Marginalized African American Grandmothers Raising their School-Aged Grandsons: Perspectives on Parental Involvement

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Marginalized African American Grandmothers Raising their School-Aged Grandsons: Perspectives on Parental Involvement

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Dedication

This study is dedicated, to my beloved grandmother, Candis Beatrice Brown Baker whose faith, support, and love helped make this dream a reality. You are and have always been my inspiration. I will forever honor you for all that you are and have been to me and for giving me your absolute all and ensuring that I had the best of your best. Grandma, I love you!
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# Table of Contents

List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... v

Abstract................................................................................................................................ vi

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview .............................................................................. 1
  Overview ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Background: Personal Perspective ...................................................................................... 9
  Problem Statement ............................................................................................................. 11
  Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................... 12
  Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 13
  Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................................... 13
  Research Design ................................................................................................................ 17
  Significance of the Study .................................................................................................. 17
  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .................................................................................... 21
  African American Parental Involvement ........................................................................ 21
    The History of African American Parent Involvement .................................................. 21
    Factors Influencing African American Parental Involvement ....................................... 23
  African American Grandmothers .................................................................................... 32
    Introduction and Historical Roles as Caregivers ......................................................... 32
    Custodial Caregivers Barriers and Benefits ................................................................. 33
  Parental Involvement Models ......................................................................................... 38
  The Importance of Parental Involvement ....................................................................... 45
  Summary ............................................................................................................................. 51
    Implications for School Leaders .................................................................................. 51
    African American Grandmothers ................................................................................. 53

Chapter 3: Methods .............................................................................................................. 54
  Overview ............................................................................................................................. 54
  Purpose and Research Questions ....................................................................................... 54
  Methods ............................................................................................................................... 55
  Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................... 56
  Cultural Capital and Parental Involvement ..................................................................... 57
  Participant Selection ........................................................................................................ 57
  Design of the Qualitative Instrument ............................................................................. 59
  Recruitment and Responsive Interviewing ..................................................................... 60
Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Invitation to Participate in Study ................................................................. 136
Appendix B: Informed Consent for an Adult Form ................................................................. 137
Appendix C: First Interview Protocol ...................................................................................... 141
Appendix D: Second Interview Protocol .................................................................................. 144
Appendix E: Volunteer Participant Flier .................................................................................... 147
Appendix F: Member Check Form ............................................................................................... 148

About the Author .......................................................................................................................... End Page
List of Tables

Table 1: Study Activities ......................................................... 61
Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants ......................... 70
List of Figures

Figure A: Elements Influencing Parental Involvement Perspectives. 80
Abstract

Literature suggests strong, positive and mutual relationships between home and school lead to higher levels of success and achievement for students. Schools should begin to focus on being more aware and sensitive to the cultural and social wealth that marginalized families carry. When institutions of learning begin to tap into and embrace the strengths of their families, it is likely to be of mutual benefit for the students, staff and families. Utilizing qualitative research methodology, this study sought to understand African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and identify strategies that supported, maintained, and facilitated their involvement in the educational process of the grandsons in their care.

In this research study, I specifically sought to address the following questions:

- How do African American grandmothers see their involvement in their grandchildren’s education?
- How have the grandmothers shaped their involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care? What influenced their involvement?
- What are their perspectives on the level of involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care?
- What do African American grandmothers see as barriers and opportunities as they try to guide their grandchildren through formal schooling?
The cultural capital theoretical framework helped to understand and interpret the experiences of the African American grandmothers in this study raising their grandsons. The framework also helped to understand how each grandmother constructed and perceived their roles as grandmothers. In terms of support for the theory, the findings collected through interviews revealed that despite past oppressive conditions, barriers and cultural incongruence associated with schools, the grandmothers stayed abreast of and connected to school norms and practices for the benefit of their grandsons. Although each grandmother displayed a combination of capitals and wealth, aspirational wealth, resonated across each capital. Major themes of the study included: Grandmothers: Mothering and Leading by Example; Family and Communal Support: “It Takes a Village;” Grandmothers Engaging in Traditional Parental Involvement Activities; Grandmothers-Grandsons as Co-learners; and Grandmothers’ Critique and Advice for Schools.

Implications for future research includes creating supportive and caring school environments, ensuring that school leaders and staff display welcoming behaviors and demonstrate support in parental involvement programs, and school leaders and teachers having and maintaining high expectations. Understanding how African American grandmothers and other family members, construct, perceive and enact certain cultural wealth and social capital should become more prevalent in scholarly work and research. Parents of different races and culture favor different forms of involvement. Implications from this research study suggest that educators and school leaders must begin to acknowledge, address, and value the cultural differences and social wealth that African American grandmothers and family members possess.
Chapter 1
Introduction and Overview

Overview

African American parents’ involvement in their children’s education has a stout legacy (Siddle Walker, 2000). Despite some of what scholarly literature suggests, such involvement has included traditional activities such as reading, helping children with homework, attending school and school related events, and promoting post secondary attendance (Harris, 2010; Thompson, 2003). Such involvement has also entailed parents using culturally relevant strategies and resources (such as the community, churches, and other family members) to negotiate predominately white educational systems and motivating their children to achieve (Cooper, 2007; Harris, 2010; Thompson, 2003).

Fields-Smith’s research (2004) chronicles African American parent involvement and traces the importance and history of education to African American families despite the challenges they have historically faced. African Americans have valued education and the education of their children dating back to the slavery era. Parents and their children even risked punishment and cruel treatment by their masters in their quest to become educated. During the 1954 case, Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and segregation era, African American parents continued their pursuit to get an education even by sacrificing to provide material and financial support (Chapman, 2005; Siddle Walker, 2000). Additionally, during the civil rights era, African American parents were
strong vocal leaders and advocates for public education (Fields-Smith, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2000).

During the segregation era in which Whites and Blacks rarely co-mingled, African American families generally trusted members of the school to educate and protect their children (Fields-Smith, 2006). Siddle Walker (1993), notes that parents had high expectations of their children, often referred to as “home training,” and they reinforced school policies, procedures, and “provided solid mechanisms of invisible support” (p. 171), thus demonstrating united support of students and their expectations. Also during this era, parents supported schools financially, attended school functions, and served as advocates by demanding resources from white school boards, (Siddle Walker, 2000). The parents, teachers and administrators were collaborative members of the community, whereas parents openly allowed community members to help their children with schoolwork when the parents were not able or available to do so (Moeller & Bielfeldt, 2011; Fields-Smith, 2006). During the segregation era (Siddle Walker, 2000), many African American parents relied heavily on schools to educate their children due to a large degree of trust and respect of the educators. As Lightfoot (1981) notes, African American parents have traditionally viewed the education of their children as being very important and for years have made sacrifices to ensure that their children achieve in school. The broad sense of the community during segregation among African Americans naturally included the school. Members of the African American community believed and lived by the West African proverb – “It takes a village to raise a child,” meaning all stakeholders had a large vested interest in all of the neighborhood children (Fields-Smith, 2004).
Jones (1981) concurs and notes that during segregation, school environments could be described, as a home away from home in which African American students were supported, nurtured, taught, and encouraged. According to Siddle Walker (1993) prior to desegregation, African American students were successful because of their school environments. Siddle Walker (1993, 2000) notes that although less often discussed, but important for historical accuracy and education reform, that strong parental support existed during the segregation era and parents, schools, and students valued schooling.

The desegregation of schools contributed to a revolutionary change in African American parent involvement practices. Institutional barriers (Hill & Taylor, 2004) began to negatively impact the education and well being of African American children. The language, communication skills, and varied learning styles of African Americans cause disconnect for African American children and families (Olmstead, 1991). These barriers also created a gap between home, school, and the community and contributed to decreased parental involvement, and lower standards and expectations. In her study, Fields-Smith (2004) notes that African American parents continued to respect and support education, but the once established trust level in schools began to dwindle after desegregation. Although many African American parents continued to engage their children in learning activities at home, African American parental involvement changed significantly over time in part to societal changes. In order to re-establish trusting relationships between home and school with African American families, school leaders must embrace the concept of parents participating more from home in order to overcome some of the institutional obstacles that inhibit African American parental involvement at the school (Fields-Smith, 2004; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010).
Parental involvement views tend to vary greatly depending upon the school setting and context (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). The literature has more often than not, defined parental involvement in terms of school-focused parental involvement where parents help schools reach the goals the school leaders and teachers set for their children (Broussard, 2003). However, the literature calls for re-conceptualization of parental involvement that is reflective of the values and cultures of diverse population of students abound (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). Researchers urge school leaders to commit to the promise of education reform, which is to work jointly with those who have historically been marginalized from the larger educational conversation (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986), and begin to realize that unique and uncommon approaches are necessary in order to move away from the deficit-driven perception that low-income parents and parents of color are uninvolved or uncaring (Garcia & McDowell, 2010; Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). One suggestion noted by Lopez and Stoelting (2010) is a partnership-focused construct. This construct emphasizes that school leaders and parents work collaboratively to create educational experiences for students. Additionally, it suggests strong and frequent home-school communication in order to maximize student resources. This perception requires that both entities (home and school) be able to communicate their expectations to one another and that bidirectional communication is the foundation for increased dialogue, understanding, and partnership, the ideal goal (Chadwick, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2007).

By re-examining parental involvement, school leaders will become more aware of the professional responsibility and duty they have to serve all families, not just those who fit into the school’s traditional system (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). School leaders must
structure opportunities to involve all parents that are reciprocal and sincere. These opportunities should be in less formal settings, with open agendas and with fresh perspectives on home-school partnerships (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Many marginalized families are already involved in the educational lives of their children in multiple ways. However, the problem of perceived involvement may rest with a limited, white, middle class understanding of what comprises involvement activities. Leaders and teachers must recognize that school connectedness involves partnering with families and tapping into the cultural strengths that diverse families bring with them, often times referred to as cultural capital, in their efforts to foster student success (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Additionally, teachers and school leaders must rethink strategies for working with parents in fundamentally different ways and rethinking our most fundamental assumptions surrounding home-school partnerships (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). Cultural capital, the unnoticed advantages, knowledge and resources that reside within certain cultural groups, has to be valued and linked to increased parent participation and the academic achievement of students (Harris, 2010; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Once school leaders begin to think differently, only then will the leaders learn that parental values and perspectives can be valued and represented in the total mission of the school organization and reconceptualize their understanding of involvement (Osterling & Garza, 2004).

Research indicates that African American parents tend to be less involved than their white counterparts, however it should be noted that parental involvement practices amongst African Americans take forms that may be different from traditional parent involvement (Hynes, 2006; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Lareau & Horvet, 1999;
Trotman, 2001; Wolfe & Lieberman, 1999). Furthermore, parents of different races and cultures favor different forms of involvement however most parents regardless of their race, education level, or class desire positive outcomes for their children and want to partner with their children’s school to help them experience success (Epstein, 1990). Lareau and Horvat (1999) point out that the parent involvement practices and initiatives of schools are geared towards white middle class norms and discourse that prevent African American parental interaction with schools. Extending further, poor African American parents are very likely to feel uneasy with teachers and other school leaders due to differences in values and patterns between middle class teachers (Kunjufu, 2002).

Despite any social class and cultural differences, school leaders, teachers, and parents must value each other and acknowledge the contribution that each can make for the benefit of the students. School leaders need to acknowledge and respond to the notion that parents from certain ethnic groups may be uncomfortable participating at school because of differences in cultural values or language barriers. Unfortunately, many teachers and school leaders have limited knowledge about their students, their families and their communities (Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010), which leaves this space of ignorance occupied by cultural biases and prejudice (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Public school culture continues to be more consistent with middle class social capital, and therefore White middle class parents have increased opportunities to become involved in schools (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Lareau, 1996).

Social class and cultural sensitivity begs that question of how do school leaders promote meaningful parental involvement which is culturally responsive, collaborative, and shaped to meet the needs of their particular communities? Increasing parents’ social
capital skills (their norms and values) will help make parents better able to assist their children in school related activities (Hill & Taylor, 2004). However, it is not until leaders of urban schools pursue meaningful partnerships, will they augment their parents’ social capital and increase opportunities for parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Legitimizing parents’ views, voicing appreciation for the many ways that parents display educational care outside of schools, and utilizing their strengths will contribute significantly to their support of their children’s learning and academic success (Cooper, 2007; Van & Orozco, 2007).

When parents are not involved with schools in 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, 2005). Parents’ non-attendance at school functions such as PTA meetings or parent teacher conferences leads teachers to conclude that parents do not care. Teacher mindsets, biases and behaviors such as this, may lead parents to feel separated from the schools, therefore seeing little or no opportunity to be included in the educational process. Sadly, many parents limit themselves to the involvement as dictated by school leaders, largely because of the parents’ unfamiliarity with the educational structure, domain and the power imbalance that traditionally exists (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). School leaders must remain mindful of the notion that parents are the primary educators in their child’s life and that barriers contributing to parents’ low level of involvement can be overcome. Additionally, school-based understandings of parental involvement often dictated by school norms should be re-examined including systemic inequities in educational policies
and resources which may have contributed to limited, involvement by African American parents (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010).

Changes in parental involvement practices need to take into consideration that families and their structures have also changed. The normalized notion of two parent families who take care of the children has been challenged in the literature (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010) and schools need to change their parental involvement views accordingly. An increasing number of grandparents assume care responsibilities of their grandchildren. Data from the United States Census Bureau’s 2005-2009 American Community Survey estimate that in a central Florida county, 8526 grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren. One thousand nine hundred sixty three grandparents have been responsible for their grandchildren less than a year, 2,187 for 1 or 2 years, 1,217 for 3 or 4 years, and 3,159 have been responsible for their grandchildren for 5 or more years (www.census.gov). Furthermore, 65.9% of the grandparents in this county who are responsible for their own grandchildren under the age of 18 are female (www.census.gov). These data show that grandparents are serving in more of a primary role in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Casper and Bryson (1998), note that households with grandparents as caregivers, appear to be more common in African American communities.

With the increasing number of African American grandmothers serving as primary caregivers to their grandchild(ren), it has become increasingly more important that public schools quickly adapt to the cultural experiences of this population and work towards a deeper understanding of what is needed in schools to strengthen the foundation for a solid home-school relationship (Villenas, 2001). Examining the perceptions of
African American grandmothers on their involvement with formal schooling of children in their care, may help shed light on how they view their involvement in the educational processes of their grandchildren.

In summary, promoting parental involvement amongst custodial grandmothers is an important element for school leaders to consider, and inviting grandmothers to the discussion of parental involvement is important due to the increased number of children under their care. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the perspectives and experiences of African American grandmothers with their grandchildren’s education.

