appropriated the term and applied it to social epidemics like crime and teen suicide in his book *The Tipping Point*. Crane (1991), a sociologist at the University of Illinois, looked at the effect the number of role models in a community – that is, the professionals, managers, teachers, and others whom the Census Bureau has defined as “high status” – has on the lives of teenagers in the same neighborhood. Crane found that when the number of professionals

dropped below five per cent, the problems exploded. Crane's research shows that, for Black school-age youth, as the percentage of role models, or high-status workers, falls below five percent of the population, dropout rates more than double. According to Crane's findings, it is not until role models represent five percent or more of the community that dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, drug usage and juvenile crime begin to decline. Similarly, Wilson, in *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (1987), describes how the presence of "social buffers" in disadvantaged communities serves to "keep alive the perception that education is meaningful," and that societal success is viable (p 56).

Finally, some research has also suggested the benefits of "rites of passage" programs for Black youth. While such programs do not often produce significant increases in academic aspirations or achievement, they are known to produce gains in resilience, self-esteem, conflict-resolution skills, social and career aspirations, and other domains outside of the sphere of formal education (Banks, 1996; Cobbs, & Enger, 1992; Harvey, & Hill, 2004; Pinckney, 2001).

### *The Nation of Gods and Earths*

#### *Lack of Literature on the NGE*

Until recently, scholars have demonstrated little interest in the NGE, a fact evinced clearly by the dearth of published research available on the topic. Though several academics have included mention of the group within the broader historical contexts of the Black consciousness movement in America (Robinson, 2004) or the anthropological context of Islam in the Black community (Locke, 1998; O'Connor, 1998; Nuruddin, 1994), few have dedicated research efforts solely to the study of the NGE on

its own merits, and only one (Nuruddin, 1994) has even briefly addressed the pedagogical implications of NGE teachings. Of the research that exists, much of it suffers from a lack of thorough investigation. One indication of this fact is the high degree of variance in presentations of what it is that the authors allege that the NGE teaches. For example, one text describes the NGE as a “theological splinter group” of Black Muslims comprised of “syncretists who combine an extremist political ideology with esoteric Eastern theology” (Occhiogrosso, 1996, p. 438), whereas another widely divergent example calls the NGE a “youth outreach mission” endorsed by the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan (O’Connor, 1998).

Writers, most often affiliated with the journalistic press, who have described the NGE using terms such as “Black supremacist religion,” “violent gang,” “Black militants” (von Zielbauer, 2003), and “anti-white” (Steinem & Weaver, 1968) have, either through careless research or the intentional omission of contrary evidence, contributed to a mostly negative media bias against the NGE. It is strange that the NGE can fairly be described as a “Black hate group” when its membership, though predominantly African-American, also includes many individuals of other ethnicities. In fact, since the NGE’s earliest period, there have been whites recognized as Five Percenters (Gottcher, 1975), as is the case in the present day as well (Knight, 2004). As early as 1968, Steinem and Weaver reported on the failure of the press to fairly address the NGE, identifying the New York Times' labeling of the Five Percenters as “anti-white” a “misjudgement made by one reporter, and repeated by the journalistic custom of writing from clips” (p. 32D).

### *Recent Interest in the NGE*

As Miyakawa (2003) points out, media interest in the NGE has heightened recently due to speculations about “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh’s early interest in Five Percenter Hip Hop before his conversion to fundamentalist Islam (Best, 2003), and allegations by police officials that Washington, D.C., sniper John Allen Muhammad may have been somehow connected to the NGE (Goldblatt, 2002; Molloy, 2002; Perlmutter, 2004). Though separate investigations revealed that Lindh had broken off sharply from the ideologies espoused by NGE Hip Hop artists (Best, 2003), and Muhammad was actually not connected to the NGE, but rather to the Nation of Islam (Swedenburg, 2002), at least one journalist (Muhammad, 2002) has raised questions about the motives behind such insinuations, considering the prolonged history of documented surveillance and covert repression conducted by CIA, FBI and local police agencies to dismantle the movement (Allah, 1987; Cuba, 1992, 1995; Gooding, 2001).

### *Available Literature on the NGE*

Published literature dealing specifically with the NGE alone generally falls into one of two categories. The research efforts either (a) describes the role and influence of NGE culture in Hip Hop music (e.g. Ahearn, 1991; Aidi, 2001; Keyes, 2004; Miyakawa, 2003; Swedenburg, 1997), or (b) investigates the conditions of the NGE culture in the prison system, and the attendant dilemma of whether the group should be classified there as a religion or a gang (e.g., Cortez & Goodwin, 1976; Graham, 1995; Tanner, 1998; Todorovic, 1996). Some notable exceptions to this rule include the ethnographic work conducted by Nurrudin (1994), a handful of published historical accounts by insiders (Allah, 1987; Cuba, 1992; 1995; Allah, S. S., 2005), and a number of comparative studies

with mainstream Islam (O'Connor, 1998; Wise, 2003). Besides the work of O'Connor (1998) and Wise (2003), most mentions of the NGE in relation to mainstream Islam have been brief synopses typically relying heavily on the firsthand accounts of Nuruddin (1994) and Gotterher (1975) but little else. One exception here is the description offered by McCloud (1995), who draws on one interview with an NGE member in addition to secondary source material.

In fact, a number of Islamic academics have become aware of the NGE in recent years (Aidi, 2001; Knight, 2004, 2005; Nuruddin, 1994). Though some accounts have portrayed the NGE as a heretical offshoot of the Nation of Islam (Muslim Students Association, 1998; Swedenburg, 1997), neither of the two organizations considered by orthodox Muslim scholars as "true" Islam, the field research of Knight (2004, 2005) and Nuruddin (1994) are thus far the most unbiased examples. There has been considerable debate between NGE members and Muslims regarding the NGE's relation to mainstream Islam (Ahearn, 1991; Allah, I. M., 2004). NGE member I Majestic Allah (2004) clarifies:

The NGE...is a unique ethno-cultural response to the condition of people of color in contemporary society. It is no less valid due to it originating from another group than Christianity and Buddhism, both extensions and reactions to the excesses of previous groups (Judaism and Hinduism, respectively). Building upon the legacy of Cultural/Religious Nationalism left by the Moorish Science Temple and the NOI, the NGE and the ethno-cultural worldview that we espouse deserve the respect and consideration afforded to other Cultures/Value Systems and should be seen as adding another dimension to the contemporary Afro-Asiatic diaspora. Already, within the last thirty years, the NGE has made a considerable

impact on urban youth worldwide and is well known through its influence on Hip-Hop Culture. The ideas and values projected by many NGE musicians [have] influenced youth culture, serving as the impetus for many to learn about people and ideas outside their previous perspective. Viewing the NGE outside the limited parameters of “Proto-Islam” will allow many to gain greater understanding and appreciation for the ideas and concepts found therein. (p. 2)

It may be true that there are more popular texts than empirical texts that mention the NGE. A number of authors, particularly those originating from New York, make specific mention of the NGE in their writings about urban culture (Lewis, 2004; Simmons, 2002; Smith, 1997). In his autobiography *Life and Def*, for example, Russell Simmons (2002) alludes to the popularity and influence of the NGE on the “young Black community” and remarks that “during the period when the gangs I hung with in the ‘70s gave way to ‘80s Hip Hop culture, it was the street language, style and consciousness of the Five Percent Nation that served as a bridge” (p. 156). More specifically, Miles Marshall Lewis (2004) recalls encountering the teachings of the NGE during his ninth or tenth grade, when many of his peers became active members. NGE meetings where members exchanged daily lessons and “crucial information on Blacks” (p. 120) served as a catalyst for Lewis, who would go on to pursue higher education and Afrocentric pedagogy throughout his adult years.

While there are likely many popular narratives containing mention of the early Five Percenters or the NGE, these references are typically brief and not central to the themes of the text. A few exceptions exist. Besides fictional works that prominently feature the presence of NGE characters like Mansbach’s (2005) *Angry Black White Boy*

or Clifton's (1973) children's book *The Boy Who Did Not Believe in Spring*, the most extensive narrative account of any kind has been that of Barry Gotterher (1975), who served as head of the New York City Task Force under mayor John V. Lindsay. Gotterher spent chapters of his autobiography *The Mayor's Man* describing his close working relationship with Allah and the early NGE from 1967-1969. It was during this time that the NGE emerged from the band of street youth known as the Five Percenters, and grew in membership from some 200 in Harlem and Brooklyn to over 800 members throughout New York (Gotterher, 1975). More recently, two prominent urban entertainment magazines published cover stories on the NGE in commemoration of its 40-year anniversary (Allah, S. G., 2005; Allah, M., 2005).

Locating relevant literature on the NGE is further hindered by the fact that NGE members and associates have published – through a mainstream publisher, at least - few accounts of their experiences with the NGE. Although the NGE has historically welcomed outsider researchers so long as they do not misrepresent factual information (Miyakawa, 2003; Knight, 2005), few investigations have presented what constitutes new primary source data. News articles by Mock (2002) and Tanner (2002) on the NGE constitute two of the objective representations of NGE culture to draw on participant-observation field research among the NGE.

It is of note regarding this study that few scholars have, in their investigations of the NGE, actually made contact with NGE members themselves. Most academics have relied primarily on content analysis of published documents and artifacts – much of it obtained from NGE web pages - or they have rehashed earlier published documentation of the NGE (Miyakawa, 2005; Smydra, 2003; Swedenburg, 1997). Exceptions include

Ahearn (1991), Campbell (1991), McCloud (1995), and Nuruddin (1994), all of whom – to varying extents - utilize interview data from NGE members. The deficiency in the published literature has led some NGE members to publicly criticize even the more objective attempts at research on the NGE (Allah, C. A., 2005b). C’BS Alife Allah, in an Internet blog review of Miyakawa’s *Five Percenter Rap* (2005), complains:

As I’ve said in a previous post scholars be treating us from an anthropological stand point. It is as though they are studying a ‘dead’ civilization. As such they continue to not let us speak for ourselves. In the bibliography there are no issues of *Behold the Sun of Man*, *The Word*, or *The Five Percenter*, which are all Nation periodicals. She hasn’t watched one video of our Nation’s events even though anyone can get access to them [through a link he posts to the website of a retailer of these videos at <http://blackfamilyenterprises.netfirms.com/video.htm>]. She hasn’t spoken to any of our elders (who actually walked with Allah the Father) such as 1st Born ABG#7, Abu Shaheed (who left the temple with Allah and has a show on public access in Power Born [Pittsburgh]), 1st Born Al Jamil, or any of the 1st Born of Medina. All of the above are easily accessible. The time of prophets and messengers is over. If you want to speak about the Gods then go to the GODS. (Allah, C. A., 2005b, para. 2)

Due to the scarcity of empirical data available regarding the NGE, and the greater absence of published studies on NGE pedagogy or participation in the NGE as it relates to educational outcomes, the most valuable primary sources are the publications of NGE members themselves. Some NGE members have been prolific in the authoring and distribution of self-published books, pamphlets, journals, supplemental “plus lessons,”

newsletters, and other documents of otherwise extremely limited circulation outside the ranks of the NGE (O'Connor, 1998; Miyakawa, 2005; Nurrudin, 1994). With the exception of a relatively small number of documents NGE members have transcribed and posted on the Internet, most NGE documents can typically only be obtained from NGE members themselves or purchased at NGE events like the annual Show and Prove or the monthly Universal Parliaments (e.g., Allah, A. G.; Allah, I. A., 2006). Until the emergence of the Internet as an increasingly popular medium for communication between distant NGE members and communities, NGE members would either photocopy or transcribe old lessons and documents, many of the original editions dating back 30 years or more, and personally share them with other members. Another means of transmission was to pass down lessons and teachings via oral tradition, or "mouth to ear," as Infinite Al'Jaa'maar-U-Allah describes the process in the self-published *A Peek into the Five Percent Nation* (p. 18). The NGE's strong social networks have spread such self-published manuscripts far and wide among NGE members, though they are almost impossible to locate outside of NGE insider circles (Miyakawa, 2003). These primary source documents are invaluable in drawing out many of the pedagogical components of the NGE culture and the NGE's effects on the lives of members. One periodical available on the Internet is *Black Seven* ([www.black7.org](http://www.black7.org)), published monthly by NGE members in London, England. The editors of publications like *Black Seven*, *Sun of Man*, and the *Five Percenter* newspaper often republish old articles and essays describing NGE history or philosophy or of particular interest to NGE members.

### *Other Sources*

Many researchers who have written about the NGE have used, in place of material gained through interviews with or observation of NGE members themselves, the lyrics of Hip Hop musicians the authors believe to be members of the NGE or heavily influenced by the NGE. This piecemeal technique for obtaining relevant information has been used both in work specifically covering the NGE presence in Hip Hop music (Miyakawa, 2005; Swedenburg, 1997), as well as in journalistic pieces intended to describe the NGE itself or its philosophy (Goldblatt, 2002; Smydra, 2003). Given the inherent flaws of such an approach, it is still worthwhile to examine the lyrical content of self-professed NGE members who are also Hip Hop musicians.

Russell's (1982) dissertation on the use of popular culture in nonformal education demonstrates the vital role that mediums of popular culture can play in spreading the developmental messages of nonformal education. Russell's research explored alternative communication networks that are indigenous and traditional to the field groups being studied. These systems of communication varied between the three groups he studied – one in the United States and two in Africa – though all could be referred to as “popular culture.” Giroux (2003) has said:

For many educational reformers, education and schooling are synonymous. In actuality, schooling is only one site where education takes place. As a performative practice, pedagogy is at work in a variety of educational sites – including popular culture, television and cable networks, magazines, the Internet, churches, and the press. (p. 38)

Since the late 1970s, Hip Hop music has served as the primary system of alternative communication and constitutes what Russell described as “popular culture” among urban Black youth. Gooding (2001) argues that the reason the FBI could not suppress the growth and proliferation of the NGE was that it was unlike the other Black movements that emerged in 1960s. The NGE was not solely a political or ideological movement, but was instead a cultural movement through its intrinsic role in Hip Hop and the musical forms that preceded it in the late 1960s until the late 1970s. Several writers have alluded to Allah’s popularity with youth owing in great part to his vocal delivery, which has been compared to an early “rap” of sorts (Allah, 1987; Miyakawa, 2004; Smith, J. I, 1999). Jones (2002) discusses the impact of the heavy NGE influence in mid-1980s and early 1990s Hip Hop:

These artists and a whole host of others (seemed like every other rap group spoke of nationalism, consciousness, and spirituality) promoted themes of Black unity, pride, history and education. Rap at this time was introducing many Black youth to a history they had little or no knowledge of, and it actually encouraged youth to read! You couldn't fully understand X-Clan or KRS-ONE unless you read a book or spoke to someone who did.

Black Leaders must have missed the Black young people on street corners and college campuses who were holding ciphers where 'science and knowledge' were being dropped about history and politics, because of what Chuck D said or what Rakim said on a record. (para. 6-8)

The use of Hip Hop music as a medium for NGE members to proliferate the ideological messages as well as many of the cultural nuances of the NGE is a standard

point of reference for most researchers who have discussed the NGE's role in Hip Hop music and culture (Miyakawa, 2005; Smydra, 2003; Swedenburg, 1997). NGE members themselves have also attested to the strategy of using popular culture to spread their message (Ahearn, 1989; Allen, 1991; 1994; RZA & Norris, 2005), while other NGE members have affirmed that NGE-influenced Hip Hop music was a major force in attracting them to the NGE (Mock, 2002). In an interview promoting his upcoming album, Hip Hop artist and NGE member Saigon states:

I'm trying to change the world with this shit. The title of the album is, "Greatest Story Never Told," after Clarence 13X the Father who started the 5% Nation. I'm trying to pick up where he left off. This music shit is the most powerful weapon we got, ya' know? We got to use it for more than just promoting some white man's car or clothing company and shit. We gotta use it to build.

*The NGE as a Transformative Force*

The early development of the Five Percenters included the engagement and redirection of a number of gang-like street associations of street youth (Gotterher, 1975). According to Aulen (2005), "The NGE historically engages in outreach among troubled youth and gang members" (para. 7). Several other authors have documented the NGE's presence in disadvantaged inner-city communities where crime and delinquency proliferate (Gotterher, 1975; Knight, 2004; Nuruddin, 1994; RZA & Norris, 2005; Simmons & George, 2001), while insiders often relate specific accounts of the NGE's work with at-risk youth and young adults (Allah, J.U., 1995; Allah, K, 2002). Often, however, due to the scope of published literature available on the NGE, much of the data has been related either to incarcerated individuals or Hip Hop musicians. Nonetheless,

investigations of the NGE culture itself typically characterize the NGE as a “transformative force” among wayward youth (Alim, 2005, p. 266).

Research suggests that cultural values can be predictors of moral reasoning and behavior in Black youth (Woods & Jagers, 2003). In Tanner’s (2002) coverage of the plight of NGE members in South Carolina prisons, NGE member Lord Premier describes the transformative effects of the NGE pedagogy: "It's always been the way. Some brothers learn on the street, and some brothers learn in jail...I was just wild like that, and it slowed me down. It made me see life in a different aspect" (A New Name section, para. 8).

Shirk and Strangler’s (2004) book *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System* describes the experience of a young inmate the authors identify as Jeffrey. Jeffrey, before becoming an active NGE member while incarcerated, was constantly fighting, gambling, and engaging in other high-risk behaviors. After becoming involved with the NGE, Jeffrey began to read more, educate himself on Black history, and participate in voluntary organizations and programs in his prison. Regarding his role in one of these programs, Jeffrey recounts, “We teach the brothers that we have alienated ourselves from society and need to take responsibility for our actions, while recognizing that the system contributed to our downfall. The whole idea is to realize what you’re up against so that you don’t re-offend when you get out” (2004, p. 35). Jeffrey attributes much of his earlier behaviors and attitudes to environment, having been born into a household of drugs in a severely distressed neighborhood where Jeffrey found a “surrogate family” in other street youth. Jeffrey recounts, “A lot of us came in here [prison] with that youth mentality, which is what led

us to negative behavior, along with the lack of integrity in our households. We looked to the streets for meaning in our lives. We have to make a transition from that mindset” (p. 35). Regarding his own transition, Jeremy reports, “My morals and principles are in order now. I’m a very different person than I was when I got locked up. I’m ready to go out in the world and do what’s right” (p. 38).

Describing a lengthy interview with veteran NGE member Born Justice Allah, Aulen (2005) comments:

"The teachings of The Father can turn your life around if you apply yourself," Born Justice asserts. Members are prohibited from consuming pork, tobacco, and alcohol. Male members, Born Justice adds, must actively form families and help their wives "be more refined like the queens they are." He speaks about a young female member who "was on the path of destruction" but, through active membership, obtained her GED and "went to college – to Spelman – and now she's a teacher." (para. 6)

In the introspective 1993 single “C.R.E.A.M.,” Hip Hop artist Inspectah Deck, a member of the predominantly NGE-affiliated rap group Wu-Tang Clan, transitions from detailing Deck’s own experience as an at-risk youth to his current obligation to teach the troubled youth of the present day:

I peep at the shape of the streets/ and stay awake to the ways of the world, cause  
shit is deep/ A man with a dream with plans to make cream/ which failed, I went  
to jail at the age of 15/ A young buck sellin’ drugs and such who never had much/  
trying to get a clutch at what I could not touch (could not touch)/.../ We got stick-  
up kids, corrupt cops, and crack rocks/ and stray shots - all on a block that stays

hot/ Leave it up to me while I be living proof/ to kick the truth to the young Black youth/ But shorty's runnin' wild, smokin' cess, drinkin' beer/ and ain't trying to hear what I'm kickin' in his ear/ (Grice, Smith, Woods, Coles, Hunter, Hawkins, Jones, Diggs, & Turner, 1993)

In the autobiographical 2003 recording "Show N Prove," Inspectah Deck describes both his experience before involvement with the NGE as well as the subsequent transformative influence of involvement with the NGE:

I once asked God to forgive for my sins/ Bent on my knees pleadin' to be heavenly cleansed/ [They] said the Holy Ghost changed the ways and actions of men/ When I stood, I felt the same as if I just walked in/ I was twelve at the time, held nines, held mines/ A frail mind, criminal thoughts well-designed/ Then the older Gods put me on, on how to rock this:/ "Maintain 360 Lord, and live prosperous"/ His jewel was priceless: "Keep the cipher righteous/ Bear in mind, God, some of your own won't like this"/ (Hunter, 1999)

The December 2002 edition of *Black Seven* republishes an essay from Gykee Mathematics Allah, one of the "first born" of Medina (Brooklyn), recounting the transformative experience of being a Five Percenter during Allah the Father's leadership:

Meanwhile in Medina the teachings took off. The in-crowd circle of Medinans found it quite easy telling the people of our new found change and way of living....Putting down our weapons relying on truth, it didn't come easy, however it became simply awesome, when putting these new found truths to the test and they worked....

The discipline [was] ingrained into us as we walked along the path of righteousness. Allah made it easy for us to admit promptly when we were wrong. He sent us to the people and institutions we may have wronged and made us correct the injustice and apologize for our wrongs. You see he was just that kind of man. Many of us didn't like it, however, we adhered to his principles, which has made better men out of many of us today. (Allah, G. M., 2002, p. 14)

*In Culture and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Bicultural Experience in the United States*, Duncan (1995) discusses a sixteen-year-old Black male identified as Clayton, who frequents Leimert Park, a meeting place of the NGE in Los Angeles. Clayton explicates his personal growth in terms of the self-knowledge he has gained:

I'm black and I'm a youth of 1993. And I have problems like every other youth that I know. And I just want to strive to help myself mentally. And that'll, I guess, when I help myself mentally, the physical will follow, because wherever the head goes, the body follows. Well, I still need improvement, really I do. And the past...in the past it was different.

Because [before] I came into proper knowledge of myself...You know, I really didn't think nothing of myself. I was just a kid who was just – I was always searching, striving to find something about me but I just didn't know, you know? (pp. 85-86)

#### *The NGE and Education*

Within the formal educational system, school reform programs and site-based interventions have been seen as the panacea to the numerous crises facing Black youth and, more particularly, Black males in school today (Steinberg, 1996). Of the school-

based interventions that have been implemented successfully, only a few of those designed around Black students' underachievement have demonstrated considerable progress (Burrell, 2001; Steinberg, 1996), while most of the widespread, commercially-produced, and government-sponsored reforms aimed at minority achievement have failed to show genuine gains in curbing significant problems in the affective domains or other areas that are beyond the scope of standardized test scores (Mathews, 2002). Meanwhile, many of the independent measures incorporating an Afrocentric "rites of passage" approach have failed to demonstrate statistical significance as well, often raising self-esteem among Black youth, but simultaneously affecting students' perceptions of and attitudes towards formal education negatively (Cobbs & Enger, 1992; Harvey & Hill, 2004). Irvine (1991) argues that the fundamental problem is with the schools themselves, and not social, cultural, biological, or environmental deficits among Black and minority children, which other compensatory programs and interventions have assumed.

Much of the disparity can be attributed to the stance Black youth and other involuntary minorities often take towards formal education, which is quite often characterized by distrust, apathy, or outright resistance. Ogbu and colleagues have described this phenomenon as the "oppositional-culture construct" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Akom (2003) has shown that teenage members of the Nation of Islam defy Ogbu's oppositional-culture construct by engaging in what the researcher calls a "Black achievement ideology." Nation of Islam youth in Akom's study develop studious orientations to school while maintaining oppositional, often defiant, stances to traditional Western education. Thus these youth neither succumb to what Fordham and Ogbu (1986) call "acting white" in order to excel, nor disengage from

school, but instead embrace intellectual ability and academic competence as dynamic facets of a reinterpretation of Blackness influenced by the “organizational habitus” of the NOI. The term organizational habitus refers to the set of attitudes, perceptions, and preferences transmitted to individuals through a shared organizational culture (McDonough, 1997).

