

THE JEWELS OF THE COMMUNITY: AFRICAN AMERICAN GRANDMOTHERS
RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN
BUILDING HOPE, NURTURING DREAMS AND SUSTAINING THEIR LEGACY

A Dissertation by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing husband, Reggie and my beautiful girls Mya, Aniya. I want to thank my grandparents who loved me unconditional and played a major role in developing me into a productive citizen. I would also like to dedicate this to the wonderful grandmothers who participated in the study as well as those grandmothers who are raising and caring for their grandchildren, you are to be celebrated.

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and commitment to higher education. Remember, Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. -Nelson Mandela. Girls you have the talent and skills, take advantage of your opportunities, education yourselves and change the world. Mommy loves you.

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ABSTRACT

According to the United States Census Bureau (2010) increasing numbers of children in the U. S. are living with their grandparents, whom are responsible for their grandchildren's care and upbringing. Although this phenomenon cuts across social class and ethnic group lines, it appears to be common among African Americans (Caputo, 2001; Heywood and sands and Golberg, Glen 2000). A qualitative study was conducted, using counter-storytelling narrative inquiry to gather and interpret the data. The Black feminist perspective was used as a guiding theoretical framework for exploring the experiences of these African American grandmothers. The purpose of the study is to provide insight into the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. Data collection included individual conversational interviews with African American grandmothers. This study concluded overall, the grandmothers viewed their experience. These views were displayed through actions by some school personnel. The grandmothers shared recommendations that could be helpful to public school personnel as they interact with grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren.

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CHAPTER 1

Research Problem

According to the United States Census Bureau (2010) increasing numbers of children in the U.S. are living with their grandparents, many of whom are responsible for their grandchildren's care and upbringing. In fact, the number of children living in a grandparent's household rose from 4.6 million in 2005-07 to 5.2 million in 2008-10 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The increase has been attributed to a variety of factors such as drug and alcohol problems, the rise in single-headed households, teen pregnancy, female incarceration, mental illness, and physical health problems such as HIV/AIDS resulting in the death of a parent (Burnette, 1999; Conway, Jones, & Speakes-Lewis, 2011; Dowdell, 1995; Harden, Clyman, Kriebel, & Lyons, 2004). Sixty-three percent of the 5.2 million children living with grandparents reside with their grandmothers (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Although this phenomenon cuts across social class and ethnic group lines, it appears to be most common among African Americans (Caputo, 2001; Heywood, 1999; Sands & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). African American families represent the majority (52%) of all grandparents who are raising grandchildren (United States Census Bureau, 2010). In African American communities, grandmothers assume the role of kinship caregiver more often than other relations and genders (M. Minkler & Roe, 1996). Thus, African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren has become a common family structure in American households (Wilson, 2002).

While this African American family structure has become prevalent in the United States, public school personnel who have these students in their classrooms may not fully understand the dynamics of the family structure or how to support it. Public school educator views may be

influenced by their personal beliefs that the white middle-class family constitutes the norm and African Americans must replicate it to be viewed as legitimate (W. R. Allen, 1978). Allen's perspective is one of cultural deviance that views the nuclear family with a male provider and head (which at the time was most prevalent form among white Americans) as normative. Thus, African American deviations from the nuclear family were judged to be dysfunctional or pathological. Thompson and Walker (1989) a decade later found Allen's framework was still applicable because the primary thrust of African American family research had not changed much with comparative work and explanations of racial differences being a dominant focus. Consequently, African American families have been compared to the normative white middle class standard instead of being studied, appreciated, or understood on their own terms. Applying white middle class norms and passing judgment on family circumstances can limit the potential for educators to create positive relationships with African American families, which are imperative to supporting children in school (McLaughlin, 1990). In this study, I argue the African American family is not an image of dysfunctional conditions, but a product of history and culture that has been conducive to the survival of the African American family since the days of slavery (McDaniel, 1990). Therefore, instead of adopting a deficit view of African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren, this study takes a stance that African American grandmothers serve a rich and valuable role in American society. In the African American culture, the long-standing tradition of grandmothers raising grandchildren and being part of child rearing is what makes them unique.

Historical Context of African American Family Traditions

The history of African American families has its beginnings in the continent of Africa (Jimenez, 2002). As Sudarkasa (1998) explained, in the traditional African family the core of the relationship is marriage and the production of offspring. Given the role of the extended family in other aspects of social life, the reproduction of offspring was the responsibility of married individuals. However, the care of offspring may not have been the exclusive responsibility of the married individuals. The primary family unit in Africa at the time of slavery in the United States was the extended family, which included the community (Lowenberg & Bogin, 1976). Children belonged to, and were the responsibility of, the collective community (Martin & Martin, 1980). In a discussion of cultural elements of Africa, Yusane (1990, p. 42) noted “kinship relations were the foundation of social organization” and the extended family system is based on interdependent functions. Therefore, African children were valued and viewed as an investment in the community’s future (Sudarkasa, 1998). Africans saw children as a part of their immortality, and there were no “illegitimate” children (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). These and many other elements of African family life prevailed in the United States, in modified form, and account for the resilience of the family during slavery (Yusane, 1990). Sudarkasa (1998) further explained how the extended family networks formed during slavery by Africans and their descendants were based on the institutional heritage Africans brought with them to America, and the form it took reflected the influence of European culture. Many slaves came to the United States not with a tradition of independent nuclear families, but with an attachment to broad kinship groups (Wilson, 2002).

In the United States, the deliberate breaking up of African American families during slavery promoted increased reliance on grandparents as caregivers (Billingsley & Peterson, 1994). An important and enduring value in African American families has been that of addressing the needs of the family and community (Ruiz, 2000). Placing the needs of children above their own is a familiar theme among African American grandmothers throughout the pre-colonial African and American slavery literature. This tradition continued with the great migrations north in the first half of the 20th century following World War I and during the 1940's, which resulted in African American children frequently being left in the care of their grandparents while their parent sought employment to support the family unit (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). During this period in history, it was not uncommon for a grandmother to take in her grandchildren and raise them as her own. These arrangements were not formalized; rather, they were seen as a means of meeting several family members' needs: the child would be cared for, the parent would be free to leave to find work, and the grandmother would have a child to raise and love who would sometimes help take care of her (Powdermaker, 1969). Children were taken in "for the joy of having them, the assistance they may bring, or merely because they need a good home" (Powdermaker, 1969, p. 202). Grandmothers continued to play an important role in African-American families after World War II. As young mothers worked outside the home, their mothers cared for their children (Carson, 1969). During the 1950's and 1960's it remained common for urban African American children to be sent to grandparents in the South for the summer to maintain ties with extended families and to learn cultural traditions (Strom, Collinsworth, Strom, & Griswold, 1992).

The biological relationship of grandparent to grandchild did not define the form or function of the grandmother role. For many African Americans, there was no constituted role of the grandmother; instead, the grandmother was another woman shouldering responsibility for the family's survival and community well-being (Jimenez, 2002). In the African-American community, the designation "grandmother" was a fluid one, often used interchangeably with "mama" and freely given by family members and others to women who may not have been biological grandmothers (Martin & Martin, 1980). Women in the community not the child's biological mother often played the role of other mothers. These women assisted blood mothers with responsibilities of child-care and upbringing for short-to long term periods, informal and formal arrangements. They can be, but not limited to grandmothers, sisters, aunts or cousins, family friend, and even church mothers (Collins, 1991).

The strength and survival of African American families has been dependent largely on the commitment and unselfish acts of grandmothers (Staples, 1985). An African American family, with grandmothers raising the children, is not anomalous nor always arising from a family deficit; rather it is a family formation in a tradition inherited from strong kinship in Africa, the slave yards in the south, and in the struggle of African Americans in America (Sudarkasa, 1998; Wilson, 2002). To better understand African American grandmothers who are caring for and providing upbringing to their grandchildren, it is important to understand the experiences and perspectives of these women.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

With an increasing number of African American grandmothers providing care and upbringing for their grandchildren, it becomes more important for public school personnel to

understand the cultural experiences of this growing family unit. The purpose of this research was to provide insight into the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. After listening to the voices of African American grandmothers it helped create a deeper understanding of this family unit. Creating better understanding will contribute to greater probability of African American grandmothers receiving what they need and want from public schools; together as partners with school personnel they will obtain the desired outcomes for children. The overarching research question guiding this study was: what are the experiences of African American grandmothers who are caring and providing upbringing for their grandchildren as they interact with public school personnel? Specific questions addressed in the study were:

1. How do African American grandmothers describe their own experiences with schools?
2. How do African American grandmothers describe their relationships with their grandchildren?
3. How do African American grandmothers describe their experiences with public school personnel?

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Theory

I selected to position this study within Black Feminist Theory, which is an extension of the feminist movement of the 1960's and 70's (Collins, 1999a; Hooks, 2000). The Black feminist movement grew out of a White feminist perspective claiming the group either did not recognize or misrepresented African American women and their experiences (Hooks, 2000). A. Walker (2003) explained that one perspective of the Black feminist movement supported an agenda of African American women's self-definition, perseverance, and self-determination. The Black

Feminist agenda includes ongoing struggles against sexism and racism experienced by African American women. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in Black women's standpoint (Collins, 1991). One example of a core theme is a legacy of struggle, which has been encapsulated by Black feminist scholar Cannon (1985) who wrote,

Throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black women's reality as a situation of struggle—a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed. (p. 30)

Cannon (1985) further suggested the phenomenon of white male privilege and its use to oppress is not only denied and protected, but alive and well in its effects in the lives of African American women. The vital roles and historical influences African American women have made in the U.S. have been overlooked with only a few isolated events acknowledged. This lack of recognition leads to the ongoing struggles encountered by African American women. As history continues to deny the presence and the contribution of African American women, it tends to lend its glory to the accomplishment of the dominant group, white males (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003) and history is just one way to manifest white privilege and oppression as described earlier by Cannon. Peggy McIntosh, (2003) a White American feminist and anti-racist activist at the Wellesley Center for women, described white male privilege as being an invisible knapsack full of unearned assets such as special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code books, passports, visas, clothes, compasses, emergency gear, and blank checks. Through her study regarding the basis of sexism, she began to explore White privilege and power. In her analysis

she was able to see that issues of power included racism and sexism. Within the U.S., the dominant culture, the group that has the most power and privilege is White men (Lindsey et al., 2003). However, most members of this group do not view themselves as more powerful or privileged than others in society, so they do not see themselves as contributors to the philosophy of White privilege (Cheek, 1976; Gilligan, 1982; McIntosh, 1988). McIntosh supports the claim of the Black feminists, who suggest that Black women are misrepresented and oppressed by white women. In her shared work experiences with Black women she examined her level of consciousness and recognized her own privileges gained as a white woman. From her study and experiences, McIntosh encouraged white males to assume this responsibility of raising their consciousness about sexism and racism (McIntosh, 1988). Delpit (2006) further suggested there are two distinct responses to privilege: (a) Those with greater power are frequently least aware of or at least unwilling to acknowledge its existence; and (b) those with less power are often most aware of power discrepancies. Lindsey et al. (2003) wrote the power that accrues to the entitled in U.S. society is so pervasive that those who have it do not see its pervasiveness.

Many Americans buy into the myth of meritocracy, that if you work hard enough you can get ahead, and if you do not make it, you did not work hard enough. This type of hegemonic thought means not recognizing that your gender or race may put someone at a disadvantage. Furthermore, being African American women exposed to controlling images of Black womanhood has been central to the dehumanization and exploitation of African American women (Collins, 1986a). Some have called this phenomenon double jeopardy (Beal, 1971), that is, being Black and female is twice the disadvantage. In spite of the differences created by

historical era, age, social class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, the legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is a common thread binding African American women (Collins, 1991).

African American women (especially grandmothers) may have a difficult time navigating through the school system and interacting with school personnel because of this legacy of racism and sexism (Banks, 1991). Collins (1991) further argued, those who control the schools, media, and other cultural institutions of society prevail in establishing their viewpoint as superior to others. She further stated an oppressed group's experiences may put its members in a position to see things differently, but their lack of control over the ideological apparatuses of society makes expressing a self-defined standpoint more difficult. Groups unequal in power are also unequal in their ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others. As Lorde (1984) pointed out, "it is clear that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others- for their use and to our detriment" (Lorde, 1984, p. 45). For example, traditional social science research assesses African American women's experiences in families using the normative standard developed for middle-class American and European nuclear families (Andrew Billingsley & Billingsley, 1968; Brewer, 1988; Ladner, 1987).

African American women whose family experience is in traditional African American culture may have a different world experience from those who are not African American and female. Scott (2008) defined consciousness as the symbols, norms, and ideological forms people create to give meaning to their acts. He further explained that consciousness is grounded in personal history, experiences, and identity as understood within particular cultural contexts.

The Black feminist perspective is suitable as a guiding theoretical framework for investigating Black women's lives. Black feminism is specific in its integration, validation, and

centering of Black women's realities. It rejects the notion of universal laws of behavior, favoring idiosyncratic approaches by focusing on individual functioning, goals and meaning within Black and female realities (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Black feminist theory allowed me to place the values and lived experiences of African American grandmothers at the center of the analysis and allowed them to define their lived experiences as they see themselves rather than how others see them (Collins, 1999b).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review consists of topics that support and guide the problem and the research questions. The literature reveals a journey of the strength of the African American families and the role that kinship care plays in the lives of African American families. The role of the African American grandmother and the barriers that she may face are also a major component that set the tone and basis for the research. The literature also explored a walk in time through de jure segregation to current school experiences for African American families.

Kinship Care

The phrase “kinship care” was inspired by the work of Stack (1975a), who documented the importance of extended kinship networks in the African American community. The word “kin” typically includes any relative by blood or marriage or any person with close nonfamily ties to another (Takas, 1992). Billingsley and Peterson (1994) referred to the nonfamily tie as relationships of appropriation, that is, unions without blood ties or marital ties. Other authors prefer the terms “kinship caregivers” for those who provide private care and “kinship foster parents” for those whose care falls within the formal child welfare system (J.D. Berrick, Barth, & Needell, 1994). Kinship care has legally been defined in congressional reports as “any living arrangement in which a relative or someone else emotionally close to the child has primary responsibility for rearing the child” (Rankin, 2002, p. 156).

Kinship foster care was originally intended to assure that children were able to maintain emotional attachments to relatives and experience the least amount of disruption when removed from the care of birth parents (Harris & Skyles, 2008; Rankin, 2002). Many welfare experts

believe that children are better off when placed with relatives (Beeman, Kim, & Bullerdick, 2000; Jill Duerr Berrick, 1997; Ryan, Hinterlong, Hegar, & Johnson, 2010). Therefore, the kinship foster care practice of placing children with relatives rather than strangers became widely accepted. While it might be preferable for kin to take on this responsibility, at one time child welfare workers and judges harbored significant stereotypes about placement with grandparents. They assumed the adult child's parenting skills were learned through interactions with a dysfunctional mother, father, or extended family member (Gray & Nybell, 1990; Sheindlin, 1994). Over the years, this thinking has shifted as changes in legislation encouraged or required that a preference be given to relatives in placement of foster children.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2011) there were approximately 408,425 children in formal out-of-home foster care placements in the United States in 2010; approximately 25% of those children were residing with relatives. The most common kinship foster care placement is with grandparents, typically the maternal grandmother. A large majority of African American children in placements are in "kinship care" or formal placement with grandmothers (Brooks, Webster, Berrick, & Barth, 1998). The system of African American kinship care in America developed in Africa prior to slavery (Rankin, 2002). It has been a long-standing practice for African American elders to raise their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and extended kin (Rankin, 2002).