**Background: Personal Perspective**

Throughout my life both personally and professionally, I have long desired to be involved with children and families. More worthy of mentioning is my first hand experience of being raised by my maternal grandmother and the sound moral, educational, and life-long learning values she instilled in me. My grandmother’s standards and expectations of me, coupled with those of my mother, a public school educator, created a strong foundation for my work both personally and professionally.

My grandmother, a blue-collar worker, was the primary caregiver for seven biological children and one grandchild: Me. My grandmother was my custodial caregiver from birth until high school. Based on neighborhood demographics and social characteristics, our community was considered a high poverty area, in which many children were being raised by custodial grandparents or other members of their extended families, a practice referred to as kinship care. Due to other family and work responsibilities, many members, including my grandmother were not available or elected
to be minimally or not involved in school or school related activities. Additionally, the schools I attended were high poverty and lacked basic resources required for a high quality education. Yet, my grandmother’s expectations coupled with my internal drive to succeed, has largely contributed to my educational success to date.

Post secondary, I had the privilege (as a student intern) of working in an urban elementary school three days per week. My interaction with the students extended beyond the school day as I voluntarily tutored students after school at a local community center. Not to discount or discredit their involvement, my experience interacting with the students’ parents was limited. As an intern and later a teacher, I would schedule parent conferences to share student progress and goals, only to be greeted by parents not attending (for various and often times legitimate reasons). Being a parent myself and an active member in my children’s education, both at home and school, made it difficult for me to grapple with the parents’ perceived limited involvement. I observed parents who would entrust their children’s academic lives to an apprentice, the student teacher, rather than become deeply involved in that process. My custodial grandmother, and my mother, an elementary school teacher, instilled in me the belief that the parent is a child’s first teacher – a belief that I quickly adopted, believe, and embrace.

I taught elementary school students and have served as a school administrator for 15 years (mostly in urban schools). As a parent, teacher, and administrator, I noticed that traditional parent involvement was less among African American families regardless of school location, demographic variation, socioeconomic status or family composition. The forms of parent involvement I witnessed and what appeared to be a lack of parental concern by the parents piqued my curiosity.
As a public school administrator, I also experienced challenges engaging African American families in the more traditional school related activities such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), School Advisory Council (SAC), and parent-teacher conferences. Typically, African American families were in attendance at student performances or sporting events more than any other school or related activity. As a parent, my observations of involvement practices among African American parents was still quite concerning to me.

The literature contends that African American parents are not involved at the levels of their counterparts (Stambach, 2001). The realization that parent involvement among African American families needs to be re-examined by schools and school leaders led me to a great deal of self-reflection as an educational leader. Upon such reflection, I would like to challenge schools and school leaders to re-examine their recruitment efforts of African American parents, and activities that may yield higher levels of involvement among them as well. The lenses of my own observations and personal experiences add to this study and prompt me to address these questions as a compelling interest in my doctoral study.

**Problem Statement**

With the growing number of African American students being raised by grandmothers and attend urban schools, examining the variables that influence their success is important for educators and school leaders. Institutional studies suggest that several factors contribute to the varied success levels that exist between African American students and their counter-parts, with one factor being parental involvement.
Pittman (2007) notes that grandmothers often play a key role in low-income minority families, including the care of their grandchildren. Under these circumstances, there is a need to examine the factors that contribute to or inhibit the involvement of African American custodial grandmothers in their grandchildren’s education. The examination of such factors should include how the grandmothers contribute to or negotiate the school environment, what are their family values, how do the grandmothers deal with the challenges of being a non-traditional caregiver, and whether schools consider these factors when reaching out to families. In their practices, school leaders should begin to consider the influence of grandmothers who are involved, particularly those from low-income, minority families (Pittman, 2007). Similarly, educators must acknowledge that although parental involvement may look different with African American custodial grandmothers, that their contributions are valuable.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although there is a wealth of research on parent involvement, programs, and practices, a limited amount of research specifically addresses the perceptions and experiences of African American grandmothers and the challenges they encounter. This study contributes to the existing literature on African American parent involvement, by allowing the voices of African American grandmothers to be heard and to become part of the dialogue on their contribution to their grandchildren’s education. This study attempted to characterize and understand parental involvement perspectives, which carries many different views, as suggested by low-income African American
grandmothers (Lightfoot, 2004). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process of the grandchildren in their care.

**Research Questions**

Questions that will guide this study include:

- How do African American grandmothers see their involvement in their grandchildren’s education?
- How have the grandmothers shaped their involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care? What influenced their involvement?
- What are their perspectives on the level of involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care?
- What do African American grandmothers see as barriers and opportunities as they try to guide their grandchildren through formal schooling?

**Theoretical Framework**

The framework that guided this study was Cultural Capital and Social Wealth. The research on parental involvement reinforces the idea that due to cultural capital deficits, African American parents lack the social skills required to successfully navigate the educational system (Laureau & Horvath, 1999). Yosso (2005) suggests that cultural knowledge and capital is valuable to students and their families, but may not necessarily be considered to carry any capital in the school context. Yosso (2005) questions whether
the forms of cultural capital that marginalized families bring to the table, rather than traditional cultural capital, is recognized or valued. The wealth and forms of cultural capital that privileged students and parents possess lends itself more toward white discourse and the more dominant groups. The cultural capital phenomenon signals a detrimental cycle where the home culture is in conflict with the needs of the school culture. Deficit scholars note that the cultural capital deficit that we sometimes see with African American families contributes to many African American parents feeling powerless and unable to challenge the system due to lack of social capital, education, and resources (Julian, McKenry, McKelvey, 1994; Yosso, 2005). African American parents often lack the social capital necessary to overcome the institutional barriers that are created and reinforced in schools by the dominant culture (Nieto, 2000; Laureau & Horvath, 1999). Laureau and Horvath (1999) found that White families had greater social skills, cultural assets, and access to resources than their counterparts. Furthermore, African American parents who agreed with teachers and school leaders were better received than African American parents who challenged or criticized educators’ thoughts and actions.

The six forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and capital include aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. These various forms of capital draw upon the knowledge that marginalized groups bring with them into communities and schools. Aspirational capital refers to having future dreams despite real or perceived obstacles or attainability. This form of cultural wealth draws upon those who desire to have things or opportunities that are beyond their means or circumstances. Linguistic capital can be understood as the social
and intellectual skills and experiences acquired through multiple languages. Linguistic capital reflects the idea that African American students often times have and use more than one language and/or communication style. Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge nurtured among families that carries a sense of community history. In this form of capital there is a great deal of community commitment and extended family support. Maintaining a community connection is of great importance. The familial form of capital minimizes isolation as families become connected to others who have similar issues (emotionally, morally, educationally, and/or occupationally.). Social capital refers to the network of social contacts and resources that can provide instrumental and emotional support in order for families to navigate through society.

Navigational capital refers to the ability to maneuver through social organizations, institutions, or structures of inequality not generally designed or created with African Americans in mind. Navigational capital connects social networks that smooth the process of community navigation through various organizations, including schools. Resistant capital is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination demonstrated by African Americans. This form of capital asserts that African American mothers, through verbal and non-verbal lessons, teach their children to assert themselves, challenge the status quo and resist the barrage of societal messages that attempt to devalue or belittle people of color. The resistance form of capital is transformative and includes cultural knowledge of racism and oppressive structures.

Yosso’s (2005) research expands critical race theorists’ views by highlighting community cultural wealth and criticizing deficit theories. Cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by People of Color (Moeller &
Bielfeldt, 2011; Yosso, 2005). African American families have typically developed and shared their cultural capital for survival, whereas others may have used their cultural capital for advancement in navigating the social context of the school (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

In building school connections, schools must strive to connect with parents through a greater recognition of the parent’s cultural capital. School practices must acknowledge and be sensitive to the differences and gifts that parents from different cultures bring with them to the school setting (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Although not mentioned as much in educational literature, cultural capital, the mechanism used by marginalized parents in their quest towards educational competence, also involves three types of capital that parents may possess: objectified, which includes cultural abilities; institutionalized, which includes educational credentialing; and embodied, which is the appreciation of cultural goods (Moeller & Bielfeldt, 2011). Participation in various activities, are measures of cultural capital within the educational realm and definitely have the potential to positively influence the achievement of African American students (Moeller & Bielfeldt, 2011).

Although all families possess various forms of cultural capital, the bias of the cultural capital theoretical framework is that it typically lends itself to a particular cultural group (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). When particular cultural groups possess unique knowledge and/or resources, it sometimes gives a social advantage to members of that group of people. Once acknowledged, the social advantage may or may not include a deeper sense of trust, loyalty, connection and kindness (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010).
Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach in order to collect descriptions of participants’ perceptions and experiences and analyze them for the meaning of cultural themes, interpretation, lessons learned and questions raised (Creswell, 2007). I conducted open response interview questions to gain a better understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process of the grandsons in their care. After initially coding the data, I searched for emergent themes.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is two-fold. First, the study contributes to the understanding of African American grandmothers’ views on involvement in their grandchildren’s education. Secondly, the study adds to the understanding of how African American grandmothers see the challenges and opportunities for involvement in schools. The results of this study provide much needed insight into how grandmothers construct their own knowledge and views of parental involvement and specifically what it means for them to be involved.

The literature suggests that over the last decade, grandparents have increasingly taken on the prime role of caregiver for their grandchildren (Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000). Pittman (2007) also notes that grandmothers have increasingly assumed an essential role in low-income minority families, including providing care to their grandchildren. There is some scholarly research on grandmothers raising grandchildren, parental involvement models, and parental involvement among low-income African-
American families, but there are relatively few studies on the parental involvement perspectives and experiences of African-American custodial grandmothers.

Demographic trends indicate that the older population is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse as the overall minority population increases. According to the Administration on Aging, statistical profiles shows that close to 37.9 million of Americans are 65 and over in which 3 of every 5 are women. It is predicted that this number will double and the number of persons 85 and over is expected to triple (www.aoa.gov). The statistical report of Black Older American indicates that along with general population trends, that the African American population is living longer (www.aoa.gov). In 2008, the African American older population was 3.2 million (8.3% of the older population). By the year 2050 it is projected to be in excess of 9.9 million (11% of the older population). In 2008, 50% of the elderly African Americans resided in eight states: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (www.aoa.gov).

Most parent involvement literature portrays schools as operating in seemingly neutral ways: structuring opportunities for parental involvement, yet parental involvement is rarely viewed through the lenses of the parent (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). As further suggested by Lopez and Stoelting (2010) rarely are the parents’ interests, needs, and preferences considered or is the process for involvement neutral. This study will contribute to scholarly literature and support the need for the study of African American grandmothers by identifying experiences, opportunities and challenges that may influence their perspectives as they relate to their grandchildren’s education. Practice and policy can be informed as educators, community leaders, and policymakers
consider the perspectives and influence of grandmothers who have been more involved, particularly those from low-income African-American families. Such research will expand the narrow body of educational scholarship that focuses on African American grandmothers, and can be used to develop culturally responsive educational and parental involvement practices that better serve African American families (Cooper, 2009). While the study findings will not generalize to all low-income African-American grandmothers serving as primary caregivers, it will provide insight into existing knowledge and views of African-American grandmothers’ characterizations and descriptions of their perspectives and experiences within their grandchildren’s schools and with school leaders.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

- **Parent Involvement**: The actions of a parent or family member through a wide range of school or home based activities which support students in the educational process. Parental involvement can also be referred to ways that a parent can contribute to home learning activities. This term may be interchangeably used with family involvement, parent participation, and parent engagement.

- **Parent**: An individual who serves as the primary caregiver of children. This term may be interchangeably used with family member, grandparent, grandmother, or caregiver.
• **Custodial Grandmother:** Individual who is the parent of one’s mother or father and serving as the primary caregiver of a grandchild/ren. This term may be interchangeably used with grandmother, grandparent or caregiver.

• **School Leader:** Individual who is an administrator of a school or an educational institution. This term may be interchangeably used with the terms principal or administrator.

• **Educator:** Individual who is trained in the theory and practice of education. This term may be interchangeably used with the terms teacher, school leader or administrator.

• **African American:** Individual whose ancestors were born in or have origins in any of the black populations of Africa. This term may be interchangeably used with the term Black.

• **Racial Minority:** Individual who differs racially from a larger group of which it belongs (Examples may be African American and/or Hispanic individuals).

• **Disadvantaged:** Individual who may be educationally, economically, or linguistically challenged.

Chapter two will review the literature associated with parental involvement, parental involvement models, African American parental involvement, and African American custodial grandmothers.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

African American Parental Involvement

This review of literature examines and synthesizes research on parental involvement. The review of the literature is organized into the following sections: (a) African American parental involvement (history, and factors influencing African-American involvement), (b) African American grandmothers as primary caregivers (historical roles, and barriers and benefits to their involvement), (c) parental involvement models, and (d) the importance of parental involvement. This section concludes with implications for school leaders.

The History of African American Parent Involvement. The history of African American parental involvement (Siddle Walker, 1993, 2000) furnishes evidence of longstanding educational commitments in spite of oppressive conditions (Siddle Walker, 2000). Since the enforcement of desegregation, African American parents have continued to struggle with institutional barriers (Edwards, 1993); segregation within, rather than between schools; and socio-cultural incongruence between school and home (Edwards, 1993; Trent & Artilés, 1993). The distinctness between African American parents of the past and current-day parents reveals a shift in social structure and schooling since the Brown v. Board decision. Parent involvement practices among African American parents have become more varied and sporadic. For many educators, home
knowledge and involvement is a form of bias (Graue & Hawkins, 2010). From this perspective, 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). Graue and Hawkins (2010) go on further to argue that to fully support children’s learning schools must cultivate relationships with all of the parents they serve.

Successful and meaningful parental involvement necessitates knowledge of the benefits of parental participation within and outside of the school community. Such knowledge and practices are key components to opportunity and access which in several instances may be limited or unavailable to low income (Lareau, 2008), single or minority parents (Lippman, Burns, McArthur, 1996) Smith-Fields, 2006). One value added piece to understanding educational history and parental involvement is avoiding past mishaps and for educators to garner cultural facts that render keys to increased parental involvement and success.

Also worthy of mentioning is that present day educators and school leaders have a responsibility to establish and strengthen trusting relationships with African American parents. Strengthening parental relationships includes, but is not limited to, openly sharing school goals, student progress, and school related concerns. Graue and Hawkins (2010) posit that there are differences between White parents’ and minority parents’ responses to home-school relations. Minority parents wish to support their children, but have different conceptions of how schools expect them to do so and how their involvement strategies may be perceived by schools (Christianakis, 2011; Graue & Hawkins, 2010). School leaders need to consider the cultural frame of reference from which they define parental engagement and remain mindful and devoted to ways in
which African American parents can become actively and meaningfully engaged in the educational process of their children. Graue and Hawkins (2010) also challenge educators and school leaders to rethink some of the taken-for-granted practices of schools and the effects on diverse families.