NGE members apparently share a similar organizational habitus. Members are encouraged to attend institutions of higher education, where they often engage actively in classroom discussions and write academic papers on the NGE itself or its teachings (Glover, 1998; Winbush, 1996). Like the youth in Akom’s study, however, NGE members’ opposition to the traditional curriculum and its Western interpretation of history, can, at times, become disruptive or confrontational. During the movement’s early years, newspapers reported schools beleaguered by waves of student uprisings led by young Five Percenters. An FBI memorandum on the Five Percenters describes students at Junior High School No. 120 in Harlem who “disrupt classes, demand to be called by their Muslim names, and have assaulted some teachers.” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1965, p. 4). Allah mandated NGE members to better themselves by continuing in school, learning a trade, or finding employment (Allah, 1987, Gotterher, 1975). However, NGE members, past and present, who have continued in school after becoming involved with the NGE often recount scenes of confrontation with teachers and vocalizing their resistance to the Eurocentric curriculum. NGE member and Hip Hop artist RZA recounts a characteristic scenario in the lyrics to Masta Killa’s “School” (2004):

Sat in the back of the class with my hand up/ Two wild security guards grabbed my man up/ Threw him in detention - five days suspension/ 'Cuz he said the teacher was lyin' about the Indians/ Tryin' to dumb us with the story of Columbus/ Tryin' to brain-numb us, when all you see, that came from us/ They caught me carvin', I learned about God then/ Taggin' Wu logo on the book margin/ Intense like a New York riot, she stood quiet/ And asked me, could she speak to me in private/ (Mr. Diggs, you actin' like a fool) Huh?/ (You know these rules that we have in these schools) Yeah/ (You and your friends think ya'll cool) Why?/ ('Cuz ya'll walk through these halls with the 12 Jewels [NGE lessons])/ Fat shoe laces and tri-colored sneakers/ I stood like a man, then I questioned my teacher/ Why don't we speak about the wisdom of the sages?/ And how did Europe black out in the Dark Ages?/ And when they got light why did they white-wash the pages?/ And [during] the Inquisition, why was Christians thrown in cages?/ And why would they try to destroy the Nation?/ With their birth control and brain control fluoridation?/ And why [does] it seem that half the school is racist?/ She said "Diggs, to the office!" We about faces/ (Turner & Diggs, 2004)

Antisocial behaviors and attitudes in disadvantaged Black youth can represent a form of rebellion against the social order when it is perceived by the youth as oppressive or corrupt (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Duncan's (1996) analysis of interviews with several academically-inclined Black adolescents with high levels of cultural affiliation revealed that many exhibited qualities of Akom's (2003) "Black achievement ideology," and Oyserman's (1995) tripartite ideals for integrating the embracement of racial identity and academic achievement. In effect, Black identity and consciousness can affect

educational attitudes and aspirations negatively or positively, depending on the orientation of the individual (Gurin & Epps, 1975).

G. Kalim, editor of *The Five Percenter* newspaper and veteran NGE member, writes:

I know that you youngsters don't like school and I know why. There was a time when I didn't like school either, because all they did there was make everything white good, and I ain't white. Ask someone who went to school with me and they will tell you that I was a Hellraiser in school, especially in JHS 120 in Manhattan. Many who went to school with me were surprised to see me become a schoolteacher...You are inundated with an educational process which promotes their Whiteness and demotes your Blackness. The same thing happened in my time, which is why I was so rebellious. (Kalim, 1998, p. 2)

One of the high-achieving males in Duncan's study (1996) borrows freely from NGE ideology in defining integral aspects of his self-schema:

First of all, let me say that I am not a Christian, that I don't have a religion, and, for a long period of time, I didn't believe in God. If I were to describe myself to myself, I would say that I'm a God. Let me break it down to you. First of all, I don't think that I have full belief in that the White man is the Devil - but I do know that I am God and that our people are Gods....I would think that God is man. And we were the first men. We are God. And then even Allah - "A-L-L-A-H," what does it mean? "Arm-Leg-Arm-Leg-Hand"-or something like that?

[Interviewer Interjection: Do you mean "Arm-Leg-Leg-Arm, and Head"?] Yes!

And what is that? It's not a man, but it's human. So, I consider myself to be a God for that reason. (para. 38)

In clarifying the “emancipatory potentialities” of this student’s discourse, Duncan cites the persistent and pervasive force of white supremacy in abstracting the causal realities behind the abject conditions of disadvantaged minority communities. Duncan refers to seventeen-year-old Kwesi’s use of discourse that apparently draws on NGE teachings as a means by which Kwesi can “affirm his people's humanity” and “recover his agency and become an actor in and with the world.” (para. 41) However, Duncan adds:

[Such] dialogical activity...undergirds the discourse practices that many Black youth exhibit in their classroom interactions with teachers, peers, and curricula.

As such, the difficulties that these adolescents typically experience in schools may very well be political responses to White supremacy and not attributable to laziness and/or inability to engage academics. (para. 41-42)

A correlation between NGE influence and sophisticated linguistic and dialogic activity among Black youth reoccurs in William Labov’s groundbreaking research on language and academic achievement among minority youth in Harlem in the 1960s. Labov’s findings revealed that the Harlem youth not only defied previous assumptions about the logical and linguistic abilities of school-age Black and Puerto-Rican children, but that these youth were very often acquainted with early strands of NGE influence (Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Labov, 1972). In one interview, two Black eight-year-olds refer to other youths who have been telling them about Allah, and in another interview a 15-year-old member of a youth association known as the Jets attacks traditional religious conventions about God and the afterlife, both of which the youth

skillfully dismisses using the kind of logical arguments being investigated by the author (Labov, 1972). Nearly 40 years later, Labov (personal communication, September 25, 2005) recalled working with Harlem youth who identified with, or were influenced by, the NGE. Labov found the youth he interviewed to be highly logical and excellent communicators of the Black English vernacular [BEV], and consequently argued that academia was not only ignoring cultural factors in assessing the intellectual and academic abilities of minority youth, but penalizing Black and Hispanic inner-city children for what are, in essence, entrenched cultural variances (Labov et al., 1968; Labov, 1972). The use of rhetorical arguments and logical constructions, with which Labov found many of these youth to be proficient and in some cases “gifted” (1972, para. 27), are not only facets of the BEV culture, but integral components of the NGE culture as well (Novek, 1995; Simmons & George, 2001; Swedenburg, 1997).

Historically, the NGE has advocated for its members to become educated, although it has never dictated the specific manner in which they are to become so. In effect, the NGE, if treated in the context of an educational institution, lends itself readily to associations with nonformal education. The NGE pedagogy, as it was first developed by Allah in his efforts to transform street youth, aims to meet the needs of members who demonstrate varying levels of capability within the formal educational system, as well as those who are - for whatever reason - outside of the education mainstream.

At least two veteran NGE members have described the “rites of passage” that all NGE members should undergo early in the course of their studies and involvement (Gathers, 1992a; Allah, D. W., 1997). Veteran member ABG Allah described the process as such:

The first phase within this process is self assessment. This is the foundation phase, the identification step. The beginning of a format to address and confront life's adversities. The student enrollment will be implemented within a period of ninety days. The area covered at this time will be value based socialization. There will be discussions with full participation on community and belonging. For as a people we belong (individually) to many communities. We shall utilize our teachers, counselors, etc. as well as those whom aspire to enter the professions. Teaching is also a learning process, which any Five Percenter can tell you.

The cognitive processes of our people must be stimulated. There already exists a thirst for knowledge, and a love for literature. The proper utilization of the alphabets and the mathematics [fundamental NGE lessons] will be implemented. (Gathers, 1992a, p. 16)

In describing the educational process of becoming involved with the NGE, the author addresses many pedagogical aspects of the NGE culture. Many elements of Freirian discourse also appear as comments on self-realization, education as a means to confront adversity, development of community, teaching as a learning process, and awareness of the untapped potential of disadvantaged populations (Freire, 1970).

Several authors have described the NGE's popularity with poor urban youth (Allah, 1987, Black Apologetics Ministry, 2003b; Smydra, 2003; Swedenburg, 1997). In inner-city communities nationwide, youthful enrollees become engrossed in the study of question-and-answer catechisms known as the 120 Lessons. In conjunction with the study of the Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet, where each number and letter are

representative of a symbolic meaning, the curriculum of the NGE focuses on the study of Black identity, history, science, and the implicit development of numeracy and literacy. These and other pedagogical practices are integral elements of the greater cultural aesthetic, and are rooted in a tradition dating back to the original dissemination of the teachings by early members (Cuba, 1992; Noor, 2002).

The NGE is often described by both members and outsiders as having a significant impact on members' aspirations and educational attitudes (Allah, G. M., 2002; Gotterher, 1975; Mock, 2002; RZA & Norris, 2005). Individuals who become involved upon entering the prison system report emerging with a new sense of discipline, purpose and direction, often having dedicated much of their time incarcerated to intellectual and academic pursuits (Shirk & Strangler, 2004; Tanner, 1998). Although some accounts indicate a delay in realization of the NGE's moral and academic organizational habitus (Gathers, 1992b; Smith, 1997), insider testimonies from formerly delinquent and underachieving youth have revealed considerable improvements in social behavior and attitude (Dass, 2005; Duncan, 1995; Gathers, 1993; Hunter, 1999; Hunter & Woods, 1993).

The NGE's primary curricular outline "What We Teach" dedicates three out of its nine tenets explicitly to educational imperatives (McCloud, 1995; Noor, 2002; Smith, J. I., 1999). The "What We Teach" document, included in Appendix B, has circulated in various forms throughout the NGE community for decades and is often included in the official newspaper of the NGE, *The Five Percenter*, and is presently available online at the NGE homepage ([www.allahsnation.net](http://www.allahsnation.net)). Tanner's (2002) coverage of the NGE's

predicament in South Carolina prisons introduces the NGE, stating, “For the Five Percent, education and family are of prime importance” (Introduction section, para. 5).

Michael Dean, in a contribution to a Denver, Colorado NGE publication, *The Knowledge Sheet*, affirms the NGE’s initiative to advance education among street-savvy youth who are not only educated, but also possess a “knowledge of the streets and themselves” (Dean, 1995, p. 1). In a frequently updated Internet blog, C’BS Alife Allah comments on fellow NGE members’ attitudes towards education and lifelong learning. In one posting, the author extols the NGE’s trend of having members who, although immersed in the culture of the streets, loved books and sincerely respected intellect and education:

One thing about the Nation in my experience is that it has always been pro-literate. I’ve seen brothers who could not read learn these degrees from mouth to ear (by oral transmission) and then be encouraged to go and learn how to read and write. I have always been impressed by how learning this Knowledge inspired a person to want to LEARN in general. That is something that the public school system has had trouble with amongst children nowadays.

When I was learning 120 all the Gods who I was around ALWAYS had a new book in hand. “Yo God, have you read (insert random title)?!!!” Black Isa my brother was into ‘criminology’ books such as the Donald Goines and Iceberg Slim. Other Gods were into the hard sciences. Others had some plus degrees that they had to hip me to. I personally loved history books and science fiction.

Ironically, while being well-read in school was being frowned upon by the 'in crowd' as 'nerdish', reading amongst the Gods who ran the streets was a...POSITIVE sign of intellect. (2005a, para. 1-3)

In one account of the street-savvy and often aggressive measures employed by early Five Percenters, Veteran NGE member Know Allah (2002) describes some of the early pedagogical practices in Brooklyn:

The two brothers came together and began teaching Islam to the brothers and sisters and babies within the community; they taught to all that wanted the knowledge themselves. The teachings began on the street corner and on the block during the summer of 1965....We would go inside, or into the yard or basketball court. Akbar or Sha-Sha would tell the people that were playing basketball that if they were not interested in learning they would have to leave when their game was over. Then Akbar and Sha-Sha would start civilization class. (pp. 15-16)

According to NGE member Bilal Allah, "The task at hand is to maintain one's own righteous existence while teaching others to be righteous. We place major emphasis on being articulate and well-read." (Todorovic, 1996, para. 31) Veteran NGE member Allah B states that a vital component of Allah the Father's "Master Plan" was for the NGE to have its own businesses and schools, so that Gods and Earths could be the exclusive teachers of other NGE members, especially those of school age (Allah Truth, 1995). "Simply put," Allah Truth writes, "We are ordained by Almighty God ALLAH to teach, save and preserve the Babies. We must teach the same righteousness that Almighty God ALLAH, Al Fatir, The Originator Himself taught Us!" (p. 20).

Regarding the nature of this instruction, veteran NGE member Almighty God Dawud Allah, in the self-published *The Babies are the Greatest*, has written:

See I have dedicated my life to saving the babies, children and youth...[through] self knowledge which is gained by intense study of self...This type of teaching...will produce self-motivation within our Black young keeping them more focused on self and this will overflow in time. Thus by seeing themselves in a better light, they will become more focused on family...business or jobs...school and health which are most important for a long life. (pp. 40-41)

In a similar vein, yet alluding more to education's role in transforming oppression (Freire, 1970), Kalim continues:

The Devil loves it when you drop out of school. That means that...you will remain ignorant/illiterate to his calculated plans to keep you down. So go to school and be the best, for with your lessons in one hand and a diploma or degree in the other hand you will be able to restore yourself and your people to the heights of your ancestors. (1998, p. 2)

Noting that some of the world's "greatest and most intelligent men," Allah and Elijah Muhammad included, did not pursue a formal education, Kalim also directs young NGE members - and presumably other Black youth who read *The Five Percenter* - to get a library card and educate themselves if they are out of school (1998).

### *Summary*

Research has discussed the implications of nonformal education for Blacks in America (Cain, 2002; Murchinson, 1977) and, more specifically, the idea of Malcolm X as a nonformal educator (Smallwood, 1999). An examination of the available evidence on

the NGE reveals that the NGE's pedagogy and attendant educational methods exemplify the framework of nonformal education. The literature offers a number of significant facts, which have, in turn, informed the course of the current research investigation: (a) The NGE, as a social movement or culture, is educative in nature (Allah, J. U., 1995; McCloud, 1995; Noor, 2002; Smith, J. I., 1999; Tanner, 2002); (b) NGE education is not site-based and akin to detached street-based youth work (Allah, B., 1987; Allah, K., 2002; Jones, 2002); and (c) NGE education is geared towards literacy (Allah, C. A., 2005a; Featherstone, 1971; Todorovic, 1996) and self-improvement (Aulen, 2005; Quinones, 2002). These observations have added significant insight to the development of the research methodology to be used in this study.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology that was used in this study. Included is a description of the research design and research methods, the selection of participants, the instrumentation, assumptions and limitations regarding the methodology employed, the role of the researcher, and a detailed explanation of the research procedures and data analysis.

### *Research Design*

As there has been little, if any, research on the topic of educational attitudes and practices in the NGE, and very little on the NGE itself, recognized theories have not been developed relevant to the topic. An exploratory qualitative study was necessitated by the gaps in the literature, the increasing demand for educational alternatives - potentially drawing on emergent themes from NGE pedagogy and practice - to reach high-risk minority youth, and an overall lack of awareness and understanding of the NGE in mainstream society and the media (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Strauss, 1993).

This study represents the first extensive case study of the NGE. Creswell (1998) defines a case study as an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case, or multiple cases, over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. According to Creswell, the “bounded system,” or the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity, or individuals, is bound by the time and place of data collection. The subsequent data analysis can be either a holistic analysis of the entire case or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case. When multiple cases are chosen, a standard format is to present a description of each case and themes within the case (called within-case analysis), followed by a thematic analysis across the

cases (called a cross-case analysis), as well as interpretations or assertions regarding the meanings of the cases.

The research design was entirely qualitative, primarily utilizing interview data. Merriam (1988) and Yin (1989) consider qualitative analysis appropriate in the field of education, where quantitative research otherwise predominates. Hamilton (1980) proposed that educational phenomena are different from those of the natural sciences and it is therefore legitimate to address them with different research procedures. According to Strauss (1993), qualitative research is most appropriate for an exploratory study, such as this one.

Isaac and Michael (1995) and Strauss (1993) proposed that semi-structured interviews are most useful when exploring a problem area about which there exists insufficient information. The researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews with NGE members. Additionally, historical research involving the collection and analysis of NGE lessons, literature, other relevant documents, and the recording of oral history illustrated the historical expansion and pedagogical workings of the early NGE and its later development.

The purpose of this study was to identify the educational practices of the NGE and the related educational attitudes of NGE members. The goal of the research was to present NGE pedagogy within the theoretically context of a nonformal educational methodology. According to Simkins (1977), such a methodology ideally incorporates the following aspects: (a) The purposes are non-credential-based; (b) the content is individualized, output centered and practical; (c) the delivery system is environment-based, community-related, flexible, learner-centered and resource saving; and (d) the

system is self-governing and democratic. Findings regarding NGE pedagogical practices with high-risk Black youth suggest implications for the development of alternative educational models and interventions for out-of-school, delinquent, and disaffected Black adolescents.

### *Selection of Participants*

The primary criterion for participation was self-identification as a member of the NGE. However, Spradley (1979) suggests that one of the criteria for selecting good informants is “thorough enculturation,” or immersion in a subculture or organization to the point that the informant no longer consciously thinks about it. As a result, participants for this study included members recognized by fellow NGE members as being heavily involved in NGE activities in their city or region, as well as interview respondents selected through theoretical sampling after a brief, informal interview. In theoretical sampling, the quantity of interviews is directly proportional to the quality of the content of each interview in regards to accomplishing the goals of the research (Gephart, 1997). Thus, a priority was placed on identifying and selecting for interview NGE members who became involved before adulthood and believe they would have been considered at-risk for academic or societal failure.

In choosing participants for this study, the researcher utilized the following criteria:

1. Participants became involved with the NGE before adulthood and described themselves as actively involved at the time of the interviews.
2. Participants either (a) came from a disadvantaged background (O’Hare & Mather, 2003), (b) experienced difficulties in the traditional educational

system, (c) engaged in at-risk behavior during their adolescence (Wells, 1990), or (d) any combination of the aforementioned factors.

Interviews were conducted in eight urban cities along the east coast of the United States, including High Point and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Trenton, New Jersey; New York City, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Detroit, Michigan. These locales were selected to reflect a greater degree of geographic and demographic diversity than a one-site study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These cities also contain varying concentrations of NGE membership and activity in their urban districts, ranging from small but active pockets in Pittsburgh (Mock, 2002) to the widespread presence in certain districts of Brooklyn and Harlem (Nuruddin, 1994). Interviews were conducted in the respondent's natural environment, or a site of their choosing, to ensure a relaxed, candid response (Van Maanen, 1988).

The researcher interviewed thirteen participants, two of whom interviewed together. The participants of this study were Born Supreme Allah, Rasheem Allah, A-King B Allah, Ja'ree Divine Allah, Steel Free Allah, Supreme Science Allah, Knowledge Fact Allah, Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, King Builder Allah, Allah Truth, Kamal Universal, Allah Righteous, and Lord Sincere Allah (all pseudonyms used for confidentiality purposes, although most members do not change their names legally). The participants in this study ranged from 20 to 58 years of age and had all become involved with the NGE before adulthood. With the exception of Allah Righteous and Lord Sincere Allah, two brothers who interviewed together, all participants were interviewed individually.

### *Instrumentation*

The questions used in the interview instrument were based on the study's guiding research questions, which were:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?
2. What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?
3. How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational achievement and post-school success?

The original interview instrument was revised and reformatted based on review of the findings and recommendations from a pilot study conducted by the researcher in February of 2005. The pilot study's results indicated that some of the interview protocol was unclear, other portions of it ineffective in attaining relevant information, and the majority of its questions sequenced or grouped awkwardly. The revised interview instrument, found in Appendix B, contains seven open-ended questions and a series of 'probe' items to prompt for further information.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

The scope of this study was limited in accurately assessing the actual accomplishments of the majority of NGE members due primarily to two factors: (a) the absence of quantitative studies of any kind regarding the NGE, and (b) limited sources of confirmable third-party data pertaining to high school graduation, enrollment in post-secondary education, employment, increases in academic performance, and decreases in at-risk behavior among NGE members after involvement.

The study's aim was to utilize a diverse sample of the NGE population so that results could be generalized and applied to the larger whole. However, even with 13 participants

from a variety of demographic backgrounds, the findings cannot reasonably be applied to the entire NGE population through the U.S. It must also be added that, in this study, as with most qualitative studies, the findings could be subject to other interpretations.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

The researcher is a doctoral candidate at Argosy University and full-time teacher with the Atlanta Public Schools system. Having resided in Jersey City, New Jersey before moving to Atlanta, Georgia, the researcher has been well acquainted with the NGE and NGE members since age 15. Having participated actively within NGE circles during his teenage and undergraduate years, the researcher became familiar with NGE teachings and practices. As an undergraduate student at Morehouse College and during Masters' studies at Georgia State University, the researcher presented a number of papers and speeches drawing on historical and ethnographic research on the NGE (Dass, 1998). In addition, the researcher has authored several undergraduate and graduate-level studies in various areas including program evaluation, curriculum comparison, nonformal education, and interventions for at-risk students.

When researchers engage in qualitative research, a chief concern is insider bias. Hockey (1993) offers a number of advantages to in-group research, including the absence of culture shock, an awareness of nuances and shared realities, and enhanced rapport with participants, but also warns that an insider researcher's knowledge does not reflect the totality of the group being studied, and that preconceptions and "taken-for-granted assumptions" should be avoided. In qualitative research, where prior hypotheses should be kept to a minimum, an insider's view is considered ideal in attempting to capture and understand the meanings and experiences of the study's participants within their culture

or social system (Kellehear, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). It is crucial, according to Van Maanen (1988), that the researcher speaks the native language of the group being studied, so as to “decode one culture while recoding it for another” (p. 4).

The researcher entered NGE circles as an insider due to his prior knowledge of NGE terminology and practice. However, by conducting research in regions far removed from the researcher’s home in Atlanta, especially among NGE circles altogether unfamiliar to him, the researcher decreased insider familiarity, establishing merely a transitory contact with the group. The use of multiple research sites and peer review of data analysis are two ways to effectively neutralize insider bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to further eliminate subjectivity and bias, the researcher utilized reflexive self-critiquing of coding and interpretations.

#### *Procedures*

Spradley’s *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979) details the process of creating ethnographic accounts of cultures and subgroups by engaging in a process of (a) locating informants, (b) asking questions, (c) analyzing interview material, and (d) ultimately writing the ethnographic piece. After identifying potential contact persons in future research locations from NGE-related resources available on the Internet, the researcher initiated contact with these individuals and established future meeting locations and times. As stated earlier, the researcher traveled from Atlanta to a number of sites along the eastern coast, including Winston-Salem and High Point, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Trenton, NJ; the New York City boroughs of Harlem and Brooklyn; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Detroit, Michigan. Before traveling to a research location, the researcher contacted active NGE members in the area through

information available either on *Allah's Atlas*, an online directory of NGE contact persons across the nation (<http://atlas.allahsnation.net>), from references supplied by other study participants, or from NGE members with whom the researcher was already familiar. As Lofland and Lofland (1995, p. 37) note regarding the value of familiarity, "Gaining entry to a setting to do an interview is greatly expedited if you have the connections."

At each location, the researcher engaged primarily in interviewing NGE members. The researcher communicated his intentions to present a factual, unbiased portrayal of the NGE and its pedagogy, as well as the researcher's prior experience with the NGE, as a means of establishing rapport. As an ethnographic researcher is concerned with the preservation of natural settings in conducting research, interviews were conducted in the communities where participants were located and the field notes include preliminary descriptions of both the participant and the scene of the interview (Burawoy, Camson, & Burton, 1991; Spradley, 1979). Participants were present at the times and dates agreed upon, and no interviews needed rescheduling. However, in three cases, participants' time constraints necessitated follow-up interviews, as the total duration of most interviews was between one and two hours. The entirety of the interviews was audio-taped using a micro-cassette recorder. The audio material was later transferred to digital media, whereupon background noise was filtered out using computer software.

After several unsuccessful attempts by professional transcribers, the researcher sought the services of NGE members who had both the familiarity to recognize the dialect and vernacular present in the recordings, as well as previous professional experience with transcription. The researcher selected two NGE members who were not involved in the study, and received electronic transcripts within days of submitting the

audio files. In qualitative research, the major themes are often already classified patterns, drawn from the relevant literature and/or a pilot study, as was the case in this study (Aronson, 1994). Each piece of data was then further individually analyzed for emergent sub-themes, or findings, from which conclusions can be drawn upon comparison and synthesis (Aronson, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Bernard (1996) has explained that texts are created in qualitative research by audiotaping or simply writing what individuals say, while other kinds of texts may be collected in the course of research. As an added measure for triangulation, the researcher extended the historical analysis of documents initiated at the onset of this project to survey the pedagogical methods and philosophy of the early NGE. With the exception of “What We Teach” and “What We Will Achieve,” which were obtained from the NGE homepage ([www.allahsnation.net](http://www.allahsnation.net)), supplemental materials and lessons, including essays from veteran NGE members, were garnered from study participants and other NGE members encountered throughout the study. NGE-specific documents, such as narrative histories, supplemental “plus” lessons, and relevant articles or essays written by NGE members have served to inform the literature review and theoretical basis of the current study. Additional documentation of this sort provided useful information corresponding to emergent themes found upon analysis of interview transcripts.

Components of this study, including the interview instrument and the inclusion of Freirian concepts on critical pedagogy (1970), are the result of the pilot study conducted in February, 2005. A review of the findings suggested revisions to the original interview instrument, and a revised approach to interviewing so that interview questions allowed for further probing to obtain additional information particularly relevant to the research

questions. In the pilot study, all informants attested to improvements since their involvement with the NGE, citing positive developments in a number of areas, including eating habits, academic motivation, and most commonly, their ability to “think.” In addition to emphasizing the importance of education in ensuring a prosperous future, NGE members also alluded to the sense of family and the nature of the NGE as a learning community in heightening their desires to achieve. Members also devoted many of their comments to explaining the pragmatism of NGE teachings (Dass, 2005).

#### *Data Processing and Analysis*

After the transcribers submitted all interview transcripts, the researcher scrutinized the transcripts for clarity and accuracy by comparing the transcripts with the original audio recordings. Afterward, the researcher began the process of analyzing interview transcripts. One reliable method for data analysis in qualitative research is known as a “chain of evidence” (Yin, 1989, p. 42).