Increasingly, African American grandmothers are caring for their grandchildren through kinship care (Karp, 1993). Kinship care has been identified as a major strength of African American families (Linda M Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Gleeson, 1995; Meredith

Minkler & Roe, 1993), and the African American woman in her role as grandmother is the relative most frequently being the primary caregiver for her grandchildren (Dubowitz, 1994). L.M. Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, and Merriwether-de Vries (1994) reported that African American grandmothers, in general, see their role as necessary for the survival of the family. African American grandmothers have been noted for their strength in caring for children in the face of major crisis (Collins, 1991). The African American grandmother has been described as guardian of the next generation (Frazier, 1939); the preserver of extended families, the keeper and sharer of history, wisdom, and folk beliefs, the source and communicator of values and ideals (Hill-Lubin, 1991); and the protector of grandchildren (Turner, 1993). While African American grandmothers may find their role necessary for the survival of the family, it may come with challenging experiences while they are caring for their school-aged grandchildren.

African American Grandmothers and School Personnel

An African American grandmother may find caring for her grandchildren rewarding but it also has its challenges (Burnette, 1997). As African American grandmothers interact with the educational system and school personnel, they often become aware of changes that have happened since their own children were in school (Gibson, 2002). These new responsibilities require the grandmothers to navigate the system differently because of changes in the educational system as well as their status as grandmothers rather than mothers (Cherlin & Furstenberg Jr, 2009).

As several researchers found, African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren can be perceived by some school personnel as a deficient family structure (Gray & Nybell, 1990; Sheindlin, 1994). Some of the findings suggest that grandmothers are generally older, sicker,

and less physically active (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001). The findings from Oliver W Edwards (2006) suggest that some school personnel believe grandchildren being raised by African American grandmothers experienced school-related emotional and behavior distress to the degree that intervention should be considered. This does not mean that the behaviors are a result of being raised by African American grandmothers, but rather the result of the traumatic circumstances leading to the grandmother assuming the parenting role (Oliver W Edwards, 2006). The study also examined perceptions of school personnel who interact with the family unit. The study suggested that children raised by grandmothers would likely occupy substantial amounts of school personnel time; further suggesting if teachers must spend much of their day focusing on the needs of these grandchildren, they will have less time to see to the academic and behavioral needs of other students (Oliver W Edwards, 2006). This perception may not be intentional on the part of school personnel, but it is displayed in their behavior as they interact with African American grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren.

School personnel need a clear sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities in order to understand those of their students and families (Banks, 1991). Despite the importance of school personnel understanding general aspects of their students' familial culture, family structures, and language, there is no such thing as a typical Hispanic family or typical African American family. The danger involved in obtaining knowledge about specific cultures or family structures is it increases the chance that school personnel will unintentionally act in inappropriate ways (Mehan & Trujillo, 1989), assuming there is a monolithic African American or Hispanic culture. These perceptions and misrepresentations may keep school personnel from seeing individuals for who they are and not making assumptions based on what they think they know about their students'

culture, family structure, or language. These challenges may create obstacles for African American grandmothers as they navigate the educational system and interact with schools. Understanding the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who care for their grandchildren may provide school personnel with insight as they interact with African American grandmothers.

Segregated Schools and African American Families

During the de jure segregation era which began with the 1896 Plessy v Ferguson decision and ended in 1954 with Brown v Topeka Board of Education, African American communities formalized their own educational settings (Brown & Harlan, 1896). Schools were built and school staff were developed and recruited to serve the African American students (V. S. Walker, 2001). Recent research conducted on segregated schools found they had many positive characteristics, including exemplary principals and teachers, strong parental support and extended family (Patterson, Mickelson, Petersen, & Gross, 2008; V. S. Walker, 2000) which are described in the following sections.

Exemplary principals and teachers. African American principals and teachers created a special kind of environment in the segregated schools. The school principals and teachers were caring, involved, and respected in the community (Patterson et al., 2008). The school principal and teachers believed in the students' and their abilities to learn; as learning was obtained through high expectations and pride (Patterson et al., 2008). The teachers provided students with a demanding teaching style; they ensured that all students mastered the material presented. The segregated schools provided curriculum, including representation of African American studies and various teaching styles to meet the students' needs (Siddle Walker, 1996; Sowell, 1977).

The teachers “made” the students do their work (W. C. Edwards, Royster, & Bates, 1979, pp. 15-16). They “made sure the students got their lessons” (Davis, 1996, p. 116). According to Sowell (1977) school personnel were “hard taskmasters,” who gave lots of work, refused to lower the standards, and “if students didn’t learn they stayed after school as long as necessary to learn” (p. 31).

In the segregated setting, school personnel assumed the responsibility of interacting with students beyond the workday and interceded when outside distractions interfered with learning. School personnel also held extracurricular tutoring sessions, visited homes and churches in the community where they taught, even if they did not live in the community, and provided guidance (V. S. Walker, 2000). School personnel talked with students before and after class, carried a student home if it meant that the child would be able to participate in some extracurricular activity (Hundley, 1965). Some of the extracurricular activities included in the formation of segregated schools were athletics, future teacher clubs, library clubs, fine arts activities, and observance of holidays. Segregated schools offered students the opportunity of being “educated inside the classrooms, as well as acquiring an education outside of the classrooms,” (Davis, 1996, p. 32). These interactions with teachers and principals created positive home connections and increased parental support.

Strong parental support for education. Building upon the environment that segregated schools provided, African American families’ involvement in their children’s education had a solid legacy (V. S. Walker, 2000). C. Fields-Smith (2005) archived African American parent involvement and traced the importance of education to African American families despite the challenges they have historically faced. Historical research has demonstrated the many ways in

which they valued the education of their children dating back to the slavery era. It has been recorded, how during slavery African American parents pursued education and risked severe punishment and even their lives to learn to read because they equated freedom with literacy (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995).

African American families generally trusted members of the school to educate and protect their children (C. A. Fields-Smith, 2006). In her oral history of a segregated Black school, Siddle Walker (1993), noted that parents had high expectations of their children; they reinforced school policies and procedures and provided support for the teachers and the school. The parents, teachers, and administrators were collaborative members of the community, where parents openly allowed community members to help their children with schoolwork when parents were not able to do so (C. A. Fields-Smith, 2006; Moeller & Bielfelt, 2011). During the era of legal racial segregation, many African American parents relied heavily on schools to educate their children due to a large degree of trust and respect they had for the educators (V. S. Walker, 2000).

African American family involvement in schools demonstrated the array of ways they supported their children. These included providing financial support to keep the schools outfitted with books, playground equipment, and science equipment. The parents also donated grass seeds and other items to beautify the school's grounds. Their contributions during this period were often linked with the philosophy of self-help, which motivated parents to continue to work hard to find opportunities to financially support their schools (V. S. Walker, 2000).

African American parents were involved through advocating and petitioning local White school boards and federal governing bodies. These parents were involved in school

desegregation lawsuits, which was an approach to secure equal educational opportunities for African American students. Advocating was usually done by African Americans with more financial assets and who had jobs that made their financial stability less vulnerable to White relation. These advocates included teachers, ministers, and businessmen (Siddle Walker, 1996). African American families also attended many school activities and events to show support for their students as well as the school personnel. The segregated schools and the environment created provided many opportunities for families to engage and interact with school personnel. School personnel and families worked together to ensure an adequate environment existed and that African American students were receiving opportunities equal to that of the White schools. Even though school personnel worked hard and the families supported them, inequities between White and Black school continued to exist, which led to the 1954 landmark court case known as *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*.

The Effects of *Brown v. Topeka BOE* on African American Family Engagement

Plessy v. Ferguson was overturned with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, with the directive for public schools to desegregate immediately. The manner in which desegregation of schools took place occurred on White terms and contributed to a revolutionary change in African American involvement with their children, and grandchildren in public school settings. African American families began to feel the loss of the decision making for their children's education (Morris, 2001). As African American schools were closed, many African American teachers and administrators were ultimately displaced, demoted, and dismissed from the teaching profession (Morris, 2001; Tillman, 2004). The language, communication skills, and varied learning styles of African Americans caused

disconnect for African American children and families in the previously all-White schools (Olmsted, 1991). These and other barriers, such as busing African American students out of their neighborhoods, created a gap between home, school, and the community and contributed to decreased parental involvement (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Patterson et al., 2008). C. Fields-Smith (2005) further explained that African American families continued to respect and support education, but the once established trust level in schools began to dwindle after desegregation.

With the enforcement of desegregation, institutional barriers began to negatively impact the education and well being of African American children and their families (Hill & Taylor, 2004). These barriers included segregation within, rather than between schools; and socio-cultural incongruence between school and home (P. A. Edwards, 1993). The once engaged African American family before desegregation was now placed in unfamiliar territory. Once their children started attending predominantly White schools, parent involvement practices among African Americans became varied and sporadic. For many school personnel, their lack of home knowledge and limited parent involvement became a bias (Graue & Hawkins, 2010). School personnel interpreted the lack of parent involvement as a sign they did not care about their children or their education, instead of understanding the home and the transition from segregated schools. This perception and bias is influenced, manifested, and acted upon by personal beliefs viewed from a white middle-class norm found in public school settings (Kunjufu, 1989). From this standpoint, relationships with parents are limited to one-way flows of information, with parents needing to understand the norms and practices of the schools (Graue & Hawkins, 2010).

It is no surprise that African American parents and school personnel are still dealing with the aftermath of desegregation. Many African American students are not performing well in the integrated settings, African American family engagement has eroded, and the connection with school personnel has been compromised (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Olmsted, 1991; V. S. Walker, 2000). P. A. Edwards (1993) suggested many of these problems have surfaced because trying to attack racism within the school system was never part of the desegregation package.

Desegregation put African American children in a racist context, hoping they would learn anyway because, at least, they then could share in the same material benefits of an integrated school as White children. Artiles and Trent (1994) contended when African American children entered integrated schools, they were met generally by White school personnel who were unprepared to deal with their cognitive styles, social values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. The lack of understanding of the families who were being integrated created disconnection between the home and school cultures. Therefore, school personnel began teaching African American children with preconceived notions and stereotypical views about how they functioned. While some of the problems are not as blatant as physical segregation; today's issues are closely related to school personnel attitudes toward and expectations of African American students (Bates, 1990). Bates went on by noting, when school personnel expect little or nothing of African American students; they tend to respond accordingly.

Graue and Hawkins (2010) concluded that differences exist between White and African American responses to home-school relations. African American parents wish to support their children, but have different conceptions of what school personnel expect them to do so and how their involvement strategies may be perceived by schools. Families who do not attend school

functions such as PTA meetings or parent teacher conferences may lead school personnel to conclude that the families do not care about their children (Christianakis, 2011; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). When parents are not involved with schools in these traditional ways, teachers tend to believe that parents do not place high values on education and have little to contribute to their children's education (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003; Kunjufu, 1989). Many families limit themselves to the involvement as dictated by school personnel. Lopez and Stoelting (2010) contended the lack of involvement is largely due to the families unfamiliarity with the educational structure, and the power imbalance that traditionally exists in educational settings. Some school personnel's mindset, biases, and behaviors, may lead a family to feel separated from the schools, therefore seeing little or no opportunity for African American grandmothers to be included in the educational process for their grandchildren.

Dominant Culture in Schools

Through the omission of multicultural understanding, America's schools have become monocultural environments (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). Monocultural can be defined as a practice of actively preserving a national culture via the exclusion of external influences. It can also mean a society with a common heritage, belief, structure, language and usually a mono-racial identity; one that tends to look inward rather than outward. The United States system of education is built solidly on a monoculture, a Euro-American view, and it tends to benefit white students, whose cultural patterns and styles are more attuned to this world view (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). When looking at the public school curriculum, one can see subtle examples of this monoculture. Public school systems dispense a curriculum centered on western civilization that encapsulates only narrowly the truth, reality, and breadth of human experience (Grant & Gillette,

1987). This curriculum reinforces institutional racism by excluding from discussion the intellectual thought, scholarship, history, culture, contributions, and experiences of minority groups (Grant & Gillette, 1987). These curriculums fail to teach students about how African American men and women have played vital roles throughout all aspects and periods of U.S. history. Lessons about a few isolated events and people cannot help students understand how such people and events relate to all U.S. history. Furthermore, because the history of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression is absent from these lessons, most students fail to understand how current societal tensions have emerged from historical events and trends (Lindsey et al., 2003).

According to Brodbelt (1972), there are two forms of prejudice among individuals. The first, open prejudice is the pervasive attitude that others are inferior as judged upon the basis of race, color, sex, or creed. The second form of prejudice is closed prejudice, which is a more subtle form of the first, for in this instance individuals utilize various institutions and policies to act upon their beliefs (Brodbelt, 1972). As the public schools fail to educate all individuals to their fullest potential, and perpetuate some individuals to be inherently inferior, or inferior because of environmental circumstances, it is prejudging, sorting, and limiting the life-chances of individuals on a non-egalitarian basis; this is institutional racism in schools (Brodbelt, 1972).

Given that most educational policy makers and decision makers are white men (Lindsey et al., 2003), the absence of the African American grandmother's voices and insights become crucial in making advances toward supporting this family structure and continuing the fight to close the achievement gap between African American and White students. As more African American grandmothers are raising their grandchildren, it becomes important for school

personnel to understand this phenomenon, and begin to look through the lens of their experiences to gain a better understanding of grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

Summary

African American grandmothers caring for their grandchildren are a family structure that has become prevalent in the United States. History, black feminist theory, and previous research, provides relevant information that helps understand the experiences of an African American grandmother who is caring for her grandchildren. School personnel who have these students in their classrooms may not have the skills or knowledge to understand fully how to support the dynamics of the family structure. The literature reviewed above gives a basis to begin the journey of exploring the lived experiences of African American grandmothers as they interact with school personnel.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design

The Black feminist theoretical perspective refers to my intent to include voices previously excluded by some school personnel, and specifically, in this case, the voices of African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren. The methodology chapter includes a description of the research approach, the design of the qualitative study, and characteristics of the participants. This chapter will also include data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness and validity, and researcher positionality.

Methodology

Qualitative research was the methodological approach, using a counter-storytelling narrative inquiry to gather and interpret data for this study (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). A Black feminist theoretical framework supported the use of qualitative methods (Few et al., 2003). Qualitative methodology is especially productive with participants who historically have had limited power and influence, such as women, people of color, and those with limited income (G. C. Smith, Savage-Stevens, & Fabian, 2002). Qualitative methodology highlights the experiences of underserved, disenfranchised populations and people who have been marginalized by allowing the researcher to hear participants from their own perspective (Creswell, 2008). The intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Silverman, Locke, & Spirduso, 2007).

Qualitative research is rooted in a phenomenological paradigm, holding that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definition of the situation (Firestone, 1987). Thus, African American grandmothers raising grandchildren and their experiences with public

school personnel were not analyzed separately from the reality as it was experienced by Black women. The grandmothers shared their voices, and a detailed description and interpretation of the problem, findings, and connections of findings to significant literature and practice were made.