**Factors influencing African American parental involvement.** Historical research outlines reasons why African American parents choose not to be involved in their children’s education. Parents’ socioeconomic status and poverty levels have been common predictors of their involvement and level of engagement. Additionally, high poverty levels may help to explain African American parents’ lack of communication and access to other resources that hinder them from being actively involved (Lareau, 2008; Trotman, 2001). Sadly, this type of disconnect tends to perpetuate inequality in the child’s school environment.

There are a host of factors that may potentially influence parent involvement in schools. Yet, most research on predictors of parent involvement has focused on parental demographics (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). To increase parent involvement, teachers and parents need to first begin with a shared understanding of parent involvement and the contributions that they can make (Pena, 2000). Factors which limit parent involvement and directly influences active engagement must be addressed before student needs can be met. Pena (2000) notes that although it may be impossible to meet the needs of all families in getting them involved, consideration of the factors that influence their involvement can lead to increased participation. In many studies, parent involvement has been measured by student attendance, attendance at school events, assisting with homework, and reading at home (Christianakis, 2011; Grolnick et al.,
Other factors that predict parental involvement include parent-child relations, family context, and the dispositions and practices of the teachers in the school. It is well reported that parents’ personal efficacy also impacts their behaviors and involvement at school (Hoover Demsey, 1997). Parents who believe that they play a significant role, and their efforts will make a difference, are more likely to become involved in school activities (Deslandes, 2003; Hill 2004; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005; Pena (2000); Shumow & Lomax, 2002).

There is also a growing body of research, that shows that economic hardships generally undermine parenting and school involvement (Auberbach, 2007; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclere, 1999; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Grolnick et al., 1997; Lareau, 2008; Lawson, 2003; Lightfoot, 2004; Ream & Palardy, 2008; Thurston & Navarrette, 2003). When parents lack the resources to assist, their involvement is likely to be minimal. Additionally, economic hardships may cause parental stress, which is also likely to interfere with their involvement.

Research has examined how social class and race shape parents’ educational involvement and has begun to examine the interplay between parent involvement, race and social class. Lareau (2008) argues that middle class African Americans are more likely to maneuver their children’s school experiences than poor parents and that one’s background exhibits a negative effect on African American parent involvement by undermining their ability to comply with school’s standards for participation. Research further suggests that social class differences tend to permeate schools, neighborhoods, and places of employment and that social class matters in that it is divisive and class membership remains an integral part of identity in the United States (Abrams & Gibbs,
Race and social class have been consistently linked to children’s educational outcomes and attainment. African American children lag behind children from middle class and upper class White families (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Research on race, social class, and parent involvement in education often implies that parents’ educational orientations result from their social class and racial backgrounds. Diamond and Gomez (2004) studied the involvement of working class and middle class African American parents. They argued that African American parents’, as do parents of other races, educational orientations are informed by their environments, resources, social class and race based experiences. Data for this study were drawn from interviews of 18 African American working and middle class parents from seven Chicago public schools. The results from this study indicate that middle class African American parents were more likely to select their children’s schools, have better access to them, and were more supported by the schools in which their children attended. Contrarily, working class African American parents were assigned to schools, had less access, and adopted a more reform based orientation (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Social class also influences the level of support for teachers, and the resources that parents possess. Family resources can be converted into forms of capital in support of children’s education (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Social capital refers to the resources derived from interaction in social networks. Social interactions provide parents with resources such as money to support education and information about schooling.
By studying the impact of social class among African American parents, the work of Diamond and Gomez (2004) reinforces the fact that social class patterns observed among Whites cannot be applied without modifications to African American parents. The data reported in this study suggest that actively involved working class African Americans see their roles as more reform oriented—pushing for change. Similar to Lareau (2008), Diamond and Gomez (2004) argue that working class African American parents respond based on their own educational experiences. This work shows how social class creates distinct challenges for working class African American parents that their counterparts do not face as often and how creating parental social capital can create or diminish educational advantages for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Ream & Palardy, 2008). This body of research is relevant and extends prior work by studying social class and parent involvement within the African American community.

Grolnick et al. (1997) declare that teachers, parents’ primary contacts at the school level have an enormous influence on parent involvement. Some teachers believe that parents are integral to their children’s education. Conversely, there are teachers who view parental involvement as a point of conflict. Nevertheless, research confirms that teacher practices significantly affect parents’ behaviors and involvement (Broussard, 2003; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Pena, 2000; Trotman, 2001).

Parent involvement is multi-faceted and many factors influence the levels of parent involvement. These factors may include but not be limited to education level, family size and structure, gender, social class, and perceptions (Casper & Bryson, 1998;
Cooper, 2007; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Dolbin-MacNab, 2006; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Lareau, 2008; Pena, 2000; Ream & Palardy, 2008). Roles are behavioral expectations for individual or group members. Research has shown that minority parents, those who have low education levels and single parents are less likely to involve themselves in school related activities. Additionally, adolescent students from traditional family structures and parents who have higher education levels have a much higher level of support for school performance (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Epstein (2001) in one of her studies notes that parent involvement significantly decreases as children transition to middle and high school. Prior research has implied that parents tend to believe that they have a greater influence in their children’s education at the elementary level versus the secondary level (Deslandes, 2003). Consistent with Epstein’s work, Deslandes (2003) also reports that parent participation from grades 8-10 consistently shows a steady decline.

In another study, Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) examined four psychological constructs of parental involvement. The constructs included relative strength of parents’ role construction, parents’ self-efficacy for helping adolescents in school, parents’ perceptions of teacher invitations to become involved, and parents’ perceptions of students’ invitations to become involved. The authors obtained survey responses from 770 parents in 5 Canadian schools. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) note that parents’ perceptions of students’ invitations, was the most powerful predictor of parent involvement. Whether at home or school, parents became involved if they perceived that their child and teachers desired their involvement.
Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) note that the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986) suggests that parents are more likely to be involved in their children’s education, if they believe that they have the skills to assist their children. Prior research by Grolnick et al. (1997) involving a diverse group of mothers (81% White, 11% Hispanic, 4% African American, and 4% Other Minority) also contends that the stronger the parents’ self-efficacy, the more likely they are to become involved in school events and initiatives.

Another influence on African American parental involvement is the school climate, and teacher practices as perceived by the parents. Delandes and Bertrand (2005) agree that parents are likely to be more involved when they perceive that teachers and school leaders invite and expect them to participate. On the contrary, teachers or students who express the desire to work independently may cause parents to limit or cease their involvement (Christianakis, 2011).

Lawson (2003) maintains that parent involvement improves student’s achievement and overall learning experiences. However, he questions to what extent are all parents provided equal access to involvement; are low-income, culturally diverse parents afforded full inclusion in school decision-making; are parent involvement activities a priority for low-income families; and to what extent are cultural differences between constituents accommodated. Ogbu (1995) also questions the extent to which some low-income minorities will engage in the school processes. He suggests that schools must begin to recognize and address cultural issues in order to bridge the home-school gap between families and schools. When parents have negative school
experiences, it repels them further and negatively affects the children involved. Lawson’s (2003) research acknowledges additional barriers: silence, educational background of parents, socioeconomic status, trust in children’s schooling, attributions of parent involvement (negative home-school interactions), teachers’ responsibility versus parents’ responsibilities, teachers’ lack of ownership, loneliness, skepticism, and withdrawal (Pena, 2000; Trotman, 2001).

Lawson’s findings (2003) suggest that school leaders’ and parents’ perceptions of parent involvement are different yet at times they may have overlapping elements. Although school leaders may experience difficulty providing parent involvement incentives or activities, they still need to work on the deficit orientations that they have established in regards to parental dispositions. As noted in previous research (Broussard, 2003; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Dolbin-MacNab, 2006; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawson, 2003; Moles, 2005; Sanders, 2008), parents will likely become more involved under the following conditions: When parents understand their role construction as it pertains to schools, they have self-efficacy, and they perceive positive opportunities from the school to become involved to bridge the home-school gap (Lawson, 2003).

Given the continuity of the academic achievement gap between White and Black students and the positive connection between student achievement and parental involvement, a more keen understanding of factors that influence African American participation in their children’s education is warranted (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011;
Fields-Smith, 2006). In a mixed method’s study, Thompson (2003) surveyed 129 African American parents on a variety of educational topics to ascertain their responses to common school practices. Thompson found that African American parents placed a high value on the education of their children. Thompson’s (2003) research shows that a majority of the parents reported that their children liked school and that their school members cared about their well being. However, when racism was mentioned, both children and parents indicated a dislike and distrust of school. The parents in this study cited low teacher expectations, unwilling teachers, and negative labeling as examples of institutional racism. This notion supports other research (Broussard, 2003; Carvalho, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 2004; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Griffith, 2001; Kunjufu, 1999; Kunjufu, 2002; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) previously cited that teachers and school leaders attitudes toward African American students impact their social, emotional and academic well being.

Teacher quality was another factor that impacted African American students' and parents' attitudes towards school. In her qualitative interviews, Thompson (2003) notes that parents reported the following reoccurring themes: (1) most teachers displayed nonchalant attitudes towards students and parent; (2) teachers were unwilling to provide assistance when needed or requested; (3) teacher dispositions and practices led to increased discipline referrals for students; and (4) parents were frustrated by their inability to assist their children with school work. Thompson's results are in congruence with previously discussed research (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Epstein, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004; McKenzie &
Scheurich, 2004; Ogbu, 1995) and support the many reasons why some African American students continue to fail at record rates as well as substantiate the reasons why some African American parents elect not to be marginally involved in the educational process.

Dudley-Marling (2009) conducted a study in which he examined parent perceptions of school-to-home literacy initiatives intended to encourage particular literacy practices in the homes of families living in poor urban communities served by underperforming schools. Specifically, this study examined how African American and immigrant ESL parents experience various school-to-home literacy initiatives. The participants included 18 African American and 14 immigrant ESL parents living in the large urban areas in the northeastern United States. The research design included open-ended, qualitative interviews regarding parents’ perceptions of the school’s literacy practices. The analysis of the data indicated that the school-to-home literacy practices did not always seem to fit into the cultural values, expectations or routines of those interviewed (Dudley-Marling, 2009). The researcher concluded that a model of family literacy considerate of families’ cultural values was needed. The researcher offered the sociocultural perspective, as an alternative to the deficit model that has mostly dominated schools. The sociocultural perspective involves manipulating social and cultural practices which involve specific ways of understanding and interacting with people in various cultures.

Together these factors illustrate why some African American parents elect not to participate in the educational process. These data suggest the need for families, schools, and communities to re-establish trust and respect in their efforts to ensure student success.
(Epstein, 1987). As a result, it is important to reconcile the home-school gap, and the culture of home with the dominant culture exhibited by schools (Tatum, 1997).

African American Grandmothers

Introduction and historical roles as caregivers. Over the past few decades, American families have relied more heavily on grandparents to assume caregiver responsibility for their grandchildren. In the past 30 years, the number of African American grandchildren who are in the care of their grandmothers has more than doubled (Doblin-MacNab, 2006). While the increasing trend of grandmothers taking full responsibility of caring for their grandchildren spans across all ethnic, racial, and socio-economic lines, it appears to be more prevalent in the African American community (Bachman & Chase-Lansdale, 2005). According to Kataoka-Yahiro, Ceria, and Yoder (2004), approximately 6 million grandparents are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. These figures are reflective of a growing national trend in grandparent headed households across the social and racial spectrum (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Pruchno & McMenney, 2000).

The average age of custodial grandparents is 57 years of age and the majority of grandparent caregivers are grandmothers (Whitley, Kelley, & Sipe, 2001). African American custodial grandmothers are likely to be older, single, and have a lower level of education than their White counterparts. Additionally, African American grandmothers are more likely to experience reduced physical functioning necessary to meet the demands of care-giving (Bachman & Chase-Lansdale, 2005; Edwards & Mumford, 2005)
A historical analysis of African American grandmothers shows that regardless of financial or other hardship situations, many are assuming the role as primary caregivers for non-biological children to ensure that their grandchildren are not placed in foster care (Gibson, 2002). Further, when researchers examine African American families and what African American grandmothers perceive to be their most important role as caregivers, they clearly note that it is education and teaching. African American grandmothers want to teach their grandchildren how to become life-long learners, how to discern between right and wrong and make good choices in life (Watson & Koblinski, 2001).

Additionally, African American grandmothers report teaching family values and ideals as being important. African American grandmothers tend to be more authoritative and parent-like when disciplining, advising, and redirecting inappropriate behaviors of their grandchildren than grandmothers of other ethnic backgrounds (Pearson, Hunter, Cook, Ialongo, & Kellam, 1997). Consequently though, low income African American grandmothers report more frustrations with their caregiver role, possibly due to employment difficulties, financial burdens, and poor healthcare (Watson & Koblinsky, 2001). As African American grandmothers increasingly become primary and custodial caregivers to their grandchildren, their experiences are emerging as an interesting, yet underdeveloped topic of concern (Gibson, 2005).

**Custodial caregivers barriers and benefits.** When grandparents assume caregiving responsibilities, they are frequently confronted with parenting challenges. Many challenges, of which most are inherited, include limited energy, negotiating changing family roles, educating a new generation of children and parenting in toxic social
environments (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). To gain insight into parenting stressors of African American grandmothers, Gibson (2005) conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 17 African American custodial grandmothers. The goal of this study was to describe strategies used by African American grandmothers as they assumed primary care-giving responsibilities for their grandchildren. In this study, grandmothers living in a Mid-western state were recruited and eligible for the study if they were an African American grandmother, cared for a related child between the ages of 5 and 18 years, and the biological parent(s) were absent from the household. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding specific areas of parenting such as: (a) defining success for grandchildren, (b) providing social and emotional support, (c) enhancing the likelihood of completing school, (d) recovering from the absence of biological parent(s), (e) eliminating the possibility of involvement with drugs, violence, and crime and (f) discussing future success. The research findings suggest that the grandmothers in this study would benefit from parent training and education which takes into account their previous parental experience while also considering the unique experiences and challenges they face while parenting their grandchildren (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006).

Gibson (2005) conducted a qualitative study in which seven themes emerged as stressors and challenges that are associated with grandmother’s parenting strategies. The themes include: maintaining effective communication, playing a strong and significant role in the child’s education, providing social and emotional support to the child, involving other extended family members, involving grandchildren in community based activities, acknowledging and working through vulnerabilities, and working through the
children’s feelings about the absence of their biological parent(s). Grandmothers in this study indicated pressure in parenting their grandchildren. The grandparents in this study voiced an array of concerns and believed that both they and their grandchildren must assume responsibility for the grandchildren’s education (Gibson, 2005).

Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory, and Arju (2007) conducted a study in which they investigated the learning exchange between three-to-six year olds and their grandparents aiming to enhance understanding the sociocultural aspects of learning. The sociocultural theory applied in this intergenerational learning include synergy, scaffolding, and using information from different sources, and grandmothers as “funds of knowledge.” This study began with an initial survey at a primary school in which the researchers surveyed the staff on the range of learning activities that take place between the youngsters and their grandparents. The remainder of the study involved nine families who participated in case studies involving interviews, video-recording, and scrapbooks. The findings of this study were significant because as the researchers suggest, there have been limited studies investigating grandparents’ role in children’s learning (Kenner et. al, 2007). The sociocultural theory of learning referenced in this study, is based on the work of Vygotsky (1978). The Vygotskyan theory explains how individual’s encounter concepts through interaction with others in their cultural community, and subsequently integrates their ideas into their individual understanding (Kenner et.al, 2007). The findings of this intergenerational study showed that grandparents and their grandchildren treated each other as equal learning partners, and that support from the grandparents assisted the child in accomplishing tasks he/she could not do so alone. The study demonstrated how “funds
of knowledge” were held by both generations rather than by the grandparent alone (Kenner et al., 2007). The findings also extend theories of sociocultural learning by bringing attention to the learning relationship of grandchildren and their grandparents, to which each generation brings particular knowledge and skill sets (Kenner et al., 2007).

Bachman and Chase-Landsdale (2005) also examined the implications of custodial grandmothers. Results of this three city longitudinal, mixed methods study, which included 90 grandmothers, reported that custodial grandmothers experience hardships and health problems associated with their physical, mental, and economic well being. More than half of the custodial grandmothers were raising one to six grandchildren and described a variety of family situations which led to the custodial care of their grandchild. The situations included maternal death, parental incarceration, mental or physical disability, abandonment, and abuse or neglect. Similar to other researchers, Bachman and Chase-Landsdale (2005), note that custodial grandmothers report more psychological distress, depressive symptoms, and impaired physical health. Increased care-giving responsibility, greater financial strain including basic household necessities, treatment and drugs for physical and/or mental health problems continue to be salient issues for custodial grandmothers (Bachman & Chase-Landsdale, 2005; Pruchno & McKenney, 2000; Whitley, Kelley, & Sipe, 2001)

Despite a larger literature base of studies highlighting the challenges associated with being an African American custodial grandmother, there are potential benefits to their being primary caregivers of their grandchildren. African American grandmothers possess a great deal of strength as custodial parents. Consequently, from this perspective,
the parenting of their grandchildren should be viewed not only as strength of their family, but also of the African American culture. Moreover, results of a qualitative study conducted by Dolbin-MacNab (2006) indicate that custodial grandmothers perceive themselves as wiser and more involved with their grandchildren when parenting the second time around.

Dolbin-MacNab’s qualitative study drew from fifty-two grandmothers and their grandchildren (ages 11-18 years) who participated in completing questionnaires and 41 pairs who participated in semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the study was to explore how grandmothers perceive parenting their grandchildren in comparison to parenting their own children and to further understand their needs. The participants of this study were from 14 states in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and Southwest and were raising their grandchildren for a number of reasons, including substance abuse, parental neglect, parental incarceration, convenience, and abandonment. The collection of data involved face-to-face interviews or telephone data collection for participants who lived beyond a reasonable driving distance. The analysis of how custodial grandparents compared their grandchildren and children revealed several themes. Grandmothers positively reported having an intense emotional bond with their grandchildren, which included increased feelings of love and affection. Grandmothers also reported confidence in their parenting strategies as they replicated family routines, discipline practices, and involvement in their grandchildren’s activities.

Other benefits noted in this study included relaxation and increased time and attention. Thirteen percent of the grandmothers attributed their relaxation to their
parenting experience and wisdom. Lastly, twenty-five percent of the grandmothers in this study reported having more time to form meaningful relationships and connections with their grandchildren. Increased time and attention was most frequently attributed to retirement or working much less than previously with their own children (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). Research findings associated with grandmothers as caregivers suggest that custodial grandmothers be provided with parent education, training and support (Gibson, 2005; Whitley, Kelley, & Sipe, 2001). Schools must begin to recognize and validate that parents have intellectually credible history, culture, and expertise that is essential in order for them to negotiate their positions (Whitmore & Norton-Meier, 2008). School leaders should learn to value the “funds of knowledge” of all parents, specifically their marginalized parents, which are an integral part of who they are.

**Parental Involvement Models**

A number of parent involvement models can be found in literature. Parental involvement has been frequently used to describe ways to involve parents at school or in school related activities (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Epstein 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005;Pena, 2000; Reynolds & Clements, 2005; Trotman, 2001). Parental involvement can also be referred to ways that parents can contribute to home learning activities (Epstein, 2001; Epstein 2004; Lopez & Stoelting, 2010).
For the past couple of decades, research, policy and parental involvement practices have been dominated by Epstein’s (1997) model of home-school partnerships. This model is based on the theory of combining school, home, and community resources. Epstein’s parental involvement model involves a host of collaborative activities and is perhaps the most popular and widespread conceptualization of involvement (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). Epstein’s (1997) framework identifies six types of involvement through which schools, families, and the community interact. They are: basic obligations of parenting, home-school communication, volunteering at school, learning at home, school decision making, and community-school collaboration.

Epstein’s (1990) typology of parent involvement is detailed by type, practices, and intended outcomes:

Type 1 – Parenting: Practices include teachers providing information to parents that will help them set home conditions and assist their child with homework.

Type 2 – Communication: Practices include home-school communication, teachers providing information to families in their native language, sending daily and weekly notes home, sharing student progress with parents, and holding parent-teacher conferences with follow up.

Type 3 – Volunteering: Practices include parental support through parents joining the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), establishing a parent resource center/meeting area, and parent’s surveying other parental needs, interests, ideas, and availability.

Type 4 – Learning at Home: Practices include developing and distributing possible topics for discussion by parents, and parents being made aware of subjects being taught at school.
Type 5 – Decision Making: Practices include parents having a voice and becoming involved in advocacy groups and become members of the governing body.

Type 6 – Community Collaboration: Practices include aligning services and resources by having organizations share relevant information with parents and students.

Although Epstein’s (1997) model is perhaps the most popular and widespread conceptualization of parental involvement, Lopez and Stoelting (2010) insist that it emerges from a discursive framework in which the role of the parent is to assist the school in fulfilling its educative mission. Lopez and Stoelting (2010) further contend that Epstein’s model (1997) assumes that parents are welcomed at schools and that parents have the requisite skills and time necessary to participate at the school level. Carvalho (2001) adds that Epstein’s model also assumes that parents have the desire to provide a parallel home environment to the school’s environment which extends the continuity of school-based learning to the home. Lastly, Lopez and Stoelting (2010) believe that Epstein’s model of parental involvement engenders culture and class specific renderings that marginalized parents are uninvolved and that the six typologies have the potential to blame parents for not getting involved, while removing from schools the onus of contributing to positive student outcomes. Epstein’s framework, therefore, positions parents as the sole determinants of their children’s success or failure (Lopez and Stoelting, 2010). From the social constructivist perspective, parents’ contributions and insights should strengthen and complement the school and I believe that school leaders should have more ownership of student success and failure, rather than student success being heavily based on the involvement of the parent. The types and levels of parent
involvement vary depending on their interactions with others, interaction with their environments, and their personal experiences, many of which are culturally constructed.

Another model which is consistent with Epstein’s parent involvement model was designed by Comer and Haynes (1991). This model was specifically designed to enhance parental involvement in low socioeconomic schools with the nine element school development program was housed in two low-income schools. The researchers hypothesized that the number of parents who chose to become involved in their children’s schools would increase if they could become involved in all levels of the school life and general educational process. Comer and Haynes (1991) also endorsed home-school collaboration in working towards academic and social goals. The goal of this school development program was to increase parental involvement by forming parent-staff groups that worked together versus the traditional isolated roles and involvement of the teachers, school leaders and parents. The researchers found that when parents actively participated in daily school activities, planning, and management, and worked together with schools’ staffs that their perspectives helped to serve in the best interest of the students.

Watkins (1997) developed a theoretical parent involvement path model with related patterns of involvement. The patterns include parents becoming involved to improve their child’s grades, engaging minority parents and increasing parental involvement at home. The exploratory parent involvement path model shows that the patterns are interrelated to parent efficacy (as supported by Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005), parent mastery orientation, and parent performance orientation, all of which lead
to enhanced parental involvement. The strength to this model is the outlined patterns of involvement for specifically minority and low income families. When models of involvement reflect parent’s relevance and uniqueness, it is likely that the parents will be more empowered to make contributions, both at home and school.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1997) parent involvement model is constructed in five sequential levels and is similar to others in that it has different levels which include a number of variables that impact parent’s involvement. This theoretical model of the parental involvement process takes a psychological perspective in explaining why parents become involved in their children’s education. Level 1-personal motivation is the parent’s involvement depends heavily on self-efficacy and requests from teachers for them to become involved. Level 2-parent mechanisms of involvement are the different forms of involvement which are influenced by encouragement, modeling, and reinforcement to become involved. Level 3-child perception is a mechanism through which parent’s involvement and expectations influence the child’s outcomes at school. Level 4-student attributes conducive to achievement involve tempering and mediating variables of self-efficacy and motivation. Level 5-student achievement involves student outcomes and the skills and knowledge required to do well in school.

Given the importance of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey’s model is aimed at understanding why parents become involved, the types of involvement activities they engage in and how to maximize the benefits of their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). Although this model finds that parents elect to be involved in activities they believe will benefit the academic success and well being of their child, Lopez and
Stoelting (2010) suggest that it is important for schools to realize and recognize that each parent’s concept of involvement widely varies and therefore should be closely aligned to the parental beliefs more so than the beliefs and expectations set forth by the schools.

Some research evidence suggests parents’ involvement in their child’s educational program will result in increased learning and fewer discipline problems (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004). The researchers present a model for developing frequent, positive, and professional relationships with parents of students with learning and behavioral problems. The model includes preparing for, establishing, and maintaining parent involvement. The authors recommend five areas of parent involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, home instruction, and school-wide. As with Epstein’s parent involvement model (1990), this model is based on the theory of combining home, school and communities. Similarly though, this model also lacks specifics as to how it can embody the needs of those who differ racially, culturally, and socio-economically from the mainstream middle class norm and that schools openly welcome home-school partnerships.

Most accounts of parental involvement among low-income parents tend to focus on what parents lack (Lightfoot, 2004). However, future research should begin to guide schools on what they can do to better reach and serve low income parents and parents of color. Despite what scholarly research suggests, research on the varying models of parent involvement clearly show common goals and activities that favor white middle class culture and discourse, and are designed to universally help parents support student learning outcomes both at home and school. The common goals include learning at
home, communication between home and school, and home-school collaboration. The learning at home theme is evident in Epstein’s (1990) typology 4 which states that the goal is support children’s activities at home, Comer and Haynes’ (1991) model in which parents are expected to be actively engaged in student’s work at home, and Darch, Miao, and Shippen’s (2004) model in which learning at home activities include teaching and reinforcing school expectations. The second common goal that is consistent across different parental involvement models is home-school communication. Epstein’s (1990) typology 2 states that communication activities include sending student progress reports home, sending weekly notes home, and holding parent-teacher conferences. Watkins’ (1997) model also identifies communication as a critical element to the parent involvement model and notes that communication motivates parents to become actively involved. The communication theme is also evident in Darch, Miao, and Shippen’s (2004) model in which the researchers stress the importance of home-school communication as it relates to student behavior, attitudes, learning and school expectations. The third goal that is consistent across the different parental involvement models is collaboration. Epstein’s (1990) typology 6 states that the goal of collaborating is to align services and resources that will benefit students and improve learning outcomes. The second model that shares the collaboration theme is Comer and Haynes (1991). Comer and Haynes (1991) believe that home-school collaboration is necessary in helping students achieve academic and social goals.

Although common goals are evident in many of the models referenced in current research, Goodwin and King (2002) identify several misconceptions surrounding parental
involvement that future research should address. They argue that misconceptions that need to be addressed when creating parental involvement expectations include: parents who do not visit schools do not care about their children’s education, good parental involvement must look a certain way to be acceptable by schools, all parents respond to the same strategies identified by schools, and that low-income parents cannot support the school. Unfortunately, most schools and parent involvement models have an unstated assumption about what effective parental involvement should look like, without regard to the parent’s perceptions of how involvement should be framed. Another concern with current models of parental involvement is the absence of a shared or collaborative, home-school focus. Lopez and Stoeling (2010) note that frameworks with a collaborative focus involve the whole family, provide community connections, and focus on the strengths of the family, thus being centered on a culture of relationship building and reciprocity between home and school. This type of framework should be the focus of future research if parents and schools are to educate the whole child.

The Importance of Parental Involvement

Researchers have known for some time that parents and family members play a vital role in student’s achievement, success, and their social and emotional development (D’Amico, 2001; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Craft, 2003; Reynolds & Clements, 2005; Van & Orozco, 2007). Clearly, parents are involved in their children’s educational lives to varying degrees, yet certain forms on parental involvement tend to fall outside of the traditional understanding of what parental involvement should look like (Hidalgo, 1998;
Kakli, 2010; Lopez & Stoelting, 2010; Valdes, 1996). The role that schools play in facilitating parents’ involvement in their children’s education is becoming more important and research studies and findings on parental involvement in schools at the local, state, and national levels have led policy makers in pressuring public schools to increase home-school collaboration efforts (Broussard, 2003; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Hill & Craft, 2003; Lawson, 2003; Moles, 2005; Sanders, 2008).

For instance, in 1994, the United States Department of Education created the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education Act. At the time, this act impacted more than 7,000 families, communities and other organizations nationwide (Moles, 2005). The partnership’s goal was to increase parental involvement in schools through parent information and resource centers. The development of the resource centers was to increase parents’ knowledge of parenting skills and activities, strengthen school and family partnerships, and to promote the development and achievement of students who are bilingual, have disabilities, or are economically or educationally at-risk.

Similarly, Title I recognizes the importance of parental involvement and involves improving the academic performance of economically disadvantaged students. The requirements of the Title I Act also obligate schools to include the criteria of parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Schools that receive Title I funding must develop a parental involvement plan which must receive input and feedback from parents and include a strategic plan to build the school’s capacity to engage and sustain parents and address barriers and factors that potentially hinder their involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). One percent of the school’s Title I budget must be used to develop or
enhance parental involvement programs and activities at these schools. These activities may include conducting parental workshops, offering childcare and transportation, making home visits, and hiring parent advocates.