In this process, each of the interviews was tape recorded. The tapes were then transcribed and the transcriptions marked to distinguish by location and interviewee, and then reviewed for accuracy. After making sure that the transcripts were accurate, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts looking for similarities in answers that would help establish the chain of evidence. After collecting all data, the researcher listed patterns of experiences or perceptions that emerged, and began naming categories or themes. The second dimension of the thematic analysis was identifying all data that related to the already classified themes.

The researcher incorporated the techniques of grounded theory analysis. In this process, after identifying emergent themes and sub-themes, or findings, patterns began to

emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kellehear, 1993). Grounded theory analysis, according to Strauss (1993), is:

...a detailed grounding by systemically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence or phrase by phrase of the interview; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded using specific operations in order to produce a well-constructed theory. The focus of analysis is not merely on collecting or ordering a mass of data, but on organizing many ideas that have emerged from analysis of the data. (pp. 22-23)

The use of grounded theory involves systematic steps, beginning with generating categories of information in the first stages of reviewing the data, also known as open coding. Next, one of the categories is selected and positioned within the theoretical model, in what is called axial coding. The process is repeated with each of the categories. Afterwards a story, or cohesive picture, can be generated from the interconnection of these categories, in a process known as selective coding (Creswell, 2003).

In addition to applying the theoretical framework of nonformal education, the researcher incorporated the concepts of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; 1973; 1975; 1989). Finally, the researcher referred back to participants for feedback before proceeding to build a valid argument that drew on related literature (Aronson, 1994).

The research design included endeavors to insure validity and reliability within the qualitative context. As construct validity is typically the most problematic area in qualitative analysis, Yin (1989) has recommended employing the "chain of evidence" in data analysis to increase internal validity (p. 42). To insure reliability, external readers

reviewed the transcripts to verify the conclusions drawn by the chain of evidence discovered by the researcher (Yin, 1989).

Whereas quantitative research relies heavily on validity and reliability, Krefting (1991) proposes similar factors in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, the qualitative analogue of internal validity, the researcher incorporated (a) triangulation using multiple locations, data sources, and interview methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); (b) referential adequacy; (c) member checking; and (d) peer examination of transcript analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1989). Triangulation and referential adequacy were accomplished through the convergence of multiple research locations, multiple participants, and a variety of data sources, including interview data and written documents and literature. Referential adequacy involved writing field notes and recording audiotapes that would provide a rich, comprehensive picture of the data to be analyzed. Member checking involved referring back to members of the studied population for a review of the accuracy of both the initial data and the final interpretation. Member checking has a number of salient features, such as that it assesses the intentionality of respondents, corrects errors, and assesses the overall adequacy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In providing an early manuscript of the completed study to three participants, all of them reported that they agreed with the findings. Peer examination and debriefing were conducted with a similar status colleague who was outside the context of the study and who had a general understanding of the nature of the study and with whom the researcher could review interpretations, insights and analyses. The process was useful because it provides a "devils advocate" and helps

to highlight matters for further clarification and eliminate inconsistencies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability refers to the reliability with which the research findings for the sample group can be generalized to apply to the wider demographic (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As there is little, if any, verifiable demographic data on the NGE, either among NGE members or outside agencies (Tanner, 1998; Smydra, 2003), descriptions of interview locations, participants, and the selection process were utilized as a recourse and means for potential future replication. Further, a diverse sampling of participants, representing a variety of demographic and geographic backgrounds, was utilized to make the study sample more representative of the greater population. Finally, preservation of raw data and utilization of detailed description of research procedures and data analysis so that they are replicable ensured that findings were both dependable and confirmable (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The final analysis of interview data was used to answer the study's guiding research questions:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?
2. What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?
3. How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational achievement and post-school success?

### *Summary*

The methodology presented in this chapter presents the plan of research and analysis used for this study. The researcher has described all components of the research methodology, including the research design and research methods, the selection of

participants, the instrumentation, assumptions and limitations regarding the methodology employed, the role of the researcher, and a detailed explanation of the research procedures and data analysis used.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### *Restatement of the Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of members of the Nation of Gods and Earths regarding their experiences and perceptions of education in both the formal educational system and the Nation of Gods and Earths. Further, the researcher sought to identify the educational practices of the NGE using the context of the theoretical framework of nonformal education. More specifically, the purpose is twofold: (a) to identify pedagogical practices within the NGE culture which may contribute to increased attainment of academic and societal success among high-risk, disconnected or delinquent, Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, and (b) to explore the influence of NGE culture on the educational attitudes and aspirations of NGE members.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?
2. What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?
3. How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational achievement and post-school success?

The seven items found in the interview instrument, having been designed around the research questions, allow for the categorization of relevant interview data into three categories, or major themes, each of them coinciding with one of the research questions. The researcher analyzed the interview data and discovered a number of emergent sub-themes, under which the findings could be further categorized, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Research Questions and Findings*

Research Question	Theme	Sub-theme
What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?	Pedagogical Strategies	Community of Learners
		Self-Instruction
		Culturally Responsive Curriculum
		Exemplars
		<i>Conscientization</i>
What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?	Perspectives on Traditional Education	Eurocentric Curriculum
		Does Not Meet Needs
	Perspectives on NGE Education	Not Comprehensive
		Alternative Curriculum
		Intrinsically Motivational
		Comprehensive
How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational achievement and post-school success?	Influences of NGE involvement	Sense of Purpose
		Responsibility and Accountability
		Intrinsic Motivation
		Legitimacy for Education

This study, beginning in November 2005 and ending in November 2006, included 11 individual interviews and one interview conducted with two participants. Through the interviews, data reflected the perspectives of the participants regarding their perceptions of, and experiences in, formal and nonformal education. This chapter details the findings of individual cases, followed by a cross case analysis used to draw deeper meanings from the data.

The researcher interviewed 13 participants who became involved with the Nation of Gods and Earths before reaching adulthood and who remained actively involved during the time of the interviews. The researcher used various means to select and secure participants from this study. After identifying a local contact person or representative in North Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin, the researcher sought to select members from the active NGE community in these areas.

### *Participant Profiles*

The participants of this study were Born Supreme Allah, Rasheem Allah, A-King B Allah, Ja'ree Divine Allah, Steel Free Allah, Supreme Science Allah, Knowledge Fact Allah, Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, King Builder Allah, Allah Truth, Kamal Universal, Allah Righteous, and Lord Sincere Allah (all pseudonyms used for confidentiality purposes, although most members do not change their names legally). Table 3 provides the name, location, present age, age of involvement with the NGE, highest level of formal education completed, and current employment of each of the participants. The cases are presented in the order in which the interviews occurred. As often as possible, the participants' narratives are presented with minimal interruption, editing, or translating, in

order to preserve the authentic voice of the participants, as well a sense of the cultural values and understandings shared by NGE members. As the focus of this research is the NGE's educational influence on at-risk youth, the three themes of each of the participant profiles address: (a) the attitudes and behaviors of the participant - and if the participant could have been designated as "at-risk" - prior to involvement, (b) the participant's perspectives on traditional education, and (c) the participant's perspectives on the education of the NGE. Whereas the themes of the participant profiles address research questions two and three, which seek to investigate NGE member perspectives on education and the influence of the NGE pedagogy on formerly at-risk youth.

Table 3

*Participant Demographics*

Case	Name	Location	Age	NGE	Education	Employment
1	Born Supreme Allah	High Point, NC	26	19	In college	Retail Supervisor
2	Rasheem Allah	Winston- Salem, NC	27	16	GED	Entrepreneur
3	A-King B Allah	Richmond, VA	22	16	GED, In college	Dispatcher
4	Ja'ree Divine Allah	Harlem, NY	20	14	In college	Videographer
5	Steel Free Allah	Milwaukee, WI	39	20	3 years college	Media Entrepreneur
6	Supreme Science Allah	Milwaukee, WI	29	17	A. A., In college	Music Producer
7	Knowledge Fact Allah	Detroit, MI	31	20	2 years college	Event Promoter
8	Ta'kim Intelligence Allah	Pittsburgh, PA	24	16	In college	Customer Service
9	King Builder Allah	Pittsburgh, PA	54	15	A. A.	Medical Records Manager
10	Allah Truth	Harlem, NY	58	16	B. A.	Director of Non-Profit Organization
11	Kamal Universal	Brooklyn, NY	29	17	3 years college	Business Manager
12	Allah Righteous	Trenton, NJ	25	16	H. S.	Recording Artist
13	Lord Sincere Allah	Trenton, NJ	26	17	H. S.	Recording Artist

*Case 1: Born Supreme Allah – High Point, NC*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Born Supreme Allah, a young man of Black and Korean parentage, spoke at length about the sort of at-risk behaviors he engaged in before his involvement with the NGE:

I was out there. I sold drugs. I was dealing with random females. I hung out all night. Plain and simple, I was straight savage. I didn't care about nobody but myself. I didn't have no respect for authority. It was all about me. I didn't have any guidance. I didn't have anybody that had me sit down, that told me that I had to get an education to work. Nobody told me that no one would hire me if I didn't have a diploma or some qualifications. Nobody sat down and showed me how to be a man. I didn't know anything about responsibility. It didn't hit me until I had to stop selling drugs because of the birth of my daughter.

In attempting to describe what would have become of him, had he not become involved with the NGE, Born Supreme Allah professed:

I'd probably be locked up. Locked up or dead, straight up and down, no lie...There was nothing out there for me to believe in. I don't mean believe as far as religion, but there was nothing out there...that made me want to stop and think about what was going on, or just stop and look at the roses, you know what I'm saying?

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Born Supreme Allah laughed when asked about school, and upon responding, prefaced his narrative with, "Well, when I *did* go to school..." He complained of outside

circumstances “distracting” him from the educational experience, and contended that the educational experience itself failed to offer much relevant. Born Supreme Allah’s description of the educational system portrays it as simultaneously uninteresting and unchallenging. He described himself as a good reader who nonetheless did not care to open his textbooks for school, and still managed to pass the tests.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Born Supreme Allah described involvement in the NGE as a developmental process in which all his negative behaviors were transformed. He cited the influence of the “older Gods,” or veteran NGE members, in shaping his path:

It taught me to have a hunger for knowledge. It taught me to learn more than I knew. It taught me patience. I was never a patient person. I used to get whatever I wanted, right then and there. I didn’t have to wait for it. It taught me how to sit down and do the knowledge so I can learn something. It taught me to, basically, be a better person.

*Case 2: Rasheem Allah – Winston-Salem, NC*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Rasheem Allah had been acquainted with the Nation of Gods and Earths since early childhood as a result of growing up in Brooklyn, but didn’t become involved in the actual studies of the NGE until age 16. Rasheem Allah’s anecdotes about criminal involvement and selling drugs were part of a larger narrative of adult experiences that began long before Rasheem Allah entered adulthood. However, Rasheem Allah made clear that he remained independent, although nowadays demonstrating greater responsibility in choosing his actions:

I always was righteous, nah mean, I always was a good nigga, but before I got into the lessons, I'd do a lot more things. It ain't matter. I'd do whatever I wanted to do. I mean, I still *do* what I want to *do*, but I choose my decisions a lot differently now. But before, I'd do what I'd *want* to do. Couldn't nobody tell me too mucha nothing. I was already a grown man.

#### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Rasheem Allah several times reiterated that he was “never into school,” alluding to other pursuits, often illicit (e.g., selling drugs and armed robbery), that he found more important and rewarding. His comments were critical regarding both the incompetence of public school teachers and the shortcomings of the school system itself. In the schools he attended, Rasheem attested, “the teachers were usually dumb as shit, and ain't have no idea what was goin' on with the kids.” Rasheem Allah had few things positive to say about either his school experience, or traditional education in general. However, regarding his own performance in school, Rasheem Allah noted that he was always one of the smartest students in the class, but that he found no interest in academic pursuits. Rasheem Allah dropped out of high school in his early teens and did not plan to return until becoming involved with the NGE.

#### *Perspectives on NGE Education*

Rasheem described education in the NGE as intrinsically more “interesting” and “satisfying.” Although he found the NGE education “self-gratifying” and in stark contrast to the “weak” education of the traditional system, he suggested that NGE members should be able to use the offerings of the otherwise oppressive system to better themselves. After becoming involved with the NGE, Rasheem Allah enrolled in training

and obtained his GED. He recalls being excited about school again, and applied to a vocational school where he began training as a chef. Rasheem Allah's experiences with traditional education, being wholly unsatisfying, offered a stark contrast to his newfound appreciation for education after becoming involved with the NGE.

*Case 3: A-King B Allah – Richmond, VA*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

A-King B Allah was one of the youngest of the interview participants. However at 22, A-King B Allah had already set up a local non-profit organization dedicated to at-risk women and youth, while working full-time as a dispatcher. He had dropped out of high school but returned to complete his GED after becoming involved with the NGE. He became aware of the NGE through his brother, and the two of them began their studies together. Both brothers remained actively involved with the NGE at the time of the interview. Like many of the participants, A-King B Allah was not entirely negative in describing himself as he was before involvement with the NGE. He spoke on having respect valuing knowledge from an early age:

Before I got Knowledge of Self, I was always a conscious person, because my mother actually raised me to respect...I never turned down any kind of knowledge, whether it was good or it was bad, whether it felt good or it hurt, regardless, I never turned down any kind of knowledge.

In explaining what he meant by knowledge that "hurt," A-King B Allah elaborated that he learned more through trial and error than anything else. His most formative and educational experiences were often the ones that introduced the most pain into his life. As an example, he described the conflict that developed between him and his brother over a

woman they were both dating before either of them had become involved with the NGE. Nonetheless, A-King B Allah professed that he always appreciated the knowledge that life events provided him. On his outlook for the future, had he not become involved with the NGE, A-King B Allah said:

If I hadn't gotten Knowledge of Self I would have been in Richmond, Virginia, probably cutting up. I probably would have ended up a rapper...I probably would have been in Richmond wildin' out. I could see myself driving up and down the street with nothing to do, wasting a whole bunch of gas, probably harassing women.

In *Shame of a Nation* (2005), when author Jonathan Kozol asks a Black student preparing to graduate from high school about his plans for the future, the young man responds with anger and sarcasm before eventually confessing, "This subject is upsetting to me...You see...I don't have the least idea of where my life is heading, and these questions that you're asking make me scared." (pp. 146-147) Members like A-King B Allah referred to the traditional system leaving them feeling ill prepared for life after high school. While the phrase "wildin' out," as it is used in many urban communities, typically signifies some sort of high-risk behavior, A-King B Allah's use of the term is presented in the context of wasting time and being unproductive, thus appropriating "wildness" as a general lack of direction and purpose.

#### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

A-King B Allah reported that before moving to Richmond, Virginia, he had spent half his life in Philadelphia, and he had "moved around a lot." Although he cited the

influence of his mother in his positive attitude towards knowledge and learning, he clarified his attitudes about the actual school system were quite dissimilar:

I really didn't think that school...that I really needed it...Before I had Knowledge of Self, I was very talkative. I didn't do my work. However, I did do the knowledge [pay attention/learn]. My grades were only bad because I was lazy and I didn't want to do the work. However, I had no problem learning the material.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

A-King B Allah's experience with education in the NGE allowed him to develop the sense of purpose that he noted he was otherwise missing, and which would have ultimately led to him "wasting gas" on the streets of Richmond:

When I got Knowledge of Self I really started to see that, "Okay, I don't really know myself." There were so many other things out there that I could have been doing that I wasn't doing. And when I learned myself I realized that I could do everything. And that's when education kicked in, because if you're going to do something, you need to have the know-how to do it.

*Case 4: Ja'ree Divine Allah – Harlem, NY*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Ja'ree Divine Allah, the youngest of the participants, spoke with a baritone voice and never smiled. His serious demeanor didn't come off as standoffish or superior, but resolute and determined. He ignored distractions and avoided digressions throughout the course of a lengthy interview conducted outdoors on a busy New York City sidewalk, noting at one point that he was serious about everything he does. Ja'ree Divine Allah's

narrative, like many others, combines recollections of positive potentials and negative outcomes:

I was always what you'd call a "spiritual" person. I was, you know, a Christian before I had the Knowledge of my Self, man. And I always considered myself a good Christian because I was interested in righteousness. But before I had Knowledge of my Self, man, I was a confused kid, a bad motherfucker as a kid. And I did all types of things, man...Like you know, just being really grown, man, started smoking cigarettes at 8 years old, smoking half a pack a day until I was 14. You know what I'm saying?

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Ja'ree Divine Allah noted that school wasn't a priority for him at an early age, and that he acted out often:

I was...punchin' people in the face and slappin' people at school. You know, just not knowing how to act. I got retained in the 8th grade, when I was Knowledge Understanding [13]. And that right there, that experience, and my mother begging me to change, led me to get the Knowledge of my Self.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Although Ja'ree Divine Allah's experience with the school system offered little opportunity to develop his artistic talents, his involvement with the NGE motivated him to pursue his own interests and develop them. At the time of the interview, Ja'ree Divine Allah, at 20 was a junior at a local college. As a film student, Ja'ree Divine Allah had begun directing music videos for local rappers, as well as producing and distributing his own short films through a company he had begun.

*Case 5: Steel Free Allah – Milwaukee, WI*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Steel Free Allah was responsible for introducing the NGE culture to the Black community of Milwaukee, Wisconsin several years ago. He remained actively involved in the NGE, although his current work schedule prevented him from attending events regularly. Meeting with him at a local bar presented the opportunity for him to wind down from a busy day and speak freely and authentically.

Steel Free Allah's narrative, again, began with a preemptory mention of early positive interests that, nonetheless, gave way to negative behaviors:

Well, I always had an inclination for cultural things. You know, I was a criminal for a little while, selling drugs, until I realized what I was doing was wrong.

Because you know, the way I was raised was very different. I was into both of them [crime and cultural interests] at the same time, but it didn't feel right.

Although Steel Free Allah attributed his behaviors to environmental factors, he spoke at length on being unable to reconcile his actions with his conscience, or "sense of right":

[Being a criminal] was just some shit to do man, like you know, a way to get money. And everybody was doing it...I didn't started being discouraged 'til I started seeing what was wrong. Out in the hood, the only morals is like, um, don't die. That's the only morals you gotta adhere to. Don't die. Stick with your crew, don't snitch and all that.

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Another dichotomy that Steel Free Allah shared with many participants was early evidence of strong academic potential coupled with severe academic disinterest:

I knew how to read the newspaper when I was two years old. I started high school when I was twelve. It was something that, as long as it was engaging and as long as I was involved in the class, I was having fun. But I didn't have the discipline or the focus necessary to really capitalize on the things I could do. So rather than me just stay in there and sit, I stayed out, cause I would get bored, and I'd start skipping class...[Education] was something I took for granted...I went to college for a little while before I got Knowledge of Self. I didn't make it a fucking year, man. I was smoking, fucking, getting down, man, having a great time. Before, when I didn't have Knowledge of Self, [school] was just an obligation to my family, what my mother or somebody else planned for me, what they wanted me to do. But in my mind, all I wanted to do, in the words of Biggie Smalls, was "Party and Bullshit." And eventually that won over.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Steel Free Allah reported a profound change in his perception of education after becoming involved with the NGE:

When I went back [to college] with Knowledge of Self, after I established Cream City [the NGE in Milwaukee] out here in the wilderness, I'd tell the brothers and sisters in the cipher that this [traditional education] is either a toolbox or a robot factory. And I came here [college] to get down. I would sit in the front row, right in the middle. Getting straight A's across the board, getting all the extra credit. You're supposed to [be this way]. You gotta be supreme, and successful, as I am now.

*Case 6: Supreme Science Allah – Milwaukee, WI*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Supreme Science Allah, one of the few participants to mention coming from a middle-class background, discussed the absence of factors for risk in his home environment. He attributed many of his positive traits to the influence of his family, who pushed him towards education and accomplishment:

Well, the circumstances surrounding myself before I was born into the Nation of Gods and Earths wasn't really unlike the majority of average Black males in North America in that I came from a family who didn't have Knowledge of Self and they were, basically, from the...middle, class and striving to earn a living and teach their kids moral/ethical principles the best they could. I wasn't really into that much negativity. You know, because, I did have a sense of self, a slight sense of self. I didn't have Knowledge of Self, but I had direction and I had guidance from my parents, and I had older brothers, so they kept me from getting into too much trouble.

However, environmental factors, particularly the influences of peers, caused Supreme Science Allah to experience his share of strain as well:

[During later adolescence] by virtue of [various] people being around me so long, or so much, you know, I would say the results of the whole cultural pull on me was so strong that I kind of bent in those certain ways. Like I started, I can remember one time I started wearing blue, you know. Some older brothers came from California telling us about Crips and Bloods. You know, and we didn't have another Black, positive Black role model in the community, so all we had was

younger people in our peer group or older people in our peer group and they would tell us certain things and we would become influenced by them.

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Supreme Science Allah articulated clearly with little slang or dialect. He shared some of the essays he had written on the NGE. One paper, at least twenty pages long, addressed the question of the NGE's position on the theology of the Nation of Islam regarding Black Godhood. Books lined the walls as he spoke on his experience in school:

I excelled in school from a young age. I never had a problem learning in school since I was also taught to value education...In kindergarten, I was reading at a second and third grade level. I was valedictorian of kindergarten and, I would say, like, until middle school I excelled in learning...In middle school there were [now] other children from other backgrounds. Now, this is middle school so you know you're not in one classroom all day. There's the chance to be around more people in school. More influences and we moved into a different neighborhood, so, you know, you would meet kids from all kinds of backgrounds, but specifically, they didn't have the home structure that I had. So, kids were wildin' out. Kids were uncivilized and I started to take on those traits. Just by virtue of them being around, it had an impact on me.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

While some participants reported a sort of “culture shock” adjusting to the educational climate of the NGE, Supreme Science Allah felt adequately prepared. Like many others, he described the culture as “natural”:

I think that, because I had [a strong educational] background that caused, when I was introduced to the teachings of The Nation of Gods and Earths, it caused a smooth transition because, the way I understood it, the teachings of The Nation of Gods and Earths was another vehicle to understand reality and a way of learning, you know, what life was about, what we were about. It was another educational instrument.

*Case 7: Knowledge Fact Allah – Detroit, MI*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Knowledge Fact Allah, a spoken word artist and event promoter, spoke enthusiastically regarding every topic he addressed. Stepping away from the larger crowd at an NGE event in Detroit, he spoke so as to be audible to all those who passed, and sermonized on, among other things, the vast difference he saw between himself “then and now”:

Now this man right here, this is the type of man that was a habitual liar, know what I'm saying. He was a womanizer, he had no respect for women. You know, he really wasn't family oriented *at all*. You know what I'm saying? He didn't know the value of the Black woman; he didn't know that the babies are the greatest, you know what I'm saying? But most importantly, he didn't know who *he* was, so, for all intents and purposes, he was a man *lost* out here in today's society.

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Knowledge Fact Allah described himself as a bright but easily bored child with too much “energy” for the traditional classroom setting:

I mean I was a very studious individual. It's just that I was mischievous, because it was like I didn't know what the fuck my energy was off into, you know? It was like, I would get done with the schoolwork, I would get bored, and then I started talking, started fucking around, this, that, and whatever-whatever; [it would happen] like that.

Knowledge Fact Allah reported that he had been “kicked out” of every public school in the Detroit area before ultimately ending up at alternative high school for troubled boys, where he was the first senior to ever graduate.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Revisiting his transition between “then and now,” Knowledge Fact Allah credited the NGE with occupying his mind and “energy” with focused study:

Basically, the difference between then and now was that once I started coming around these lessons, it was a must that you had to study. You know what I'm saying? So the amount of study that it took made up for the amount of time that I didn't have anything to do, so it gave me some where else to focus my energy.

*Case 8: Ta'kim Intelligence Allah Ce'hum Allah – Pittsburgh, PA*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, a young man of Puerto-Rican descent, described himself as “very troubled” since early youth due to a number of factors, foremost of which were a “dysfunctional home” and negative peer influences:

Before I got the Knowledge of my self, I was in a gang. Being from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, there was a gang called L.A.W., which was two adjoining neighborhoods, Larmer and Williamsburgh, L.A.W. And my cousin was in

L.A.W. at that time. I began selling weed at 12 years old. Began to be involved with gang activities around that time, 11, 12 years old. I didn't necessarily have problems in school *per se*, but outside of school, trouble at home and what not caused me to spend a lot of extra-curricular time in the streets...Prior to me getting the Knowledge of Self, I was very apathetic to the things that went on. A dysfunctional home, not to mention the community, not caring about my brothers and sisters, family members, even the thought of procreating and having children was not there for me. You know what I mean? ...You know, [I had] a very destructive mindset which led me to destructive behavior.

#### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, in addressing the factors that "turned" him "off" from school, mentioned the feeling of being alienated at school as a result of his and others' placement:

In school I was in the Honors program, however I only passed with C's, because I was dissatisfied because of the environment they put me in. It was um, predominantly Caucasian. And all my [Black and Hispanic] friends were in wood shop and metal shop. And that caused a level of dissatisfaction.