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative inquiry may be oral or written and may be heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation (Chase, 2005). A narrative may be (a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters such as a friend, family member, or school personnel, (b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life such as schooling, work, or involvement in a social movement, or (c) a narrative of one's entire life, from birth to the present (Chase, 2005). Narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objectives into a meaningful whole, and connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Bruner, 1986; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Unlike chronology, which also reports events over time, a narrative inquiry communicates the narrator's point of view, interpretations, thoughts, and emotions. Instead of describing what happened, the narrator explains, entertains, informs, defends, complains, and confirms or challenges the status quo. The narrator tells the story which shapes and constructs his or her experiences, and reality. The act of storytelling creates the voice which draws attention to what and how the narrator communicates it as well as to the social locations from which one speaks. The combination of what, how, and where moves the reader away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator's statements, instead they highlight the versions of self, reality, and

experience that the narrator produces through storytelling (Chase, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

A narrative inquiry approach seeks ways to understand and represent experiences through the stories that individuals live and tell (Creswell, 2008). Researchers engage in narrative inquiry by respectfully infringing on the lives of the research participants and asking them to help us understand and learn about their lives, experiences, and stories (Wyrick, 2010). Consistent with the tradition of phenomenology, narrative inquiry seeks to understand lived experience and how individuals describe and perceive their experiences (Patton, 2002). Based on the philosophy of John Dewey, “who believed that examining ones experiences is the key to education” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. xiii), narrative inquiry in education is an interactive and dynamic process of telling stories and listening to the stories of others. Personal stories of lived realities help transfer extremely complex concepts and the effects of highly embedded traditions in society to more understandable, humane, and personal levels (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Sharing life stories brings the unknown to the known, allowing individuals to view lived realities through the lens of another and opening their eyes to a new way of seeing and being in the world. In addition, empathy may be gained across varying social contexts through storytelling and listening to others share about their lived experiences (Gamson, 2001).

Counter-storytelling

Counter- storytelling is a narrative approach used to address issues of marginalized groups in response to racism and sexism (Delgado, 1989). This approach can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. Counter-storytelling is also used for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the dominant

discourse to create potential change (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren and their experiences is not a well researched area, thus the importance of hearing their stories. In this study, counter-storytelling allowed the participants to tell their truth about raising their grandchildren and their experiences with public school educators. Their truth was a powerful narrative means which could shed light on existing mindsets, and counter the perceptions of public school personnel. Sharing their stories could lead to further dialogue by public school personnel that can potentially transform established systemic beliefs. Counter-storytelling narrative inquiry approach was an appropriate method for providing insight into the lived experiences of grandmothers caring for their grandchildren.

Participation Selection

The population for this study was African American grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren. Purposeful sampling was utilized, which resulted in six participants. Purposeful sampling is the foundation of qualitative research techniques and seeks out certain research participants for their knowledge of the topic in order to gain the most insight (Merriam, 2009). By having a smaller sample size I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences with public school settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where I selected participants for in depth study. The purpose was to understand the lived experiences of African American grandmothers as they interacted with school personnel.

In order to recruit participants, I scheduled presentations with the following Wichita, Kansas African American senior organizations: African American Women groups, Golden Age Club, the Council of Elders, and grandmother groups in local elementary schools. After

conducting the presentation regarding my research, I distributed a potential interest letter (Appendix A) for further individual contact with the grandmothers in their homes. Upon completion of a screening interview (Appendix B) I identified the six participants who met the research criteria. The criteria for selection of the participants in this study were: (a) the grandmother identifies as African American, (b) she is raising one or more school-aged grandchildren on a full time basis, (c) she has been the caregiver for a minimum of one year, (d) she has had more than two interactions with school personnel dealing with her grandchildren, (e) her grandchildren are in the public school setting and, (f) she has not legally adopted her grandchildren.

Finding the grandmothers who were willing to share their stories was more complicated than I anticipated. My initial thought was it would be a simple process in obtaining names and acquiring the participants; however that was not the case. The grandmothers were reluctant to visit with me because they heard that someone from the school district wanted to visit with them about their experiences with raising their grandchildren and many of them declined. When I further probed with the building administrators they shared that they did not know me and they did not want me in their business.

Data Collection: Narrative Interviews

Narrative inquiry data collection involves several strategies, and for this study included conversational interview questions. I collected the data through conversation with the participant. However, I had one grandmother who could not agree to a face-to-face interview, which is typical in a narrative study. Due to the emotional nature of her story, she preferred to respond to the questions in written form instead of verbally. I did follow up with her once I

received the written responses; for additional clarification. This grandmother constructed her own narrative without the formal face-to-face interview process. Once the interviews were collected and transcribed, I analyzed and organized them based on the guiding question of the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are caring and providing upbringing for their grandchildren as they interact with public school personnel.

The one hour interviews consisted of a series of conversational questions. This type of interview style allowed the interview to feel more like a conversation. The goal of the interview was to understand African American grandmothers who were caring for their grandchildren and their experiences with public school personnel. The conversational questions for the grandmothers were designed to allow the grandmother to tell her story and to capture the qualitative nature of the data. The conversational questions were broad and open-ended, similar to prompts with the intent of giving the participant equal control of the conversation (Kramp, 2004). The interviews began with a short list of questions to allow opportunity for questions to emerge from the participants' answers to the previous questions. The goal was to build upon and explore the participant's responses to questions aimed at providing the opportunity of the participant to reconstruct her experience.

In using a Black feminist theoretical framework to design interview protocols and to code data, the diversity of Black women's experiences can be analyzed within a dynamic matrix of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) or multiple jeopardy that informs and manifests itself as a multiple consciousness (King, 1988) individually and collectively for Black women. Issues of race, gender, class, and national identity matter because they inform the choices Black women

make. Including interview questions that tap these issues allows for a more in-depth analysis of Black women's realities. Interview protocols can be found in Appendix C.

I asked the participants to sign a consent form (Appendix D) that explained the purpose of the study, what their participation would be, and how the data would be used in the study. The interviews lasted approximately one hour in length; no more were needed as the participants did not express a desire to share more about her experiences. The goal of the interview was to create detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed, and the data were interpreted using thematic content analysis. The data used for this study came from the participants' stories. I transcribed verbatim using the Jeffersonian method (Jefferson, 2004). This method is designed to guide the researcher to produce a transcript that is comprehensive, exhaustive, and verbatim, regardless of whether the speech contains fragments and incorrect grammar.

The data for this research were analyzed using two different methods of analysis. The first approach used was a form of interpretation that required me to engage in an iterative process of critical thinking, questioning, and categorizing (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011). In other words, it is defined as a method of analysis for coding and scoring verbal materials to make inferences about characteristics and experiences of a person, social groups, or historical periods (C. P. Smith, 1992). In the context of thematic content analysis, an inference is a conclusion the researcher develops from systematic thinking and reasoning about the meaning of the narrative data that are the subject of analysis (Lapan et al., 2011).

The second method of analysis for this research was creating plot lines. I created a visual plot line table to help tell the story of each participant. The plot lines provided the opportunity to scaffold stories, identify, and highlight times and events in the participants lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I provided each participant with her transcribed story to ensure accuracy regarding her lived experience. Participants were given the opportunity to offer additional input, feedback, and make corrections to their stories. This process and analysis provided opportunities for better understanding of the participants' experiences and how their stories shaped the findings of the research (Mertova & Webster, 2007). Each of these methods of analysis required me to have an open mind; to be ready to learn new things about the participants.

Interpretation is the process in which I engaged with each participant to make sense of the data within the context of historical, cultural, and relational context of the lived experience (Lapan et al., 2011). Interpretation also included the process of representing the data in another written form that describes and summarizes the core elements of how I made sense of the data. The data I present in Chapter 4 is each grandmother's unique story.

Research Quality

Research quality in narrative research most often refers to dependability and trustworthiness of the data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Black feminist researchers recommend being creative in devising multiple strategies to assist participants, in this case African American grandmothers, with uncovering and confronting unarticulated meanings or subjugated knowledge instinctively hidden for survival, and political purposes (Collins, 1991; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). By approaching a specific question in multiple ways, the grandmothers can reflect upon

her experience for a longer period of time. This technique is a useful method for triangulating data and increasing dependability and credibility (Few et al., 2003).

In a review of Riessman's book (2008) on narrative methods, Duque (2009) summarized the quality of narrative inquiry lies in a narrative's "ability to inform future studies and contribute to social change by empowering participants" (p. 25). As stated in my research problem, African American grandmothers raising grandchildren has become more prevalent, therefore this study assists with further understanding African American grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren.

Jean McNiff (2007) explored issues of research quality through the idea of goodness, focusing specifically on what counts as authentic practice and ethical research accounts. The transcribed interviews were shared with each study participant, a method referred to as member checking (Appendix E). Collecting multiple nontraditional sources of data is another way to empower the grandmothers. These nontraditional sources of data are physical archival evidence on intangible, dynamic states of mind; these could include spiritual, oppressed, oppressive, and resilient (Bell-Scott & Johnson-Bailey, 1998). These sources could lead to revelations about how a grandmother may have understood herself and her relationships to others on a certain day, during a specific event, or at a significant time (Few et al., 2003). However, in this particular research, the need to collect this data was not needed.

To further explain, McNiff (2007) suggests one needs to answer the following questions : (a) what is my concern? (b) Why am I concerned? (c) What kind of experience can I describe to show the reasons for my concerns? (d) What can I do about it? What will I do about it? In my

study and the recorded experiences, I addressed these questions in order to maintain the integrity of the grandmothers' stories.

Researcher Positionality

I am an African American woman conducting qualitative research on African American women. It was important that I paid special attention to developing and maintaining an “informed reflexive consciousness” (K. R. Allen, 2000, p. 7) to contextualize skillfully my own subjectivity in data interpretation. I was reflexively attuned to the dynamics of the grandmother-researcher relationship, with the goal of minimizing the hierarchal constellation of power in the relationship (Collins, 1998). Throughout the process, I kept a personal journal for self-reflexivity (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983), so I could monitor my unconscious and conscious thoughts. Self-reflexivity promotes the reconciliation of personal motivations for conducting research with a specific population and the extent of accountability owed to the population being studied (Few et al., 2003).

During this process I made sure that I was knowledgeable about the history and culture of the grandmothers in order to gain access into their lived experiences. Without gaining an understanding of the history and culture I could risk misinterpreting the collected data and contribute to the silence, distortion, generalization, and marginalization of the diversity of Black women's experiences (Collins, 1998; Hooks, 2000). I was also careful of my appearance and the language that I used throughout the interview process. I wanted to ensure that my appearance and language did not become a challenge or turn off full disclosure of the grandmother's experiences. I learned that throughout the research process, the decisions I made

could enhance or suppress the personal experiences, and subsequently, reaffirm or deny their account of the experience (Few et al., 2003).

I am an African American public school educator in a high ranking position within the school system; therefore I had to consider the grandmothers may want to request information or advice about matters shared during the interview. I made sure that I addressed my own limitations with the grandmothers upfront. I explained to them that during this process I would be stepping out of my boundaries as a researcher by responding to their personal school related questions or requests. I explained that I could however; refer them with other professionals within the school system that could respond to their requests.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected from the individual interviews with six African American grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren. All of the participants in this study identified themselves as African American grandmothers. The six participants provided insightful descriptions of their lived experiences with public schools while they are caring for their grandchildren. For confidentiality purposes, I used fictitious names for the participants to protect their privacy.

Table 1 Characteristics of the Grandmothers

Grandmothers	Characteristics
Sapphire	Vivacious, Strong Advocate
Ruby	Humble, college educated
Pearl	Strength and resiliency
Emerald	Determined, perseverance
Opal	Young, energetic
Topaz	Welcoming, serves many roles for her family

Their Stories

Each grandmother's narrative is presented below. The narratives are divided into themes that emerged from their individual interviews with Sapphire, Ruby, Pearl, Emerald, Opal, and

Topaz. Interviews were conducted during October, 2014, and the narratives are presented in the order the interviews were conducted.

Grandmother Sapphire

My first face-to-face conversation was with Sapphire. She was a vivacious, outspoken grandmother who clearly had a lot of say about her experiences with public school settings throughout her life. Sapphire was not sure about who I was or really what I wanted, so the trust level was low as we began the conversation. Grandmother Sapphire has ten grandchildren; however, she is raising two of her grandchildren. She did not want me to come to her home so she invited me to the school her grandchildren attended. When I arrived, I was greeted by the building administrator who escorted me to the conference room to await Grandmother Sapphire. Once Sapphire arrived, the secretary escorted her to the conference room. She immediately turned to the secretary and said, "Thank you, I can take it from here." The secretary looked at me with big eyes and said, "If you need anything, just let me know." I immediately stood up and extended my hand to greet Sapphire however; she did not respond and sat down in the chair across from me. I knew right away that I had to start out by building rapport with her. I began to introduce myself and Sapphire asks, "Who are your people?" I knew what she meant; she was asking me who I am related to, she was trying to make a connection to me, and who I am. I named a few of my relatives and she did not know any of them. I mentioned that I attended St. Mark United Methodist Church and she immediately started naming people that she knew who attended my church. Thank goodness I knew some of the same people that she was familiar with and so she loosened up a bit.

Grandmother Sapphire's family. *I was born and raised in Wichita, KS. I am number nine of fourteen children. I am fifty-five years old. I attended Brookside Elementary School. I lived with my mother, father, eight brothers, and five sisters. Both my parents worked full-time jobs and sometimes two jobs to make the ends meet. My older brother and sister had to step up to help with the smaller siblings. My role was to cook. I can cook anything, you name it, and I can cook it.*

I had a good relationship with my mom, and my grandmother who lived two doors down from us growing up. She often stepped up to support us while my parents were working. My grandmother was real fond of me because I have always been outspoken. I was her favorite grandchild out of the 90 grandchildren she had. My mom and grandmother taught me the way I should go; they created me. Anytime I had an issue at school with the teachers, my ma'dear (grandmother) would go up to that school and tell them some things. Ma'dear was from the Deep South and she did not like all that mess and she always thought that they were taking advantage of me because of the color of my skin. If it was not for my grandmother advocating for me, I don't know where I would be today. She kept me grounded and focused on what it was to be a true advocate for what was right.

Experiences that shaped my thoughts about public schools. *I did not have such a good experience in school. I attended a school where my teachers were White and they did not always have the best interest for me and my brothers and sisters. I had cousins that lived across town and they attended schools with Black teachers and their experiences were different. I had such a rough time that I think I was scarred for life. I did not finish school, had kids with no*

father and now I am raising my grandchildren because my daughter is having some issues. I am proud of all of my kids; I did the best that I could by them.

As a child, attending public schools on the south side of town was not good. I can remember the teachers thinking that we could not be anything and could not learn anything. They would not call on us in class and never followed up with us to see if we were learning what they were teaching. I had older brothers and sisters and my older brother would sit down with the younger siblings and he would read bedtime stories to us. He would teach us how to read. One day during class, I remember being called up to read in front of the class and White teacher told me to read the passage out loud. She looked at me as if I was going to have a problem reading, trying to embarrass me. I begin reading the passage aloud with ease. The teacher was amazed and said, "Looks like somebody has been reading at home." She was making fun of me in front of the class. This created low self esteem for me. What she did not realize was that I had an older brother reading with me at home, which is how I was learning to read. It was a shame that she would call me up to read and then expect for me not to read and then announce it to the class. When a teacher tells you, somebody has been reading at home, she should have been saying Bravo. I was trying to better myself. After that incident, I just knew the teacher would move me up to the next higher reading group, but she did not do it. She told me that she knew I needed to move up to the next group; however she wanted to see how I would continue to perform. I went home to share this with my parents and they were too busy working to come up to the school and advocate for me. Finally, I decided to ask the teacher if I could move up to the next group and she said I will move you, but I do not want to. Wow, I was just amazed at how cruel this teacher was to me. It was just not me that was treated poorly, it was my whole family.

I believe all the children of color were in the same boat. I think this is why I am so hard on the schools. I know that if I do not advocate for the kids, they will be treated poorly and have no chance to succeed. I had problems with the adults in schools when I was attending them, my kids had issues, and now my grandchildren are having issues. Racism is alive and well in the United States, even in the year 2014.