Title I schools are also required to develop home-school compacts, an agreement between schools, parents, and students. The compacts indicate how the schools and families will collaborate to ensure student success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The contents of the compacts describe in detail the parent’s responsibilities to support school initiatives at home, the school’s responsibilities in providing a high quality academic program, and frequent communication between home and school (Moles, 2005). In general, the home-school compacts emphasize shared responsibility for student progress and achievement.

Another reform initiative, The National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement, are guidelines that aim to strengthen family involvement in schools and their communities. In general terms, parent involvement is operationally defined as the parents’ role in supporting their child at both home and school. There are six national standards which focus on promoting and enhancing communication, parenting skills, and encouraging more parental participation in school related activities. Studies on parent involvement issues and initiatives have identified many factors that are critical to student success and performance. One predictor of increased student success is sustained parental involvement in all levels of their child’s schooling -- decision making, student advocacy, and volunteering. Parents who are aware of school related issues and concerns can provide a greater contribution to their child’s education.
A number of studies have confirmed that parent involvement is an important factor in the outcome of children’s performance in school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pena, 2000; Reynolds & Clement, 2005; Trotman, 2001). The research of Henderson and Mapp (2002) supports the notion that the more parents are involved, the better students will thrive academically and socially at school. The researchers note that although there is a substantial decline in parent involvement at the middle school level, schools that implement a strong parent involvement model have and will continue to see significant increases in standardized test scores, student attendance, and overall performance (Anderson, 2008). However, to accomplish a strong parental involvement model schools must commit to demonstrating consistency with parent engagement strategies (Anderson, 2008).

Parental involvement is certainly important in the efforts to improve overall student and school performance. Due to advances in school standards and accountability at all levels, there is also an increased need to involve parents as home-school partners. Simons-Morton and Crump (2003) conducted a survey study with students in a suburban Maryland school district. The study was limited to 1267 students in four different middle schools. The purpose of the study was to identify factors associated with school involvement and school adjustment among middle school aged students. The results of this study indicate that parental involvement in the four schools that participated was a better predictor of student engagement. Findings indicated that school adjustment was lower for boys and African-Americans, and respectively there was a large decline of school engagement among the same groups. The declines as reported in this study, are
disturbing because they are happening during a time when students’ school adjustment, commitment, and engagement to school are important for future academic and behavioral success (Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003).

In another study of parental involvement, Thurston and Navarrete (2003) examined the impact of poverty on children’s learning and development. The participants in this study involved mothers from low-income areas in four states, Florida, Texas, Kansas, and Tennessee. The sample included 263 women. Approximately 40% of the rural mothers in this study reported having one or more special needs children. The parents were surveyed regarding their interest levels in getting involved with their children’s schools. The results of this study indicate that nearly all of the respondents wanted to be involved in their child’s education, but that intimidation and past negative experiences prevented them from doing so. As previously noted, parental experiences compose their reality and if the social context or construct in which that happens is less than desirable, it may negatively impact the parent’s involvement and ultimately their child’s success at school.

Fan and Chen (2001) attempted to identify the influence parental involvement had on high school student achievement. This study examined parent’s level of involvement over a four-year period. The measure of student’s achievement was determined by report card grades and achievement test scores. Three types of questionnaires were used per student, and achievement tests were given in the academic areas of reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. The researchers assert that although parent involvement is rarely seen in high school classrooms, that parent volunteers at school significantly
influence students’ academic achievement. Such a finding again stresses the importance of parental involvement and the need to create family friendly social environments.

Another study points out the elements of parental involvement as it relates to student’s academic achievement. The purpose of the study was to develop parental involvement strategies that would improve student achievement with all students, including minorities and those who are impoverished (Ingram et al., 2007). This descriptive study used survey methodology to determine which parental involvement strategies were most evident in at-risk, high-achieving schools. The sample population included 800 families from three Chicago Public Schools that were identified as high performing and at risk. The study was limited to schools that scored in the top third of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). Schools were considered to be at-risk if 50% or more of the population was low-income and more than 50% of the students were minority. The instrument used in this study was a Family Involvement Questionnaire which identified three Epstein’s typologies (1997): involvement at home, involvement at school, and home-school conferencing. This research finding suggests that learning at home and parenting were critical components of parental involvement. Learning at home and parenting strategies included encouragement, motivation, modeling mentoring, disciplining, praising, and supporting children (Ingram et al., 2007; Moles, 2005). The findings of this study show that parental involvement regardless of the social setting (home or school) has the tendency to yield positive results for students, and that student learning takes place in a number of social settings.
Like other ethnic groups, African American parents want their children to excel academically. Researchers who have studied home-school relationships that involve low income families and families of color have found that educators usually do not welcome, expect, or cultivate power sharing practices or involvement with the students’ families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Broussard, 2003; Cooper, 2009; Dudley-Marling, 2009; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004; Trotman, 2001). Consequently, the deficit thinking model suggests that when parents are marginally involved, parenting as well as academic socialization will suffer (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Deficit-based belief system by teachers, who believe that low income, culturally different families have little to contribute to their children’s education may lead teachers to conclude that parents are uninterested and do not care to be involved (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Lightfoot, 2004). Therefore, current research must begin to focus on supporting, maintaining, and facilitating parent involvement, thus the purpose of this study which is to gain knowledge from African American custodial grandmothers regarding their perceptions of education, parental involvement practices and actions that will support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process.

Summary

Implications for School Leaders. A question that continues to arise in research is “how do marginalized parents construct their parental involvement role in promoting their children’s success?” Parents who often come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and whose children experience unequal economic, human, cultural, and social capital are usually less involved in school (Auerbach, 2007; Pena, 2000; Shumow
& Lomax, 2002). However, Lopez (2001) counters that marginalized parents are significantly involved in their children’s lives, yet their involvement activities may often times fall outside of the conventional understandings of engagement. Auerbach (2007) suggests that teachers and school leaders place such a high demand on school involvement and lower socioeconomic African American parents are less involved which leads them to assume that these parents are uninterested in the educational process of their children, when in fact the meaning of involvement is seemingly unitary, but is in fact diverse and culturally determined (March & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010). Deficit thinking, as suggested by Yosso (2005), takes the position that minority parents neither value nor support their children’s education. Research acknowledges that deficit thinking permeates the United State society and schools alike (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Unfortunately, such deficit thinking may continue to perpetuate the myth of uninvolved African American families in the schooling process.

In short, parent roles, views, and parental input are essential when designing and developing effective parental involvement activities and programs that meet the needs of multiple constituencies (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). School leaders are likely to see improvements in home-school relationships, student achievement, and parental involvement when schools identify and address the perceptions and practices of parents as it relates to their involvement. Understanding parents’ perceptions is critical to overcoming barriers in order to help improve home-school relations and to improve student performance. The methodologies most frequently used in African American parental involvement research involved parent interviews and surveys. The research
implied that all stakeholders benefit when parents take part in their children’s education, and the results show an increase in student achievement and improvement in student’s overall attitudes (Epstein, 2004). Kunjufu (2005) further notes that if schools want to improve home-school relationships and get parents more actively involved, a major area that needs to be revised is home-school communication.

**African American Grandmothers.** Lastly, the research on African American grandmothers indicates that many are now assuming the primary caregiver role for their grandchildren and view their most important role as educating and teaching their grandchildren. In caring for and teaching their grandchildren, African American grandmothers are often times faced with many challenges, including changing family roles and educating a new generation of children. Being that African American grandmothers place a high value on the education of the grandchildren in their care, school leaders must begin to explore and include their history and experiences into the general educational process and school life. Culture neutral research and strategies for closing the home-school gap would add to the existing body of research. In this study, the voices of African American grandmothers will be heard and contribute to current research by examining their perceptions of education and parental involvement practices.

The next section describes the methodology for this study. I conducted a qualitative study with a focus on African American custodial grandmothers and parental involvement. I used interviews and maintained field notes to document the study.
Chapter 3

Methods

Overview

An extensive review of the literature has shown that there is an abundance of information on parent involvement yet there are relatively few studies that have investigated minority parents’ involvement in their children’s education particularly with African American custodial grandmothers. The purpose of chapter three is to describe the methodology that was utilized to explore the research questions in this study. This chapter includes the questions that inform and guide the study, the research methodology, research design, participant selection, data collection, reliability efforts, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. The findings of this study are presented in the dissertation primarily in narrative format with a summary of the participants’ experiences and perceptions.

Purpose and Research Questions

As evidenced in the literature review presented in Chapter Two, the need to support the engagement of African American families and their level of parental involvement has been clearly outlined. Additional research is needed to understand how African Americans, particularly African American grandmothers, perceive the importance of education, how they see their involvement in their grandchildren’s
education, and what has influenced their actions in regards to their grandchildren’s education. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process of the grandchildren in their care. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- How do African American grandmothers see their involvement in their grandchildren’s education?
- How have the grandmothers shaped their involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care? What influenced their involvement?
- What are their perspectives on the level of involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care?
- What do African American grandmothers see as barriers and opportunities as they try to guide their grandchildren through formal schooling?

Methods

A primary goal of qualitative interviewing is to seek out what is on another person’s mind (Patton, 1991). Use of other source documents provides a way to more deeply analyze the data (Hatch, 2002). To further enhance the data collection and analysis process, I used field notes, in the form of note cards, to maintain notes of observations while working with the participants. My field notes enhanced the development of the greater picture involving the participants and provided additional insight into the environmental surroundings of the study participants.
The qualitative approach of this study allowed me to collect descriptions of participants’ perceptions and experiences and analyze them for the meaning of cultural themes, interpretation, lessons learned and questions raised (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of an issue through talking directly with people and allowing them to share their stories. A cultural capital framework informed this study by allowing the voices and opinions of African American grandmothers to be heard. This methodology was best suited for this research study because it allowed me to interview, record and listen to the experiences of the grandmothers and for them to share their views from a cultural and social capital/wealth perspective. Furthermore, this method was appropriate for this study because of the authentic stories of the grandmothers’ experiences and perceptions, that are needed to capture, honor and validate their realities through personal descriptive narratives, and focuses on the individual’s learning about parental involvement practices.

**Theoretical Framework**

Cultural capital was the theoretical framework that guided this study. This social theory maintains that cultural and social wealth challenges traditional understandings of cultural capital that educators often times see with African American families. There is a wide array of cultural information, skills, and power owned by socially marginalized groups that often go unacknowledged and untapped. Various forms of capital encouraged through cultural and social wealth have multiple forces in which schools or other organizations can use to support their efforts in the communities and the classroom.
Cultural Capital and Parental Involvement

I believe that each grandmother’s view on parental involvement influenced how they perceived education and the extent of their involvement in the educational process. Individuals develop personal meanings of their experiences – meanings directed at certain things or situations (Creswell, 2007). Experiences that occurred influenced the grandmothers’ level of engagement due to the subjective meaning of their experiences. The ideas and perceptions of the grandmothers’ involvement evolved from both historical and social events that have occurred in their lives. My objective was to research and consider the different meanings the grandmothers established for their involvement based on their subjective and diverse experiences. I also considered the implications for school leaders and how their beliefs and actions affect the involvement of the grandmothers in this study.

Participant Selection

The population for this study was African American grandmothers who are solely responsible for the care and well-being of one male grandchild. Qualitative researchers select participants that best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2007). I used purposeful sampling which involved selecting persons who could inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study because participants included those who could describe and explain their experience and perspectives on the education of their grandchildren and their perspectives on parental involvement.
The participants were selected based on the grandchild’s school status (Title I designated school), participant accessibility, and years as a primary caregiver. The criteria for selection of participants in this study was: (1) the grandmother is African American (2) willingness of the grandmother to participate in the study, (3) grandmother has only one grandson in their care, (4) the grandmother has been the custodial grandmother for a minimum of three years, (5) the child in the grandmother’s care is male (6) the child in the grandmother’s care attends a Title I public school, and (7) the child in the grandmother’s care is not classified as ESE (Exceptional Student Education).

One of the boys in the care of the grandmothers in this study was an elementary student, and two were middle school students. At least 70% or more the total student body population qualified for free or reduced lunch at the schools they attended. The schools were not in walking distance of the homes and therefore, the boys were either bussed to school, or driven by car.

I purposely selected grandmothers who were raising African American males because the data surrounding Black boys had always piqued my curiosity. As a parent of a teenage Black male, whose exceptionality is gifted, I often wondered why a large percentage of Black males struggled in school. It is widely known that Black males tend to have the highest percentage rates for school discipline referrals, out of school suspensions, expulsions, referrals for special needs evaluation and services, and they tend to have the lowest academic achievement scores.

Three grandmother candidates meeting the criteria were selected for this study, with one being a pilot study. The recommended participant names were provided to me by school level personnel from various schools. The said number of participants was adequate for a
small, representative qualitative study. Grandmothers were recruited via persons who are members of the County’s Kinship Program or through the School District’s Family Involvement Team. I did not utilize the Kinship Caregivers site for recruitment, but sought referrals for the study from the grandparents who are active members of the County’s Kinship Caregivers Program that volunteer at one of the District’s Public Schools. Recruitment efforts occurred through the District’s Public Schools. The Kinship Care Program serves the needs of grandparents, or other relatives caring for their grandchildren, siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, or other children of relatives. Support services provided to Kinship Care members include but are not limited to: linking families to community resources, medical care, educational training, child care assistance, support groups, economic assistance, and parenting skills enhancement activities. During the time of the study, I served as the Supervisor of Title I Programs. The Title I Program worked alongside, but not directly with the Kinship Care Program. The grandparents who were members of the Kinship Care Program may have had grandchildren or other family members who attended Title I designated schools, but there was no direct connection. There were no potential conflicts of interest in conducting the study in the selected school district as there is no direct relationship with the researcher and the members of the County’s Kinship Care Program or the parents who were Family Involvement Team members.

**Design of the Qualitative Instrument**

Interviewing allows researchers to obtain the participants’ perspective and gain a deeper understanding of people’s experiences (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). The research
The design of this study is response interviewing followed by a descriptive narrative. The goal of this research was to generate a depth of understanding through responsive interviewing.