#### *Perspectives on NGE Education*

Ta'kim Intelligence Allah reported some difficulties adopting the culture of the NGE, due in great part, to being "turned off" early in his educational career by the school system:

In the beginning [it was difficult] learning how to master myself, control myself, and focus on reading a book cover to cover. You know, prior to that I would only

read things that I was interested in, like the *Source* [urban entertainment] magazine, which provided some level of political-cultural outlook in the early 90s. The *Source* in the early 90s had a lot of good articles, you know what I mean? However, if I wasn't interested in it, I wasn't going to learn it. And the Nation of Gods and Earths allowed very intense information to be presented to me in a way where I wanted to keep learning more.

*Case 9: King Builder Allah – Pittsburgh, PA*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

King Builder Allah, at 54, mentioned during the interview that he was proud “not to be on the other side of the booth” at the local community health fair in Pittsburgh where he was volunteering, alluding to his good health. He became involved with the NGE in Harlem at age 15, in 1967, around the time Allah instituted the first Universal Parliament, or monthly gathering, of the NGE. King Builder Allah related stories of struggle and crisis that resonated with increasing despair and severity. Of his early youth, King Builder Allah summed it up thus:

Well I was what you would call a classic rebel. I was raised by the juvenile system, in terms of the group homes, youth homes, or moving on to jail as I graduated into selling drugs...I didn't care. I didn't regard myself as a human being or a person. I thought that I was ugly. I had no self-esteem...Yeah, my old Earth [mother] was a dope fiend and my stepfather was a dope fiend, *and* he was the dope man. So when my sister and I got older - she was a year older than me - we became the dope dealers and we was the top dealers in the projects. And then I became my best customer. We are talking about heroin.

### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

King Builder Allah's home environment presents an issue that presented itself a number of times in the narratives given by participants: A broken home in a distressed community, rife with factors for risk, that pushes education as a means to success:

It's interesting because my upbringing was a total negative...However we did value education in our family, we did value good grades and things of that nature, but there really wasn't any knowledge in the home. So it's not like we had time to study with the fam[ily] because my old dude was hustling and my mom was strung out at the time.

Although he described himself as a "swift," or intelligent, student, King Builder Allah's experience in school was also characterized by avoidance:

I was popular. I was a funny guy. I always drew people's attention, because I had jokes and whatnot. I was the kind of person who people came to talking about issues or problems or things of that nature. And I would gladly help them with their issues because I didn't want go around and hear about mine. So I sorta focused the attention from my self, and surround by other people and their problems.

### *Perspectives on NGE Education*

King Builder Allah talked about a number of the pedagogical aspects of NGE culture, including the features of the culture that attract and retain learners. He spoke about the innovations the NGE began introducing into popular culture as early as the 1960s, including styles of urban dress, speech and rhetoric patterns, and other elements that were transmitted without being taught explicitly. Conversely, King Builder Allah

offered that members of the NGE “study ferociously,” and pursue long-term learning, as opposed to the short-term memorization encouraged by the traditional school format.

*Case 10: Allah Truth – Harlem, NY*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Allah Truth, at 58, was the oldest of the participants. He became involved with the Five Percenters in 1964, recognized by the NGE as “Year One,” and was implemental in establishing the NGE community in the Bronx. Recognized as a “leader” by local authorities, Allah Truth was arrested and convicted for a murder for which he continues to maintain his innocence. Long considered a political prisoner by the NGE, after 27 years of incarceration, Allah Truth was released. Having earned several degrees and certifications in prison, Allah Truth worked with a non-profit organization in Albany, New York before returning to Harlem, where he served as director of the NGE’s Allah School in Mecca at the time of the interview.

During a quiet day at the Allah School in Mecca, Allah Truth’s narrative began with earliest childhood and demonstrated a rapid succession of adversity and problematic behavior:

Ok, in the house, with my parents and especially my mother, I was an angel. But in school, I was a savage, as the lessons would tell. As it was, the system didn’t really teach any Knowledge of Self or respect for Original Black people. I kind of rebelled from that. At an early age I was offended at being called Black. That’s when my youthful age was a negative time, a bad time...Next thing you know, I had a little gang. How I got a little gang, I don’t know. Me and my cousins and brothers used to be gathering these babies, and the leadership ability, [with me]

being the oldest, just came out...And I became more experienced. Like I had a God U Now [gun] ever since I was Knowledge Wisdom [12]. So, when things were happening, I used to come out with the God U Now and, at that time, that was hard to get you know, so it gave you a lot of status. It let you know that we was doing things like men. We wasn't fighting with knives and sticks and things of that nature; we was fighting and somebody could get shot. They would get shot by a *gangster*.

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Interestingly, Allah Truth reported the problems he experienced being “offended at being called Black,” being replace with other problems once he learned *not* to be ashamed of being Black:

I took that and ran with it. I became proud of being Black, and then I'd fight, as they used to call them, the little devils. Not “intelligent” or “smart” but they would say “violent” [about me], but I was in the smartest elementary classes, at the top of the classes. No matter what reading level, [I was at] the top of the class. And I was one of the smartest students...But I might finish before everybody, and didn't have, you know, no other work to do. So my attention span wandered, and I got bored with everybody else, waiting on them to catch up or finish, and I started doing other “extra-curricular things.” I think I was introduced to the spitball, just sitting up in the class waiting for everybody else, and somebody hit me up with a spitball. So you know, I'd just get even, and since I'm the one that was finished before everybody I would just bomb everybody with the

spit balls, and that's when I started doing my thing. That was the beginning of my troubles...I believe it had to be in the second grade.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Allah Truth, as an “older God” himself, was the only participant to comment on changes that had taken place between the NGE of early years and the NGE of recent years. In noting the “wisdom” of veteran NGE members, many of whom endured countless hardships to establish the presence of the NGE and were “fucked up” as a result, Allah Truth expressed concern that the newer generation of NGE members lacks an understanding of what the earlier generation went through to call themselves God. According to Allah Truth, not only were there struggles with the public and with local authorities, but the early Five Percenters themselves went through “a graduation process” of their own. Allah Truth observed that far too many individuals have been using the name and culture of the NGE without having committed to the educational process of growth and development required to transition from “boy to man to God.”

*Case 11: Kamal Universal – Brooklyn, NY*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Kamal Universal had worked with several non-profits and educational organizations catering to at-risk youth and adults before taking on his current position as an office manager. He characterized himself thus:

I had low self-esteem. I was what you would call violent. I was violent towards family. I was uncontrollable [and] antagonistic. I was a thief, damn near by trade. And I ate the wrong shit. I was a savage.

In addressing the potentialities had he not become involved with the NGE, Kamal Universal asserted:

I'd be dead. I can tell you a couple of ways I know I'd be dead, because I'm not exaggerating. I would've killed myself. I would've shot myself. If that didn't happen, the police would've killed me. Because I've always been vocal against the police. I've always been like, "Fuck you, officer." I never felt like nothing would've happened from the streets because I always felt invincible. But I just know that one way or the other I would've been outta there [dead]. I'd seen that coming because people was dead. If you was like 15 or 17, you was dying. It wasn't even no game out there where I was at. And that's kind of how it is nowadays. When you young, you're either gonna be the one who gets shot, shot at, beat up, or cut down. Or you're going to be the aggressor. And I decided at a young age that I would be the aggressor rather than be a victim.

*Perspectives on Traditional Education*

As an adolescent, Kamal Universal experienced several reasons to disengage from school, beginning with feelings of alienation after enrolling in a predominantly white school. After returning to Brooklyn, Kamal Universal's attitudes worsened, leading him to violence and crime, much of which he attributed to his environment. Kamal Universal had nothing positive to say about the formal educational experience:

I'm smart, you know, I'm intelligent. So whenever I decided I liked a class, I excelled. But when I was in high school, I wasn't organized. I didn't do my work. I wrote graffiti. [I was] fighting, getting in trouble, stealing...When I graduated high school, my average was a 76 but my SAT's were a 1070. That's not high, but

it was high at *my* school. I'm from Brooklyn, New York City. So school is like war. In those days people were dying in school. My school was the first to have metal detectors because people was getting shot. And my school wasn't even the worst school. But at least three or four people had gotten shot in or around the school in one year. School was like where you gotta go, so my mother wouldn't get mad or put me out or whatever. That was all school was. It wasn't about no future. It wasn't anything good. My mother said I gotta go to school, so I gotta go to school. And it was like a jungle. You gotta worry about not getting robbed. You gotta worry about not getting into fights, not getting into trouble. I played basketball. But even with that, [others said] "Fuck practice," so I said "Fuck practice" and I quit. It was all about the streets. School was in the streets.

*Perspectives on NGE Education*

Again using personal experience as a means of illustrating points, Kamal Universal spoke at length on the pedagogy of the NGE, including the teaching practices he witnessed used among the NGE. In his first encounter with an NGE member, he was admonished for not knowing the meaning of a "simple word," an event which would later lead him to looking up "every word" in the 120 Lessons and learning its meaning and usages. In recounting his experience being told to go find a word in the dictionary, Kamal Universal said:

I felt real small and shit. But in some way I felt it was something I needed to do. I looked it up and came back to him. He just kind of looked at me like, "So?" So I just had to get in this dude's head. But he was getting in mine. He was doing the knowledge to my way of life, and [at some point] he saw that I was eating the

wrong shit. When he said something to me about not eating pig, I said “I do what I want to do.”

Kamal Universal’s account touches on an attitude that many participants regarded as a feeling of selfishness, irresponsibility, or general indifference about the world around them before coming in contact with the NGE. In noting his defensive posturing in saying “I do what I want to do,” Kamal Universal also recalls his issues with authority, which translated into rebellion in school and trouble with the police, as he noted earlier.

Kamal Universal didn’t see himself as *changing* so much as *growing*, beginning with the guidance of his high school classmate who introduced him to the teachings of the NGE:

But I’d ask him about what he was into, his culture. He showed me mathematics and it attracted me. It didn’t change my life. It changed my heart. And he would put me in my place, on some Daniel-san/Mr. Miyagi shit [from the *Karate Kid* movie series]. He made me feel like I was real small, but I *was* small. The more he made me feel small, the more I wanted to learn about what he was dealing with. So basically I was like “Come on,” and he wouldn’t because he hadn’t completed his studies yet. But he gave me Supreme Mathematics, and I took that and ran with it.

*Case 12: Allah Righteous – Trenton, NJ*

*Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Allah Righteous and his brother Lord Sincere Allah interviewed together in a recording studio while putting the finishing touches on their latest release. The two of them has experimented with Islam for about two years before coming in contact with the

NGE. Allah Righteous was 16 and employed when he met an older NGE member at his workplace. Allah Righteous didn't believe he displayed many signs of risk during his adolescence, primarily due to his involvement with Islam:

Getting Knowledge of Self was a transformation that was, uh, it was a smooth transition. So I was pretty much fasting, and I was somewhat religious, you know, for the majority of my life. Not into reading, until I actually started studying Islam, that's when I began to surround myself with the value of education, and surround myself with books, and so on and so forth. I always listened to a lot of music, as an 85 Percenter and a civilized person. That never changed; actually, it only intensified as I got older.

However, although Allah Righteous felt that it was "hard to say" what could have occurred had he not become involved with the NGE, he offered that he "might not be alive." When asked about his rationale for why he was alive and not dead at the time of the interview, he responded, "Because I know I [now] make wiser decisions, I'm able to see things coming before they happen." In his statement, Allah Righteous alludes to an awareness of causality and consequences that many participants noted in their narratives. Participants credited this understanding often for allowing them to "make it," where people who lack those understandings usually fail.

#### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Allah Righteous reported being a "class clown" in school. He claimed that he saw, early on, the contradictions between the success ideology of traditional schooling and the opportunities society actually offered. He summed up the major failures of the traditional school system, and attributed them to one fundamental cause:

So, that's why there's so many of our youth, and when I say "our youth," that means Black, brown, yellow, and Original People on the planet Earth in general, and, in particular, in the ghettos of North America and nationwide, even in the suburbs. They don't have a drive to be educated because they don't see the worth in themselves...And that's why there's such a high dropout rate. It's a graveyard in the school system when it comes to our people. It's a tragedy and it's something that needs to be addressed, and is ignored and swept under the rug.

In Allah Righteous's narrative, like those of many other participants, one of the critical shortcomings of the traditional educational system is that it doesn't address self-identity, or "Knowledge of Self."

#### *Perspectives on NGE Education*

Having completed their high school diplomas, Allah Righteous and his brother chose to follow their shared vision of success as recording artists. Allah Righteous spoke highly of "older Gods" who offered him guidance and taught him the history of the NGE. Allah Righteous felt "rooted" because of this education. Although he saw coming into the NGE as a "smooth transition" due to his earlier involvement with mainstream Islam, he also mentioned a more difficult transition from attitudes of arrogance and competitiveness after being "shut down" by the older Gods.

#### *Case 13: Lord Sincere Allah – Trenton, NJ*

##### *Attitudes and Behaviors before Involvement*

Lord Sincere Allah was Allah Righteous's elder brother. Lord Sincere Allah learned of the NGE through his brother and began learning at the same time. He, too, experimented with Islam, and valued education as a result. Although Lord Sincere

Allah's demeanor exuded seriousness and humility like his brother, he was the less vocal of the two, and often remarked that he his experience "wasn't really much different." Being only a year apart and spending most of their time together, it is very likely that this was the case. Lord Sincere Allah's narrative about his past was not entirely like his brother's however:

As an 85, it really wasn't much different than the way I am now, because I was always in the pursuit of education and learning more than what I know now. You know, knowledge is something that is infinite and you're always going to be able to grow with it. I would say that I was more mature [than most of my peers]. I used to have a serious anger problem. It would show the inexperience, you know, because there was always a wiser way to go about doing things. Like my brother, I was in different stages of religion, dealing going through different phases of Christianity and Islam.

#### *Perspectives on Traditional Education*

Lord Sincere Allah's criticism of traditional education didn't rotate around his own personal experience, but was more of a sweeping indictment of formal education worldwide. He contended that all of the problems with education today stemmed from formal education's intentional neglect of teaching youth to find their own identity. In addition, the school system, Lord Sincere Allah proposed, doesn't teach students "how to think or how to become independent in their thinking," but instead delivers "what to learn," as in the banking system of education described by Freire (1970). Lord Sincere Allah differentiated between traditional and NGE models of education by stating, "The

true purpose of education is to expand your mind,” while the school system’s purpose is, in the words of his brother, to “maintain the status quo.”

#### *Perspectives on NGE Education*

Lord Sincere Allah argued that the traditional school system was inadequate for one reason above all: It doesn’t give youth “the education of self.” He explained in the following manner:

It has the most important education, which is the education of self, because everything begins with you and your origin. If you don’t have the education of yourself, then you’re not of any use to anyone else. So that’s the first thing that needs to be dealt, and definitely divide that. The first thing is where you came from, where your origins in this world. And once you know that you have a purpose. See, a lot of people don’t understand that there’s a difference between “what” and “how.” “Why?” is the most important question. And a lot of people don’t understand that. First, when you get knowledge, you’re going to say, “Okay, who am I?” Then you’ve got to understand, “Why am I? What is my purpose?” That’s something that the school system can never provide you, no matter how many years you go to school.

#### *Cross Case Analysis*

The purpose of this section is to present a review of the interview data from all 13 cases across the findings that emerged. As stated earlier, the research questions guided the formulation of the semi-structured interview questions and probes, which then produced interview data that demonstrates a number of consistent themes. The major themes correspond directly to the research questions themselves, and more specific sub-

themes, or findings, emerged from a further analysis of the interview data. Interview data from all 13 cases could then be categorized across the findings. Conceptualizing the data across the various cases allows for the researcher to develop substantive, holistic theory. This process is known as cross case analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989). Yin (1989) describes the end result of cross case analysis as an integrated, general explanation that fits the individual cases, although the factors in the cases themselves vary in detail.

The data for this study were collected over a 12-month period where the researcher traveled to numerous cities and engaged with local NGE members in dialogue and observation before selecting thoroughly acculturated members as participants. The researcher interviewed 13 participants over the course of 12 months. All participants were NGE members who had become involved with the NGE before adulthood and had prior demonstrated some indications of at-risk behavior for academic or societal failure.

*Research Question 1: What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?*

The first research question sought to identify the educational practices of the NGE, using the theoretical framework of nonformal education (Simkins, 1977; Tight, 1996). Five findings emerged that illustrated the pedagogical strategies of the NGE as experienced by the participants of this study. The overall findings emerging from the data were:

1. Involvement in the NGE introduces one to a learning community that also functions as a support network or family group.
2. Self-instruction is an integral facet of education in the NGE.
3. The NGE provides a culturally responsive alternative to the Eurocentric curriculum of the traditional school system.

4. The NGE often attracts learners through exemplars who possess a number of attractive qualities as a result of involvement.
5. Involvement in the NGE involves the affirmation of dialogue as means towards *conscientization*.

Table 4 lists the cases by number and identifies the case or cases where the findings emerged.

Table 4

*Findings from Research Question 1*

Findings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Community	X	X	X	X			X		X	X		X	X
Self-Instruction	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Curriculum	X	X				X		X	X		X	X	X
Exemplars	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Conscientization</i>	X	X		X	X		X				X	X	X

As illustrated in Table 4, the findings were present in the majority of the cases. Several of the factors above having already been addressed in the individual case examinations, the following section briefly presents the findings as they occurred throughout many of the cases.

*Finding 1: Involvement in the NGE introduces one to a learning community that also functions as a family group or support network.*

Several participants attributed much of their development to the influence of the NGE community, which emerged in the findings as a highly influential peer group

association, through which members felt they both learned from and bonded with each other. Peer group associations vary in nature from the voluntary associations described in the context of nonformal education to the street gangs where adolescent youth find surrogate families and contexts in which to excel (Eldson, Reynolds, & Stewart, 1995; Collum, 2001). Peer group associations like the NGE often provide disadvantaged youth with social support and access to material, psychological, or emotional needs that are otherwise lacking in the home, school, or community (Kipke et al., 1997; Osgood, Wilson, & O'Malley, 1994), and adolescent group identity can become distinctive, salient, and likely to have motivational and behavioral consequences especially within intergroup contexts where membership is a privilege (Branch & Boothe, 2002; Oyserman & Harrison, 1999). As a result the NGE community is highly influential, as will be discussed in addressing the findings for Research Question 3. Groups like the NGE provide a context for youth to develop a sense of self-identity, belonging, and responsibility, all of which are integral to intellectual and academic development (Blakemore & Blakemore, 1998; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; Taylor, Lerner, von Eye, Bobek, Balsano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; 2004), and are often the context in which nonformal education itself actually occurs through meaningful dialogue (Collum, 2001). Freire (1970) used the terms "culture circles" or "thematic investigation circles" to refer to the small learning community groups where dialogue, naturally occurring without agendas and prepared questions ultimately develops into *conscientization*, or critical awareness.

About the interactions and exchanges he experienced in the NGE, Ja'ree Divine Allah stated:

Well, I went through many trials and tribulations with Knowledge of Self. I've been bombed. I've bombed motherfuckers my self. I been two inches from a motherfuckers face getting screamed on (chuckles), and going through it, and you know, that made me want in, so I wouldn't have had it any other way. And I also had the ability to walk land with the great; it was a great jewel being amongst brothers who walked with the Father Allah, and to get it right and exact, man. And they made sure that my foundation, you know, is right and exact.

Other participants, like Ja'ree Divine Allah, extolled the influence of the "older Gods," veteran NGE members who serve in the NGE community as a source of wisdom and guidance. Allah Righteous explained:

I was at the parliaments; I would go to civilization classes; and I was big on putting Gods on their square 'cause I was sharp - in my estimation. So, I thought that's what it was about, competition. And really it is, because steel sharpens steel. And I ended up knowledging 120 degrees in about equality [6] months, then I found out that I had to be born again, because a lot of the information that I had wasn't right and exact as far as the history... so I had to trace my history back in Medina, and the first born of Medina took me under their wing – Siheem, Shamgaaud, Born, the God Knowledge Fact Allah Everlasting Allah, Supreme Mathematics, his older physical, Allah Sha-Sha – and they took me under their wing and I began seeing them every weekend. And I would get the original history as it was given from Allah as they lived it, because they were there, as to how this Nation was first founded and what was his determined idea. So, I had to correct a lot of my lessons and a lot of my history. And a lot of that came about

because I was that brother in that cipher that you would see at the parliaments with five or six Gods, arguing with them. And I ended up getting shut down, a couple times, and I was like “Who are these Gods that keep shutting me down?” And it was because they had a wisdom that was older than mine, and they had an understanding that was deeper than mine.

The metaphor “steel sharpens steel” alludes to the concept of critical communication as means to correct errors and strengthen weaknesses in each other. In Knowledge Fact Allah’s summation of the NGE’s “culture circle” (Freire, 1970), he remarked:

[A] chain is only as strong as it's weakest link. In order to have a truly fortified chain, we can not have any weak links. So this is why you have to examine a person's character and characteristics to single out what his strengths are and what his weaknesses are.

The familial nature of the NGE was also seen as essential in both engaging and retaining members of the learning community. Allah Truth spoke at length on the topic:

We had the crew that was making the money, and I mean, [names several gangs of the time] all came up under my influence...So we began to have the girls, the money, and whatever the case may be, and you know how people is in the street, if you got enough money they think you got enough respect. But it was the Knowledge...and brotherhood...And when we got knowledge and started doing as we did... We cared for our brothers like we cared for ourselves, and we had each other’s back. We had to come together...So it was bonding. It was a serious bonding process, and we learned each other.

Rasheem Allah also cited the presence of the shared curriculum of the lessons as a means for members from different walks of life to “relate” and develop bonds:

First off, you gotta have a hunger yourself to start attracting the people who are like you. So you can meet other people that are going through the same things, but they’re only seeing it from their own side, with their own understanding, because they come from a whole ‘nother walk of life. But the lessons made y’all relate, so staying on top of it is how you got to know your brother, and how y’all made each other sharper. It was always good to be on point with your brother. Like y’all kept each other sharp.

King Builder Allah noted the importance of brotherhood as well, specifically citing its lure among young people, commenting, “There’s other things that they need to see too. They need to see me with these young guys. They need to see that there is a bond. They need to see that there is a brotherhood.” In A-King B Allah’s narrative on his experiences learning in the NGE, he related the following episode:

One of the main things that I learned with having Knowledge of Self is that we’ve got to come together...[Once there were] some brothers that were trying to sell drugs in front of a laundry mat that we used to build in front of. Every Wednesday we would come together in front of this laundry mat and [these] brothers were trying to sell drugs. It was crazy for me at that time to see how quickly everybody came together for the righteous cause of getting these brothers off the stoop of the laundry mat so that our women and babies could come through there with no problem. And, you know, just to see how brothers who have beef was holding hands making sure brothers didn’t break through the gate.

Brothers that had beef said they put the beef behind them for the common cause of making sure our women and babies were safe. And, you know, with that it really proved to me regardless to whom or what you never turn your back on your brother.

The concepts of “coming together,” “never turning your back on your brother,” “steel sharpens steel,” “bonding,” and “brotherhood” were intrinsically tied to the NGE community’s concepts of dialogue, open exchange of ideas, and horizontal relationships.

*Finding 2: Self-instruction is an integral facet of education in the NGE.*

Freire (1970) contrasts the “banking” methodology of the formal schooling system – where students are seen as empty repositories to be “filled” with information which they will later regurgitate – with the problem-posing nature of critical pedagogy, where learners are seen as capable of finding solutions on their own. Participants in this study generally related that involvement in the NGE began as a result of their own innate propensity for knowledge. Participants reported being “sparked” (as in curiosity) after coming in contact with an existing NGE member. However, NGE members weren’t cited as proselytizing, but as posing problems or inquiries for the participants to investigate, which they subsequently did, thus beginning their studies. The research of Akom (2003) with high school-age members of the NOI found that the development of a “Black achievement ideology” catalyzed from the teachings of the NOI, motivated Black adolescents to pursue education on their own terms and during even their leisure time. Several authors on the NGE have addressed members’ penchant for study (Muhammad, 2002; Tanner, 2002), but Gardell (1996) goes a step further in describing NGE members as “plunging deeper into the black Gnosis than the average NOI member” (p. 225).

“Knowledge of Self” was a phrase that occurred in every participant’s discussion of education in the NGE. The phrase refers both to members’ becoming educated on their racial and social identity, as well as members’ self-instruction and the resultant sense of ownership this sort of study entailed. John Taylor Gatto, a New York City and State Teacher of the Year, in *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (2005), noted, “I am confident that as [students] gain self-knowledge, they’ll also become self-teachers – and only self-teaching has any lasting value.” (p. 31) Kamal Universal related the following dialogue from his first interaction with an NGE member:

I asked him, “You God?”

He said, “I’m a man. How can I be God?”

I said [to myself], “Ok, he’s a wise-ass.”

I said, “You a Five Percenter?”

He said, “I’m a hundred percent. How can I be five percent?”

I said [to myself], “Ok, he’s a fucking asshole.”

But I’m drawn to this shit, so I asked, “Are you righteous?” and he said “Yeah.”