The fruits of my labor. *I have four children of my own. There was no male in the home. In the late 80's and 90's my children attended Collette School, Jarvis Middle School and Southbench High School. My children did not have problems with the schools because I am just like my grandmother, I don't take no mess from the schools. I vowed I would pay attention to my kids and make sure they were treated right in school. During the time that my kids were in schools, teachers did not listen to what the kids were saying. My kids wanted to learn about Black History like we did in school, but the schools did not celebrate or support that type of learning, so I taught them at home. I feel like they were robbing our kids. They robbing them of their education, they robbing them of their culture, they're robbing and I was sick of it. I remember a time when my son was asked to write a paper about what he wanted to be when he grew up and they needed to set goals. He wrote the paper and stated that he wanted to become a lawyer. The teacher pulled him aside and said your paper is great; however I think you're dreaming too high, you have to set goal like maybe a bus driver or a trash man. I could not believe that this was happening in Wichita, KS. I went to the school to advocate, just like my grandmother taught me. The school dismissed my complaint and I went further up the chain until someone heard my displeasure with this comment. I think you have to be visible in the schools so the teachers know that this child has someone who cares about them. That is why I*

am so involved with my grandchildren. Sometimes when I go up to the school because my kids were not being treated fairly they would refer to me as an angry, aggressive Black woman. If this was a White woman doing this, they would say she is a go-getter, but with me I'm an angry Black woman. I really have a hard time with this perception. This is how they keep us down; they categorize us to make us look bad. I realize that sometimes the school was tired of seeing my face, but I wanted them to do right by my kids. Most of my kids are doing well; they work and are productive citizens. I have one that is a work in process.

Sapphire's grandchildren, her pride and joy. *I have two of my grandchildren living with me and they are both in elementary school attending Collette. I have my grandchildren because their mom (my daughter) is not able to care for them because she has some issues and she is trying to finish school. I have a decent relationship with my daughter. I know she is doing the best that she can. We do not see her often but when we do it is hard on the kids with her coming in and out. It never fails that when she comes and goes the kids struggle and has anger problems. The school does not understand and they just call me and tell me to come and pick them up; that is no help at all. The kids are crying out for help but we get no support from the school. Instead of helping them, they kick them out of school and give the child low self-esteem. They should be lift 'em up instead of tearing them down. This reminds me of the judicial system; they are tearing down our communities. I just do not trust the system. The educational system and the judicial system are not to be trusted. We need to advocate making sure things are fair. My grandchildren need to know someone is listening and understands what they are going through; they only got me, their grandmother. Sometimes my grandkids would tell me that when I come to advocate for them; I was being called ghetto. I told them; I was not worried about*

what people think of me. Some of them (teachers) would say I was aggressive. I am not aggressive; I am just trying to get my point across. I have a big voice and it carries; some would say I was yelling at them. I just could not understand why they did not understand what I was trying to do for my grandkids; I was just being me. I am their cheerleader. Don't get me wrong, there are some nice folks at the school, but some of them need training on how to deal with these children. More and more grandmothers are raising their grandchildren and it is not going to get any better for these kids. Another issue that really bothered me about my grandkids school is the fact that they had an event called, "Dancing on the Blacktop." The students were outside on the basketball court dancing. The school is almost all one race and the music that they were playing did not represent all of the students that attended school there. I did not think that was right, my grandkids did not enjoy the activity as they only played songs that certain groups enjoyed. The next day I did go up to the school to share my concerns. Again, I could tell they did not want to hear what I was trying to say to them.

Keeping the family together. *My role as a grandmother is to advocate and keep my family together. The state is so quick to take our children. One incident and they can come take your children. That's not right. I mean, they are already growing up Black in America with problems. Then you take them and put them in a house with somebody they don't know. I don't like that at all. I also think that when you adopt your grandchildren, you are giving them (the state) a free ticket to be in your business, and they don't need any free ticket. My grandmother would turn over in their graves if they knew this was happening to our kids. Our job is to keep the family together. I am doing the best that I can on a fixed income. I do not have a lot of money and I will say that the school has helped me with coats and shoes for the kids. This is*

very helpful. On the other hand the school keeps having all these fund raisers with special prizes for the kids who sell so many items. That puts us in a bad bind. I want my grandkids to get special prizes but we cannot go around selling items. I am not the mother, I am the grandmother and these things are all new to me, it was not like this when I was in school nor was it like this when my kids were in school. I am still trying to understand my role. I want to spoil and love all on them, but instead I have to have some discipline. It is a hard balance. I love my grandkids, it is all worth it. I would not change it for the world. It is what we do.

Advice to the educators. *Listen. Listen to what the grandparents and kids are saying. Open your ears and eyes to what is happening with our families. We need extra help with homework. My grandkids are behind in Math and Reading and I can't help them with all this stuff. These kids also have some behavior and my grandkids have medical issues too. These kids have a missing mother and father, they need help. It just seems like no one understands that I put my life on hold, I'm 55 years old. I am done raising my kids. I think it is my role to step up and raise my grandchildren, but I just want the school to hear me and see me. I am unique; most kids have both parent and at least one. My grandkids are doing ok and I will keep working hard to make sure they have the best future. They are my legacy.*

Grandmother Ruby

My next face-to-face interview was with Grandmother Ruby, and hers was a little different from the other grandmothers. I met Ruby through the McAdams Golden Age Club. I went to the organization and presented my study and asked for grandmothers to participate. Grandmother Ruby was very willing and excited that someone in the community wanted to hear the stories of grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. She was married to her

husband for 40 years before he passed away a few years ago. The two have three adult children. Two of her children are doing very well and live in Texas. Ruby's demeanor was different than the other grandmother's I interviewed for the study. She was thoughtful, highly educated, and knowledgeable about how to work through the system to get resources for the grandchild she was raising. Ruby's granddaughter has some health issues and she has spent a great deal of time getting the medical attention needed for her to be successful in school.

Fond memories of school and family. *I was born and raised in Guthrie, Oklahoma. I attended a small all Black school; however I started school attending a Catholic school. Of course, the rules and regulations were a lot different than public schools, so it was a change for me to go from very, very strict rules and regulations to public schools that were not as strict, but still good. I attended Favre High School and then I attend Oklahoma State University, which was my first experience in an integrated setting. I was the youngest sibling out of 7 children in my family. We lived with my mom and dad. By the time I went to high school my older brothers and sisters had graduated from college and were either into their careers or in the military. My parents were very adamant about our going to school. My dad was very smart with numbers; he was a Math whiz. If any of us needed help with Math we always went to my dad. My mother would tell us you need to be smart in Math. To make it in life you must be better than the Whites. He would tell us stories about how his parents were out in the field farming and his grandmother would get him up, feed him, and send him on his way. You know, he had to walk 10 miles uphill and downhill to go to schools with one shoe. He was a character. He wanted us to know that we should do anything it took to get an education. I remember my dad telling me about my great-grandparents being slaves. He told me about the struggle of our family trying to gain respect*

from Whites. I value those stories and they remain in my mind. My dad was the only son for a long, long time and he had four sisters. Of course, he was the older so he had to protect his sisters. My grandparents, not too sure about how much education they had. I don't think they could read or write; however they stressed the importance of education to my dad. My grandparents were very spiritual; they trusted the Lord for everything. My grandparents worked in fields. My grandmother was a midwife; she was a caregiver. My mother learned to be a caregiver at an early age. She helped her mother by getting the water and towels to help with the delivery of the children. I have fond memories of my grandparents. They lived in a cabin out in the country. I just loved going to visit my grandparents. I think there were about 52 grandchildren and of course, I was the favorite grandchild. Every summer I would spend several weeks at my grandmother's house. She would tell me stories, and teach me how to cook and quilt. My grandfather loved baseball so he taught me how to catch and hit the ball. Maybe he thought I could be the next woman Jackie Robinson. I really enjoyed those memories with my grandparents. They built a strong foundation for me and my siblings. That is one of the drivers for me caring for my granddaughter; I know the power of the relationship of grandparents.

My children, my success. *I have three children. I have two boys and a girl. In the 80's and 90's my children attend McDonald Elementary School, Marsh Middle and North View High School. My two boys of course went to higher Ed. One graduated from Langston University, the other son attended Butler and then went to Florida A&M. On the first days of school, I made it my business to make sure that I could go in and visit with the principal and the teachers. The schools always let me know that their door is always open. I also told them that they are the teachers and not their friends. I told them to teach them; they have enough friends at home.*

I think we had good relationships with the schools, for the most part. I do remember a time when my son, he was in kindergarten, he did not want to go to school anymore. I was very concerned that he would come home at this age and say he wanted to drop out and never return. I of course, immediately made a visit to the school to see what was going on. I was always taught and heard from the ministers in the community that as parents we must go into the schools and make our presence known. The school needs to know that we care about our kids and that someone is watching and paying attention to what is happening. The schools treat our kids better, when we show up and are involved. When I arrived at the school, I wanted them to take me seriously so I spoke calmly and clearly about my concern and my expectation of how I wanted my kids to be treated. I did not want them to think that I would come in there loud and cussing. You know that is how they (the schools) think we are. I never had any other issues for the rest of the school year. I would show up unannounced to not only check on my kids, but to also send the message that I am engaged with my children. I think they treat them better when you are there. It should not be that way; but it is. Where I attended school, (all black school in Oklahoma) our teachers were part of our community. They attended church with us, shopped in the same grocery stores and some lived within our neighborhood so it was truly a village concept. Once we started integrating treatment began to change; however I do think things are a little better now.

Grandmother Ruby: her granddaughter's advocate. *I have a total of six grandchildren. I have a positive relationship with my grandchildren. They come and visit me on a regular basis and I go and visit with them as well. We traveled more when my husband was alive. I am currently raising my daughter's daughter. I actually have had my granddaughter*

since she was born. I picked her up from the hospital. My daughter has two other children and I took this one because my daughter asked me to take this one. I did not know about the other two until years later. My daughter has some drug issues and has had a rough life. She later shared with me that she delivered those children in some unspeakable places in the streets and the government has taken the other two away and she did not want to lose this one, so she asked me to take her. My daughter was on drugs while she was pregnant with my granddaughter, she was bound to be born with drugs in her system; however we prayed and my church family prayed and she came out drug free. We are so blessed; I call her my miracle baby. I did not want this baby to be in the system so I did what I needed to do to keep her safe. I had my daughter sign papers to make sure I could raise her without any problems. Today, I have very little connection with my daughter. I am very hurt by my daughter; but I do not want her involved with my granddaughter. I don't want her to be a hindrance to me or my granddaughter. Her mother's behavior might put too much mental pressure on her. I just want her to grow up with pleasant memories and have hope for a better life than her mother. My daughter was a good girl, she just started hanging out with the wrong crowd and one thing led to another and she was out there. Once they get out there on those drugs all you can is pray for them.

My granddaughter attends McDonald Elementary as well. I visited a lot of schools before making that decision. I knew she would be one of the few African American kids in the school; however I had a decent experience there so I felt comfortable sending my granddaughter there. I remember enrolling my granddaughter in school; it was interesting. I completed the paperwork and they read through the contacts and asked me would her mom or dad be attending any events at the schools because they want parents to be engaged. I knew they wanted to know,

why I was listed as the caregiver and not her parents. I just chuckled and let them know that I would be caring for my granddaughter and that was all. They just looked amazed and moved on. The school seemed to be uncomfortable; however more and more grandmothers are caring for their grandchildren. My granddaughter has medical problems that we did not know about until she was about 5 year old. She has a very rare heart condition. She has to miss school because of this condition. The school has been very nice about letting us work with her at home and to turn in her assignments late (when she is out). My granddaughter is old enough now to have this surgery that will correct this heart condition. We will do this during Christmas break. We did not realize until later that the drugs did impact certain internal organs. I like McDonald as this school is small and since she has some health issues, they have the energy and resources to concentrate on her need. I really have to advocate and push for everything I get for my granddaughter. Not just with the school but in every aspect of me raising her. I have issues getting her on my insurance, getting counseling for her, getting tutoring for her. I am a single retired grandmother on a fixed income and I need help in raising her alone. It has been a challenge, but it is worth it.

My responsibility to keep the family together. *I take my role as a grandmother very seriously. My relationship with my granddaughter is positive; I am the only mother that she knows. I have a funny story; I attend PTO meetings at my granddaughter's school. I am the only African American woman present. The mothers ask me who my daughter is and whose class she in. I tell them that my granddaughter attends here and she is in Ms. Lee's class. They look at me and say, "Oh how nice of you to fill in for the mother." I tell them that my granddaughter lives with me and I am her caregiver. You could hear a pin drop.*

I think grandmothers are so important; they are everything. They are our connection with the past and your connection to the future. My role as a grandmother is to keep my family together. My family is just not my immediate family; it is the community. That is how I was raised. It's kind of interesting... I have some kids at the church who have lost their grandmothers by death. They ask me, "Can you be my Wichita grandma?" They have lost their grandmothers or their grandmothers live far away. Those kids come over and I will cook them a home cooked meal, just like their grandmothers. It is me just keeping that tradition alive.

Acknowledge the family structure. *I think the schools should let the grandmothers know that they appreciate them being involved in their grandchildren's lives. Things have changed so much and kids have so much to deal with. I think the schools should listen to the needs of the community. There are more and more grandmothers caring for their grandchildren and I don't think they know how to work with us; especially when our grandchildren have challenges. It would be nice if they could just recognize that we are doing something that has been part of our culture. My grandmother played an important part of my life when my parents were alive and well and I am playing a major role with my granddaughter while her mother is not around. It is expensive to pay for tutoring services for my granddaughter; I wish they could help with the additional support for her learning. As I said before, I am an active grandmother, I am present, and I come across in a way that they can understand so I normally get the respect and support I need for my granddaughter. I'm just glad I am able to care for my granddaughter and keep my family together.*

Grandmother Pearl

I named this Grandmother Pearl. I was amazed at the strength and resiliency that Grandmother Pearl displayed. I had a friend come to me and asked about the title of my dissertation. I shared the topic with this friend and she asked if I needed additional grandmothers for the study. I needed additional participants so I quickly accepted the invitation to visit with Grandmother Pearl. I was given an email address to contact her. I sent her an email requesting some time to visit with her about my study. She wanted to visit by email correspondence. After confirming that she met the criteria for the study; she quickly requested that I send her the questions, as she would like the opportunity to respond to them by email. She shared that her story is very emotional and that she wanted to take her time and respond how and when she wanted to respond. I agreed; she has an awesome story and she is truly a Pearl.

Grandmother Pearl's roots and beginnings. *I was born and raised in Wichita, Kansas. I lived with both of my parents and my three siblings. My parents were my primary caregivers. They were kind, supportive, and hard workers. My father was the sole breadwinner and my mother worked in the home. My parents wanted the best for all of us and considered education as a means to attain success. My grandparents, both paternal and maternal, were deceased before my siblings and I were born. I attended Love Elementary school here in Wichita, Kansas. During the 50's and 60's Love was a segregated school. My fondest memory of this school was the support of all of the love shown to us by our teachers. During this time the administrator and most of the teachers were African American. The teachers were very professional in their teaching methods and dressed accordingly. There was no mistaking who was in charge. They looked the part of someone with authority. My fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Richardson, became my*

favorite of all of my teachers. She made learning fun and interesting. I remember her being quite colorful in her efforts to give her students a better understanding of the subject matter. It was Mrs. Richardson that influenced me to become the best that I could be. To me, our principal, Mr. Carter, was bigger than life. He commanded respect yet he was kind and understanding. He was always visible and attentive to the students. I had a great experience in school.