**Recruitment and Responsive Interviewing**

I contacted the members of the County’s Kinship Program and Family Involvement Team via phone to arrange for a group meeting. Next, we met as a group and I explained the purpose of the study and hand delivered recruitment fliers and participation invitation letters. Group members assisted with reaching out to potential candidates. Three participants were selected in an effort to maintain a manageable sample size, thus allowing me to have a deeper focus on the individualized experiences of the study participants. Upon receiving the names of potential candidates, I contacted the three participants via phone and personally invited them to participate (Appendix A) in the study. Each participant met the criteria, accepted my invitation to participate and therefore, I did not have to recruit additional study participants. Following verbal acceptance of the invitation to participate, each participant received and signed a statement of informed consent and the interview process (Appendix B).
Table 1

*Study Activities*

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<th>Steps</th>
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| 1: Identifying Participants| • Study participants were selected based on the identified criteria  
|                             | • The researcher presented the informed consent form and explained the interviewing process to the study participants.                     |
| 2: Interviewing Participants| • Individual face-to-face interviews took place with each study participant.  
|                             | • A predetermined interview protocol was used with each study participant.  
|                             | • Study participant interviews were audio recorded.                                                                                       |
| 3: Reviewing Interviews    | • All interviews were transcribed by the researcher using the cut and sort method.  
|                             | • Transcribed interviews were shared with each study participant (referred to as member checking).                                         |
| 4: Reviewing Field Notes   | • Field observations were recorded in a journal by the researcher, and reviewed by the researcher.                                        |
| 5: Data Analysis           | • Data were coded using the cut and sort method.                                                                                          |
|                             | • Data were organized according to identified themes.                                                                                    |

The pliancy of responsive interviewing permits the researcher to make modifications based on additional information received from the participant. Individual interviews were used to collect data from the sample. I developed interview protocol 1 (Appendix C) and interview protocol 2 (Appendix D) based on research, personal experiences, and personal interest. The interview sessions occurred at a location of each grandmother’s choice at either the child’s school or the grandparent’s home. Interview sessions of each participant were separated by two weeks each during the month of December. The total time of the interview protocol for each participant was
approximately two hours. The first series of interviews used closed and open-ended structured questions, related to participants’ background, demographic information, and views on the education of the children in their care. During the first interview series I aimed to establish a risk-free environment and trust level with the participants. Trust was established by having effective open communication with the participants regarding the intent of the study and how the results would be used. I established trust by sharing my personal experiences of being raised by my grandmother for 14 years. The second series of interviews used open ended or semi-structured questions, relating to parental involvement, which was aimed more at gathering information on patterns, themes, overall perceptions, and information needing more clarification or details. I also utilized field notes to maintain notes of observations while working with the participants. For ensuring the integrity of the data, hardcopies and electronic files of the data will be securely stored.

Data Collection

Pilot study. Prior to conducting the participant interviews, I obtained informed consent from a pilot participant and conducted a pilot study using the interview protocol with one grandmother. The pilot study included one custodial grandmother who is the caregiver for a male grandchild who attends a Title I school and who is not classified as ESE. The grandmother in the pilot study was asked to provide feedback regarding the succinctness of the interview protocol. The grandmother indicated that she believed the questions were sufficient for the purpose of the study. Additionally she said she believed that she was able to share her story through the questions that were posed. Based on an
analysis of the pilot study and feedback from the grandmother in the pilot study, modification of the interview protocol to provide a more concise understanding for the other participants in the study was not required, or changed.

**Interviewing.** After the study participants were identified and selected, I began conducting interviews in December 2011. Each study participant signed the informed consent form prior to the first interview. I used conversational and semi-structured interviews in order to gather as much information and data as possible from each study participant. Two interview protocols were used as guides for the conversation between the researcher and the study participants. The interview protocol was not altered, as during the pilot study, the participant suggested that the questions remained unchanged. Interview sessions of each participant were separated by two weeks each. The total time of the interview protocol for each participant was approximately two hours. After interviewing the candidates over the two week period, I transcribed the data that was collected from the interviews.

I recoded the interviews by hand and audio and provided a copy of my transcriptions to the study participants along with a member check form. The member checking process allowed the study participants to review the data and to check for accuracy in the reporting of the data. Each study participant indicated that the data presented was accurately portrayed. I also used field notes to capture visual observations of what occurred during the interviewing process. The field notes included descriptions of the environment, interactions, and any additional information that may have assisted in interpreting the individual interviews.
Data Analysis

The qualitative data for this study came from the participants’ responses to the interview questions and my field notes. Once the interviewing process was completed, I began the qualitative analysis of the participants’ experiences and identifying patterns among the data. I organized the data to allow for emergent themes to develop. I created folders and used the cutting and sorting method for analysis. I reviewed each question and response from the study participants and looked for commonalities. Reviewing the content in this manner helped to categorize, and classify the data into themes (Patton, 2002). I classified the data by looking for similar events and comments among the data, and interpretations and conclusions were made based on the findings. The cultural capital framework helped to frame the initial coding. I searched for specific words, phrases, and comments, the study participants used as I worked to develop the themes that emerged.

For data analysis purposes, I used the cutting and sorting method (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) which involved placing the questions and narrative responses from each interview into a labeled theme descriptor envelope until all statements were categorized based on key terms, phrases and concepts. There were some responses which overlapped and may have been applicable to more than one theme. I elected to use the cutting and sorting method, as I wanted to have a more personal and hands-on approach to re-reading and sorting the data. The cut and sort method allowed me to use my personal lens to extract the most meaning out of the data while ruling out unconventional explanations. It also allowed for a closer look at what was important to the grandmother’s in this study and the construction of the themes. This data analysis strategy afforded me the best
opportunity for discovery, answers to the research questions that were posed, and the generation of new questions for future research.

**Reliability**

There is no specific test available for ensuring that qualitative research is reliable and valid. However, there are suggested guidelines for judging the soundness of the research. For the purposes of this study the guidelines outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1985) were employed. These guidelines include credibility and transferability. Each was used to judge the soundness of the research.

Credibility allows for the study participants to verify that the data have been accurately reported. I used confirmability to determine credibility and followed through on each identified step of the study as noted in Table 1. Confirmability is one methodological criterion used to evaluate qualitative research and includes data interpretation and confirmation by others (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Additionally it serves as an extra cross-check of the overall logic and soundness of the study design known as “member checking.” Member checking confirms the consistency of the themes presented and gives participants the opportunity to respond to the results of the content analysis (Janesick, 2000). It is during this process that each participant was given the opportunity to review and modify the interview data. Each study participant was provided with a Member Check Form (Appendix F) and the analysis of their interviews. This allowed an opportunity for the participants to review, modify and/or comment on the analysis of the content. Neither of the study participants responded to the verification process and accuracy check of the data. A variety of data gathering sources were used to achieve
triangulation in this study. The triangulation of the data included my field note recordings as well as the study participants’ responses to the interview questions. The audio taped interviews, the interview transcripts, and my field notes were all used to help me understand how the grandmothers in the study formed their perspectives. In re-reading the grandmothers’ responses and reviewing my field notes, it became apparent that the grandmothers based their perceptions on their experiences with their grandsons’ schools, staff, and community and was heavily influenced by their cultural capital and social wealth.

Transferability provides the opportunity for other researchers to generalize the findings of one study to similar situations. My observations of the study participants, surrounding environments, field notes, summaries of the grandmothers’ responses and literature review studies allowed me to generalize my findings. The key to successful transferability lies in a thorough description of the setting, circumstances, participants and the procedure thus, providing enough information for comparison by other researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Trustworthiness of the Data

It is critical for researchers to establish a level of trust with their study participants (Janesick, 2004). I sought to build a trusting relationship with the study participants early in the process by sharing my story of being raised my grandmother, attending low-income schools and living in a low income community. By establishing trust, I believe that participants are more open to sharing their stories and viewpoints in manner which is honest and meaningful.
Using various forms of source documents helps to ensure trustworthiness of the data. I used a combination of the interviews, field notes, and had each participant to review the data for accurate representation of their voices. The data sources assisted me in answering the research questions of this study and to help identify emergent themes. I was keenly aware of my personal biases as I reflected upon and analyzed the data from the study. I attempted to richly describe the participants and their parental involvement perspectives.
Chapter 4

Presentation of the Data

Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process of the grandchildren in their care. In this chapter, I report the findings from three participant interviews. In reporting the findings I described the parental involvement perspectives of three African American grandmothers.

This chapter includes a description of the three participants, a description of the settings in which interviews took place, and themes that emerged from the study as it related to the research questions. Participants are given fictitious names to protect the identity of the participants and their grandsons. The themes that emerged from the study were- Grandmothers: Mothering and Leading by Example; Family and Communal Support: “It Takes a Village;” Grandmothers Engaging in Traditional Parental Involvement Activities; Grandmothers-Grandsons as Co-learners; and Grandmothers’ Critique and Advice for Schools.
Interview

The participants in the study were African American grandmothers who were responsible for the care and well-being of a male grandchild for three or more years. Participants were recruited through members of the school district’s Kinship Program and Family Involvement Team. Three participants were recommended by Family Involvement Team members. The Family Involvement Team includes parents, grandparents, and staff members from the Title I schools who meet several times per year to discuss topics relating to parental involvement practices, activities, and legislation. Each participant agreed to share their experiences with me for the purpose of the study. The three participants were neither members of the Kinship Program nor the Family Involvement Team, and were referred to me by members of the Family Involvement Team. The persons recommending the study participants may have been influenced by the study criteria, by their positions or association with the schools, and by their personal knowledge of those who were active in schools and willing. Upon receiving three names, I reached out to the first three participants to assess their level of interest in participating in the study. After each agreed, I elected to end the recruitment process, as it was determined that three participants would be used to maintain a manageable study. Each of the three participants agreed to participate, scheduled a time to meet with me and reviewed and signed the Informed Consent to Participate Form. Each participant was provided with the option of selecting the location for the interviews. Two participants selected their homes, and one participant selected a local school.
The Study Participants

A summary of the study participants is noted in Table 2 which illustrates participant information and it is categorized by participant name, marital status, age range, number of years they have had custody of their grandson in their care, number of years residing in the district in which the study was conducted, and the participants’ present occupation. The participants represented: (a) two married and one single grandmother, (b) ages ranged from 45 – 65 years, (c) participants maintained full custody of their grandsons for an average of 6 years, (d) participants have lived in the Florida’s district for an average of 41 years, (e) and all participants were African American and female.

Table 2:

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age Range (years)</th>
<th>Custody of Grandson (years)</th>
<th>Resident of the County (years)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Harris</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>60 – 65</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>60 – 65 years</td>
<td>Homemaker/caretaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Nora</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>45 – 50</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Samuels</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>50 – 55</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>50 – 55 years</td>
<td>Disabled/Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army Veteran</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Army Veteran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mrs. Harris. Mrs. Harris is an African American grandmother, who is married, and is a full-time care-taker. She is in her sixties and has resided in the county for over sixty years. She resides on the eastern side of the school district. She cares for her daughter’s son and has been his primary care-taker for the past seven years. She gained custody of her grandson, when her daughter, was diagnosed with a very serious illness.
Her primary source of income comes from her husband. Earlier in life, she attended almost two years of college. She described herself as an avid reader and provided a number of academic activities for her grandson to do at home. Mrs. Harris stated that mothers, or in her case, grandmothers, hold the primary responsibility for their children and grandchildren’s values development and education. According to the literature, parents who believe that they play a key role in their children or grandchildren’s education, are more likely to be involved in their schooling and related activities (Deslandes, 2003; Hill, 2004; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005).

**Field notes.** Mrs. Harris was brought to my attention by a member of the District’s Family Involvement Team. Mrs. Harris, a stout, older woman, was dressed in a mid-calf dress, with black closed-in shoes. Upon our first meeting, she greeted me at the front door, but remained seated during the interview. She shared that she had recently suffered a mild stroke and therefore did not move around as much or as easily as she had in the past. She sat in a dark brown two armed chair that was positioned to the right side of the front entrance of her home.

During my visits with Mrs. Harris, I noted that persons, both children and adults, frequently entered and exited the home. Throughout the interviews, Mrs. Harris paused to either take phone calls, speak with children and adults who were entering or leaving the home. As I interviewed Mrs. Harris, another person outside of the home was overheard asking Mrs. Harris’ daughter “who is that lady that’s here?”

The neighborhood that she resides in can best be described as low-income, single-family homes. Students in this community are geographically zoned for Title I schools, at both the elementary and middle school levels. Even though the schools that the
students in this community attend are Title I, meaning at least 65% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, the neighborhood appeared to be in fair condition. As Mrs. Harris and I talked, she described her grandson’s school as a caring and loving place for him to be, and generally spoke in favor of school staff and administration. It was obvious that Mrs. Harris had constructed her beliefs and perceptions as a result of the experiences she had with school staff, and as depicted in some literature, that her socio-economic status was not to be used as an excuse to not be involved. Many of Mrs. Harris’ comments throughout the interviews contradicted the deficit thinking model that Yosso (2005) refers to in chapter two which suggests that minority parents neither value nor support their children’s education.

Mrs. Harris seemed to be knowledgeable as it pertained to the global aspects of public education, school policy, governance and the politics surrounding public school systems. Although literature in chapter two suggests that African American parents often lack the social capital necessary to overcome institutional barriers which limit their knowledge and involvement (Nieto, 2000; Laureau & Horvath, 1999), it was interesting listening to her passionately share her understanding of the school’s academic expectations, school district policy and systemic gaps. Additionally, I was also intrigued by her willingness and commitment to share (the knowledge she had gained), not only with other friends and community members, but with her grandson’s principal as well. She mentioned how she very rarely missed watching the local bi-monthly school board meeting. She also spoke about staying abreast of educationally related issues in her grandson’s district, throughout the nation and the state by regularly reading the newspaper and watching television. Mrs. Harris seemed to have a strong belief that all
mothers (and grandmothers) should have the desire to seek out information that pertains to the education of their child(ren), and how they should not be quick to say that they “didn’t know” when they had not taken responsibility to seek out information for themselves. This type of belief system is the traditional form of cultural capital that Yosso (2005) suggests marginalized families have and that should be more widely recognized and valued.

Mrs. Nora. Mrs. Nora is an African American grandmother, who is also married, and characterized her role as a home-maker. She is in her upper forties and has been caring for her grandson for six years. She stated the she gained custody of her grandson when his mother passed away at a young age. The household’s primary source of income comes from her husband. She has resided in the county for five years. Mrs. Nora has some post secondary experience and stressed the value of education by indicating that she is actively engaged in her grandson’s school and community based activities.

Field notes. Mrs. Nora, a tall, slender, soft-spoken woman was dressed in dark slacks and a white buttoned down shirt. We met at the school site, and held our interviews in the school’s (Title I funded) Family Center. The school’s Parent Educator came by to offer water, juice, and light pastries. We sat at a kidney shaped table in close proximity to one another for our conversations. At first Mrs. Nora appeared nervous as I noticed her looking away from me or rubbing her hands together. After taking time to share my background and a detailed purpose to the study, Mrs. Nora appeared to become a little more at ease as we progressed through the conversation.