I had heard that Gods used “righteous” [to describe themselves], but I didn’t know what it actually meant. So I asked him what it meant and this is exactly what he said to me, “B, I’m from Germany. I came to this country a few years ago. You were born here, and you don’t know what righteous means? Go look it up.” So I felt real small and shit. But in some way I felt it was something I needed to do. I looked it up and came back to him.

Similarly, Born Supreme Allah reported, “[When] the God who first brought me to the knowledge [started telling me things I’d never heard before] I didn’t take it on face value. I went back and I did the research, and everything he told me was right.”

This early inquiry-based learning subsequently gives way to independent research and investigation (McShane, 1991) of the NGE’s teachings, usually guided by more established NGE members using the curriculum of the 120 Lessons. Of this, Allah Truth related the following:

I found a lot of history in learning whatever we could about the Original Man, and what made him the Original Man. Why was he the first? And what man did he come from? And where was the first discovery of man? And so, not only were we learning geography or the sciences or things of that nature, we was learning about the inventions at the time. You never heard about the Black man inventing anything. So we did research and learned to deal with the inventions of the Original Man, and that they only invented things when it was the time for that invention, and we learned about that. There was a book, *Sex and Race*, by J. A Rogers, and he had 3 volumes. He mentioned a lot of information, about the inventions of the Original Man. So when we spoke about the Original Man being the maker and owner of this, that, and the other, we had a literal reference that says, not only are we saying it, but that we can show and prove it. And then we went a little further, and went into other books that showed this as well.

Of the significance of study, Rasheem Allah added:

Just like I said, it’s the fact that knowing that I was part of the small population who knew the truth. It made you wanna know more. It made you hunt,

everywhere, nah mean? If I see somethin' in the lessons about the sun, I'ma study everything I can find about the sun. When I'd see the word "sun," it attracted me, like it was just that kind of magnetic in the truth that made you always want to seek out more. It's like that to this day. If I see anything that refers me back to a lesson - it could be one word - if it takes me to a degree, it's gonna automatically attract me to see what that's about...*That* education [in the NGE] - it was satisfying, self-gratifying.

Memorization (McShane, 1991) also emerged as an importance facet of the NGE curriculum. A-King B Allah's account of learning the lessons focused in part on the actual processes involved in learning and memorization:

As far as with 120, one of the main things I learned is if you're going to study to learn these degrees you study until you know the degree. When I first started my degrees, I used to study a little bit and then I would walk away. And then I would wonder how come I don't know the degree the next day. And then I got to the point where I studied until I knew that I knew it. And a big part of studying so that I could know these degrees was saying the degrees out loud. And as I say my degrees out loud, I make sure that I pronounce each word. And I say the degree very slow so I could pronounce each word, but I pronounce each word very slow and say it out loud, that way I was able to do the knowledge twice, you know, I'm doing the knowledge to what I see, and I'm doing the knowledge to my own voice.

King Builder Allah also addressed the “learning process” and the role of memorization. However, King Builder Allah was clear to be distinct regarding the NGE’s approach to memorization in contrast to that of the formal educational system:

Well I personally think that, to be successful in your learning process, particularly in lieu of the Nation, that you know, there is this, there is long-term memory and short-term memory. And in short term memory, some of us [in society] are really good at cramming with a couple of Red Bulls and a couple of amphetamines, and you study and cram to get an A, then you graduate. And after that, the information is gone...And in the Nation of Gods and Earths, we do value that [long-term memory/study]. We study ferociously. I think that we are committed to studying and committing things to long term memory, as far as degrees and other parts of these lessons that we know. So I do think we value education in its proper form, in terms of doing research. Especially today, you have the Gods that do more and more research in the information that they enjoy.

According to Kohn (1993), internalization refers to the process by which an individual appropriate norms and values, developing “a commitment to certain actions in a way that one feels a sense of self-determination about the matter and ultimately is able to determine what kind of person he or she will be” (p. 294). Ta’kim Intelligence Allah’s account focused on the internalization (Bandura, 1994; McShane, 1991) accomplished by memorizing the teachings of the NGE:

[By] committing it to memory, I have internalized it, so now it has become like a second nature *per se*, in terms of my mindset and how I process stimuli, how I process things that are going on around me. I [automatically] take everything

back through the Mathematics and the Alphabet and the lessons. When I watch the news in the morning, or when I watch *Good Morning America*, and they are talking about [current events], I can go to a degree right away and show where that person was manifesting [the same type of event] at that particular time, and how it's reoccurring again, and how I need to deal with it. [I am aware of] what went on in history that I can change and not repeat [history].

Kamal Universal used the psychological benefits of memorization to construct his argument for its significance:

I also learned how to memorize. And that's based on expanding your mind. When you write things down all the time, you're not teaching your mind to retain things. You're not teaching your mind to grasp new concepts readily...When I was first learning about this culture...the first time I tried to write something down, he slapped the pencil out of my hand...It made me feel great that I have hundreds of phrases in my mind that I can rattle off word for word, and then make it relevant. And we [in society] aren't taught to remember anything, except for the occasional number or word. And I have volumes of shit in my head that I know verbatim. And I'm a regular dude, just a Black man. But we have that capacity. We're just not taught to foster that. I'm like, "Yo, if I was in school with this shit, I could've done anything!"

Steel Free Allah's remarks addressed similar ideas:

I think one of the strongest things we do is memorize. Because it becomes part of your thinking and it becomes part of your character. Western scientists have found that the so-called junk DNA is affected by the language that you speak. So

we were given a set of lessons that are like a combination to the lock. A verbal equation that elicits a specific response, and the ordering of the words, the sounds and the breaths that you're taking. Its very powerful because the collective body of true and living Gods and Earths are all memorizing the same thing. I don't know of any organization like that, that memorizes something like that as part of the culture, and memorizes all of it. We're young, but I think that gives a great advantage.

*Finding 3: The NGE provides a culturally responsive alternative to the Eurocentric curriculum of the traditional school system.*

The findings from Chapter 4 illustrate many of the shortcomings of the traditional educational system in the United States in addressing its Black populations, particularly young Black males from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hernandez-Tutop, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Macleod, 1995). Many at-risk Black youth are academically capable and otherwise educationally inclined, but are, for a variety of reasons, disengaged from the formal educational experience (Holloway, 1994; Labov, 1972; Noguera, 2003; Solomon, 1992). Often, a primary concern for participants was the Eurocentric nature of the traditional school curriculum (Solomon, 1992). The NGE presented a viable and attractive alternative, in some cases filling in the gaps left by the schools, and in other cases presented a new kind of education altogether.

More than any other personage or content issue, participants brought up Christopher Columbus in explaining their perspectives on the Eurocentric nature of the traditional school curriculum, and what the NGE offered as an alternative. Although the 120 Lessons serve as something of a standard curriculum, NGE members, through

independent research, can come to various interpretations of the same lesson. Born Supreme Allah's explanation focused on how the traditional curriculum deemphasizes the Black presence in history:

Well, the Nation of Gods and Earths teaches us to learn more, because you know, knowledge is infinite. It teaches you to knowledge those lessons. You know, they're *lessons*. When you're in school they just teach you Columbus discovered the "New World" of North America. In our lessons, it says that Columbus was a Half-Original [of mixed ethnicity] man born in southeast Europe in Italy...so you got to learn that the Moors were in Italy, and before that it was Hannibal...and his navigator was an Original Man. I never knew this in high school...They never even teach you that.

Alternately, Allah Righteous's explanation centered on the traditional curriculum's omission of any information that portrays whites in a negative light (Hernandez-Tutop, 1998): "Okay, Halloween, they won't teach them where it came from, but they'll teach them lies. What do they teach them about Columbus Day? They don't teach them that Columbus was a slave killer and an Indian killer but they teach them that he's a hero."

Rasheem Allah's account recalled other Black students who were equally disconnected, and their reaction to hearing a different perspective:

If [anything about Blacks] was taught in schools you had to dig for it, but when you come to school with the buried treasure, it's like everybody's eyes open.

Don't nobody want to hear about Christopher Columbus, but when you start tellin 'em the truth about Christopher Columbus, the whole class is interested now, nah

mean? And this is something that the whole system never told them and you comin in with the information for them. It's a good feeling.

However, participants like Ta'kim Intelligence Allah were clear that simply learning about facts and history in isolation, as in many Afrocentric curricular models (Banks, 1996; Harvey & Hill, 2004), wasn't enough:

It's [about] more than just learning about Black people building pyramids, from Asia to America, you know what I mean? That can only get you so far. There's people that deal drugs that are very aware of that. There's people that are involved in devilishment and destruction that are very aware of that. So the difference is between having Knowledge of Self and Understanding of Self. I think the Nation of Gods and Earths not only includes those that history but we also focus on what are you doing today, because yesterday was yesterday.

Finally, Allah Truth's commentary on his first chance to hear Allah teaching in the streets of Harlem resonates with the ideas of attraction discussed above:

He [Allah] was in a cipher building about the role of the Black man, I couldn't tell you the exact words, and when he took a pause, I kinda looked said "Thank you," and he looked at me and smiled...Then I stood there a little longer as he built, then headed back up town, knowing that what he was saying was very special and meant an awful lot. Not only that but...he was talking about the role of the Black man, and this is what I want.

*Finding 4: The NGE often attracts learners through exemplars who possess a number of attractive qualities as a result of involvement.*

In informal conversations leading up to the interviews, some NGE members expressed discontent with the idea of being categorized as role models (Keating, 2002) while others embraced the notion. While the term role model is useful in identifying community members who embody various traits of success and ethical behavior, the findings are far more specific in this regard. As a result, the above factors have predicated the use of the term “exemplar” to signify individuals who are perceived as embodying all, or most, of the characteristics desired by the learner or initiate (Allan, 1994). Male NGE members, in presenting themselves to others as “Gods,” inherently associate themselves with the highest qualities of person. NGE members who “attract” others are typically those who serve as exemplars of both what the participants wanted to become and, as noted by Allah Truth in his account of Allah, what the participants wanted to “be about.”

A review of the findings identifies exemplars of the NGE as possessing several desirable qualities, foremost of which are (a) access to and mastery of information, (b) intelligence, (d) confidence and self-assuredness, (e) difference from participant’s peers, (f) accomplishment, (g) prestige or self-respect, and (h) street-savvy. In essence, many of the desirable traits of adult role models and mentors were critical in NGE members who could be considered exemplars (Allan, 1994; Keating, 2002). Knowledge Fact Allah’s account relates the following:

Yeah, well see, my first introduction, well, I was doing school and I was doing work, so I was familiar with Islam, but you know, I had run across a God, and asked why were they 5% you know? It was just really fascinating, you know, the

way he articulated himself and the things that he spoke about. I had just come up to him and asked him, “What's up, how are you doing?” And he would go off into this really profound build about bio-chemistry and everything, showing and proving all the 92 original natural elements were in the Black man's body, thus showing and proving the birth of the universe lays within the mind of the Black Man! You know, and I was intrigued by this, so he invited me to a rally. Once I went to the rally, that's when everything was made manifest to me. So this would have to be my life.

In King Builder Allah's narrative, he sees what he wants to become, almost instantly, in the first NGE member he encounters:

We would go to the projects every night...It would be 9 or 10, and this brother came, with this sister - his name was Shareef - and this brother Shareef would come through the projects with his Earth - and she was a Queen - and she had a headwrap on. And she was a beautiful queen. And he was just dropping science on me, the science of the lessons, of the mathematics, and after that, man, I was like, “I want to be like *that*”... I mean here I was - worthless - and he had the power to attract...He was walking through the projects teaching *everybody*.

In Ja'ree Divine Allah's account, the decision-making process is only slightly longer at a week:

Like, I got retained in the 8th grade, uh when I was Knowledge Understanding [13]...I knew I needed something to uplift my Self. I didn't know where to turn, and that was in 98. 99 came, I'm in 8th grade for the second time, and a brother begins kicking it to me. The first thing he tells me is that there is no mystery god,

and that the Black Man is God. He breaks down the 85 percent, the 10 percent and the 5 percent. That just had my mind like “Wow”. My mind was expanding swiftly right there...It was hearing how scientific the break down was, is what did it for me. Uh, you know man, initially it took me a week, after this had been sparked for me, to decide this was the culture I was going to live for the rest of my life.

Born Supreme Allah’s emphasis was on the positive difference that existed between him and the individual who introduced him to the NGE:

The God that first brought me to the knowledge was a professional brother, you know? If that brother was a bullshit ass brother, it would have went in one ear and right out the other. He was the alternate of what I looked up to [at that time]...You know he was very professional, carried himself well and everything, you know. And he was telling me stuff that I had never heard before, never. And I had heard Wu-Tang Clan, Brand Nubian and all of that and I’d never understand what they was saying, until this brother started telling me about it and then once I had my Supreme Mathematics and [Supreme] Alphabet, you know, their lyrics became more clear to me.

Kamal Universal’s narrative describes his experience becoming involved with the NGE through a high school classmate, as well as the circumstances that predicated his decision:

Towards 18, school became doable, only because of an individual that I met. It was a dude, no homo though, but he made me want to go to school. He made it seem like he was mad advanced, like past me. He showed me a different way of

living. School became cool but only because of that individual. That individual, while I'm wildin' out and doing stupid things, basically this individual – when I say “wildin' out” I don't want to paint a picture like I was biting the heads off of chickens or shootin' up preachers, you know, but I was a savage – dude was real peaceful. He had dreads down to his shoulders and I was just twisting my hair at this point. In terms of the aesthetic value, I had already cut my hair a couple of times, and I said to myself that this dude accomplished what I was trying to accomplish. This was a time when people weren't really growing dreads if they weren't Rasta. And then he talked funny. He was from Germany so he talked funny. He had a German accent, that was one thing, and then dude was mad peaceful. So I was like, “Yo, what's goin' on with this dude?” At this time, I was pretty much tired of school. I had just had an incident with the police and I had pretty much had a breakdown. So between dealing with the police and what was happening in the streets, I got a vision of where I was heading. I wasn't headed nowhere good. So I was like, I'm gonna get shot. Because I ain't gonna to jail. They ain't gon' take me, so I'm just gonna die. I was cool with that. Until I learned there was an alternative. I was reading a book on eastern religions, like Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. And there was a reoccurring theme of peace...That shit made sense to me...At the same time I met him, was the same time I was looking for peace. So I came to him and, for some reason, I thought he was a Five Percenter.

Allah Righteous reported encountering the NGE at 16 through a coworker:

[I learned] from a God named Father Shateek. Now, at the time when I met him, I met him at a job I was working at. I was a salesman for this bullshit company I was working at, and he was the best salesman in there. And they used to call him 'Black Jesus'. And when I used to wonder why they called him Black Jesus, I saw [he was the best]...They had him train me, and I had little bit of style, because I was a Muslim...I had like a big medallion with the moon and the star, you know, with like a ruby in the middle and all this shit. So, he's asking me, "What's that about?" So I tell him what I know, which, in the depth of my knowledge at the time was right and exact. And said "Well, alright. You got the moon and the star, but where's the sun at? The universe ain't complete without the sun, moon, and stars." And I agreed, but I couldn't answer his question. So he pointed to my mind, you know. So that's when it started, there. So that's when I said, "This guy, this guy knows something that I need to know."

*Finding 5: Involvement in the NGE involves the affirmation of dialogue as a means towards conscientization.*

An integral facet of peer group associations and learning communities like the NGE is mutual communication and exchange of ideas and values. According to Freire, "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education." (1970, p. 73) Through dialogical action, members are empowered to no longer function as objects in society, but Subjects who can "focus their attention on the reality which mediates them and which - posed as a problem - challenges them. The response to that challenge is the action of dialogical Subjects upon reality in order to transform it." (p. 149) Transformation of reality is part of the process Freire named

*conscientization*, that is, “Learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions - developing a critical awareness - so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 19).

NGE members refer to dialogical action as “building,” and identify it as an integral part of development of self and others. One example is in Lord Sincere Allah’s account of his first encounter with the teachings of the NGE, which he received from his brother Allah Righteous:

Well, I actually got Knowledge of Self in some ways through my brother, because the God would stop over, the name of the brother was Shateek, and he and my physical brother would be at the job. He started building with him, and then from there he would come over and we’d both add on with him. In a way, it wasn’t meant for me directly, but indirectly. Because my brother he would come to me, and he told me this and he told me that, but he didn’t understand it [yet], so we would sit there and we would build on every word.

Lord Sincere Allah’s brother Allah Righteous responded with the role of dialogue in their present relationship:

Every day when I see my brother I’m going to say “Peace” and I’m going to add on with him in one shape or form on today’s mathematics. This is considered by most to be esoteric, but still, we’re just talking about the qualities of that which... that the average individual may speak on the quantity, so we can get into both and on their significance, and take it even further. You’re going to constantly be challenged to question everything around you. And everything around you is mathematics, because just doing the knowledge to your circumference you’re

going to survey and measure everything around you. That's just the nature of man. So that's what Knowledge of Self is, it's giving you the true nature of man. [Now] we have the ability to build with other people and able to add something on. We're able to study 120 and the questions and answers, and not only that but each of those lessons is only a basic knowledge that you can expand on in many other ways. It only gives you a fraction and then opens up the door [to do more].

The word "build" is clear indication of the role of dialogue in the NGE as a means to transform self and the world. In Born Supreme Allah's account, he uses the term to refer to developing society, stating, "The young Gods have to build." Ta'kim Intelligence Allah's evaluation of traditional education addressed the lack of opportunity for dialogue in school:

You have a teacher to so many students and, and it doesn't allow certain questions to be answered or asked because it's within a specific time period. Knowledge of Self, on the other hand, and the way of life of the Nation of Gods and Earths, can only be learned through living, through walking with somebody on a day to day basis [and engaging in dialogue]. I was fortunate enough to have a brother who was available to do that with me at a young age, when I gained the Knowledge of Self at 15 years old. He walked with me and acted and performed father figure functions in my life when I needed that. He not only taught me the information, but customs [like] how to carry myself, taking my shoes off before I entered into a home, you know?

Ja'ree Divine Allah also made mention of the NGE's emphasis on communication: "I was always an intelligent person, you know, and having the Knowledge of my Self gave

me the tools to really express that intelligence in a way that, you know, that was only suitable for me.”

Participants emphasized dialogical action in the context of educating others, and thus transforming, or “building,” reality. Addressing this sort of “constructivism,” Lord Sincere Allah noted:

Education occurs in many ways. A: We’re building. We have the ability to build with other people and able to add something on. We’re able to study 120 and the questions and answers, and not only that but each of those lessons is only a basic knowledge that you can expand on in many other ways. It only gives you a fraction and then opens up the door [to do more].

Rasheem Allah’s account of his experience in school reveals the sense of agency instilled in NGE members by dialogical proficiency:

School ain’t really been my thing. I could care less about Christopher Columbus and all that shit, nah mean? But once I started really understandin’ the science behind what was going on, then I started takin’ it a lot different. I started talkin’ to the teachers, nah mean? Buildin’ with the teachers, educatin’ the class myself, havin’ one-on-ones with the teachers in the middle of class, on stuff that’s not in the history books, but *I* knew it. So it was just like, you know, a lot more interesting. [How’d it feel to be able to teach the teachers?] I mean, that was nothin’. We taught *everybody* when we got the knowledge, nah mean? People like...we was teachin’ Jehovah’s Witnesses, I mean anybody who cared. Like, that’s what made it so interesting. Just knowing that it was the truth, that it was undeniable.

Rasheem Allah's account of "teaching" in everyday situations was not uncommon in the narratives of NGE members. Participants spoke specifically on teaching methods they used. Most frequently, instruction was strongly rooted in dialogue, as in Steel Free Allah's explanation:

I use a couple of different methods [to teach]. My first method, my preferred method, is what I call the interrogation technique. Because nobody really believes in a motherfuckin' Mystery God. Otherwise, they wouldn't be working, stealing, getting involved with hustling, whatever they do. They'd just be sitting there waiting for some bread to fall out the sky. So the interrogation technique is when I have somebody and I just ask them the right questions, and it [their understanding] comes out of that.

Born Supreme Allah discussed the role of posing problems in reality as opportunities for dialogue as well:

[A God began] telling me about the Nation. It was something that I'd never heard of, dealing with the Original People being supreme beings, that there wasn't a Mystery God. Me being from a Christian background, yet I still had questions, [he was] filling in the gaps I had questions about, you know? And we would just be up all night, and I'd question him on everything.

Kamal Universal emphasized the importance of communication skills in educating others:

Every word you say, know what you're saying. Because everybody you go to doesn't subscribe to or believe what you know to be true. And you've got to be able to take this [teaching] everywhere. And mathematics is the science of

reasoning and order. And being intelligent, I need to be able to express myself 100 percent completely, clearly, and concisely. Down to the mastery of the simple words, because nothing is really simple. Being able to use simple words when talking to people who [only] know simple words and being able to talk to people using so-called complex words in their arena. You have to be able to go from the boardrooms to the classrooms to the poolrooms to the bedrooms – yes, even the bedrooms. Like Elijah Muhammad said, “Know about the English language because she knows about you.” I had to look up every single word [in the lessons].

Several members also stressed the significance of “knowing and understanding” each word in the 120 Lessons, and being “held accountable for everything you say.” Ta’kim Intelligence Allah addressed the critical aspects of dialogue as it occurs among NGE members. Citing the concept of “steel sharpens steel,” in his affirmation of critical discourse in community development, Ta’kim Intelligence Allah noted that the heated debates that often arise between NGE members are essential:

People think that this is a very critical Nation, that we argue over the dumbest things, but, to me - they may understand it in a different way - it’s an exercise. It’s a test, allowing you to analyze everything that is going on. And you have to do that. You just can’t do things *just because*, because you will find yourself getting drawn up in a current of the mainstream, of the masses.

*Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?*

The second research question sought to explore the perspectives of NGE members on education, both that of the traditional educational system and that of the NGE. Six

findings emerged that illustrated the stark contrast between members' perceptions of traditional and NGE education. Regarding traditional education, the overall findings emerging from the data were:

1. The curriculum of the traditional educational system is often perceived as inherently Eurocentric and oppressive.
2. The traditional educational system's ideology and instructional philosophy do not meet or address the needs of disadvantaged Black youth.
3. The traditional education system is not comprehensive because, in delivering the standard curriculum, traditional education does not sufficiently address non-curricular issues that negatively affect student outcomes.

Regarding NGE education, the overall findings emerging from the data were:

1. The ideology and curriculum of the NGE is attractive to many Black youth who find themselves disenchanted with the traditional educational canon.
2. Education in the NGE is intrinsically motivational, and drives one to study and engage in pedagogical practice without any extrinsic incentive.
3. Education in the NGE is comprehensive because, in addition to addressing "Knowledge of Self," the NGE reinvents, remediates, and/or supplements the learning available in the formal system.

Table 5 lists the cases by number and identifies the case or cases where the findings emerged.

Table 5

*Findings from Research Question 2*

Findings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Traditional Education													
Eurocentric Curriculum	X	X			X		X	X		X		X	X
Does Not Meet Needs		X	X	X	X			X	X			X	X
Not Comprehensive	X	X				X			X	X	X	X	X
NGE Education													
Alternative Curriculum	X	X				X			X	X	X	X	
Intrinsically Motivational	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Comprehensive	X		X			X		X	X	X		X	X

As illustrated in Table 5, the findings were present in the majority of the cases. Several of the factors above having already been addressed in the individual case examinations, the following section briefly presents the findings as they occurred throughout many of the cases.

*Traditional Education*

*Finding 1: The curriculum of the traditional educational system is often perceived as inherently Eurocentric and oppressive.*

Knowledge Fact Allah was concise in evaluating the traditional system's curriculum:

Basically, it's Eurocentric, they don't teach you anything about your history. They teach that our history started in slavery, you know what I'm saying? And then they try to front and hand us the shortest month of the whole Gregorian calendar year to celebrate this, you know what I'm saying? And the amount of education that you receive - it's a bunch of B.S. because what I have noticed is, if you don't notice already, is that the reason they educate you on [such] a poor level is because they don't want you to know the truth.

Although members often referred to Eurocentrism's role in History and English classes, Allah Righteous included the sciences:

One thing I was saying when you asked me about public schools was the fact that math was universal. So the [content of] mathematics is something that's hard to mix, dilute, and tamper with. So what they do is mix, dilute, and tamper with the origins of these things, these types of mathematics – geometry and algebra – and the fact that these are things that Original People have manifested thousands and millions of years ago. And these are things that European scientists and Caucasian scholars are just now getting credit for and they're teaching this, or telling it, from their perspective.

Supreme Science Allah observed that, even coming from a middle-class family that reinforced education at home, school presented difficulties. He noted his discomfort with the traditional curriculum, stating, “Well, like I said, because I had a family about was enthusiastic about me learning that's what, you know, really motivated me to want to learn. But I thought it was a lot of European history, a lot of European concepts being taught to me.”

*Finding 2: The traditional educational system's ideology and instructional methodology are not designed to meet or address the needs of disadvantaged Black youth.*

In addition to portraying tradition education as irreparably Eurocentric, participants also complained that the country's "philosophy of education" was not designed around the needs of disadvantaged populations, but for the children of white elites. Members argued that involuntary minorities, especially Blacks in low-income communities, experienced the greatest amount of disconnect between their school experience and the real world.