My girls. *I had two children. One living and one deceased. My children attended Wichita public schools during the mid 80's and 90's. They attended Green Elementary, Miles Elementary, Cole Middle School, and Summer High School. I believe my children were fortunate in their treatment by the support staff, teachers, and administrators. I had several positive interactions from teachers and administrators. Once, I was notified that one of my children lacked certain instruction she should have received in kindergarten and the teacher was adamant about getting her caught up and offered suggestions that could be used at home. Another time a teacher left a voicemail for me to call her. I was hesitant, of course thinking the worse only to be surprised that it was phone call just to let me know that my child was exceptionally kind and a joy to have in class. I still talk about that today. I have had teachers go out of their way and go the extra mile to make my children successful.*

My unique family arrangement. *I have four grandchildren and my two oldest, 14 and 16 have lived with me permanently for the past twelve years. They are both in high school, freshman and junior. We chose not to legally adopt our granddaughters as they are military survivors of our daughter, their mother. We did not want to confuse the government nor be laden with all the red tape and possibly deny them of their benefits as military dependents. Our*

granddaughters are like our children with rules, expected behaviors, chores, daily encouragement, constant rules that may or may not be followed, and lots of unconditional love. If you were to ask them, they would tell you I am just too strict and over protective. Perhaps it is due to my age and what I expected with my own children. They see the unequal difference on how they are treated versus the two grandchildren that do not live with us. I can honestly say their concerns and opinions are valid. I have tried to explain to them that I may seem to delight in their presence and more lenient with what they are allowed to do; they do go home where their parents can administer the rules and regulation that they follow or not.

I am unable to have a current relationship with my grandchildren's mother, my daughter. My daughter passed away in 2002 and as a result it was her wish that I become the guardian of her children, which I did without regard to our age and my personal life. Some days it is like raising my daughter all over again. Both are in her likeness, headstrong, intelligent, and extremely talented athletically and in the arts. My daughter, as a young teen, was a challenge to raise as she often sometimes followed a destructive path. Later, she became a leader of her own life. She applied and received a college scholarship in track, later joined the army, served oversea, and was excelling in her army career prior to her passing.

My granddaughters both attend Wichita Public Schools. My very first interaction with school personnel was when my youngest grandchild was made to sit outside the classroom in the first grade. I really can't remember the reason except that it was a minor behavior problem, especially for someone six years old. I was called to the school for something any trained professional teacher should have been able to handle. She just chose not to and my granddaughter missed instructional time. I actually told the teacher how I felt and to call me

when she really needed me. The next time I had an interaction with a teacher was concerning oldest granddaughter in the fourth grade. It occurred during school conferences where the only good thing the teacher had to say, with my granddaughter sitting there, that she was there every day. She had nothing nice to say about her learning abilities and when asked by me what I could do to improve her learning, the teacher told me to not worry as it was probably nothing as whatever was wrong it occurred in her mother's womb. Needless to say I spoke to the principal and when confronted, she lied. I knew then that something had to be done. I didn't know at the time that both my granddaughters were learning different as they were later diagnosed with dyslexia. They have been tested and graciously received accommodations (outside of public educational setting) that will allow them to become a success in their learning opportunities. They receive instruction from a teacher that has been trained at Fundamental Learning Center. I am now happy that I do not hear my granddaughters say, "Everyone thinks I'm not stupid." They still struggle with this diagnosis but their self-esteem and self-confidence has greatly improved.

My most recent experience with my grandchildren's school has been very positive and supportive. The teachers and administrators are available through the use of email, telephone, conferences and an on line tool. One can view a student's daily progress. This tool allows you to know if homework has been turned in or even if it is a late, test grades, and teacher comments. I feel very comfortable addressing any concerns to all of the school personnel. Teachers, administrators, counselors, college counselors are always eager to assist me whenever I need anything. Their door appears to be always open when it comes to educational success of children.

My dream for my granddaughters. *My responsibility as a grandparent is to instill in them the love of God, distinguishing from right and wrong, provide a path for educational success, being kind and respectful to others. I would say all the normal things any parent would want for their children and grandchildren. I believe I am probably hard on myself in regards to second guessing myself in what is best for my grandchildren and not letting my emotion cloud my better judgment. I feel that is what my daughter would have wanted; yet I feel they have missed out on a youthful caregiver they would have found in their mother. I know they compare me as a grandmother with their friends' parents and may see a different and old fashioned parenting style. It is my hope to make these exceptional young women to be women their mother would be proud. Their educational success is by far one of the most important.*

Things to ponder. *An African-American grandmother raising their grandchildren occurs more often than we would like to think. Grandmothers come in all ages; but those that are mid-sixties and above may find raising grandchildren more difficult than those that are younger. They are realizing that raising their own children is totally different with raising their grandchildren in today's world with high and ever changing technology. It is my opinion that older grandmothers may not be technology savvy with computers, email, and social media. Another obstacle for African American grandmothers that goes hand in hand with the technology is the ownership of a computer and purchasing power to provide internet access. It is through these high tech tools that more and more schools are relying on to communicate with parents. I strongly believe that these grandmothers will be at a loss in effectively raising their grandchildren and being part of their educational experience. Schools should identify those students who are being raised by grandmothers and make a commitment to communicate with*

these grandmothers in an alternative manner. The twice a year conference schedules that most schools adopt is not enough. Grandmothers need regular and timely notification of their grandchildren's progress, behaviors, school activities, and/or calendars. My recommendation would be maybe to establish a liaison between school and grandmother for grandmothers who are unable to provide a computer, unable to execute or understand the computer or provide some type of computer, whether it is a laptop or ipad, to give them access to school information. This will allow them to become involved as they choose and feel connected and a part of their grandchildren's education.

Grandmother Emerald

Grandmother Emerald is a refined, private lady who was reluctant to visit with me. She was referred to me by one of the schools in Wichita. I contacted her by phone and she wanted to know more about the study and what I was going to do with the information. She told me that she trusted the principal at the school and that is why she was going to accept the invitation to be a participant in the study.

Grandmother Emerald invited me into her home and when I arrive, she asks a younger gentleman to come into the living room with her. I was not sure if we were going to be able to start the interview as it was very silent and there was lots of staring at me, from Grandma Emerald. I decided not to pull out my recorder and papers; instead I noticed her décor was unique so I began complimenting her on how lovely her home was. She smiled and started sharing with me how she obtained some of the pieces displayed. She then asked me to have a seat and she nodded to the gentleman and he left the room. I then asked if I could take out my

recorder and paperwork so that I could explain how the process would go. Grandmother Emerald was willing and we were off on our journey together.

Precious memories. *I was born and raised in Wichita, Kansas. I lived with my great-grandmother and my mom. My mother was the primary caregiver, she was wonderful. I knew my father and my grandmother on his side of the family. My mom was single mother; however I did get to know the other side of my family as well. My mom was protective and she worked hard to provide a good living for me and my great-grandmother. I attended Love Elementary School; which in the 50's and 60's were segregated. The best memory of Love Elementary was the teachers. I just remember the teachers; wow they were awesome. I did not realize it back then, but you know they were all Black. The teachers were Black and even the principal; he was Black. It was just good to know that we had educators who were actually looking out for and encouraging the young people to do the best that they could. My mother was one that saved everything so I recently got a chance to go back and look... She saved all of my grade cards and everything, and so I could see the teacher's comments and things; it was so positive. Things are not that way anymore. I remember Miss Hardrick; I think she was my first grade teacher. She was always so pleasant and positive. And then later on there was Fleta Mosley who was my third grade teacher she was like a rock. She was the one that was the Girl Scout leader and she spent a lot of time with the kids, especially the girls. We would do extra-curricular activities like slumber parties and things like that.*

My mom was the one who interacted with the teachers at the schools I attended. Most of the time things were very positive; however I remember my kindergarten teacher. She was a teacher who had been there forever and she was not so nice at times. I remember loving to go to

school. I could read before I went to school; my mom taught me. One day my mom noticed that I did not want to go to school; the teacher was being mean to everyone so I did not want to go. My mom went up to the school and talked to her and straightened it all out and from then on; school was fun.

During my schooling, I had to move schools; I attended Horace Elementary. This was the first time that I had to attend a school that was integrated. They had a variety of teachers. Most of the teachers were White. I did not run into prejudice until I started attending that school (Horace Elementary). I had always been an A and B student when I attended Love Elementary. I had teachers at Horace Elementary who did not believe that I was that smart and I could not earn an A to save my life. My mom told me there was prejudice and that she wanted me to remember two things 1. No matter what your teachers tell you or say to you, you are smart. You keep doing and giving the best that you can God knows. 2. There are going to be people who will not do what they are suppose to do by the kids, so you go on and you do what you are suppose to do and that is learn. One thing I do know is there was a difference from going to an all Black school to a school that was desegregated.

Grandmother Emerald's children. *I have four children. They attended school all over the city. In the late 70's the two older children attended Sunny Elementary. In the late 80's and 90's the younger two attended Wasburn Elementary, Oak Elementary, Dunbar Elementary, Mayfield Middle, Hill High, Noble High and Winsor My youngest son graduated from Winsor, and my older two graduated through the GED program. I usually had a good relationship with the school. I did not really have troublemakers at school. Although the older ones decided not to keep going to school at that point, but they later on did what they needed to do and got their*

GED. I usually had a good relationship with my children's teachers and principals. I try to be proactive, and if I see if anything that is usual or if there is something that I need to know; I just go up there (to the school) and ask for a meeting with the teachers.

I do remember a time when my child wanted to play the violin. Back then, we could not afford to buy him one. I talked with someone in the community and they told me to go talk to the mediator at the school district office. This person suggested that I go talk to the building principal about getting him an instrument to play; so I did. The principal's first reaction was. "I don't think your son is gonna be recommended to play anyway." Well, what he did not know was that he was already recommended to play so he had to eat crow and give my son an instrument to play. This principal had no expectation for my kid. This is why as a parent, you have to get in there and fight for the rights of your kids and now my grandkids.

Obstacles and road blocks. *I have 18 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. Out of those grandchildren, I have two that are living with me on a full time basis. One of my grandchildren is in the fifth grade, she attends Sam Communications Magnet and the other one is in high school, he attends Noble High School. I did not legally adopt my grandkids. When the time came for them to come live with me, they just came and that was it. The first one that came to live with me, it was going to be a temporary deal, you know, it was like a transition that had to happen. I'm more or less helping her to make sure she gets her education and making sure she stays in line. The second one, it was not planned so it just kind of happened, and we only had enough time for my son to write legally that he wanted me to have guardianship, that is about all the time we had to do. I am here for my kids and grandkids. I did not want the system to get them, so I did not think twice; they are coming to live with me. My kids and grandchildren look*

to me for a lot. They call me to get advice and they vent; I am whatever they need me to be. My children trust me to raise their children, my relationship with my kids are awesome. One of my children is actually staying here also (The young man who greeted me when I arrived in her home). He helps me with his nieces and nephews. I think my kids are relieved that I am here for them when needed.

One of my grandchildren that are living with me began to have problems. We thought there might be an issue with autism. It took a long time for the school to work on testing. My son shared with me that he thought something was wrong, so I pursued it. Finally, the school decided that she was not autistic. She was having problems but she did not qualify for any special programs. I had to work with the school to get her some additional help. At the school there was an African American principal, an African American psychologist, and An African American social worker; they really worked with me. They knew I was trying to raise these grandkids so they would come to the home and give me support. One time my grandchild left the school and she went into the street, they were concerned as to why this was happening and they came over to the house to talk to me about things we can do to make sure this does not happen again.

I did have a few incidents that were not so positive with the school. When I got my grandkids I went to the school to enroll them and I had a hard time getting things in order. I did not have certain papers that they wanted; it was so frustrating. I kept trying to tell them that I did not know where the mom was and that I was the guardian. We finally worked through that but then the mother (my daughter) was showing up and going up to the school and then I became

the second class citizen when I had been raising them in my home on a full time basis. I felt like the school was pitting me against my daughter.

Now my other grandkid at Noble that is another horror story; it was a rocky start. My first interaction at Noble was, "Well, he will have to go to the school from the address that his mother lives." It was like they were not listening to what I was saying. The child lives with me. They kept saying that I had to fill out a special transfer paper to get him enrolled. I did not understand; Noble is my neighborhood school, he is living with me, why would I need to fill out a special transfer. I was sent from the counselor's office to the vice principal's office to the principal's and office then to someone downtown. In the meantime, I called Winsor High school and talked to the Black counselor there and they knew my story and she made a few phone calls and got me into the school (Noble) without a special transfer. I could not believe that I had to go through all of that to get him enrolled. Since then, we have had an okay experience. He has some anger issues, but we are working through them.

I am my family's keeper. *As a grandmother my role is just to help them in whatever way I can. I feel like kind of the concept that it takes a village to really raise a child. If I don't do my part; you know who will. When I was raised, my great-grandmother being there and my mom were there. My mom worked, so my great-grandmother would be home taking care of the family. Now you don't want it to go on forever, but you want to help them to be able to do whatever it is that they need to do, and you do what you need to do the help them through.*

Support needed. *One of the most challenging things about raising your grandchildren is the funds. The schools help out a little with the free and reduced lunches. That is a great help. I do not know but maybe the schools can work more closely with SRS to provide some services*

for our grandkids. The SRS told me that they would give us stipends for each grandkid; well that was a lie. I did not get a stipend to support me. I also need help with medical expenses for my grandkids. Maybe the school can work and interact more with the system to help us get what we need to support our grandkids that are living with us. I also think the school could be more aware and supportive; instead of finding fault and being negative. They could communicate better when the parent (my kids) come to the school to pick the kids up or to let them make decisions. When they have been living with me on a full time basis, it would nice if they could communicate these interactions with their parents with me. It cuts down on a lot of confusion. I just don't think people really understand our living arrangements and sometimes they don't reach out enough to know.

Grandmother Opal

Grandmother Opal was referred to me by the building administrator. When I called Opal, she was excited that I would consider using her story as part of my research study. We quickly confirmed that she was eligible and we set a time to visit. Grandmother Opal told me she liked to eat and wanted to meet me at I-Hop so that she could drink her coffee, eat her breakfast, and enjoy the conversation. I arrived at I-Hop early so that I could set a good first impression. Grandmother Opal arrived; I was very surprised. She was a very young grandmother, who was very sassy in appearance. She greeted me with a hug and said, "I am excited to participate, let's get started."

Raised by my community. *I was born and raised right here in Wichita, Kansas. I lived with my two brothers and two sisters. My parents were Leroy and Millie Barnes. I was blessed to have the community raise me; lots of people supported me, my sister and my brothers as we*

were growing up. I had great parents. I was closer to my dad than my mom, because my dad was the patient one. He was the one that really taught and trained us. My mom, well, she worked double shifts, she really could cook; she stayed busy.

My grandparents lived in Muskogee, Oklahoma on a farm. That was where we spent many summers and holidays. My grandmother was a wonderful woman, she would be considered the rock, and she kept the fort down. She was the one that could put you in line when you fell out of line. I think I developed knowing how to parent through her more than my parents because they were workers and was out of the home a lot. In the mid 60's I attended Brooks Elementary School, which was in Plainview. I loved Brooks. I was always very athletic so I could outrun any of the people in school. I could swing higher than anybody; I could lift more weights than anybody. I loved to learn and the teachers were willing to help me learn anything. They were not there for money; like these teachers are today. One of my favorite things in schools was the SRA programs. I don't know why they ever took that out of schools because I'm telling you; it taught us. It gave us understanding. To this day even though they have tried to duplicate it with different things, I'd say they need to bring that one back. They tell me they still use it in the special education classrooms. Elementary school was good for me. Then I went to middle school; it was different. It did not have the same structure and I got caught up and lost and teachers did not care about you. Again, I stood out in gym class, because I'm athletic. I probably could have been a gymnast, but I did not have anyone to push me. I think a lot of that had to do with home. All my brothers and sister are three years older than me, and then the youngest is nine years younger than me. Everybody was busy doing their own thing. Parents were working. There was not structure in the house. We did not have daily routines of you

better clean this or you better empty the trash. My parents did not have expectations of me. I was always thought of as being responsible so they figured I did not need as much attention or guidance.