Inside of the Family Center where we met, there were shelves of used school uniforms and shoes, new and used backpacks, and instructional games and materials for
both students and parents. Mrs. Nora described her grandson’s school as a great place for learning and commented on how everyone at the school embraced her participation (on the School Advisory Council, Parent Teacher Association, and other school related events). It appeared that the level of acceptance by the school and her experiences with school staff members strongly inspired her perspectives. Title I schools, by federal statute, are charged with recognizing the importance of parental involvement and improving the academic performance of economically disadvantage students. It appears that Mrs. Nora’s role as an active volunteer and relationship with several persons and groups within the school (principal, parent educator, classroom teacher, music teacher, etc.) most likely led to her positive outlook about the school community.

Mrs. Nora shared specific examples regarding the involvement of the community in helping her grandson become well-rounded. She spoke of surrounding him with others who could help mold him into a productive young man. She frequently mentioned the importance of him being involved in church activities, community groups (for performing arts), and for community service activities which fostered the concept of “giving back” in one’s community. It was intriguing listening to her share her perception of parental involvement. She stated that “being involved included parents and family members teaching our children how to give back to their community and feel good about their contributions.”

**Ms. Samuels.** Ms. Samuels is a divorced African American grandmother. She is in her fifties and the county has been her permanent place of residence for her entire life. She has cared for her grandson for five years. She did not share how she gained custody of her grandson, only that her job was to ensure that he was taken care of by someone in
the family and that she was delighted to serve as his care giver. Her primary sources of income are derived from alimony and retirement. Ms. Samuels has a high school diploma and completed one year of college. She is a retired and disabled military veteran. She described herself as being involved in every aspect of her grandson’s life, and stressed that her primary goal is to ensure that her grandson does well in school and gets his high school diploma. She also stressed that she wants him to earn a college degree, which is similar to findings by Watson & Koblinski (2001) who state that African American grandmothers believe that an important role that they have is to ensure that their grandchildren are educated.

**Field notes.** Ms. Samuels, a fair skinned, slender woman was dressed in blue denim jeans, a light multi-colored sweater, and a pair of sneakers. She has long dread locks that drape well, but neatly, over her shoulders. She mentioned that she babysits her younger nephew while her niece (the baby’s mother), works as a teacher in the local schools. Upon our initial meeting, there were two house guests present. Aside from the visitors, there were minimal interruptions to our conversation. The baby boy was being attended to by one of the other ladies.

Throughout our interviews, Ms. Samuels often times referenced other family members as supporting both she and her grandson. She also mentioned her grandson and the school being responsible for his education, and that the parents and families are there to support the children. Mrs. Samuels’ made it obvious from the nature of her comments and suggestions, that there is a great deal of trust in the schools to get her grandson the resources and means that he needs in order to be successful in school and that she has developed community cultural wealth and the capital necessary for her grandson’s
survival. She stated that “schools need us as parents” to volunteer, send in school supplies, participate in fund raisers, and to reinforce learning at home. These findings, support Deslandes and Betrand (2005) study that parents are generally more involved, when they perceive that their involvement is encouraged and welcomed by school leaders. She indicated that in her experience raising her grandson the schools have always made his learning a priority, and perhaps this commitment may have persuaded her perspective.

Although Ms. Samuels did not share as much information in regards to seeking out knowledge and resources related to school, it was very clear that she held high the notion that parents and family members are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their children succeed in school and in life. Perhaps her history of working alongside school administrators and teachers has shaped her perceptions and strengthen her support and confidence in the schools, thus her willingness to be involved where required or requested.

Emergent Themes

Researchers have to make sense and meaning of their data in an effort to categorize the findings into themes. I began the data analysis process by listening to the interviews. As recommended by Hatch (2002), data should be read with fundamental questions in mind during the analysis process. At the conclusion of the interview sessions, I reviewed the (fundamental) research questions, transcribed the data, and re-read the interview data to gain a full awareness of what was included. I read through the
data seeking salient and similar responses from the participants regarding their relationships and their perceptions of their grandchildren’s schools and this is what guided me in the coding process. I found that many themes overlapped to I coded them based on key word and phrases.

After reviewing the literature on grandmothers and the data, five themes have been identified for this study. I developed the codes by many of the words and phrases identified in reviewing the interviews. The research questions also played a role in that helping to formulate common categories.

The major themes were Grandmothers: Mothering and Leading by Example; Family and Communal Support: “It Takes a Village;” Grandmothers Engaging in Traditional Parental Involvement Activities; Grandmothers-Grandsons as Co-learners; and Grandmothers’ Critique and Advice for Schools. I used the cutting and sorting method (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), to determine which elements which would be categorized into the major themes. The cutting and sorting method involved placing the questions and narrative responses from each interview into a labeled coded envelope and grouping similar responses from the grandmothers, of which some overlapped. I felt deeply connected to the data analysis process by using the cut and sort method, because it provided me with the opportunity to personally manipulate, arrange, and process the responses. I matched each participant’s interview responses with a coded theme until all statements were categorized into the large envelopes based on key terms, phrases and concepts. I re-read the responses in each envelope to determine if all responses were categorized under the best suited theme. Next, I sought to identify direct or relevant
quotes to include in the analysis. A final check of the analysis involved locating direct quotations that expressed the ideas I sought in the study (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, I shared summarized excerpts from my field notes in describing the environment, some of my direct observations and personal thoughts.

**Elements Influencing the Themes**

Review of literature suggested that a number of themes and/or attributes, that combined, personified the elements of the grandmother’s role. Over the past few decades, American families have relied more heavily on grandmothers to assume caregiver responsibility for their grandchildren. A historical analysis of African American grandmothers showed that many are assuming the role as primary caregivers for their grandchildren (Gibson, 2002). Educating and teaching family values and ideals to those in their care is a primary role the grandmothers perceived as being important. Similarly, Thompson (2003) noted in his research that African American parents placed a high value on the education of their children. Watson and Koblinski’s research showed that African American grandmothers want to teach their grandchildren how to become life-long learners, how to discern between right and wrong and make good choices in life (2001), and they perceive their role as taking full responsibility of caring for the child.

According to the literature, parent roles, views, and parental input are essential when developing effective parent involvement activities and programs that meet the needs of multiple constituencies (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). School leaders are likely to see improvements in family-school relationships and parental involvement when schools identify and address the perceptions and practices of parents as it relates to their
involvement. Understanding parents’ perceptions is essential to reducing or overcoming barriers in order to help improve family-school relations.

Historical research outlines reasons why African American parents choose or choose not to be involved in their children’s education. Parent involvement is multi-faceted and many factors influence the levels of parent involvement. These factors may include but not be limited to socio-economic status, education level, family size and structure, gender, social class, and perceptions (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Cooper, 2007; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Dolbin-MacNab, 2006; & Guerra, 2004; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Lareau, 2008; Pena, 2000; Ream & Palardy, 2008). Although research has shown that minority parents are less likely to involve themselves in school related activities, the participants in this study were involved, as outlined throughout this chapter. As I describe and analyze the data in this chapter, some quotes are lengthier than others due to the constructivist approach of the study, see Figure A.

Theme 1: Grandmothers: Mothering and Leading by Example

Primary role of grandmothers: To take care of everything. The diverse roles of the grandmothers in this study are significant to understanding how they each construct their perceptions of parental involvement. The interview responses provided by the grandmothers specified some of their perceived primary roles. All three participants suggested that it is their responsibility to take care of their grandchild’s every need
Figure A:

*Elements Influencing Parental Involvement Perspectives*

(development, schooling, education, preparation for adulthood, etc.), that they do everything possible to be involved with their grandsons and their schools, that family members provide additional support, and that their involvement as a grandmother versus being a mother has remained, for the most part, unchanged. Mrs. Harris described her role as being the most important in her grandson’s life. She discussed areas in which she provides preparation and support for her grandson’s schooling. When asked to describe her role as a grandmother, Mrs. Harris shared the following.
My role is to take care of him on a full-time basis. By full-time, I mean that I take care of his every need. She stressed “this is our household and we help him. I help my grandson with homework such as science and math, and other lessons that he needs to learn. We have conversations and I believe that telling him what I expect is the best way to educate him. I teach him by setting positive examples. I read, I write, I watch television, I ask questions, and I discuss things with him.

Mrs. Nora shared that she believes in having a regular routine for her grandson. She described her role as preparing him for school, such as making sure he is dressed, that he has a good meal each morning before he attends school. She also believes that her role involves her keeping him involved in school and community based activities. When asked about her role as a grandmother Mrs. Nora described some of what she considers.

My role is to basically provide every aspect of his daily routine. His daily routine consists of preparing him in the morning for school, meals, extra-curricular, in and out of school activities and doing things with our family. I cook for him, I make sure he has school uniforms and shoes, and I make sure that he does his schoolwork and anything the teachers ask him to do.

When describing her role as a grandmother as compared to being a mother the first time around, she stated that “it’s never too much.” She seemed to believe that there is always more grandmothers could do and go the extra mile to help the children under their care. She went on further to share that as her grandson progresses to adulthood that she wants him to stay connected to the community and school. She also expressed thoughts on how she works to show her grandson how to be family oriented. They attend church together, and do and go most places together. Her comments clearly depict how she has socially
constructed her role and her wanting her grandson to stay connected to many things so that he is willing and able to give back to his community.

Through silent tears, Ms. Nora emotionally expressed additional thoughts of excitement and honor, and stated that she was pleased that God was showing others how important the work of grandmothers is to their grandchildren. She praised me for doing a study which was attempting to highlight the work of African American grandmothers raising their grandsons. Although her comments were of praise, her comments led me to believe that her beliefs were somewhat critical, as she expressed the following comments.

Somebody is out there recognizing the things that you are doing and that we do as grandmothers. So often, we are not looking for reward but to see that someone sees it, shows you that you are doing the right thing.

Differences between then and now. When asked if she perceived her role as a grandmother to be much different from her role as a mother, she did not think so as much as her own children. Her perception was that her role for the most part was unchanged. However, she stated that her older children believe that she spoils her grandson and provides him with much more than they had growing up. Through a slight smile, she said that she thinks her grandson deserves a little extra for his hard work. She did share one noticeable difference - she worked when her children were younger, whereas now she does not. Although she was a working parent, she indicated that she still volunteered and would help out when the teacher would send activities home, just as she does now for her grandson’s school. Mrs. Nora also volunteered to make parent phone calls and send letters when needed or requested.
I was involved then and now, in school and out of school. I had jobs then so I had to ask for appropriate time off to attend school activities. When I asked for time off, I would find ways to make up the missed time. I would come in early or stay late, so that I was still doing my job at work. To me, I don’t think I do anything different. School involvement has always been a top priority for me and my family.

**Clear expectations.** Mrs. Harris suggested that her grandson, just as her own children did, know that he goes to school to learn. She expects for him to learn as much as possible so that he can teach others. She expressed concerns that sometimes other parents question when and why school personnel call home in regards to their child. Mrs. Harris on the other hand stated that if the school or principal calls that it must be something important. She stressed the point of trusting the schools and that if there was a concern with her grandson that she would settle the issue.

**Parent participation: Grandmothers’ motivation.** Throughout the interviews, Mrs. Harris describes her perceptions of involvement, and shares that her job is to make sure her grandson goes to school to learn. It is obvious that she has formed her judgments and constructed her feelings based on her beliefs, of which some may be racially or politically driven. She stressed that her grandson must be respectful to the adults at school in order to learn. She details her perceptions of involvement. I encourage him to use resources, things like computers and reading. I watch school board meetings and I work hard to understand the political system which impacts education. I think that more parents need to get involved. I question, how can parents send a child to school if they don’t know what’s going on? And
they’ll holler, I didn’t know that. I tell them you did not know because you are not involved.

Mrs. Harris thinks that it’s important to pass along information regarding new things that are happening in school to others. She stated that she passes along information to the school principal as well. She believes that parents have a responsibility for making the world a little better by trying to teach the children under their care. She stated “Once we had fear because it was a white society. It’s not a white society anymore.” The communities are blended and she believes that students can be anything that would like to be with the proper support from home and school. She models the example that she would like her grandson to be.

Mrs. Nora described her perceptions of involvement. She believes that grandmothers may gain custody of their grandchildren due to financial situations or hardships where biological parents cannot give them everything they need. Parents may have two or three jobs and it may be better for the child to live with the grandmother. Grandmother’s accept the children for the love, care, and attention they need so they are not left out to fend for themselves. To her, parent involvement means being actively engaged in the child’s education.

I am influenced by my grandson’s interest in wanting to learn and him being excited about what he can achieve. His excitement shows that he wants to do things and be the best that he can be. I am involved at home, school, and in the community. In the past some people in the community and school have thought that my grandson was my child. He considers me to be his mom and so do I. Only when certain situations come up will he say this is my grandmom and my
mom is in heaven. I provide him with fun things to do. He does not realize that he is learning from me and that I am reinforcing what he has been taught in school. My involvement includes us doing homework, and playing games. I also allow him to help me do things which helps with his math and English skills. I put him in organizations to help him achieve. Down the line he’ll bring it back. He takes mental notes so that’s why I always try to lead by example.

Ms. Samuels constructed her views of parental involvement around the goals that she wants for her grandson. Ms. Samuels shared her perceptions.

It is my responsibility to help my grandson stay excited about education. Education will make him successful. I have to stay involved to help him succeed.

My goal is for him to graduate from high school and continue his education.

Everything I do focuses around him successfully finishing school. I did not finish college, but I hope that he can.

Ms. Samuels believes that a big role that parents have is encouraging their children to establish goals. She believes goals should be set for school and graduating. She also favors students having post secondary plans.

**Getting a good education: Not getting lost in the system.** Mrs. Harris suggested that families are breaking down. Too many mothers are working too long and many homes do not have father figures. Mothers are overwhelmed. To help out, many grandmothers, such as in her case, are taking care of the children. She stressed the importance of schooling for a number of reasons.

Schools need volunteers to do different things. This is important. I do not want my grandson to get lost or caught up in the black male education problem.
Making sure he does not get lost in the system is my biggest concern. This is why it is important for him to get a good education. I’m there with all levels of his development and stressing the importance of learning.

Mrs. Harris shares that she and her grandson engage in a variety of educational activities such as classical music, the arts, listening to different types of music, dance, ballet and operas. She loves tennis, soccer, and the animal planet and when she learns about it, she teaches her grandson. She wants her grandson to be able to talk about different things and wants him to be able to participate in various conversations when they arise.

Similarly, but not as in depth, Ms. Samuels shared her belief about that the main purpose of schooling which is for the child to learn about education and about themselves. She shared that it is important for her grandson to go to school every day, and to be on time. She determines his success by his grades, attendance, and behavior.