Some members, like Supreme Science Allah, characterized the lack of legitimacy formal education carried in inner-city communities as disparaging:

So, yeah, I saw the people around me kind of having the same attitude, and not quite understanding why they felt like that. But just in general because where they came from, the environment they came from, people on the block weren't talking about this. They weren't talking about history. They weren't talking about why they should excel in math and so and so, so it was kind of like "the white man's thing.

Several others, like Knowledge Fact Allah, referred to the origins of schooling for Blacks:

Nothing has changed between the Jim Crow days and even the days before then, you know what I'm saying, in slavery. They still don't want you to read. This is why they put the truths in a book they already [expected] you not to read. They already know "They're not going to find it. They're not going to go searching for

the truth.” Because it what? It takes time for you to sit down and research and study and think about these facts of life, you know? So yeah, as far as the educational system, man, the educational system in the wilderness of North America is piss-poor, and it's propagated to keep the Black man down, [and] the Black woman not acknowledging her true beauty, or original essence.

Some members noted that education for Blacks took a turn for the *worse* after integration, when whites reassumed responsibility for Blacks becoming, or *not* becoming, educated. Rasheem Allah also took the stance that the traditional school system was not designed to meet the best interests of Black people:

That [the American educational system] wasn't set up for us to really succeed anyway. I mean, the school system, really man, we came from slavery, [at least] from our time in *this* country, nah mean? The same people who did us the way they did us is not gonna educate us to the best. They not gonna feed us what we supposed to know, they gon' give us what they wanna give us. Just like the poor part of the...poisonous food [pig] the part that they didn't want, that's what we had to eat. The parts that they didn't want, nah mean? The garbage, the scraps, that's what they gon give us, that's how they gon do with the education too, and any other system they set up that's based for us...I ain't gonna never tell no kids to leave school...Schooling and education are always gon' be key, for life, but [traditional education is] not everybody's deal. That's not how everybody's gon' go.

Ja'ree Divine Allah also compared the offerings of the school system to the slave diet:

The traditional American education system is like the typical American diet. They call it S.A.D., or Standard American Diet. And being that we are talking about Knowledge and that we are talking about food, all of them are all equivalent and both of them relate to one another. So basically, that food is swine, man. You go into those schools, they're giving these babies swine. See what I'm saying? That school system is not intended to give you the Knowledge of your Self. Their school system is intended to give you some knowledge to make you walk out of the place like "Ah, I'm glad I'm out of there, I don't want to learn anymore."

Like his brother, Allah Righteous argued that there were several consequences to the fundamental shortcoming of the traditional education, that is, its disregard for teaching Black students identity:

There are a lot of babies who just graduated or were pushed up to the next grade...because the teacher just doesn't want to deal with that child. And it's because the teachers are not equipped to give that child an education from within, because they're not giving that child Knowledge of Self or anything that's going to give that child encouragement and pride.

Allah Righteous attributed the same causative factors to the dropout rate in this country as well, describing the school system as "a graveyard." Steel Free Allah's commentary extended to higher education as well: "If you don't have a sense of self, you just end up with a two hundred thousand-dollar lease, a big debt." Allah Righteous described the school system's true purpose in the following manner:

I'll answer that by saying the public school system is set-up to maintain a status quo...I'll go as far as to say that it's a franchise that was set-up in their circle to maintain the colonialism that we endure as Original People in the wilderness of North America, and I also would go as far as to say it was also set-up to maintain white supremacy in this country; and it was also made to teach us and keep us illiterate at the same time. One might say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" To teach and keep somebody illiterate at the same time means that they're given lies told as fact, so when they're confronted with an actual problem they can't procure an answer. But it's not really [their fault]; it's their teachers who are giving them these answers. So to make a long story short, the school - in terms of the public school system - is not formatted to teach a child *how* to think, but to teach a child *what* to think. And that's a big difference...Getting Knowledge of Self you learn actually *how* to think...But when we're dealing with the public school system, its whole purpose is to maintain a capitalist system in which we're nothing but - how can I say it other than saying pawns - we're tools being used in a large machine and we have to fit in that machine. So therefore, your mind is sculpted in that fashion of maintaining capitalism and not questioning or rebelling against white supremacy.

Nearly all of the participants alleged that the purpose of the traditional educational system was generally oppressive or repressive in some form or fashion, a supposition that is, in many ways, supported by the literature. Drawing on historical research, Apple and King (1983) have said:

Historically, social control was a value of educators which was seen as essential to the preservation of the existing social privilege, interest, and knowledge of one element of the population at the expense of less powerful groups. Most often this took the form of attempting to guarantee expert and scientific control in society, to eliminate or socialize unwanted racial or ethnic groups or characteristics or to produce an economically efficient group of citizens in order to reduce the maladjustment of workers to their jobs. (p. 86)

Similarly, Irvine (1991) proposed:

Schools have sociopolitical purpose of maintaining the status quo and have only an incidental function of teaching students to solve problems and ask critical questions...If one acknowledges this perspective, it is clear that no matter the method of instruction or the intervention, black children and other minorities will continue to be relegated to the bottom of the status hierarchy. (pp. 2-3)

King Builder Allah was equally explicit about the intentions of traditional education:

I think [reinforcing the desire to learn] is one of the most critical factors in education because there's this literature by Jawanza Kunjufu, *The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, and other literature similar to that, that is letting us know that there is literally a designed system for us to fail, as far as Black boys, by the time they are 5, 6, 7, 8 years old, we may have mastered their curriculum but they already have destroyed our will to learn.

Some members made mention of the traditional curriculum's irrelevance to modern-day life, again characterizing formal schooling as ill-preparing Black children for the real world. According to Wood (2004), even with the recent push towards making significant

gains on standardized assessments as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, there is still no evidence of test scores being linked to post-school success in any area. In fact, Lewis Terman, a founding father of educational testing, proposed the need for testing of minority students in order to demonstrate “enormously significant” racial differences, allowing them to be segregated in “special classes.” Blacks and other minorities, he asserted, “cannot master abstractions, but they can be made efficient workers.” (Irvine, 1991). A-King B Allah noted:

Being twenty-two, I would say that I wish that, when I was in school, they taught me about things like filling out a W-4 form. [I wish] they told you about things like actually getting scholarships and grants instead of having to go get a loan for school. I also wish that they would have taught me things like how to read maps. You know, the stuff that you really needed to know were things that they made you come out here and learn on your own. How to establish your credit, these are things that you need to know in this day and time and you don't learn them in school nowadays.

Other members, like Steel Free Allah, addressed the inadequacies of the formal system in terms of its methodology:

I'm not knockin' it, I'm not knockin' formal education. I just don't think it's structured to be competitive in the now. I don't think its engaging the intellect that young people have. They learn, I mean shit, I grew up on *Tom and Jerry* and *Gilligan's Island*, you know what I mean? And there's cartoons out there [now] with more intricate plots than a lot of movies I was watching back in the day, deeper than *Smokey and the Bandit*! So these babies are exposed to much more

information at a much earlier age. And I think that they learn 8 or 9 times faster than the average motherfucker. They have to memorize two or three dozen things in a row to get to the next level of the [video] game, while engaging in hand eye coordination the whole time. [However] they don't get any physical fitness training, or nourishment, because they're being fed the wrong foods, so they're fat and weak. And their vast intellect is only being engaged in consumerism.

Finally, some members criticized the set-up of most traditional schools, citing the preponderance of female teachers, white teachers, or middle-class teachers, who didn't fully connect with the needs of the at-risk Black males. Supreme Science Allah scrutinized his experience thus:

I didn't think it had relevance to me. The only reason I thought it had relevance to me was because my father kept pushing it and kept offering it that it would be important for my life some time in the future. I kind of understood, based on my recollection now, I kind of understood how things were. I came up in a family where we taught to do for ourselves. I had a little history in terms of how Black people were treating here in America from slavery until, you know, when I was born. So, I was taught not to trust white people or, you know, to really rely on Original People, Original Black people. So, when I went to school I saw a lot of teachers who were white and I kind of understood the educational system to be an extension of the way they thought about us or their ideals and concepts that they had of life. I wasn't too enthusiastic about learning.

Giroux (2003), addressing many of the same concerns in his analysis of school-age youth as an “abandoned generation,” criticized the inequities inherent in modern society:

The United States is at war with young people. All youth are targets, especially those marginalized by class and color... Youth have become the all important group onto which class and racial anxieties are projected. Their very presence represents both the broken promises of capitalism in the age of deregulation and downsizing and a collective fear of the consequences wrought by systemic class inequalities, racism, and a culture of "infectious greed" that has created a generation of unskilled and displaced youth expelled from shrinking markets, blue collar jobs, and any viable hope in the future. (p. xvi)

*Finding 3: The traditional education system is not comprehensive because, in delivering the standard curriculum, traditional education does not sufficiently address non-curricular issues that negatively affect student outcomes.*

Citing a multitude of environmental factors, many participants were clear that school was not a top priority for them as an adolescent. Even members like Supreme Science Allah and A-King B Allah, who had stable family backgrounds where there was a push for education, noted that school appeared irrelevant. Kozol (2005) has noted the apparent irrelevance of the training offered in many public schools, ranging from environmentally isolated scripted reform programs to mandated sewing classes in high school.

Members frequently cited other pursuits that appeared more attractive or lucrative, ignoring the dominant ideology’s formula, that is, that hard work and education

will equal success (O'Connor, 1999). Several members mentioned selling drugs, before their involvement with the NGE, as a highly desirable alternative to attending school. Others, like King Builder Allah, experienced other factors that resulted in truancy. Some members mentioned dropping out of school altogether. Participants agreed that, once out of the education mainstream, there were few, if any, alternatives for education until becoming engaged in the nonformal education of the NGE.

Rasheem Allah, like many others, noted that he was “in the streets” more often than preoccupied with schoolwork: “Like I said, I’ve never been that dude that was gung-ho about school. I’ve always been intelligent. I always was the smartest dude in the class. I just didn’t do the work. ‘Cause I ain’t see the purpose for it. I had my own agenda. Nah mean?” Born Supreme Allah also spoke on “hustling” instead of attending school, describing his rationale for why students today are disengaging from the academic experience:

The generation has changed so much since I was in school. I know I was a hard case, but these kids now are even harder. These teachers though, they’re not adapting to them. You can’t make a student sit down and learn. He’s got to want to learn. He’s gotta see how he can apply it. All they’re doing is giving them information and definitions. And that’s why they don’t care.

In Allah Truth’s narrative, he recalls how becoming bored with unchallenging schoolwork led to discipline problems, which ultimately grew into gang activity and a life of crime by the time he was 12:

I’m going to school with my crew or coming back from school, and it seemed like everybody wanted to be down with us because we were adventurous. And we’re

gifted and we're smart so, one thing led to another and, the behavior in the class fell. So I got into the street and the next thing you know, gangs was taking place in the ghettos...So the next thing you know, it filled out and the teacher started seeing us running around in the streets. Then one thing led to another to where I was labeled as a leader, the one that had disciplinary problems and behavioral problems in the school. So I guess that I was labeled real early...I was actually kicked out of the school and sent to, what we would call a "jail school"

Allah Truth's anecdote on attending a "jail school," or alternative school for students with recurrent discipline problem, is reminiscent of what Chaddock (1999) described as a trend toward "learning prisons" (p. 15). Similarly, Giroux (2004) noted, "The class and racial war being waged against young people is most evident in the ways in which schools are being militarized with the addition of armed guards, barbed-wired security fences, and 'lock down drills.'" (para. 1.2)

King Builder Allah stated that, although he was highly capable, he didn't attend school much: "Because frequently I was a run away at an early age, around 11 or 12. And as a runaway, I didn't sleep much at night. So I was on the train during the daytime, asleep." Born Supreme Allah's account was similar, although he was more distracted by other pursuits:

When I *did* go to school, I would barely go to class. I barely did my schoolwork. I would get out of class any chance I could get it. I was smart, but I ain't see the reality in it, and I didn't apply myself. [I didn't get straight A's] because the work didn't challenge me. I was into other things. I was all about making money,

hangin' out, hollerin' at females. I mean I barely opened my books but I could still pass the tests.

In complaining about the school system's failure to address these issues, participants often stated that they felt the schools and teachers simply "didn't care." Participants described a number of other factors that interfered with school performance, none of which they said were ever addressed by the school system.

Kamal Universal began disengaging from school after feeling alienated around white students:

I did my homework when I was young, like up until the third grade...Fourth grade is when I moved to a [predominantly] white city for a year. That's when I got my first taste of being different. So pretty much, from fourth grade on, I wasn't doing my work.

During high school, Kamal Universal's disengagement from the academic experienced increased dramatically and contributed to other behaviors: "School was a place where you - I wasn't getting girls - so I had to act up somehow. I was stealing bookbags and money, playing cards, playing Three Card Monty, fighting, and not doing my work, trying to make it fun." Like many members, Kamal Universal didn't view school as part of the "real world," stating that from his perspective at the time, "It was all about the streets. School was in the streets." Although he engaged in a number of delinquent behaviors himself, Kamal Universal noted that, in a school like his, it would be hard for *anyone* to get an education because of issues inside, and in the proximity of, the school itself: "You gotta worry about not getting robbed. You gotta worry about not getting into fights, not getting into trouble."

In general, NGE members were clear that school did not address any of the issues that discouraged or prohibited them from participating actively in the academic experience. They cited the absence of knowledgeable guidance counselors, teacher who could “relate,” schools that made learning safe as well as respectable, and alternatives for youth out of the education mainstream. NGE members perceived the traditional system’s education as not being comprehensive for failing to address the non-curricular issues that led students to disengage from the academic experience or withdraw from the education mainstream altogether.

### *NGE Education*

*Finding 1: The ideology and curriculum of the NGE is attractive to many Black youth who find themselves dissatisfied with the traditional school curriculum.*

As explored earlier in the findings for Research Question 1, the curriculum of the NGE is seen as a culturally responsive alternative to the traditional school curriculum. Participants universally perceived the curriculum and ideology of the NGE as attractive and refreshing, in some cases claiming that the teachings of the NGE were what they had “always been looking for.” Lord Sincere Allah expressed the need for an alternative curriculum like that of the NGE in the following narrative:

I know what needs to happen is we have to create our own teachings, we have to create our own structure. Because if we don’t, everything is just going to continue on in this fashion, and the people who are in control of things don’t even actually know what they’re doing, and it’s really causing death, hell, and destruction across the planet; not only to Original People - which is the Black, the brown, and the yellow - but even to whites, to their own children. Because remember, a lot of

our children influence a lot of their children as well. There's no way to have the one without the other. And a lot of their children are starting to wake up and realize that the information that they've been given and that they grew up with is inaccurate. They're learning through music, such as Hip hop, and there are other avenues to finding out the truth. The Gods, you know, are out. Nowadays we're in the age of information, the Internet, so you can find out whatever you want to. So they're trying to find out what's real because this is some bullshit that they've been telling us. There is going to be a rebellion that takes place, a regurgitation. If you give somebody something that isn't good for their body, what do they do? They throw it up, they expel it back at you...The mind is a structure the same way the body is and you have to feed it the same way you feed the body. If you feed it something that's not good and not healthy for it you're going to make it sick.

Seven participants, including Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, discussed the pedagogical practices that distinguished the NGE from the rote learning of the traditional school system:

A lot of things that were taught to me were taught in the wide open, on the bus, in the park, at the super market. Examples of things around us would be used to illustrate certain principles and certain ideas, which allowed me to make a connection with everything around me, and to establish some level of understanding, between me and that object.

A-King B Allah made similar comments:

The Gods and Earths will actually walk with the seeds instead of telling the seeds what to do, or trying to tell them how to live their life. The Gods and Earths,

they're going to walk with you and show you how life should be led. A lot of times we can either teach from mouth to ear, or we can teach from action to eye.

You know, that's how I like to teach, from action to eye.

Lastly, Supreme Science Allah offered an in-depth analysis of some of the socially inherent factors for the attractiveness of the NGE ideology:

Well, first and foremost, you gotta keep in mind the young brothers and sisters in my age bracket at that time, mentally and physically, they were dealing with such a unique circumstance, more so than at any other point historically. And, this is why: In essence, we've experienced centuries of conditioning and the destruction of the Black family to the degree that the Black male image and role has been successfully altered, confused and destroyed. You know, I'm talking about we're coming from under a system of slavery, in a post-slavery environment, when there was [then] a clear and open entity that we could blame collectively. So...during the sixties and seventies they have all of these so-called liberties extended to Original People during the Civil Rights era, and they gave us the appearance of progress. But we were still faced with this highly unstable environment, in terms of the Black family, you know? But here we are, with no *visible* oppressor, yet there were still very concrete, tangible manifestations of living conditions which suggested that we were still being victimized to this great extent...[but] there were no apparent social conditions or entities to assign that blame to. Everywhere we went, as far as we were told, we were supposed to be responsible for ourselves [and our conditions]. When we looked around, however, we didn't see [how that could be]. Then you have an articulate, poignant, unabashed brother pretty much

telling the truth to you [about how and why], and relating it to your perspective.

No other Black male or Black man was doing that, that we could see. Most Black men were too busy imitating and trying to assimilate into the European, yuppie, upwardly mobile model, you know? So, for someone to come and relate to my perspective, saying these things to me - that was highly appealing.

*Finding 2: Education in the NGE is intrinsically motivational, and drives one to study and engage in pedagogical practice without any extrinsic incentive.*

Rasheem Allah referred to NGE education as “self-gratifying” and “satisfying,” referring to the intrinsically motivational nature of the NGE pedagogy. Alfie Kohn (1993) says intrinsic motivation, defined positively, is “the desire to engage in an activity for its own sake – that is, because of the satisfaction it provides,” (p. 290) whereas extrinsic motivations refers to activities carried out in the desire of some other benefit. Noting the difficulties in defining a concept like intrinsic motivation positively, Kohn continues:

[Intrinsic motivation] may be understood in terms of qualities and more general motivations that define human beings, like “the desire to ‘feel good,’ ‘an orientation toward learning and master,’ ad a need for competence and self-determination, as well as, perhaps, to relate to and be engaged with others.” (1993, p. 291)

Steel Free Allah’s narrative is an example of the way NGE members differentiate their motivation to teach others and transform the world from how they perceive other community organizations and groups who cater towards youth and education:

I was talking to one of the Gods last week about the social services industry. I asked him, “What industry do you know of that’s designed to put itself out of business?” [What the NGE offers can be summed up in] one word: Love. With love, you’ll never stop. You’ll never take no for an answer. You’ll never stop digging deeper. You ain’t never scared. You’re never tired. You’ll never stop teaching. Because the true and living [Gods] do this shit for free.

Other NGE members noted this distinction as well. Applying the same criticism to the school system, Lord Sincere Allah offered the following hypothetical dialogue: “Some people go to school saying, ‘I want to become a doctor.’ Why? ‘Not because I want to help people but because I can make money’...But we’re not on this earth to make money.” Members described their purpose in terms of transforming reality as opposed to other groups who they noted were interested only in “getting paid.”

Several members explained that they did not proselytize like members of a religious community, but were teaching to create a change in the community and a change in the world. Evidence of this can be found in the NGE document *What We Will Achieve*, found in Appendix A. NGE members cited intrinsic, immaterial motivation to both learn and teach, as a result of the NGE culture. Born Supreme Allah recalled his own experience learning, and how there was no compulsion or offering of incentives:

If you want to learn something, I’m not going to you with it. You got to come and get it from me. When I was getting my lessons, not one time did a God call me and talk about, “Yo, do you want to get these lessons, God?” No! I had to get them myself, you know? This knowledge is not forced upon anybody.

Knowledge Fact Allah's address of self-instruction incorporated the intrinsic motivation NGE members should have in studying:

I ain't really going to drop no long build about [the purpose of study] because it's simple, man. Allah said, "Keep it Simple and Teach it Real." If you're not educating yourself then you're killing your self, point blank, because the day you stop learning is the day you stop living.

Allah Righteous's account explored the inward focus of the NGE as a primary factor in the absence of external compulsion to learn:

The most supreme education takes place within the Nation of Gods because education is always something that you can have from within, it doesn't come from anywhere else but the inside of an individual. If you don't want to learn, you don't learn. If you don't see knowledge as being something that will better yourself or give you an advanced take on life, then you won't seek it, and if you don't seek it, you won't find it.

Other accounts, like Steel Free Allah's, highlighted the immaterial motivations of NGE members to teach others:

Nobody's going to [make a change] if we don't do it. And I don't have nobody to look to for help. I gotta figure it out. I gotta come up with a realistic solution for some real major fucking problems going on out here. As a man, my responsibility is not just take to care of my family in these square feet that we call home, but everywhere we go, I have to take a proactive approach to teach civilization. Just like in the *Spiderman* movie [where the main character's grandfather is killed by a criminal the main character failed to attempt to stop earlier]. If I don't teach these

cats, one of them may whack one of these babies, or somebody may try to kidnap one of my children. You know? So I stay proactive.

The idea of being “proactive” in solving the world’s problems, is synonymous with Freire’s concept of the oppressed being empowered to begin functioning as a Subject instead of an object. This motivation to transform reality is central to the sense of agency the NGE instills in its members (Freire, 1970). In the context of this study, agency, like self-efficacy, refers to an individual’s perception of his or her own ability to influence events in his or her life and in the world (Bandura, 1994; Gurin & Gurin, 1976). The issues of autonomy and intrinsic motivation are strongly correlated, according to Kohn (1993), although he does not make the argument as to which factor is causative of the other.

*Finding 3: Education in the NGE is comprehensive because, in addition to addressing “Knowledge of Self,” the NGE reinvents, reinforces, and/or supplements the learning available in the formal educational system.*

Participants, although typically sharing negative perceptions of the formal educational system, agreed that the NGE covered every topic and area of learning to be found in the traditional curriculum. Whereas the traditional system’s education was perceived as not being comprehensive for failing to address students who, for whatever reason, were disengaged from the academic experience or out of the education mainstream altogether, NGE education was described as comprehensive because it addressed both the formal curriculum and nonformal learning.

Some participants, like Born Supreme Allah, noted the fact that the NGE does not follow doctrine or scriptures, but that members study “lessons,” hinting at the educative

nature of the culture. Similarly Steel Free Allah said, “We have an actual curriculum. We have an actual language and curriculum,” while Allah Truth cited the “graduation process” of learning 120 Lessons and adopting a righteous name.

In response to his brother Lord Sincere Allah’s commentary that “each of those [120] lessons is only a basic knowledge that you can expand on in many other ways,” Allah Righteous’s account clarifies the comprehensive educative nature of the 120 Lessons:

120 Degrees gives you a basic knowledge and a basic overview of every science that’s known to man, woman, and child. So, therefore, it gives an individual access to every field of education and of study. If you are interested in geometry, then these things are available to you in 120 Degrees. If you’re interested in genetics, these things are available to you in 120 Degrees. If you’re interested in history, theology, all of these things are available to you in 120 Degrees, you know, even architecture or cooking. So therefore, an individual is given the idea, which he might not have had before, by being offered every aspect of study or every field of study in one degree or another. You know? Somebody might say I never thought about studying genetics, but after reading and studying the understanding cipher degree in the 1-40 [one of the 120 Lessons], now the idea is, “Okay, you got dominant, you got recessive, you got unlike...Okay, now that’s something I might want to look into.” Or, you know, learning about history and Jesus and that he didn’t teach Christianity, that that’s something that was made up long after he passed away, but that’s something that’s still not acknowledged as a concrete fact in the educational and religious institutions in this country. And, I

mean, that's something you can go out and make your own field of study, but that's something you might not have even thought about doing [before then]. So, that's what is most important, it gives an individual, once they come into the knowledge of themselves, an opportunity to now be reacquainted with every aspect of education.

Some members viewed traditional education as something of a "necessary evil," or a means to an end. While Rasheem Allah, in critiquing the oppressive nature of the traditional school system, interjected, "But we can use that, they system, to get where we need to be," Steel Free Allah described school functioning as either a "tool box or a robot factory." Ta'kim Intelligence Allah, like several other members, credited the teachings of the NGE as helping him succeed academically during school, stating:

The Nation of Gods and Earths' learning has reinforced everything that I have learned in the educational system, taught in the public schools and what not. It gave me a structure, with which to analyze and understand all these things by piecing it together. It taught me how to study. It taught me how to appreciate information and, most importantly, [it taught me] what I can do with the information, which made me want to gain more.

Although some participants reported disengaging from school to pursue entrepreneurialism after experimenting with post-secondary education, King Builder Allah also accentuated Allah's push for NGE members to enroll in higher education: "In this Culture, at this point in time, I know a couple of brothers with Masters [degrees], and I know one brother with a Ph.D. I know a couple of sisters with double and triple Masters." Knowledge Fact Allah described the educative nature of the NGE's learning

community in regards to the culture reinforcing or remediating literacy and other academic deficiencies:

One God you may come across may not be a proficient reader. Another God many not be proficient in Mathematics. Another God may lack in the English language. Another God may have, you know what I'm saying, another affliction. You have to be able to come among each one of those Gods and be able find what the weakness is, and each one of those Gods must be able to manifest and turn that weakness into a strength.