Grandmother Opal's family. *I had 6 children. My baby boy passed away at 22 on November the 20, 2010. So I have left 1 boy and 4 girls. In the 80's and 90's my children attended Collette, Rivers, Bradley, Hamlet, Coles, Jones, North View, Heights Grove and Metro City. They went to a lot of schools. My oldest was very shy. He wasn't very outgoing at all. He just sat back did his work and did not cause any problems at school. My oldest daughter, she was very outgoing. She was like a magnet around people; she would draw them into her web. She was good in school, just always talking. Marva, I carried her for 10 months, so she was a month old when she was born although she was a newborn; so she was intelligent. She would just do her work and be done with it. Catrina; super intelligent. She was so smart that she would get bored 'cause she would be through with her work and she would cause problems. They labeled her a trouble student. Tiffinie, she kind of grew up between here and her grandparents in Texas. She grew up as a single child, very independent. And then there was Jay, my baby, my love child, five years after Tiffinie, he was spoiled rotten. He's the one that passed away. He had a smile that all the teachers would melt away. He was a character in school and he had no problems at all. My kids all had good experiences at school except for Catrina. And to this day, that's why I have my granddaughter.*

A couple of times I had to go advocate for my daughter. It was hard; I had to decipher where the real truth was at because you have the principal and the teachers saying one thing and you have the kids saying another thing. My children were very strong and they stood their

grounds and I taught them to be respectful; however they need to stand up for themselves. You want to support the school, but you also need to listen to your kids. The school did not like that my daughter stood up to them to protect her right. I'm pretty mild mannered. I'm not pushy or aggressive like they think most of us are. There were times my children felt like I did not stand up for them enough. I am peaceful; I don't want a lot of havoc. If it is going to cause too much confusion, I will just back away. I would take her home and try to talk to her and she would be mad at me for being on the side of the school so not a lot got resolved in those situations. This did not make me feel good. I have six children; I was basically a single mother, even though I would be married from time to time. I was a single mother trying to do it all. I am not quick thinking on my feet so after I went home with my daughter I would think about all the things I should have said to advocate for her. I feel really bad that I didn't say or stand up more for them (my children). In the school setting you are almost made to feel like you can't advocate; in a sense. If I was more aggressive then they may kick me out or call the police. Like one lady I have seen at the school. Ms. Thomas...When her boys would get in trouble, Ms. Thomas would come up the hallway, walking fast, boy you knew there was going to be trouble in the office area. But I really admired her; she had the courage to stand up for her boys. Sometimes that could be a good thing and a bad thing; but she was not afraid to speak up.

Grandmother Opal's passion, her grandchildren. *I have 17 with those that were married into the family. I have 3 grandchildren that were married into the family. I have one granddaughter who lives with me full time. My granddaughter is nine years old; she is in the 4th grade at Jackie Robinson Elementary School. She has been living with me for about 3 years. I did not legally adopt my grandchild because I wanted them to be able to deal with their mom;*

see her; visit her without the system. Not adopting her was the only way that would happen. My daughter lost a baby son in a house fire in 2006. My granddaughter has had a lot of loss in life and I didn't want to take the mom completely out of her life. I'm never going to be able to take the place of her mom; but I will do my best to provide a decent life for her while her mother works to get her life together. I did not want my granddaughter to be in the system. I wanted her to know that she has a family and we love her and we will make sure she stays with family.

My granddaughter is a good girl; I still have had to go into the school to advocate for her rights. I still have the same calm spirit when I go into the school; however this time I listen to my granddaughter and I make sure that the school hears her concerns and we work together for a solution. I think my granddaughter appreciates that and I want to model for her how to handle situations in a productive manner. There was one interaction that I had with school that I did not handle in such a diplomatic way. My granddaughter was in first grade and they said that my granddaughter had an anger problem, so she looked the teacher in the eye and they say she kicked the teacher. The very next day she was shifted to another classroom. I felt like they should not have moved her out of the classroom. The principal should have made my granddaughter apologize to the teacher and let her go back to that classroom. They moved her into the other teacher's classroom and she started out on the bad list. This teacher immediately started treating my granddaughter poorly, because I know she heard what happened the day before with the other teacher. I was going to visit the classroom and I overheard the teacher tell the other lady, "I am going to handle her don't worry about it." The teacher did not see me standing there and did not know I heard her say this. I stepped up this time and told her, "You will not be 'handling' my granddaughter." How could she treat a kid this way? This child has

lost her mother through the legal system and her brother in a fire and no one is going to hurt her. It is my job to protect her. Of course, the teacher and I got an understanding and this did not happen again.

Who am I? *I feel like my responsibility to my grandchildren is to teach them how to live right. Sometimes their parents (my kids) does so many things that they need to know that there is a right way to live and a wrong way to live. You can do your own thing and mess your life all the way up; or you can learn from somebody that can teach you to do it the right way and maybe you will have a chance at a better life. It is my responsibility to keep my family together. I am not going to send her out the system to have someone potentially rape or molest her; I am not having that for my granddaughter. She is my blood; I got her back.*

Advice. *Take time to listen. I do not think the schools really hear us. I think they see us, but not hear us. I think the teachers need to understand what these kids are going through and instead of handling them; they should pray for them and have some compassion. The teachers should realize that not all kids have the family structure of a mom and a dad. Those days are over; my kids did not even have that type of family structure. I also think that schools should have a monthly gathering for grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. During these meetings we can share, talk, and feel united. Feel like we can grow and help one another. Then maybe the school can see how they can better help us as we raise our grandkids. We need to build each other up during this stressful time; because it is stressful raising your grandkids. They come to us with lots of baggage that we do not have the energy or the skills to deal with. I am a younger grandmother; but I still get tired too. I am also still working and going to school, so financially I can support my granddaughter. I don't know how the retired folks do it. I just*

keep prayed up and keep pushing forward hoping that one day my daughter will get herself together and she could come and get her daughter full time.

Grandmother Topaz

Grandma Topaz was my final grandmother to interview; she was a true joy to visit with. I received her name from the principal of the school where her grandchild attended. I called her on the phone and she was expecting my phone call as the principal had prepped her for my phone call. She invited me to come to her home and was very gracious and appreciated the opportunity to participate in the study. When I drove up to her home; she was standing in the door awaiting my arrival. When I entered her home; I could see babies sleeping and lots of books and toys. She led me back to a room where she introduced me to a gentleman who was watching a ball game. She let me know that he would be staying for the duration of the interview. I could tell she was eager to get the interview started so we moved quickly into the interview protocol.

Roots and upbringing. *I was born and raised in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. I lived with my auntie and my dad because my mom died when I was eight years old. I had eight sisters; it was a lot of girls. My aunt and a lady name Linda Dunklin, my godmother; they took care of us girls. I had one grandmother, she was my step grandmother and she was a mean woman. We hated to see her coming; but when she was on her death bed, she apologized to us for being so mean. I was just blessed to have other ladies like my aunt, my godmother, and some of the other ladies from the church who stepped up to help my dad when my mother died. So because of them, I know what it means to raise the village and take care of your own.*

In Oklahoma, I attended Black schools in the mid 50's and 60's. We attended church with our teachers and our families lived in the same neighborhood. When we attended church

we knew that the ladies at the church would spank us and when we got home we would get another spanking. These were the good ole days when everyone took interest in us and loved us unconditionally.

My daughters and public schools. *I have two daughters. In the 90's and 2000's my kids attended Price Harris, Coleman, Pleasant Valley and Southeast. I always had a great relationship with the schools. I was always head room mother for my kid's classrooms. I was over the PTA; I was over the Fun Night at the schools. The school and I had a great relationship and communication was good. There was one incident that occurred when the teacher asked me if I could come to the conference without my husband. The teacher was always saying that my daughter was needy, spoiled and always wanted the attention of the other kids. The teacher was always negative about our daughter and so my husband would step up to the plate and asked (the teacher) if he had anything nice to say about our daughter because everything that came out of his mouth was negative. The teacher was intimidated by his presence and tone so he did not want to meet with him; he just wanted to meet with me. We had to schedule a meeting with the principals to make sure that my husband could attend. Anytime you want to advocate for your children, we seem to come across the wrong way to others that do not understand. We also had another interaction with the schools that was not pleasant when she was in secondary schools. It really hurt us because this guy was Black. He told her that she would never be able to go to college, and that she was a needy person and society was going to eat her up. I went round and round with this man. One day he kept her in from school and she missed her bus home and he told her she had to walk home. She walked to the fire department and they called me and I went to pick her up. You know that did not go so well either. Other than those two interactions, I*

would say we had very positive interactions with the teachers and principals at the school. They were kind and gave our kids a good education.

My legacy. *I have 5 grandkids. I have two that live in Texas and three that live here in Wichita. I have two grandchildren living with me on a full time basis and they both attend Marva Collins Elementary School. I did not legally adopt them, we as a family just decided it was the best thing for the kids right now. I also did not want to take the rights away from their mother. I have faith in God. I refuse to let the devil have anything that God gave me; I stood on that word. The bible says if you raise child up in the way you want 'em to go, they got to come back how you raised them. I know she cannot survive out there in the streets because she was not raised in the streets. She was raised in the church and she has a foundation and will come back. Just like I was active with my children, I am active with my grandkids. I was at the school events and attended PTA meetings, letting the school know and the kids too; grandmother cares about you and that you are loved. The school seemed to be shocked of my involvement with grandchildren. My grandchild also mentioned that this was not the norm for him and he was excited to have me come to his school. The school saw that I was there and so the interactions became very positive.*

The kids wear uniforms; we get them out and iron them, so that they look nice when they go to school. It makes them feel good, looking good and smelling good. The kids attended the school for months before the school realized that I was their grandmother. I was there and participated, I guess they assumed I was the mom. I will just show up at the school and sit in the back of the room and observe. Once they (the school) found out that I was the grandmother, they really rolled out the red carpet for me. It felt good to feel appreciated by the school. I voiced my

opinion about not having something for the grandmothers at the school because I knew I was not the only one who was raising my grandchildren; they responded and now there is a grandparent's day. It was unorganized; but it will get better.

One of my grandkids has been molested before coming to me; she needed lots of support. I went up to the school to talk to the teacher; she was very nice. They got her into therapy; and would send notes homes and to the doctor so that we were all on the same page helping her to get better. I cannot tell you how helpful they have been when it comes to supporting my grandchildren through this transition. When my kids were going through school is was more White educators and I felt like I always need to prove myself at this school I don't feel that way. There are a lot of Black professionals at Marva Collins and they are so helpful and supportive. I am not saying that White teachers were not helpful and supportive; I'm just saying I notice the difference from when my kids were in school. I am a Christian woman and I use kind words when I work with the school so I do not have poor interactions with the school personnel.

Responsible for my family. *My role as a grandmother is important to me. I feel like I am responsible for my family, I have never had the opportunity to be irresponsible. I don't know what that is. I get mad at myself because I'd like to know how it is to be irresponsible and just don't pay your bills, or not pay your light bills, or don't buy groceries. I just don't understand how people could not be responsible for their families. You really don't want to split up the family. The system gets in the middle and the messes thing up. I think the system jumps in too fast; they need to let the families work it out for the best interest of the children.*

Schools need to listen. *I would want the schools to not jump to conclusions so fast, keep an open mind and listen to what the grandmothers are saying. The schools should notice and*

realize that the family is going through a transition. We need them to be patient and maybe offer some type of support. The kids and going through a tough time, they need counseling. The grandmothers are going through a tough time as well. Things are not like they were when my kids went to school. We (grandmothers) need some type of training to help support these kids. The schools should offer some type of after school tutoring to meet their deficit in their reading and math skills. As grandparents, we cannot always afford to make that happen. We have had some good experiences with the school personnel; however there a few things that they can improve upon.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

The overarching question that guided this study was: what are the experiences of African American grandmothers who are caring and providing upbringing for their grandchildren as they interact with public school personnel? With the increasing number of African American grandmothers providing care and upbringing for their grandchildren this research gives a voice and creates some clarity of implications for school personnel as they continue to support and work with grandmothers. This chapter presents the conclusions derived from analysis of the findings presented in chapter four and then gives their recommendations to school personnel as they continue to work with grandmothers who are their caring for their grandchildren. The chapter concludes with implications for policy and practice and my personal reflection.

In this narrative inquiry these grandmothers provided rich data on their perspectives of their experiences as they interact with school personnel. Narrative inquiry allowed me to explore my participants' thinking and create meaning from their backgrounds and experiences. Each story expressed events, emotions, and interpretations unique to the individual lived experience(Chase, 2005). As a researcher, I was honored and found it a privilege to be in the presence of these esteemed women. I will never forget the pride and humility that I saw in them as they shared their stories.

African American Grandmothers' Standpoint

There were a number of themes that emerged during the analysis that provided insight into the narratives of the six African American grandmothers who were raising their grandchildren. Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by African American women

clarifying a standpoint of and for African American women (Collins, 1986a). Although racial segregation is now organized differently than in prior eras, being African American and female in the United States continues to expose African American grandmothers to certain common experiences (Collins, 1999b). The grandmothers' family experiences as well as their participation in diverse expressions of African American culture mean that overall; grandmothers as a group live in a different world from that of people who are not black and female. The particular experience that accrue to living as a grandmother can stimulate a distinctive consciousness concerning their experiences and society overall (Collins, 1999a). As African American women the grandmothers in this study possessed a unique standpoint on, perspective of; their experiences and certain commonalities of perception expressed through their stories. Three primary themes from comparing the narratives were (a) a strong historical context of African American families and traditions. (b) childhood experiences in segregated schools and, (c) experiences raising their children and grandchildren and their interactions with public school personnel.

Strong African American Family and Traditions

The first theme common to all the counter stories is the importance of a strong tradition and family support in the African American culture. Traditions, strong extended families, making sacrifices, and keeping the family together were all important components of the stories shared by the grandmothers.

Traditions. Many of the grandmothers in this study grew up during the height of the civil rights movement, the 1950's and 1960's and they talked about the influence of their own grandparents who passed along family culture and traditions. Grandmothers occupy a special

place in transmitting values to children about their proper place in society (Collins, 1991). These traditions are handed down via the stories their grandparents told them of slavery and the perseverance displayed by their families. The relationships between these grandmothers and their grandchildren served as a private sphere in which cultures of resistance and everyday forms of resistance were learned (Scott, 2008). Grandmother Sapphire recalled a story in which her grandmother would tell of her school days. Her grandmother told her the tale of walking 10 miles uphill and downhill with one shoe to get to school and how she did not understand kids today. Through this story, she was stressing the importance of education and how she should go to any extreme to ensure she was in school and learning how to improve herself and to uplift the circumstances of all African Americans. These stories modeled the through that a parent can foster her children's oppression if she teaches them to believe in their own inferiority. Through these experiences the grandmothers were passing along stories that debunked the hegemony of African American inferiority. They did not want their children to forget where they came from as they moved forward. Grandmother Ruby shared stories of her grandparents telling her about her great-grandparents being slaves. She talked about how they were proud people and desired to be respected by Whites. She recalled her mother telling her she had to learn and be smarter than the Whites if she wanted to get ahead in life. These grandmothers had vivid memories of these stories. They were instilling perseverance and self determination to fight on for improved circumstances for all African Americans.