Similarly, Allah Truth observed that the NGE had been teaching literacy and basic skills since its earliest days:

Al Jabar taught the God in Raleigh, North Carolina, [because] he didn't know how to read. We taught him word of mouth, and he learned 120 word of mouth...And this is how we used to take pride, because it didn't make any difference [whether you could read or not, because] we was teaching it word of mouth...That was a process that we was famed and noted for, that we would teach an illiterate person how to be literate. We were famed and noted for teaching the illiterate how to read.

Finally, Allah Righteous's narrative addressed many of the pedagogical features inherent in the NGE culture:

Sure, one thing that makes an individual sharpen his mathematical skills is that some form of mathematics is added on in some way or another in this Nation... Reading and writing skills are offered in civilization classes. There are quite a few Gods who have classes in reading comprehension. 120 Lessons is a crash

course in reading comprehension, because it tells you in the beginning that “In order to become a student enrolled these questions must be answered 100 percent right and exact before admittance to said lesson number one.” So, therefore, you learn from the gate that you must comprehend, and you must punctuate, and you must articulate and speak properly and grammatically correct, or else you won’t be able to even finish what you just studied.

*Research Question 3: How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational and societal achievement?*

The third research question sought to identify the extent of the influence of the NGE on members’ attitudes and behaviors, including later life accomplishments. Four findings emerged that illustrated the influence of the NGE as experienced by the participants of this study. The overall findings emerging from the data were:

1. Involvement in the NGE instills in members a sense of purpose and agency in helping and educating others.
2. Involvement in the NGE increased members’ sense of responsibility and accountability.
3. Involvement in the NGE developed intrinsic motivation in members to achieve their highest potential.
4. Involvement in the NGE gave legitimacy to education where it had previously been absent.

Table 6 lists the cases by number and identifies the case or cases where the findings emerged.

Table 6

*Findings from Research Question 3*

Findings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Purpose and Agency	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Responsibility and Accountability	X		X	X	X		X		X		X		X
Achieving Potential	X	X	X		X	X		X	X		X		
Legitimacy for Education		X	X			X		X	X	X		X	X

As illustrated in Table 6, the findings were present in the majority of the cases. Several of the factors above having already been addressed in the individual case examinations, the following section briefly presents the findings as they occurred throughout many of the cases.

*Finding 1: Involvement in the NGE instills in members a sense of purpose and agency in helping and educating others.*

Eleven of the participants characterized their “duty” in the context of helping and educating others. Members placed equal value on transforming themselves and providing guidance to others, but spoke highly of the initiative to educate the “85 percent” of people who did not “know the truth.” Members stated that teaching others was a process of exponential growth, as everyone they introduced to the teachings of the NGE would be

expected to pass the teachings on to others, much in the way the teachings proliferated from Harlem in 1964.

Members were clear, however, that only transferring the literature of the lessons to others, without actually engaging in the “educational process” was insufficient. Born Supreme Allah said:

I don't know anybody who really benefited from just knowing the lessons. [The ones who benefit are] the people who strive to master it every day, in the ghettos of Hell, who strives to teach the 85, those that don't know, to civilize the uncivilized. Because it's like this: The duty of a civilized person, it's not [to just] teach a brother 120, you know? I feel my duty is to civilize them. Now if the person I taught teaches somebody besides them, then I know I'm teaching. Then I know I'm doing my duty.

Others, like Lord Sincere Allah, used the word “purpose” instead of “duty” to denote the sense of obligation they developed from the NGE: “[During adolescence] you start to learn and find your place in the world, and what your purpose is and who you are. Those were some of the things that led us through that transition [into getting the Knowledge of Self].” Similarly, Supreme Science Allah observed, “Before I don't really know if I developed a purpose in life, you know. Now I see that I have to make one for myself. So, at that point, I was young I was seventeen, sixteen, seventeen, so not knowing who I was or where I going in life.” Kamal Universal addressed the sense of purpose and agency in terms of his new priorities since becoming involved with the NGE:

I went from being a follower to not just being a leader, but teaching other people how to lead themselves, and not follow the wrong things. Another thing is that

I'm living. I love living. I don't mind dying, but now I've learned there's a difference in what you can give your life to. Before, I'd give my life to [another person] or the police [for nothing]. Now I'd give my life for a baby. My priorities are real straight.

Detailing his actual endeavors, Kamal Universal later added:

[Since getting Knowledge of Self] I've traveled through Asia, Europe, and South America and gained a lot of perspective on self and other people. In terms of the role model thing, I spent some years working as a counselor in high school. I work with the jails in New York, and I've taught GED prep with the high schools. I've saved some lives, that's probably what I'm most proud of. I've done a lot of shit. I've done food drives, and clothing drives – not no old-ass clothes, I mean new clothes – in the winter time. I'm a man of my community. Whatever I see that's missing in the community, that's where I come in. I'm a protector.

Ja'ree Divine Allah also used children, and the future they represent, in his rationale:

We are looking at where the universe will go. We are looking at the babies 20, 30, 40 years in the future... We are planting those seeds now so that, in a thousand years, you are going to see the fruit of that tree, and how great that fruit is.

Knowledge Fact Allah, like Steel Free Allah and Allah Truth, was responsible for introducing the teachings of the NGE to a new locale:

[I'm] from the D-Mecca cipher, which is Detroit, Michigan...I originate from that cipher, and what I have done is gone up to Ypsilanti, Michigan and taken Knowledge up there as well. So we have Gods up there as well as Earths that we are building with right now...As far as my main accomplishment, it's [that I]

continue to teach, man. Every Black man that I have come across that wants to learn himself, and is willing to be responsible enough to himself to dedicate that time to himself, then, *this* [teaching him] is what my duty is, *this* is where my accomplishment is.

The sense of agency is clear in members' narratives about teaching and "spreading knowledge." The idea of a grand purpose to such endeavors is especially clear in Supreme Science Allah's account: "So, now I'm really enthusiastic about learning and about teaching, because I've seen that is one of the most effective ways we have to change ourselves and the environment around us."

Veteran NGE member King Builder Allah, again, scrutinized the congruence of younger NGE members' words and actions:

I think some of our "sound bites" end up being some of our greater teachings...like, "The Babies are the Greatest." That is really, really what is saving us, and you can always look at an individual that says that "The Babies are the Greatest," and see if they are teaching the babies...Our history shows that Allah's most important work was done with the babies.

Steel Free Allah's narrative was both informative and revealing in terms of his sense of purpose and agency:

The whole reason I got into this entrepreneurial thing [digital technologies] was that I was noticing these [problems in our society] all the time, and I understood [why]. You know, I was a social worker before I started emergency medicine. Even being an Emergency Medical Technician, it was taking a reactionary

position. I had to *wait* for a motherfucker to get their stomach blown out before I could help.

Steel Free Allah continued, explaining his rationale for leaving college to build his company:

I want to develop virtual laboratories for the public schools...[Because] right now America is ranked number 23 in scholastic performance, and if you look around, one-third of the students are dropping out of high school, and the other two-thirds can't even fucking read when they get out, damn near. We've got a really fucked up situation.

*Finding 2: Involvement in the NGE increased members' sense of responsibility and accountability.*

Of the several participants who reported having “no sense of responsibility” before coming in contact with the NGE, all reported that they had since developed a strong sense of responsibility as a result of identifying themselves as God. For NGE members, the association is both theological and ideological. Participants transition from attributing causality to outside factors like society, family, and the “Mystery God,” to associating the ability to change social and personal conditions as resting primarily within themselves.

The concept of internal locus of control, like the concepts of self-efficacy and agency, refers to the degree to which an individual associates their own actions with the consequences that occur in the individual's life. Individuals who have a more external locus of control view life as “happening” to them, where they are the object of actions and events. (Bandura, 1994; Bartel, 1969; Gurin & Gurin, 1976). Literature associates

the terms “hopelessness” and “helplessness” with individuals who have an external locus of control (Kolotkin, Lee, Woude, Renneke, & Rice, 1994). Conversely, individuals who have a strong internal locus of control, or sense of self-efficacy, view themselves as causal agents, and thus tend to act purposefully to produce the desired consequences in their lives (Bandura, 1994; Bartel, 1969; Muriel, 1969), similar to Freire’s designation of members in society who are “Subjects” or “objects.” (1970) The research of Muriel (1969) and more recent studies by O’Connor (1999) show that locus of control is correlated to Black students’ acceptance of the dominant ideology of guaranteed success through education and hard work, and that students’ perceptions of the opportunity and social mobility afforded to their group is directly linked to the students’ orientation towards school.

NGE members transition from perceiving themselves as affected objects to causal Subjects by defining themselves as God, and the resultant attitude shift is a repetitive theme in participants’ narratives. Supreme Science Allah related:

I was impatient in a lot of ways, like a lot of people around me. I was impatient, angry, frustrated with society, with myself, with my parents in a lot of ways because, you know, that whole aspect of, you know, casting blame, just casting blame [on others]. A lot of that stress disappeared when the understanding was born within me about *what I can do*. You know? With that growing with me over the years, I’ve become a lot more patient, a lot more understanding, a lot more confident, a lot more loving and caring towards my family and myself.

Lord Sincere Allah addressed the importance of developing this understanding during adolescence, stating, “[I got Knowledge of Self] in the stage of going from middle school

to high school, and all of those stages where you come into being a man. And the age of responsibility is like 16 [so it was good timing].”

Supreme Science Allah continued his rationalization thus:

Our most important teaching is that the Black man is God. Number one, like I said, [because of] the responsibility aspect of it. Everywhere we look in society, we're taught to believe in something other than ourselves ultimately. I think that there's been a trick that's been used, that's been utilized on, not just Original People here, but on all people, to try to get them to sabotage themselves intellectually so as to keep them in paralysis socially - whatever you want to talk about - labor, law, politics, it's been used to keep them stagnant. So, to be taught that God *isn't* somewhere in the clouds and that you are ultimately responsible for *yourself* - that is something that can transform you. It's something that can empower you. And you don't have those limitations that a lot of people around you have, whether they're self-imposed or actual, just by knowing that...And a lot of things extend from that, but that teaching is one of the most fundamental teachings of the Nation of Gods and Earths.

Steel Free Allah recalled a similar transition:

In my awakening from a mental death, I started seeing who I was, and coming to terms with the word God. At first, I was on some superstitious bullshit. Like, “I can't spin around and disappear and shit.” As I started looking around I saw that I have the ability, man, to make a change. I have the responsibility to make a change.

Kamal Universal was more critical of the role of religion in negatively affecting his locus of control:

I was very religious. But I was like [the characters in the movie] *The Godfather* when it came to religion. I'd do some shit and pray that I wouldn't get caught. Like God would save me from getting caught. I wasn't pious. I was like, God is up there watching me, but that's it...Religion put me in a position where I had to rely on somebody else to be responsible for my righteousness. I relied on someone else who could absolve me from my guilt, cleanse my conscience, when all that was within myself. I did a lot of bad things. I've hurt people. I know that [seeing] me [as] the source of my righteousness helped me to take accountability. It made me accountable. Me being accountable for everything that I do definitely made me better, instead of a putting mysterious force on it, like God made me do it, or God knows what I'd doing. As a man, if I was to be religious and do crazy shit and then look to God, I'm not standing up for what I do. Who the fuck wants to do shit and apologize? "God, I shouldn't have did that shit." Nah, that's not a man. When I put that power on myself, the apologies stopped and the actions took place. People go to jail and pray, "Yo, God if I get out I promise I ain't never gonna do it no more." Who are you going to lie to? You can lie to God, you can lie to everybody else, but you can't lie to yourself. You won't see the mystery God when you look in the mirror. You're gonna see yourself. And that's gotta be a beautiful sight. You gotta be happy to see that person. Like, "I'm the shit." Not, "Oh Lord, how did I get here?"

However, members repeatedly commented that the title of God carried with it “a lot of weight.” King Builder Allah, who quoted, “To whom much is given, much is required,” offered:

A lot of us don't take along the responsibility that comes along with [Knowledge of Self]. We just say, “Here, I'm God.” Ok, well that means you got to go down and save our people!..I maneuver myself into a position to be accountable. I think when I teach the babies how to think about what they did or to remember what they had for breakfast, or you know, just remember what knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is...things like that [teach accountability].

Ta'kim Intelligence Allah also highlighted the significance of accountability in communication among NGE members, and extended this attitude to his expectations of others around him:

Coming into the Knowledge of my Self, one of the first mottoes or slogans that I was introduced to was “Show and Prove.” There's an accountability that was to be held for one another...And the critical aspect of this Nation, people cussing each other out and arguing, maybe over one word in a lesson, allows you to develop more accountability for what you say and what you do, in any aspect of life. You know I even find myself at work correcting other people when they say something like, “Everybody in Pittsburgh is my cousin.” “Oh really? How many people is that? What is the total population of Pittsburgh?” They might think I'm being a smart-ass. I'm just trying to show them that they need to be right and exact.

Born Supreme Allah, like many others, saw himself as selfish and irresponsible before becoming involved with the NGE. Since his involvement with the NGE and the birth of his daughter, his attitude had changed drastically:

[Our most important teaching is to] teach the young, the babies, because the babies are the future...The ones in the next generation are going to have to be the ones that carry on the torch. They are going to be the ones that have to show and prove - be held accountable - for setting up [NGE events and activities] and everything. This is the responsibility of the young, you know, Gods like myself.

*Finding 3: Involvement in the NGE developed intrinsic motivation in members to achieve their highest potential.*

NGE members, in identifying themselves as God, were not only empowered to perceive themselves as agents of change in the world, but often saw transforming themselves as the first step in transforming the world. Steel Free Allah quoted one of the early means by which NGE members appropriated the term Islam without attaching the religious connotations: “In Self Lies All Mathematics,” an acronym that defined the potentialities NGE members saw in themselves. Whereas Knowledge Fact Allah’s mention of the “birth of the universe laying within the mind of the Black man” draws on metaphysical reasoning, Ta’kim Intelligence Allah’s account accentuates the practicality of the same teaching:

In terms of self-mastery, [the NGE] taught me to focus and concentrate my efforts on my potential, my possibilities. Rather than concentrating on what I am [perceived as] in society, you know. And it allowed me to escape the idea of limitations. Everything is possible, once you know yourself, once you know your

power and what you are capable of...Getting the Knowledge of Self allowed me to be more productive, to be more positive. It showed me what I could do with this ability that I had. [It showed me] that I had so much power to destroy, that I could [instead] use that to create, to create my own world for my self, and to succeed.

A-King B Allah briefly noted, “Some of the most important teachings of this Nation [are that there are] no little I’s and no big U’s, and to be the best. [Just] to be *the best*.”

Knowledge Fact Allah emphasized the importance of the learning community in transforming individual weaknesses:

You have to be able to come among each one of those Gods and be able find what the weakness is, and each one of those Gods must be able to manifest and turn that weakness into a strength. To [the point] where you have no minuses, you have nothing but pluses, and a plus is to what? Add on.

NGE members reported that low self-esteem was no longer a factor in their lives. Allah Righteous, again emphasizing the role of identity in achievement, proposed, “If you don’t see value in yourself, you won’t see any need to add to that individual that you see when you look in the mirror.” Rasheem Allah also address the potentialities of Black people in his explanation of how NGE members could “use” the school system to accomplish their own goals:

We’re creative people. C’mon man, we created everything in existence, it [all]comes from us, so knowing and understanding that, we know that everything we put our mind to we gon’ make it supreme. So that’s why I say, whatever the young got a passion for, let ‘em go full speed ahead. If they got it in their mind

and their heart, they could be the best that ever did it. That's what mathematics teaches us, that we're not limited, nah mean? There's no boundaries with us.

King Builder Allah addressed external locus of control and internal locus of control:

There are many that are focused on what they don't have versus what they have, who have been taught to look outside of themselves for the answers, and as a result, they never got any real true answers...I think that those that have a strong sense of knowledge of who they are, that it propels them to excel.

Born Supreme Allah, like many participants, noted that the NGE made him a "better person" overall:

It's not like I "converted" overnight. It took time...But I realized that this is what I wanted to do, because this was going to make me a better person...Building with older Gods that walked with the Father, [I know that] he always told them, if you don't get a degree, you take what you have, and make something of yourself...[The older Gods say] "Go out and teach." "Do something and make something of yourself." "Be an example." You know, just being able to quote degrees [is not enough]...it's going to be your ways and actions that will attract them to you - the magnetic of your ways and actions.

The incidence of both variance and similarity between member responses is indicative of the nature of education in the NGE. Members often referred to the same lessons or specific examples to make distinct points on different topics. In one clear case of congruence, two participants used their knowledge of the etymology of the word "education" to make their points on striving for one's limitless potential. Steel Free Allah explained:

The word “education” comes from a Latin word. I think its *educare*, which means to bring out what is within. And it [the NGE] definitely did that for me. Because within, you know, the emotional subconscious, my super-conscious, magnetic conscious, infinite conscious – and these aren’t meaningless terms but they related to a more advanced study of psychology - they operate in levels of perfection. My internal organs and the systems within my body operate on an inborn intelligence that is naturally who I am...There is no mystery God. The Black man is God. Now, just because I say I’m God doesn’t mean I can just snap my fingers and shit happens for me the way I want. I’ve got an intrinsic understanding of myself, my connection to everything in life, how to equalize my words, ways, and actions, to stimulate life and matter to bring about the desired response.

Ta’kim Intelligence Allah, situated over 500 miles away from Steel Free Allah, observed:

You have to look at education from many different perspectives. It’s more than just giving somebody a book. It’s more than just having them memorize a sheet of facts and regurgitating that back to you. You know what I mean? If you look at education and what it means, it comes from the Latin word *educare*, which means to bring out of. And that’s what Knowledge of Self does. That’s what walking with somebody each and every day, hearing them speak and talk and live mathematics, does. It brings things out of you. It brings that which is already in you, out, you know?

Allah Righteous, although not using the same reference point, made the same argument:

So, once again, it doesn’t teach them how to think, or how to be independent in their thinking. It’s not really about education at all because part of education is

learning how to expand your mind. It's teaching you to learn [what they want you to know] because once we go outside of that boundary it becomes a blow to the system.

Finally, as evidenced in the findings for Research Question 1, NGE members strive to become exemplars of the NGE teachings and culture, possessing a number of desirable qualities, and thus attracting initiates. Kamal Universal, like several others, spoke on his own transition into that role:

I'm a role model [now]. I went from theoretically not being shit – you know everybody's something, but as they say, “Y'all ain't shit” – knowing I could somehow *evolve* to being shit, but not knowing *how* to be shit. Maybe “shit” isn't the best analogy. I went from being nothing to being a role model.

*Finding 4: Involvement in the NGE gave legitimacy to education where it had previously been absent.*

As noted in the findings for Research Question 2, the school is not viewed as an integral component of the inner-city landscape by many teens, but a foreign institution impressing often irrelevant information upon disinterested youth. Several members echoed Kamal Universal's notion that school was somewhere he “had to go” only to avoid negative repercussions from his mother. Other members, like Rasheem Allah and Supreme Science Allah, related that no one in their peer group viewed school as a valuable institution, and it was more socially respectable to be truant than in attendance. For many members, involvement in the NGE legitimized the idea of education, and made learning respectable. Allah Truth noted that, during the early years at Harlem Prep high school, “No one messed with the Gods. And every God wasn't a rough and tumble,

fighting type of God. There were so many Gods back then, a lot of the Gods were nerds too. But everybody knew not to mess with them because they knew what would happen.”

King Builder Allah addressed the same phenomenon in more recent years:

The Gods legitimized intelligence in the hood...What occurs in the [NGE] Culture is that it is cool to be intelligent. You know because the society is dumbing down now. And so you [society] don't want to, you don't want to teach the children how to speak properly, because “that's talking white.” So when we turn to the presence of Gods and the demographics and recruiting we get a lot of college students now in the Nation. And a lot of students [of the NGE nowadays] are, you know, graduates of high school and maybe attending college, so they have certain aspects of education and things of that nature, so that when they come back to the neighborhood and teach the 15 year olds, the 15 year olds are like, “Ok, this guy is cool, and he raps, he's got an Earth, or he speaks intelligently. He's a good brother but he's real talk [has street credibility].”

Ja'ree Divine Allah viewed the stylishness and street-savvy demeanor of NGE members as better equipping them to attract and educate even the most at-risk populations.

As far as you know, us being hip with Knowledge, you now, being “ill” and being “stylish” and all of that, we don't do it like these artists do, and just try to use it for it's magnetic benefits. We use this as what it truly is: the tools to civilize the planet Earth...And that don't mean you are a nerd if you are a mathematician. The illest motherfuckers and the illest styles are the most scientific...The Gods is the most righteous and the most intelligent people, and also the most grittiest...Within the Nation of the 5%, you are going to see both angles, you are

going to see both dynamics. And you are going to see both sides of the spectrum, man.

In regards to the flexibility of NGE members, who Kamal Universal noted should be comfortable teaching in the “school hall or the pool hall,” King Builder Allah added:

That’s what I try to get across in my teachings because sometimes people would be like “I didn’t even know that was you God,” and I would be like, “Well why?” “God, because you usually got a suit on, God” God, I’m swift and changeable.

We have to invoke methods so that people can see you standing tall. That means I can deal with everything. I can deal with the wino on the corner and the people in the boardroom. It doesn’t matter. It’s all equal God.

A-King B Allah sought to employ the “cool appeal” of NGE members in attracting at-risk youth towards participation in both the NGE and his non-profit program:

Yeah, I was saying that one of things that turns brothers from being unrighteous to righteous when you get in this Nation is that, until you get Knowledge of Self, being righteous don’t seem cool. You know, once you get Knowledge of Self you see that being righteous is the cool thing to do. And in this day in time, for me, that’s one of the things that I’m striving to do... I’m striving to make it, for these young seeds out here, I’m striving to make it cool. I’m striving to make this Nation cool for them. You know, the only reason they listen to 50 Cent and them is because they think they cool, you know? And I know I’m cooler than 50 Cent.

### *Summary*

In describing themselves before their involvement with the NGE, several participants used words like “conscious,” “righteous,” “spiritual,” “values,” and

“cultural,” as well as allusions to questioning religion. NGE members appear to have been interested in the ideas of “justice” and “righteousness” long before becoming aware of the NGE and having these ideas emphasized and reinforced. Conversely, all participants demonstrated some degree of risk, ranging from individuals influenced by their high-risk peers to individuals involved in gangs, selling and using drugs, and engaged in other anti-social or self-destructive behaviors. Participants used words ranging from “irresponsible,” “selfish,” and having “low self-esteem,” to “wild,” “savage,” and facing the prospects of being “dead or in jail.”

In terms of academic potential, nearly every participant alluded to having intelligence or academic capability that exceeded the requirements of the traditional curriculum. Members used words like “smart,” “intelligent,” and “advanced,” with varying degrees of frequency, and made mention of Honors programs, advanced placement classes, reading above grade level, as well as finishing work early and passing tests without studying. Participants also remarked that they “got bored,” their “attention span wandered,” they had too much “energy,” they were “class clown,” they “didn’t do the work,” and that they “excelled only when interested.”

Regarding themselves since their involvement with the NGE, all participants noted a dramatic change. Participants used words like “patient,” “at peace,” “happy,” “calm,” “righteous,” “civilized,” “wiser,” and “dedicated,” in describing themselves in the present. Although a great deal of the transformative pedagogy of the NGE focuses on self-development, the narratives reveal that much of the transformation of self is seen as a means to ultimately transform the world. The following chapter will present a summary of the findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations.

## Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify the educational practices of the NGE and the related educational attitudes of NGE members. The researcher interviewed 13 Black males who became involved with the NGE before adulthood and had previously demonstrated some of the characteristics of at-risk behavior for educational or societal failure. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies employed by the NGE?
2. What are the perspectives of NGE members regarding education?
3. How do members of the NGE characterize the influence of the NGE on their educational and societal achievement?

This chapter presents an overview of the research design, a summary of the study, the individual findings, and the major findings. The chapter concludes by presenting the implications of the study and recommendations for further research.

### *Research Design*

The research design was entirely qualitative, primarily utilizing interview data. The researcher an exhaustive review of the available literature before conducting semi-structured interviews with NGE members from a variety of backgrounds and demographics. The purpose of this study was to identify the educational practices of the NGE and the related educational attitudes of NGE members. The goal of the research was to present NGE pedagogy within the theoretically context of a nonformal educational methodology. Participants for this study included embers recognized by fellow NGE members as being heavily involved in NGE activities in their city or region, as well as interview respondents selected through theoretical sampling after a brief, informal

interview. A priority was placed on identifying and selecting for interview NGE members who became involved before adulthood and believe they would have been considered at-risk for academic or societal failure.