During the 1950's and 1960's it was common for urban African American grandchildren to be send to their grandmothers for the summer to learn of their family culture and traditions (Strom et al., 1992). Grandmother Ruby reflected on times when she was raised by her mother

and father; however she would spend the entire summer with her grandmother. During that time she recalled learning how to sew, cook, and work in the garden. She also remembered going to church and singing spiritual songs and, learning of the importance of family and the history of their ancestors long ago. Grandmother Opal reflected on her grandmother being the rock for her family; she was the glue to keeping the family together. She talked about spending holidays and having summers visits on the farm and learning from her grandmother. Now that they were grandmothers, Ruby and Opal intended to continue passing on these traditions to their children and grandchildren.

Many of the grandmothers revealed their desire to continue to share the rich history and tradition with all of their grandchildren so their family's strong legacy and courage can carry the next generation forward. Grandmother Ruby had high hopes for her granddaughter. She explained how she wanted her granddaughter to grow up with pleasant memories. She wanted her granddaughter to have a better life than her mother created for herself. Grandmother Pearl wanted to make sure she gave her grandchildren the values that were given to her as a child, and that she gave to her children. Her family values included instilling in them the love of God, to distinguish right from wrong, to be kind and respectful to others, and to pursue high academic achievement. When these grandmothers taught their children to trust their own self-definitions and value themselves, they offered a powerful tool for resisting oppression, which they were eager to pass on to their own grandchildren.

Extended families. Collins (1989) noted the depth of relationships among African American women and their own biological children, in their extended family, and with the community's children. As mothers, othermothers, teachers, and churchwomen, African

American women participated in constructing and reconstructing these oppositional knowledge's (Collins, 1991). The importance of family and extended family was still prominent in the stories of these grandmothers. As the grandmothers shared their stories about their families, they always included parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who all played an important role in their lives. The relationships the grandmothers shared with family were pronounced thorough their actions. For example, Grandmother Topaz was raised by her aunt and her father. Her mother was deceased and her mother's sister moved into the home to help support.

These grandmother's experiences are consistent with Martin and Martin (1980), who also pointed out the children belonged to, and were the responsibility of the collected community. Thus, in addition to her aunt, there were also ladies from the church who stepped up to support Grandmother Topaz's family. Grandmother Topaz also recalled living in the same neighborhood and going to church with their teachers and administrators. This helped her feel connected and secure when she went to school. She gave an illustration of getting a spanking at school or church and then when she got home she would get another spanking from her mom or dad. This was a sign to her that we are in this together; we all want what is best for you. As young children, these grandmothers felt the strength and commitment of families and community.

In a discussion of cultural elements of African American family structures, kinship relations were viewed as the foundation of social organization and extended family system is based on interdependent functions (Yusane, 1990). Therefore, African American children are valued and viewed as an investment in the community's future (Sudarkasa, 1998). This discussion supports the stories shared by the grandmothers and their relationships with extended

family and community members invested in their upbringing. It gives credence to Grandmother Sapphire, who provides support to all of the children who belong to her family unit, even if they are not “blood.” Grandmother Sapphire explained her son had step-children who were not her blood; however she treated them as if they were her own. She talked about filling that void when their other grandparents not around. She considered them part of her village. In this case, communal child-care arrangements are practiced, women as a group felt accountable for one another’s children in their absence (White, 1999). Grandmother Ruby recalled how some of the young kids at her church said, “Can you be my Wichita grandma?” These kids were away from home or their own grandmother had passed away. She would invite them over and cook them a meal, just as their grandmothers would do for them.

Sacrifices. The strength and survival of the African American families has been dependent largely on the commitment and unselfish acts of grandmothers Staples (1985). This was true for the grandmothers in this study, first as children growing up and today as they raise their grandchildren. Becoming a care giver to their grandchildren was rewarding and stressful. All of the grandmothers interviewed shared what a joy it was to have their grandchildren living with them in their home. In spite of what was going on with them personally, financially, or physically, they wanted to be there for their family and valued the children in their family and felt like the children were the future to carrying their legacy forward. Grandmother Pearl’s story hit home as her situation was much unexpected when her daughter died. Grandmother Pearl was living a productive life and was in good place thinking about retirement when all of a sudden she was burying her daughter and taking on the responsibility of raising her two granddaughters.

This grandmother did not think twice about taking her grandchildren; knowing the toll that it would take on her mentally, physically, and financially.

Grandmother Sapphire, like many of the other grandmothers talked about being on a fixed income. She explained how expensive it was to raise children, who needed food and clothes, and wanted to participate to school activities. Grandmother Sapphire was determined to make sure those basic needs were met. She was willing to spend her last dime on her grandchildren. Grandmother Sapphire was appreciative of the school's help in providing coats, and shoes for her grandchildren; she found it be a great service for her family.

Grandmother Ruby had a granddaughter with some major health issues. Her granddaughter was born with a rare heart condition. When the doctors discovered the condition they needed to schedule the surgery right away. Being retired and on a fixed income she had to come up with funds to pay for her granddaughter to have surgery. It has been a struggle; however she is pleased with the outcome and was happy that her granddaughter could return to school with good health. Grandmother Emerald shared that her grandchildren were behind academically, so she had to pay for a tutor to come into her home to provide additional support to get them to a proficient level. Many of these grandmothers were spending an enormous amount of resources to provide for their grandchildren's basic needs.

Not one of them complained or regretted the decision to take on this responsibility of caring for their grandchildren; instead I saw the pride and joy on their faces to be the one as caring for the grandchildren. They were proud of keeping strong the African American tradition of grandmothers being the hope and foundation for their families.

Staying together. Throughout African American history grandmothers have been the core of the family's endurance to stay together (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Throughout their stories grandmothers referred to their own grandmothers as the foundation that kept their families together. Stack (1975b) work found African American families living in their communities needed a steady source of cooperative support to survive. The grandmothers themselves felt a sense of ownership and responsibility to keep families together. Grandmother Opal recalled her grandmother being the "glue" for her family and grew up believing this was how things were to be done. African American women have been the backbone in sustaining the family (Hooks, 2000). To further express this thought, Grandmother Emerald said, "We take care of our own, we stick together." This mindset was a common theme throughout the stories from the grandmothers. Another grandmother referred to her grandmother as the "rock" of their family. Grandmother Sapphire recalled her grandmother standing up for her and making sure that she filled in the gaps when her mom and dad were working. The desire and commitment to keep their families together were strong for the grandmothers in the study.

The grandmothers' shared many reasons why they are caring for their grandchildren, which included their own children pursuing educational opportunity to better their lives, drug abuse, incarceration and even the death. Whatever the reason; the grandmothers all felt it was their responsibility to take the children and raise them in their homes.

Many of the grandmothers in this study did not formalize (i.e. legally adopt) their living arrangement with their grandchildren. Often, grandmothers are willing to undertake parental responsibility for their grandchildren to keep them out of the foster care system (Oliver W. Edwards, 1998). As the grandmothers told their stories, I questioned why they did not formally

adopt their grandchildren; a theme rang clear: the lack of trust in “the system.” The grandmothers did not trust the legal system or the educational system. Grandmother Pearl explained that when her daughter died, she was afraid of losing military benefits from the government if she formally adopted her granddaughters. Another fear and lack of trust was expressed by Grandmother Sapphire, who did not trust the educational system. She shared how the educational system reminded her of the judicial system; they keep tearing down Black communities. She as well as others questioned why the school was leaving their children behind academically.

Several other grandmothers expressed a fear of the legal system taking their grandchildren and placing them in homes that may be unsafe and not providing the love that blood relatives would provide. Grandmother Sapphire claimed if she legally adopted she grandchildren, it opened the door for the legal system to be in her business forever. However, by not legally adopting these children, the grandmothers are missing out on many resources that otherwise would be available to them; these resources include medical, mental health, and financial. Even though they understood what they were giving up, they were not willing to take the risk of formalizing the adoption.

Childhood Experiences in Segregated Schools

Most of the grandmothers in this research attend segregated schools for a portion of their schooling. These experiences created a unique standpoint and stimulated a distinctive consciousness concerning their experiences and the way they view interactions within the schools (Collins, 1999a). The grandmothers attended schools where their principals and most teachers were African American. Most of the grandmothers were excited to talk about their

elementary experiences in particular where they recalled the joy of their upbringing, even when things were hard for their families. African American families generally trusted members of the school to educate and protect their children (C. A. Fields-Smith, 2006). The grandmothers talked about the concept of it taking a village to raise a child. They felt safe in segregated schools. They remembered principals and teachers shopping in the same grocery store, living in the same neighborhood, and attending church with them on Sunday. Their parents knew the teachers and principals. The parents and students' were proud of their schools and neighborhoods. They remembered not feeling isolated or singled out because everyone looked like them (African American).

The grandmothers told explicitly about the exemplary principals and teachers that impacted them as young children. They recalled how the principals and teachers dressed. Grandmother Pearl could tell by the dress and how they carried themselves who was in charge; which is "Much different than what you see today." Most of the grandmothers shared their principals and teachers wanted them to succeed in school. They felt encouraged and knew their educators had high hopes and dreams for them to be successful.

In her oral history of segregated school, (Siddle Walker, 1993) noted that parents had high expectations of their children; they reinforced school policies and, procedures and provided support for the teachers and the school. Many of the grandmothers had parents who valued education and had high expectations for their children. The grandmothers gave examples where the schools would discipline them and when they went home they were in trouble with their parents as well. The parents, teachers and administrators were collaborative members of the

community to help their children be the best that they could be in school and in life (Moeller & Bielfelt, 2011). The grandmothers characterized this as the “good old days.”

Things begin to change for the grandmothers once schools began to integrate. As African American schools were closed, many African American teachers and administrators were ultimately displaced or demoted (Morris, 2001). Most of the grandmothers shared they were treated differently and were not expected to do what the other children were expected to do in school. They felt they did not fit into the school culture. Most of the grandmothers overall felt the principals and teachers did not care whether they were successful in the school setting or with their academics. Grandmother Emerald recalled moving into an integrated school and feeling like things were going downhill for her academically. She recalled going from getting A’s and B’s and having lots of confidence in her ability to learn to becoming one of the lower performing students in her classroom. It was the first time she felt prejudice and low expectations. After listening to the stories one can see how these experiences with school personnel shaped how they interacted with school personnel as parents and as grandparents.

Experiences Raising their Grandchildren and Their Interaction with School Personnel

All of the grandmothers wanted the best for their grandchildren as they took on this role of raising their grandchildren. They all shared individual concerns as they interacted with school personnel. While the grandmothers believe things are better than when they attended public schools; they all identified obstacles that still exist as they interacted with school personnel.

Changes. Gibson (2002) suggested when African American grandmothers interact with school personnel, they often become aware of changes that have happened since their past school experiences. A few of the grandmothers found they needed to navigate the educational system

differently because of the changes that had occurred since their children attended school. One of those changes is the way in which school communicate with families. Instead of having face to face or phone conversation; most schools communicate through email and other complex tools. Technology has changed the face of communication in the schools that their grandchildren attended; this caused some of them to feel left out of the school communication loop. The lack of resources, such as equipment and internet access were mentioned as a barrier in communicating with the schools. Grandmother Pearl explained if she wanted to know what was going on with her grandchildren, she had to know how to navigate the website and the communication sites for the school. Many of the grandmothers who participated in the study did not have access to technology in their homes. They relied on visits to the school and phone calls as their primary mode of communication with the school. Some of the other grandmothers shared that calling and receiving a phone call back was not timely and very difficult. Another change noted was the curriculum. Grandmother Sapphire expressed disappointment in her children not being taught African American history. She recalled being taught about all races and all cultures and how to be proud and respect all people. This was something she believed was important and now it has been removed from the public school curriculum.

Supporting their grandchildren academically became a challenge for many of the grandmothers. Many of the grandmothers expressed that when their grandchildren came to live with them, they found out their grandchildren were behind in their ability to read and complete basic math problems. When they attempted to try to help them with homework they immediately noticed the changes that had occurred in how they were taught math and in some cases how their own children learned the skills. In addition, many of their grandchildren's experiences caused

them to have some behavioral concerns that manifested themselves in the school setting such as anger and depression. The grandmothers expressed some frustration in being able to work with their grandchildren academically as well as emotionally.

Policies and procedures. The findings also uncovered another area of frustration grandmothers had with the school, which were school policies and procedures. Sometimes policies were interpreted differently across the district. Researchers bring out the notion that school personnel interpret policies in terms of their own experiences and motivation to enact policy (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Fairclough, 2001). Lack of consistency of practice amongst the schools was a major frustration for Grandmother Opal. She became frustrated with the multiple layers of the school system she had to peel through; only to find out the school interpreted the policy on enrollment incorrectly. Grandmother Emerald had an experience in which she was trying to enroll her grandchildren in her neighborhood school and the principal would not let her because she did not have legal papers to enroll her grandchildren. She understood that the procedures were in place to protect her grandchildren; however she thought the policies could be revisited to consider families and situations that were not the norm.

Advocacy. Building upon the environment that segregated schools provided, the grandmothers had a solid legacy of advocacy (V. S. Walker, 2000). Many of grandmothers talked about being an advocate for their grandchildren. They recalled their parents and grandparents being visible in the schools, participating in parent conferences, and being part of fundraising for the schools. Their contributions during this period were often linked with the philosophy of self-help, this motivated families to continue to work hard to support their children and the school (V. S. Walker, 2000). The grandmothers understood how important this was and

how it made them feel to have their families, teachers, and community involved in their educational experiences. The grandmothers wanted to continue this legacy with their own grandchildren.

As they began to advocate for their grandchildren, it came out loud and clear that school personnel do not always listen or respond to their concerns or needs. It was very clear as Grandmother Pearl and others began to ask questions and push to get support for their grandchildren; they encountered some obstacles that caused them to advocate for their grandchildren. Some of the grandmothers had successful experiences while others found frustration. Grandmother Sapphire recalled many times going to the school to share concerns with teachers and principals and felt she was dismissed by the response she received from the school. Grandmother Sapphire was determined to get a positive outcome for her grandchildren by taking the concern to the district level offices. There she found people were more willing to listen and problem solve. Grandmother Topaz had a similar story in which her granddaughter was having some problems transitioning to her grandmother's home and had some behavior issues at school. The school labeled her granddaughter as a problem child and prejudged her; never giving her a chance. This child lost her mother through the legal system and her brother in a fire and Grandmother Topaz expressed her job was to protect her granddaughter from people who were not willing to help.

Some of the Grandmothers were frustrated as they worked to ensure their grandchildren were successful academically. Grandmother Pearl and Grandmother Emerald had trouble getting academic support for her grandchildren; who all were eventually diagnosed with learning disabilities. Both of these grandmothers knew something was wrong with their grandchildren

academically and felt exhausted with the process before something was done to support their grandchildren's learning styles. The grandmothers did not fully understand the process, which caused the delay in their grandchildren receiving services.

Misrepresentation. Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communicates, these grandmothers formed their own ideas about the meaning of African American womanhood. When these ideas found collective expression, the grandmother's self-definitions enabled them to form conceptions of self and community. These self definitions of African American womanhood were designed to resist the negative controlling images of African American woman advanced by Whites as well as the discriminatory social practices that those controlling images supported (Collins, 1991). The phenomenon of the angry Black women and the imagining that it creates for society is one archetype several grandmothers experienced firsthand (Collins, 1986b); Hooks (2000). Within United States culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal and inevitable (Collins, 1999a). These assumed assumptions and negative stereotypes attached to African American women are used to justify oppression. These grandmothers were aware of school personnel perceiving them as angry Black women. Therefore, some were careful about not coming across to school personnel as loud and angry. Grandmother Ruby believed she had to approach the personnel in a nonthreatening way so school personnel would be willing to work with her to support her granddaughter. This grandmother and several others held to the belief that if they did not come across in a way school personnel thought was appropriate; they may not get what they wanted from the school.

One of the grandmothers felt she had been misrepresented and placed into the angry Black women category. As I waited at the school for the arrival of Grandmother Sapphire, I was given the unspoken eye gesture by the office staff and the comment made was “if you need anything, just let us know.” I could tell then, they were telling me this grandmother could be a problem. Grandmother Sapphire believes she has been misrepresented for her assertive method of advocating for her grandchildren. She is a big woman, with a big voice and a frank way of sharing her views. The grandmother is aware of her reputation and understands the uneasiness that it causes when she arrives in the school. Her demeanor in the school setting caused school personnel to categorize her as aggressive, ghetto, and angry.

Grandmother Sapphire also makes this connection when she shared her experiences of when her grandchildren went to the school dance and only hearing one genre of music; not relating or concerned about the audience that was attending the dance. When grandmother Sapphire approached the school personnel with her concern, they had not even considered this being an issue for the families or the students. Delpit (2006) suggested there are two distinct responses to privilege: (a) those with greater power are frequently least aware of or at least unwilling to acknowledge its existence; and (b) those with less power are often most aware of power discrepancies. The school personnel that hired the disc jockey and selected the music that was played at the event did not even consider all students in the school population. Instead, they played the dominant culture’s genre of music; hence isolating some of the students and parents who attended the school dance. Again, this may not have been the intention of the school personnel; however it magnifies the existence of white power in a subtle form in public school settings.

Wisdom from the Grandmothers

The final analysis of this chapter will review the recommendations from the grandmothers who participated in the study. The purpose of this study was to hear their stories and from their stories and to glean insights that could help improve interactions with school personnel. The last few questions at the end of the individual interviews were crafted to probe into recommendations grandmothers had for school personnel. Those topics included behavior and emotional support, academic support, communication and family support.

Behavior and emotional support. Many of the grandmothers expressed their grandchildren had behavior problems. Some of the grandmothers recognized that some of the behavior problems were due to the life they had before moving into their homes. They believed the school was aware the grandchildren were having behavior issues; however their answer in most instances was suspension. Some of the grandmothers believed that they were out of school more than they were in school. It was a common response that several grandmothers wish the school would work with their children by offering counseling services during the school day.

Academic support. Other grandmothers shared the struggle that their grandchildren were having academically. Several of the grandmothers were concerned and would like for the schools to do something for their grandchildren. They felt as though the school realizes and share their concern; however they continue to leave them behind. The grandmothers recommended the school provide before or after school tutoring services for their grandchildren. One grandmother stated that she is paying someone to come to her home to tutor; however that was not going to continue as it is very costly.

Communication. One grandmother recommended that the school work on better ways to communicate with grandmothers. Most schools use technology to communicate progress of students, and missing homework assignments. She shared that many grandmothers may not have the skills or resources to communicate using technology. She felt like the schools should take that into consideration as they work with grandmothers.

Family support. Most of the grandmothers shared the importance of school personnel understanding and responding to the family unit. The grandmothers mentioned numerous times; the schools need to listen to what we are saying to them. I believe the grandmothers were referring to their verbal requests as well as their unspoken cues. The grandmothers felt they were not appreciated for their efforts in raising their grandchildren. One grandmother mentioned having grandparents' day, which could be used to celebrate them and their contributions to the school and the community. Another grandmother recommending having a support group at the school for grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren; this would provide a vehicle for networking.

Implications

The following section includes implications for school personnel who interaction with grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren. Implications were derived from empirical research and this study's findings and conclusions and are intended to inform and support school personnel. Implications include adjusting school policies and procedures, creating cultural/sensitivity training, providing opportunities for connecting grandmothers to school, and maintaining high expectations for students. Some resources identified include academic

intervention during the school day, and connecting to free resources within the community that provide tutoring and mental health services for the grandmothers as well as the grandchildren.

School Policies and Procedures

School policies and procedures are always being evaluated for their effectiveness and efficiencies in the school bureaucracy. The experience of these grandmothers opens the opportunity for school personnel to evaluate and review current procedures that may need adjustment to meet the needs of families who are not considered the norm. Applying white middle class norms and school bureaucracy on family circumstances can limit the potential for school personnel to create positive relationships with African American families, which are imperative to supporting children in school (McLaughlin, 1990). Through some of the grandmothers' experiences, it seems school personnel may have a deficit view of African American children who are being raised by grandmothers. Public school personnel views may be influenced by their personal beliefs that the white middle-class family constitutes the norm (W. R. Allen, 1978). Instead of adopting a deficit view of African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren, seeking to understand the family unit and the rich and valuable role African American grandmothers play in keeping their families together could help school personnel adjust their practices and attitudes. School personnel should provide staff with cultural/sensitivity training, which gives school personnel the contextual background when making decisions for students and their families.

Connections and Expectations

Artiles and Trent (1994) contended when African American children first entered desegregated schools, they were met generally by White school personnel who were unprepared

to deal with their cognitive styles, social values, beliefs , customs, and traditions. This lack of understanding created a disconnection between home and school cultures. As I analyzed the findings this had implications for school personnel as they interact with grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. The grandmothers in the study wanted the school personnel to listen to them as they attempted to communicate and express their desires. The grandmothers found it challenging to connect with the school personnel. It is well known connecting with families is critical in building positive relationships (Kunjufu, 1989). School personnel must think about all of the family formations and conditions in which their families come from. This may help the school develop programs and activities that meet the needs of connecting with all families. School personnel must be intentional about creating opportunities to connect to the diverse populations within the school.

School personnel views may be influenced by their personal beliefs that the white middle-class family constitutes the norm and their thoughts and beliefs transfers in unintended actions toward students, and families that they do not understand (W. R. Allen, 1978). This has implications on school personnel attitudes toward and expectations of African American students. Bates (1990) suggests when school personnel expect little or nothing of African American students; they tend to respond accordingly. I contend that if school personnel were provided with cultural/sensitivity training, it could give personnel the contextual background when making decisions for students and their families. To take it a step further, if school personnel actions and attitudes are not in alignment with this belief it may lead to performance concerns from building administration. This could lead to a formal plan of action to improve performance.

Building trusting relationships between families and school may be a challenge. The grandmother's actions and stories indicated that they had little or no trust in the educational or judicial system. The lack of trust between the grandmothers and school personnel may become barriers that hinder the progress that can be made with their grandchildren. It may be important for school personnel to consider ways in which trust can be formed.

Academic and Behavior Support

School personnel have many challenges as they work with students from many different background and experiences. However, it is the responsibility of the public school personnel to provide an equitable education for all students, regardless of their disability, race or creed. The findings from Oliver W Edwards (2006) suggest that some school personnel believe grandchildren being raised by African American grandmothers experienced school-related emotional and behavior distress to the degree that intervention should be considered. His study further suggested that children being raised by grandmothers would likely occupy substantial amounts of school personnel time; further suggesting if teachers must spend much of their day focusing on the needs of these grandchildren, they will have less time to see to the academic and behavioral needs of other students. This mindset is another example of how the deficit view is expressed by school personnel. These thoughts may not be intentional; however can be displayed by actions by some school personnel.

The findings should cause school personnel to consider the options available for students who are not successful with the general instructional and behavior practices. Providing opportunities for small group and individual sessions with a school counselor who could help students navigate through their experiences and feelings. There should also be safe spots

developed where students could go when they need to vent or talk to someone. The schools could also provide a triage for students so as they enter the building each morning someone is there to greet them and give them time to process before they begin the school day.

Academically, school should consider before and after school tutoring that would be available for students. Peer tutoring is also a consideration for students who need additional academic support. These implications are not exclusive to these few students but all students in the building who need additional support.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to shed light and understand African American grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. Overall, the African American grandmothers viewed their experiences with school personnel as positive; however they shared that there is room for improvement as they continue to work with the schools. The grandmothers were proud of their decisions to raise their grandchildren. The grandmothers felt it was how they were raised; it was their culture and background that gave them the feeling of responsibility to their family. As they continued to share their stories, they were all saddened that their own children were not able to care for their grandchildren; however they would do whatever was needed to make sure the family stayed together. The grandmothers felt a strong desire to advocate for their grandchildren to ensure that they were being treated fairly and was given a quality education.

The findings from this study support previous research completed by (Powdermaker, 1969) that suggested that children were taken by their grandmothers for the love and commitment that she has for her family. All six of the participants acknowledged that caring for their grandchildren has been a struggle, it has changed their lives and has been a burden

financially; however they all acknowledged that it is an honor to have their grandchildren in their home.

Personal Reflections

When I began this research, I had to acknowledge my own perceptions on the treatment of African Americans in public school settings. My personal beliefs, experiences and biases regarding the treatment of African American's particularly women and students from public school personnel greatly influences my perceptions going into the research study.

Professionally, I sit in a position in which I receive many of the calls from parents/grandparents whom have had difficulty problem solving issues to meet the needs of their students. Therefore, I have many instances in my mind that could cause me to difficulty in completing this research. Personally, my family, has experienced a close family friend who is a grandmother raising her grandchild in another state. She has called with many frustrating experiences from the school personnel in her school.

I allowed the grandmothers to become the experts and authors of their stories and I became the co-author. Once the introductions were made; the grandmothers were comfortable and opened up to me. They were very excited that someone cared about their experiences and they believed I would have some understanding of their world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I listened to their stories I learned that the grandmothers were aware of their commitment and responsibility to their families; but they embraced it with open arms and never regretted the decision that they made to their families. I was amazed and encouraged by their passion to the community and to world in which they live. I thank them from the bottom of my heart, for allowing me into their lives.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A



Department of Educational Leadership
Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Participant Invitation to Participate in Study

March, 2014

Dear Participant,

My name is Alicia Thompson, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, Wichita Public Schools. I am currently a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Wichita State University. I am requesting your participation in my study: **African American grandmothers raising grandchildren and their lived experiences in public schools.**

The purpose of this qualitative study is get insight into your experiences with school personnel. From your experiences our hope is to have a better working relationship with grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

If you accept, I would like you to read and sign the Participant Informed Consent Form. The privacy and research records will be kept confidential and will be filed in a secured location. The results will appear in the dissertation. The participants of this study will remain anonymous. The published information will not include any information that would in any way identify the participant, the children, or the schools.

There is no compensation for the participants. Please respond to the researcher at 316-259-1030 regarding your acceptance or denial, not later than March,???. My email address is athompson0523@gmail.com.

I am confident that your participation in this study will contribute valuable information for the advancement of African American grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren.

Sincerely,

Alicia L. Thompson
Wichita State University Doctoral Student

Appendix B



Department of Educational Leadership
Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Initial Screening Protocol

Hello. My name is Alicia Thompson and I am so excited that you are interested in my research. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to explore the possibilities of you and me working together on this project. I have a few initial questions that will get us started in determining if you meet the criteria to work with me on this project. Are you ok with moving forward with the initial screening process?

1. Do you identify yourself as African American?

2. How many grandchildren do you have?
 - a. What grade are they currently?
 - b. How many of them live with you on a full time basis?
 - c. Have you been caring/raising your grandchildren for a minimum of a year?
 - d. Have you legally adopted your grandchildren?

3. Are your grandchildren enrolled in a public school?
 - a. Have you had more than two (2) interactions with school personnel dealing with your grandchildren?

Appendix C



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Interview Questions

1. Let's talk about your early years, when you were growing up.
 - a. Where were you born and raised?
 - b. When you were growing up who lived in your home with you?
 - c. Who were your primary caregivers?
 - d. Tell me about your relationship with your parents? Grandparents?

2. Now let's talk about your school experiences
 - a. Where did you attend elementary school?
 - b. What is your best memory from school?
 - c. Tell me about your teachers
 - d. Is there one that stands out in your memory?
 - e. Tell me about your principal?
 - f. Do you remember a teacher who made a significant difference in your life? Who? What was the impact that they made on your life?
 - g. What did that person do to make you feel this way about them?

3. Let's talk about your family?
 - a. How many children do you have?
 - b. Where did your kids attend school?
 - c. How would you describe your children's relationship with their administrators? Teachers?
 - d. How would you describe your relationship/interactions with your children's administrators? Teachers? (school personnel)
 - e. How many grandchildren do you have?
 - f. How many grandchildren do you have living with you on a full time basis?
 - g. What the ages and grade levels of the grandchildren you have living with you on a full time basis?

- h. How long have they been living with you on a full time basis?
 - i. Why did you not legally adopt your grandchildren?
 - j. Tell me about the current relationship between you and your grandchildren?
 - k. Tell me about the current relationship between you and your child in whose children you are caring for?
 - l. As a grandmother, what do you think is your responsibility to your grandchildren? Why do you think that way?
 - m. Where do your grandchildren attend school?
 - n. When and for what reason was your first interaction with school personnel after your grandchildren come to live with you on a full time basis?
 - o. When you went to your grandchildren's school to introduce yourself to the school personnel, tell me about your first interaction. How did they make you feel, what was their response to you?
 - p. When was the last time you had interactions with school personnel? Tell me about that experience.
 - q. Describe other experiences you have had with school personnel at your grandchildren's school.
 - r. How do you see the relationship with your grandchildren's Teacher? Administrator? Other school personnel?
 - s. What do you think the school can do to support grandmother's who are raising their grandchildren?
 - t. If you were to give advice to school personnel as to how they could better support African American grandmother's raising their grandchildren, what would it be?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share or describe as it relates to your interactions with the school personnel at your grandchildren's school?

Appendix D



Department of Educational Leadership
Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a study of the lived experiences of grandmothers who are the care givers of their grandchildren and the experiences that they have had with educators.

Participant Selection: Approximately 6-8 individuals are sought to participate in an individual interview. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are the care giver for your school-aged grandchildren.

Explanation of Procedures: Your participation will consist of an individual interview that will take approximately 1 hour, with possibly a follow up interview to ensure that the research captures your lived experiences with school personnel. With your permission I will audio-record and take notes during the interview.

Discomfort/Risks: There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences expected from your participation in this study. You may skip a question (s) or stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits: The research is being conducted to shed light into the live experiences of African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren and their experiences with school personnel. The purpose is to tell your story.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Results may be published in journals and presented at conferences in order to share what I learn from the study with others. Again, identity will remain confidential.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationship with Wichita State University or myself. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will be provided a copy of this consent form for your records.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, please contact Alicia Thompson, 316-259-XXX (cell phone) or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at: 316-978-6392 or

jean.patterson@wichita.edu, Educational Leadership program, Wichita State University,
Wichita, KS 67260-0142.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates you have read
the information provided above and voluntarily decided to participate.

Signature of Subject

Date

Print Name

Title

Signature of Witness

Date

Appendix E



**Department of Educational Leadership
Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142**

Member Check Form

Dear _____,

Thank you for volunteering your time to provide me with such an insightful interview. Attached, please find a copy of the transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy and completeness of responses. Please feel free to contact me at (316-259-1030) or via email at (athompson0523@gmail.com) should you have any questions or additional comments for me to include. If I do not hear from you within two weeks, I will assume that you agree with the attached draft of the transcription.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Alicia L. Thompson

Wichita State University