The researcher interviewed thirteen participants, conducting 11 individual interviews and one interview with two participants who opted to interview together. Interviews took place in eight urban cities along the east coast of the United States, including High Point and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Trenton, New Jersey; New York City, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Detroit, Michigan. These locales were selected to reflect a greater degree of geographic and demographic diversity than a one-site study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After transcribing interview data from audio recordings, the researcher began the process of analyzing interview transcripts. One reliable method for data analysis in qualitative research is known as a “chain of evidence” (Yin, 1989, p. 42). In this process, each of the interviews is tape recorded. The tapes are then transcribed and the transcriptions marked to distinguish by location and interviewee, and then reviewed for accuracy. After making sure that the transcripts are accurate, the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts looking for similarities in answers that help establish the chain of evidence. After collecting all data, the researcher can list patterns of experiences or perceptions that emerge, and begin naming categories or themes.

The second step of the thematic analysis, also known as grounded theoretical analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), is identifying all data that relate to the already classified themes. After identifying emergent themes and sub-themes, or findings, patterns may begin to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kellehear, 1993). Glaser and

Strauss (1967) provided the primary theoretical model used for thematic analysis in this study. In addition to applying the theoretical framework of nonformal education, the researcher incorporated the concepts of critical pedagogy into the analysis of data and development of theory from the findings. (Freire, 1970; 1973; 1975; 1989). Finally, the researcher referred back to participants for feedback by contacting participants by phone to clarify the intended meanings of statements the participants made in the interviews. This feedback process occurred shortly after the researcher received the completed interview transcripts from the transcribers, and was an essential step before proceeding to build a valid argument that drew on related literature (Aronson, 1994).

### *Summary of the Findings*

After thematic analysis of the 12 interviews, 15 unique findings emerged from the three research questions:

1. Involvement in the NGE introduces one to a learning community that also functions as a support network or family group.
2. Self-instruction is an integral facet of education in the NGE.
3. The NGE provides a culturally responsive alternative to the Eurocentric curriculum of the traditional school system.
4. The NGE often attracts learners through exemplars who possess a number of attractive qualities as a result of involvement.
5. Involvement in the NGE involves the affirmation of dialogue as means towards *conscientization*.
6. The curriculum of the traditional educational system is often perceived as inherently Eurocentric and oppressive.

7. The traditional educational system's ideology and instructional philosophy do not meet or address the needs of disadvantaged Black youth.
8. The traditional education system is not comprehensive because, in delivering the standard curriculum, traditional education does not sufficiently address non-curricular issues that negatively affect student outcomes.
9. The ideology and curriculum of the NGE is attractive to many Black youth who find themselves dissatisfied with the traditional educational canon.
10. Education in the NGE is intrinsically motivational, and drives one to study and engage in pedagogical practice without any extrinsic incentive.
11. Education in the NGE is comprehensive because, in addition to addressing "Knowledge of Self," the NGE reinvents, remediates, and/or supplements the learning available in the formal system.
12. Involvement in the NGE instills in members a sense of purpose and agency in helping and educating others.
13. Involvement in the NGE increased members' sense of responsibility and accountability.
14. Involvement in the NGE developed intrinsic motivation in members to achieve their highest potential.
15. Involvement in the NGE gave legitimacy to education where it had previously been absent.

The individual findings can be grouped and synthesized into 3 major findings, as outlined in the following section.

## *Conclusions*

The purpose of this section is to discuss the major findings of this study. Following the individual case analysis and cross case analysis of the data in Chapters 4 and 5, three major findings could be drawn from an analysis and synthesis of the 16 individual findings:

1. Through the NGE community's collective emphasis on the transformation of self as a means to transform the oppressive elements of reality, NGE members transcend factors for risk of academic and societal failure.
2. The traditional educational system does not adequately retain the engagement of many otherwise intelligent and academically capable Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. The NGE addresses educational issues that are currently outside the scope or focus of the traditional educational system.

*Major Finding 1: Through the NGE community's collective emphasis on the transformation of self as a means to transform the oppressive elements of reality, NGE members transcend factors for risk of academic and societal failure.*

The first major finding corresponds to the first research question, which sought to investigate the integral elements of the NGE pedagogy. After interviewing 13 NGE members from diverse geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds, many elements of NGE pedagogy emerged that were consistent among participant responses. These elements thus appear to be integral to the NGE pedagogy. Further, based on the perspectives of the participants, these elements represent significant factors in the transformative nature of the NGE's organizational habitus (McDonough, 1997). The

specific influences of the NGE pedagogy, as identified in the findings to the third research question, can be summarized as a “transformative force” (Alim, 2005) that motivates members towards self-transformation as a means towards transformation of the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970).

According to the findings, aspects of the NGE culture addressing the transformation of self in transforming reality include emphases on (a) transference of focus on external factors [society, parents, the “Mystery God”] to internal factors [self as God], (b) intrinsic motivation towards altruism, (c) self-instruction, (d) inquiry-based learning and investigation, (e) individualization of education and development, (f) dialogical action, and (g) *conscientization*, or the development of a critical awareness in order to challenge the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970).

*Major Finding 2: The traditional educational system does not adequately retain the engagement of many otherwise intelligent and academically capable Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

The second research question sought to identify NGE members’ perspectives on both traditional education and education in the NGE. Although members had varying experiences within the traditional educational system, the majority of their responses regarding formal schooling were critical or negative. Members supplied a variety of reasons for their perception of the traditional school system as - at best - inadequate, or - at worst - purposefully oppressive.

The findings suggest that NGE members were academically and socially capable youth who experienced discontent with the school system due to factors both inherent in the traditional educational system itself, and non-curricular issues that were often specific

to the communities where the participants were raised. In general, NGE members agreed that the traditional school system was not adequately engaging and educating Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds like themselves.

For several reasons, it is the researcher's contention that the formal educational system presents a number of factors responsible for actually increasing the at-risk status of Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Regarding the "deplorable" physical circumstances of public schools in disadvantaged communities, Kozol has noted the many children who "did not suffer these indignities passively but seemed to simmer with hostility toward many of the teachers and the principal" (2005, p. 3). In a similar vein, regarding the consequences of the school system's methodology and curriculum, Brann (1979) has written:

First and most pernicious is the perversion of the educational process into a mere formalism, an instrument of mere advancement, namely, when the chief or sole purpose is certification...Naturally, only a debased subject matter is amenable to treatment of this sort; it is utterly impossible to engage in true learning in this way. There are many explanations but no excuse for this perversion of learning. It is an indignity in education that any student should meet with open rebellion or quick departure. (p. 27)

*Major Finding 3: The NGE addresses educational issues that are currently outside the scope or focus of the traditional educational system.*

In contrast, participants generally proposed that the NGE addressed Black youth in ways the formal school system did not, and the education members received in the NGE was highly preferable to that offered in the traditional system. Members contended

that while the traditional curriculum was inherently oppressive, the NGE curriculum was “emancipatory” (Freire, 1970). Whereas the traditional system did not sufficiently address social conditions in disadvantaged communities, or respond to the consequences of these conditions in the way it dealt with the student population, the NGE was deeply grounded in the communities in which it existed. Lastly, several members reported that they became increasingly “high-risk” as a result of the negative school climate they experienced in the formal system, whereas the NGE promoted a low-risk lifestyle and motivated them to “slow down” (Tanner, 2002).

The findings suggest that the NGE addresses populations not adequately addressed by the traditional system, including (a) youth who are often truant or engaged in anti-social behaviors, (b) youth who are capable but dissatisfied with the traditional curriculum, (c) youth who are capable but not challenged by the traditional methodology, (d) youth who have difficulty learning the traditional way, and (e) youth who are engaged in multiple risk-taking behaviors. The NGE also addresses areas of deficiency in the traditional curriculum, including (a) the omission of non-whites from historical content, (b) whole-group learning that neglects learning styles, varying attention spans, and the necessity of dialogue, (c) school and faculty unprepared to respond to the needs of at-risk Black youth and severely distressed communities, and (d) school curriculum that does not meet the needs of at-risk Black youth and severely distressed communities.

As this is an exploratory study, there is little available literature relevant to the topic of NGE pedagogy with which to compare the findings. However, both outsider and insider accounts of the NGE, as well as the literature on nonformal education with Black youth, reveal a number of corresponding educational practices and perspectives identified

in the findings, including the need for culturally responsive curriculum (Hernandez-Tutop, 1998; Lee, 1991; 2003; Powell, 1991), the “rites of passage” (Allah, D. W., 1997; Banks, 1996; Cobbs, & Enger, 1992; Gathers, 1992a; Harvey, & Hill, 2004; Pinckney, 2001), the incorporation of role models and mentoring (Keating, 2002; Wilson, 1987), the affirmation of Black self-identity, especially as within the greater context of society (Gathers, 1992b; MacLeod, 1995; Oyserman & Harrison, 1999; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003), dialogue and horizontal relationships (Duncan, 1996; Freire, 1970), the development of a Black achievement ideology (Akom, 2003; Carter, 2005), and the transformative quality of NGE membership (Alim, 2005; Aulen, 2005; Gathers, 1993; Gotterher, 1975).

An additional goal of the research was to present NGE pedagogy within the context of a nonformal educational methodology. Specifically, such a methodology ideally incorporates the following aspects: (a) The purposes are non-credential-based; (b) the content is individualized, output centered and practical; (c) the delivery system is environment-based, community-related, flexible, learner-centered and resource saving; and (d) the system is self-governing and democratic (Simkins, 1977).

A review of the available literature on the NGE revealed that the NGE’s pedagogy and attendant practices were congruent with the theoretical framework of nonformal education. The available literature offered a number of significant facts, which, in turn, informed the current research investigation: (a) The NGE, as a social movement or culture, is educative in nature (Allah, J. U., 1995; McCloud, 1995; Noor, 2002; Smith, J. I., 1999; Tanner, 2002); (b) NGE education is not site-based and akin to detached street-based youth work (Allah, B., 1987; Allah, K., 2002; Jones, 2002); and (c)

NGE education is geared towards literacy (Allah, C. A., 2005a; Featherstone, 1971; Todorovic, 1996) and self-improvement (Aulen, 2005; Quinones, 2002).

Revisiting the four-part model outlined in Simkins (1977), the research findings demonstrate that:

1. The purposes of the NGE are non-credential-based (with the exception of accomplishing personal mastery of the 120 Lessons).
2. The content of the NGE becomes: (a) individualized as a result of self-instruction with a focus on self-development and the transformation of one's weaknesses, (b) output centered in terms of self-development, and (c) especially practical and relevant to individual, cultural, and environmental factors;
3. The delivery system is (a) environment-based through members who enter communities and peer group associations with the agenda of teaching, (b) community-related, (c) flexible, (d) learner-centered, and (e) resource saving due to no outside materials or funding being necessary or desired.
4. The system is self-governing and democratic due to the absence of any hierarchy (Gardell, 1996).

Based on the relevant literature and the research findings, the pedagogy of the NGE satisfies all of the above criteria and thus exemplifies a nonformal educational framework that represents a viable alternative for at-risk Black adolescents who have either disconnected or fully disengaged from the formal educational process. In addition, the incorporation of grounded theory analysis allowed for the development of a theoretical framework for nonformal education with at-risk Black youth out of the education

mainstream. Based on the relevant literature and the findings, the theory developed from this study offers the following explanations:

Otherwise academically capable students who belong to an involuntary minority group and have developed a racial self-schema rooted in an awareness of racial identity, and the resultant limited opportunities of social mobility for their group and oppressive elements in the society, are more likely to exercise oppositional stances towards the traditional educational system than minority students who identify with the success formula of the dominant ideology. The oppositional stances may manifest within a range spanning from passive disinterest or apathy to classroom instruction (these students are often labeled “disaffected”), to physical disengagement from the school experience (occurring as truancy, dropping out, and other behaviors intended to reduce school time), to overt rebellion and conflict with teachers and school administration. The traditional educational system, as it is designed around social constructs that reinforce the dominant ideology and perpetuate the social and economic underpinnings of the status quo, is unlikely to meet the above challenge, as evidenced by the various reforms and interventions which have either ignored the above factors affecting minority student failure, or worsened the situation by make schooling increasingly repressive and irrelevant to the needs and interests of Black students. As a result, Black students increasingly disengage from the school experience, mentally and physically, and opt for education as it occurs outside the context of the traditional system. As a result, nonformal education constitutes a significant portion of traditional student’s educational experience, and the majority for youth out of the education mainstream. Nonformal education is generally unstructured and occurs through popular culture and media, as well as stronger

social influences like peer associations and gangs. Groups like the NGE and its pedagogy represent relevant means to engage disaffected youth, evincing that where the curriculum of the traditional system is deficient, effective nonformal education must supplement and accommodate. In effect, nonformal education “fills the void” left by traditional education, a void which is connected more to the drop out rate of Black students than to the in-school achievement gap between Black students and others.

### *Implications for Practice*

The findings point to a number of shortcomings in the traditional educational system, and raise serious questions about how effectively traditional schools educate students, especially Black youth from disadvantaged communities. While a number of members cited teachers’ inability to hold their attention or engage their intellect with the traditional instructional methodology, several others complained that the curriculum itself was discouraging. In many cases, the school environment was not deemed conducive to learning. As a whole, the findings suggest that schools and school staff have been unprepared to meet the needs of large segments of the Black student population since the 1960s. As a result, Black students in disadvantaged communities have either found themselves inadequately educated by the school system or have voluntarily disengaged themselves from the formal educational process (Card & Krueger, 1992).

As in the quote popularly attributed to Mark Twain, “I have never let my schooling interfere with my education,” (Kidd, 1969, p. 9) many youth turn to nonformal associations like the NGE for their primary education, viewing the education found in the traditional school setting as either secondary or altogether irrelevant. For many youth growing up in disadvantaged communities, the most readily prominent alternative to

engagement in the nonformal education of a proactive group like the NGE is gang involvement and criminality (Collum, 2001; Holloway, 1994). The findings suggest that many Black youth who are at-risk for academic or societal failure are academically capable, intelligent youth with untapped potential for success. If the projections of the participants are any indication of fact, then similar youth who do not become involved with an equally redemptive and transformative process very often end up “dead or in jail.”

According to the findings, the NGE culture is a nonformal educational institution whose transformative pedagogy allows for previously at-risk youth to become successful, low-risk adults. The findings suggest that many Black youth from disadvantaged backgrounds turn to alternative ideologies like that of the NGE because of their dissatisfaction with both the traditional school curriculum and its de-emphasis of Black identity and contribution to greater society, as well as a desire to obtain - often on their own - the learning to fill this void. This fact implies that Black youth are more oriented towards education than the achievement gap suggests, although the type of education in question is evidently substantially different.

An implication for school leaders to consider is the role of the school itself in fostering at-risk behaviors and attitudes. Several of the participants of this study were being pushed towards education in their home environment, but for a variety of reasons, the students' needs were not met in the school. It is also evident that students who disengage from the academic experience or disconnect fully from education mainstream by dropping out often do so because of the shortcomings of the school system in meeting their diverse needs. The findings suggest that the formal school system itself is not seen

by many Black youth as a beneficial institution, and instead was seen as something to escape, avoid, ignore, or grudgingly pass through. Not only was the school site itself not regarded in positive terms, but the traditional school system as a whole was perceived as being constructed on oppressive premises, such as “maintaining the status quo,” “keeping people blind,” and “miseducation.” As a change of the scope needed to remedy these effects would require years, if not decades, of redesigning antiquated mechanisms, school leaders presently should educate themselves to become more aware of student dissatisfaction with curriculum and methodology in order to meet those needs on a local or site-based level, while government and non-governmental organizations alike should begin developing and proliferating nonformal educational programs for at-risk youth out of the education mainstream.

#### *Implications for Research*

As this was an exploratory study of the culture of the NGE, there was limited opportunity to fully and consistently apply an already developed theory, like that of Freire (1970), Giroux (1994), or Delgado (1995). However, a number of Freirian concepts emerged in the findings and have been noted throughout. A full ethnographic account, including participant-observation research - although highly desirable - was untenable given the constraints on time and resources. Further research, conducted over an extended period of time, could focus on the cultural practices and nuances of the NGE culture, or an analysis of how NGE members interpret and apply the 120 Lessons. A longitudinal study of NGE member attitudes as they transition through the developmental process of becoming incorporated into the NGE would offer a more comprehensive look into the culture and influence of the NGE. Finally, as this study focused on issues

affecting Black males, a future study of the NGE could explore issues surrounding women in the NGE culture.

Other suggestions include theoretical analyses of the NGE culture or pedagogy in the context of critical race theory in education (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, Delyhle, & Villenes; 1999; Tate, 1997) or adult education (Cain, 2002; Knowles, 1970; Tight, 1996), as adolescent members typically identify themselves with adult attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Rasheem Allah's commentary on "already" being a "grown man"). Alternately, a quantitative study on any aspect of the NGE would be highly useful and would increase generalizability. Highly advisable are studies focused on collecting and analyzing statistical data on the NGE community, as few records of the kind exist.

Further research should also be conducted on the traditional educational system. As Kozol (2005) noted, there is "no misery index" (p. 163) for students in public schools. While school administrators and legislators push for increased test scores and the school-based interventions that apparently succeed in raising assessment results, little consideration is paid to whether test scores actually translate into post-school success (Wood, 2004), or whether large segments of the student population are, in effect, turned off from school and education as a result of their experiences in the public school system.

### *Recommendations*

This study presents a number of implications for nonformal alternatives geared towards the education of at-risk Black youth. Community organizations, as well as educational institutions in partnerships with community organizations, can begin employing similar pedagogical practices to those of the NGE to engage and educate youth who are disengaging from the academic experience, or who have disconnected

from the education mainstream altogether. The shortcomings of the traditional educational system currently leave large segments of the minority student population underserved, especially in severely distressed neighborhoods where poverty and crime leave youth who are not thriving in the formal school setting with few options. As higher education transitions away from site-based learning to accommodate the lifestyles and circumstances of its student population, one implication of this study is that similar options are needed for the country's youth population. The results of this study suggest that thousands of academically and socially capable Black youth across the country are at increasing risk for academic and societal failure because of the inadequacies of the traditional school system. Community and educational leaders need to work diligently, further examining the pedagogy of the NGE, to develop culturally responsive solutions to meet the needs of America's at-risk minority youth.

Considering the systemic inadequacies of the traditional American educational system, especially in meeting the needs of Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is highly advisable that comprehensive alternatives be sought. As Black students, particularly adolescent males, are increasingly disengaging from the formal academic experience, it also advisable that the alternatives be designed to address the large segment of the youth population who are out of the education mainstream, as well as those who are regularly truant. Such an alternative methodology is best implemented outside of the scope of the traditional system and delivered in a nonformal context, so as to avoid the pitfalls of the numerous educational reforms and interventions mentioned in the relevant literature.

What is needed, the researcher recommends, is a large-scale introduction of nonformal education through various agencies and groups dedicated solely to the needs of at-risk Black youth. This alternative education framework should incorporate the pedagogical constructs identified in the findings of this study, and not be tied in any way to governmental aid or mandates. This educational model, like other alternative approaches to education (Dewey, 1938; Montessori, 1967), will be designed to “fill a void,” or serve an area of clear deficiency in the traditional American educational system. These deficiencies - identified in the findings, as well as in the review of literature - can be met effectively by the widespread implementation of a nonformal educational methodology that is designed around the intellectual, affective, and behavioral needs of at-risk Black youth. This methodology should incorporate the pedagogical strategies used by groups like the NGE to redirect wayward youth toward academic and societal success.

Although it is unrealistic to call for the dismantling of the traditional education system, even in light of its many shortcomings, nationwide implementation of an effective approach to nonformal education for at-risk youth in disadvantaged communities may significantly improve otherwise worsening trends in juvenile incarceration, gang activity, violent crime, teenage promiscuity, and adult illiteracy and unemployment, as well as the ubiquitous achievement gap between Black males and their peers.

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## APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### What We Teach and What We Will Achieve

### *What We Teach*

1. That Black people are the Original People of the planet earth.
2. That Black people are the fathers and mothers of civilization.
3. That the science of Supreme Mathematics is the key to understanding man's relationship to the universe.
4. Islam is a natural way of life, not a religion.
5. That education should be fashioned to enable us to be self sufficient as a people.
6. That each one should teach one according to their knowledge.
7. That the Blackman is God and his proper name is ALLAH. Arm, Leg, Leg, Arm, Head.
8. That our children are our link to the future and they must be nurtured, respected, loved, protected and educated.
9. That the unified Black family is the vital building block of the nation.

### *What We Will Achieve*

1. **National Consciousness:** National Consciousness is the consciousness of our origin in this world, which is divine. As a nation of people we are the first in existence and all other peoples derived from us. National Consciousness is the awareness of the unique history and culture of Black people and the unequalled contributions we have made to world civilization, by being the fathers and mothers of civilization. National Consciousness is the awareness that we are all one people regardless to our geographical origins and that we must work and struggle as one if we are to liberate ourselves from the domination of outside forces and bring into existence a Universal Government of Love, Peace and Happiness for all the people of the planet.
2. **Community Control:** Community Control of the educational, economic, political, media and health institutions on our community. Our demand for Community Control flows naturally out of our science of life, which teaches that we are the Supreme Being in person and the sole controllers of our own destiny; thus we must have same control on the collective level that we strive to attain on the individual level. It is prerequisite to our survival that we take control of the life sustaining goods and services that every community needs in order to maintain and advance itself and advance civilization. Only when we have achieved complete Community Control will we be able to prove to the world the greatness and majesty of our Divine Culture, which is Freedom.
3. **Peace:** Peace is the absence of confusion (chaos) and the absence of confusion is Order. Law and Order is the very foundation upon which our Science of Life rest. Supreme Mathematics is the Law and Order of the Universe, this is the Science of Islam, which is Peace. Peace is Supreme Understanding between people for the benefit of the whole. We will achieve Peace, in ourselves, in our communities, in our nation and in the world. This is our ultimate goal.

PEACE

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Instrument

## Interview Instrument

### Demographic Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Years of involvement with NGE \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of education completed \_\_\_\_\_

Current employment \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Questions

1. What were you like before you became involved in the NGE?  
[Probes: social behavior, academic achievement, attitude toward education]
2. Describe your experience in the traditional school system.  
[Probe: perception of traditional education in this country]
3. How are you different now from the way you were before you became involved?  
[Probes: influence of NGE on aspirations and achievement, self-comparison with peers, possibilities if never introduced to NGE]
4. What has been your experience learning in the NGE?  
[Probes: introduction, distinctions from traditional ed., difficulties, accomplishments]
5. What is the role of education in the culture of the NGE?  
[Probes: role of the lessons, teaching methods, changes observed]
6. What are the most important teachings of the NGE?  
[Probes: application of teachings, changes observed]
7. What do you think of other community and youth organizations in comparison with the NGE?  
[Probes: implications]

## APPENDIX C

### Factors that Place Students At Risk

## Factors that Place Students At Risk

Wells (1990) has identified a list of circumstances that can place students at risk for academic or societal failure. The following list, adapted from Wells' *At-risk youth:*

*Identification, programs, and recommendations* (1990), presents factors occurring on the individual, family, school, and community levels.

### School Related

- Conflict between home/school culture
- Ineffective discipline system
- Lack of adequate counseling
- Negative school climate
- Lack of relevant curriculum
- Passive instructional strategies
- Inappropriate use of technology
- Disregard of student learning styles
- Retentions/suspensions
- Low expectations
- Lack of language instruction

### Student Related

- Poor school attitude
- Low ability level
- Attendance/truancy
- Behavior/discipline problems
- Pregnancy
- Drug abuse
- Poor peer relationship
- Nonparticipation
- Friends have dropped out
- Illness/disability
- Low self-esteem/self-efficacy

### Community Related

- Lack of community support services or response
- Lack of community support for schools
- High incidence of criminal activities
- Lack of school/community linkages

### Family Related

- Low socioeconomic status
- Dysfunctional homelife
- No parental involvement
- Low parental expectations
- Non-English-speaking home
- Ineffective parenting/abuse
- High mobility

## APPENDIX D

### Glossary of NGE Terminology

## Glossary of NGE Terminology

Term	Definition
85	In general usage, “85” or “85 percent” refer to non-NGE members. Technically, the term refers to the 85 percent of the population who do not know the truth of God.
<i>Build, Building</i>	“Building” typically refers to the constructive communication NGE members engage in with each other as well as with non-NGE members.
<i>Civilize</i>	The term “civilize” refers to the dialogical and pedagogical activity of NGE members employ in educating others.
<i>Knowledge of Self</i>	“Knowledge of Self” refers to the understandings that NGE members develop through involvement, especially in regards to identity and Godhood. As a result, “Knowledge of Self” can be used synonymously with involvement in the NGE.
<i>Knowledge, Knowledging</i>	Used as a verb, to “knowledge” something is synonymous with the act of learning it or becoming aware of it.
<i>Mystery God</i>	The “Mystery God” is a common way for NGE members to refer to the immaterial, transcendental characterization of deity popular in most theistic religions.
<i>Original Man, Original People</i>	“Original” is used synonymously with Black, although “Original” technically refers to any non-white population.
<i>Savage</i>	A “savage” according to the 120 Lessons, refers to “someone who has lost the knowledge of himself and is living a beast way of life.” In its common usage, the term refers to an often illicit lifestyle characterized by indiscretion.