Theme 2: Family and Communal Support: “It Takes a Village”

Family and community partnership: Educating the whole child. Although Mrs. Nora noted that she is responsible for her grandson’s daily routines, she also recognized and shared the importance of school staff and members of the local community in educating the whole child. Ms. Samuels shared that she sets the example for her grandson to follow, and that she relies on the schools and teachers to assist with her grandson’s achievement and success. Ms. Samuels describes her role and the interconnectivity of the entire family. She emphasized the importance of not just herself, but the entire family partnering to help her grandson achieve it and out of school. When asked about her role, she describes her thoughts on being a grandmother.
I am his role model. When I accepted him as my own that meant that I was going to take care of everything. I am very active in whatever he does, from school work, sports at school, sports in the community, helping the school raise funds, volunteering at games, or whatever the teacher or school needs. I am there to give hands on assistance and partner with the school. My family also helps out because that’s how we were raised. Everybody helps out. The whole family is involved and supportive. We stick together.

As compared to the other grandmother’s in the study, my analysis is that Ms. Samuels appeared to have a broader support base from immediate and extended family members. She speaks as though other family members are readily available to assist her as needed or requested, or perhaps without being prompted to assist. She stated that the grandmother should not be “the bad hand.” When asked if she perceived her role as a grandmother to be different from her role as a mother, she suggested that as a parent she may have been stricter, but stressed that she was still involved. As suggested in chapter two, her general perception aligns with the thought that grandmothers generally have intense, emotional bonds with their grandchildren.

Ms. Samuels echoed the thought that the schools are welcoming and family friendly. She noted that the school her grandson attends has never turned away support offered by either she or other family members. When asked about her views of the school, she shares a few brief thoughts.

The schools count on us and we like helping the school. It is exciting for us to volunteer at football games taking tickets, working concessions, or helping when the school has events like the annual meeting. At the annual meeting, the schools
share with parents supplemental services available for students such as after school tutoring, and computer lab programs.

My belief is that Mrs. Samuels and her family play a key role in supporting the school, and the school has made it easy to do so. The research of Henderson and Mapp (2002) supports the notion that the more parents are involved, the better students will thrive.

**Academic and Social Learning: Everyone is responsible.** Each participant clearly identified themselves as the person responsible for ensuring their grandson’s academic and social success. Ms. Samuels noted that it is her job to constantly push and encourage her grandson. Similarly, Mrs. Nora indicated that at home she, her husband, and the child’s father are the persons who should assume the responsibility and they do not solely depend on the school. Mrs. Harris stressed the importance of taking the time to help her grandson and to be there for him. When asked about her view of student support, here is how Mrs. Harris describes her view.

> When it’s time for school, I make sure everything is ready. We pack the backpack, we pack school supplies, we buy lots of supplies in case he needs more. His clothes are ready and he gets a good night’s sleep. I make sure he knows that he goes to school to learn. Me, my daughter, and my husband make sure we start with the basics at the house, then the church, then we look to the school.

Mrs. Harris further shares how the school also assists as a greater part of her grandson’s support system. It appears that, based on her personal experience as a child, that she expects the support to be bi-lateral. She shares that her grandson is a good kid, he is friendly, likable, and he follows the rules. The teachers help teach him how to be polite, mannerable and respectful. The school knows that learning is a big part of life and she
shared that they help her with that. She believes that the teachers know what students can or can’t learn, and they understand that when you work with students, they can learn. She shared that the roles that the children’s grandmothers play at school and home in helping the children succeed in school is to be on one accord and on the same page with the school. It is apparent based on her response that the support between home and school is connected and the child knows that they are all on the same page.

Mrs. Nora in describing her views on student support appeared to slightly challenge the traditional model typically seen. Although she is very involved at the school level, she extensively reaches out to community agencies in building a network of support for her grandson. Her level of involvement outside of school could perhaps be a critique of her school practices perceptions. She shares her views of student support, including spiritual methods, in which she molds her grandson.

We always get excited about the first day of school. We get excited about the teachers and other staff, school activities the school is offering, meeting new friends and other parents and the community. We don’t solely depend on the school though for his academic and social learning. We also depend on family and other organizations such as clubs, chorus, yearbook staff, K-kids and swat kids. Outside of school, he is in Stir Up the Gift, where he does vocals and acting. He is in church organizations as well. He’s an usher and he sings in the children’s choir. In the K-Kids club, children become leaders in the community and do community service.

Mrs. Nora notes that the school knows that her grandson is a great kid. She shared that he is well rounded, he is loving, a leader, a motivator, and he is giving. Her
perception is that it is the school’s role to help the child be more connected to the family and the community. Mrs. Nora appeared to take pride in her grandson being involved in community organizations. She suggested that with so much going on, those who want to be connected might shy away because they don’t want their reputation misinterpreted. She believes that there are a lot of teachers willing to go the extra mile to get involved with the child’s education, and the overall success and well being of the child. She shared that she volunteers and organizes community related events that her grandson is a part of, and that she is dedicated to building and maintaining those partnerships. Her positive experiences with the community agencies, has likely led to her understanding the importance of seeking out community resources to support her grandson, in and out of school.

Ms. Samuels, again briefly, stressed the importance of, and strong sense of family as being the most important support network for her grandson. She shares her expectations. She also shares thoughts of family support.

When it’s time for school I try to ensure that he gets to school on time and that we (various family members) meet most of his teachers. I leave the social part up to him. I make sure his academics are taken care of by making sure that each night his school-work is complete.

She shared that most of the teachers at school have always helped her with him. She stressed that he is a good student. She believes that it helps that he is mannerable and is willing to learn. She believes that everyone involved serves as a role model and hopefully her grandson will graduate from high school one day. She suggested that everyone has to show the child that they are concerned, including aunts, uncles, and other
adults. Their entire family encourages her grandson, and makes sure that he is doing well in school. She comments, “that’s our job to do that, not just the school.”

**Theme 3: Grandmothers Engaging in Traditional Parent Involvement**

**Facilitating factors for involvement of grandmothers.** Delandes and Bertrand (2005) denoted that parents are likely to be more involved when they perceive that teachers and school leaders welcome their participation. Grolnick et al. (1997) declared that teachers have an enormous influence on parent involvement. Additional research confirmed that teacher practices significantly affect parents’ level of involvement (Broussard, 2003; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Pena, 2000; Trotman, 2001). To maintain or increase parent involvement, teachers and parents need to first begin with a shared understanding of parent involvement and the contributions that they can make (Pena, 2000). The shared understanding first begins with open communication and ongoing interaction between both parties. Personal contact between the families and schools is essential in establishing close working relationships. The forms of contact may include phone calls, emails, and notes sent home. As I analyzed the data, the importance of constant and open communication surfaced throughout. Mrs. Harris describes her interaction and relationship with the school.

With the school, I can call the teacher when there is a concern. We have a good relationship. They know they can call me anytime and I will be on top of it. The last time I was involved in a school activity was the last of the school year because of my stroke. I’m getting better and they know I’m getting there. I’m
involved, but I had not been physically there as much. The school in the past has asked me to send in items such as construction paper.

Mrs. Harris believes that it is important to maintain good communication to minimize problems with the child and to make sure everyone gets what they need to help the student. Communication must go both ways. The parents are responsible for communicating with the school as well. Mrs. Harris suggests that parents be open and share things with the school that may impact the child’s learning at school, including but not limited to academic or behavioral concerns.

Mrs. Nora discusses ways in which the school communicates with her. She often times mentioned the School Advisory Council or Parent Teacher Association. She believes that communication allows for parents and school members to have clear expectations of one another. She shares her perceptions.

My relationship with the school, past and present has been to volunteer. I’m on the PTA, the SAC committee and I volunteer inside of the classroom. I help the teacher with her paperwork. I help undo the teacher’s load when I can so that she can focus one-on-one with the children. I receive daily correspondence from the teacher. The school has agendas to write notes back and forth to the teacher. One teacher gave out her cell phone number. We communicate through text, email, and by phone. The school welcomes me with open arms. At the beginning of the school year they send a form asking parents to list your volunteer interests. Some of the things I put down were office, clerical, media, classroom, field trips, or activities which consist of PTA, SAC, and fundraisers. My experience has
primarily been great. From the beginning the parent educator, teachers, and office and administrative staff all welcomed us with open arms. They told me what to expect while my grandson was here and that they’d help in any way being that I was a grandmother helping to raise my grandson. The school has been true to their word.

Ms. Samuels shared similar sentiments. She mentioned the school having regular contact with her, sometimes daily. She believes that the school is welcoming and maintains good communication with parents and family members. Ms. Samuels shares her thoughts. “My relationship with the school has been very good. I do conferences, sports, and make donations. Sometime I communicate with the school daily if there are problems. There aren’t many problems though.”

Ms. Samuels stays in touch with the teachers. She shared that she was involved with the school as recently as the current month. She gets involved in mostly all fundraising events. She assists though with other projects as the situation arises. She shared that the school does a good job keeping parents informed. The school sends letters home and they also call. Ms. Samuels also contacts the schools when she is concerned about something and she indicated that the response is always good. She stated that “people at the school are nice and they treat me with respect.”

**Theme 4: Grandmothers-Grandsons as Co-Learners**

**We must learn together.** Mrs. Harris passionately shared that it is essential for her to regularly communicate with her grandson so that he knows what she expects and
that she is there to help him succeed. Mrs. Nora reflecting on her experience recalled that she had very frequent communication with her grandson, including several times per day. She also shared that they engage in a number of pleasure/social activities together.

Similarly, Ms. Samuels denoted the importance of communicating with her grandson and spending time doing enjoyable activities, such as supporting his sporting events, and working to help him eventually graduate from high school. The participant responses indicated that there is a strong bond between the grandmother and the grandchild, and that the contact is paramount to the overall well being of the child. When asked about her interaction with her grandson, Mrs. Harris describes her thoughts.

I’m always talking and showing my grandson that education is very important. We use Highlights (magazines). They have math mania, we get involved with national geographic and use plenty of books. They have new things and stuff, not junk, where you use your mind. The new ones have algebra. We discuss and do homework. We did geometry the other night. I tell him you find the answer and we’ll discuss it together.

Mrs. Harris’ personal ties to education may have impacted her perspective on being very communicative with her grandson. She seemed to be creative in her approach to having him work through school work or problem solving. She frequently mentioned being an avid reader and expressed a love for books. “I am an avid reader and so I teach him how to read. You have to teach the child to stay well informed to things around us. We can sit and discuss the (news) paper. I tell him if you can’t spell you can’t read.” Perhaps her passion for literature drives her literary discussions with her grandson. Although,
conversations likely occur in more detail than were shared, the other participants shared their thoughts. Mrs. Nora shared her perceptions.

I talk to my grandson on a daily basis and throughout the day. In talking with him I’ve tried in the past and now in the present to illustrate for him the importance of education. I am now taking classes as well.

Mrs. Nora takes classes to show him that they are in the learning process together. She enrolled in classes and is doing homework along with her grandson. She does not want him to think he’s in the process alone. She believes that there is always something new to learn and she wants to teach and talk to him about it.

Ms. Samuels shared that she talks to her grandson everyday. She is always checking on him and is always at the school and at his activities. When she talks with him she wants to know what he knows. She stated that “practice make perfect.”

Theme 5: Grandmothers’ Critique and Advice for Schools

Going the Extra Mile. In relation to schools, Mrs. Harris shared her belief that there are restrictions placed on teachers and administrators which make it hard on both parents and students alike. She believes that teachers have an insurmountable about of responsibilities such as grading papers, conferencing with parents, learning how to individualize student instruction, assessing students, and for some, managing unwanted student behaviors. When asked to describe her views of the school, Mrs. Harris shares the following comments.
Paperwork is taking over and there isn’t as much one-on-one teaching as it used to be in the past. Some kids are getting lost in the crunch. Teachers, at one point, could come by and spend more time with kids when they had teacher’s aides in the classrooms. So, in order to do my part in helping the school, I have to help him at home do homework and teach him how to stay on task.

Mrs. Harris believes that schools want to do more to involve parents and provide world class service to students, but suggested that schools are very limited in their human and material resources, and therefore can only do so much. She further noted that supporting teachers and schools should be another primary role of every parent. Her mentioning the barriers that teachers and schools face in involving parents at an optimal level is a testimony that schools should examine more closely the efforts being put into promoting and enhancing parental involvement in schools, which would ultimately promote increased achievement for students of the school.

They each also eluded that there is a high level of trust between the home and school, which defies what has been commonly reported in literature as it pertains to low income, African American families and their relationships with schools. Previous research, as noted in the literature, suggests that parents will likely be more involved when they understand their role construction and they perceive positive opportunities from the school to bridge the home-school gap (Lawson, 2003).

Despite the barriers and her construction of these views, Mrs. Harris frequently praised the schools for what they have done with the available resources and means that they have. She shared that schools are dedicated to helping students learn, and that there is a concerted effort on the part of the schools to involve parents in the educational
process of their children. Specifically, she mentioned a host of communication efforts on the part of the schools to keep parents informed and involved. She shared that she likes it when teachers write in the agendas, and send notices home. She also appreciates it when teachers make personal contacts with her. Teachers making personal contacts led her to believe that they genuinely cared.

Mrs. Nora suggested that she goes the extra mile at home to support the school with her grandson. She commented that the schools do a lot to welcome her involvement and to provide her grandson with multiple opportunities to engage in learning activities. She generally describes her views on the school and how she constructs her views.

The school is a place for him to grow. The goal is for him is to continue to achieve those things that he has set for himself. The goal is to get a higher education, a college degree and become employed so that he can give back to the community (and schools) what they have given to him.

According to Mrs. Nora, the school provides her grandson with the foundation to do many things and keeps him engaged. The school also invites and supports her involvement. She stays involved with the School Advisory Council, as well as other school groups. My analysis is that this keeps her abreast of what her grandson should be doing and what she can expect of the school. She shared that she has never been turned away when asked to assist. Her grandson’s school has always been open to her and they make sure that her family knows when important functions are happening. “I am always there.” If the school needs her, they know they can count on her support.
The lack of opportunities: Schools must do more. Mrs. Harris shared that parents have to get involved and encourage schools to embrace their involvement. She stated that although not applicable to her grandson, that some kids feel as though school members do not like them or that school members make them feel isolated. Mrs. Harris expressed a critical viewpoint as she discussed school level participation.

I want to know why black kids do not have the opportunity to get in the (news) paper when they reach certain levels of success. I have a nephew who is in the high honor society, he always gets As in school, and there are other black kids who are smart but you never read or hear about them getting the recognition they deserve. People then wonder why the students leave the county and they don’t come back, not even to apply for a job. The schools must do more to recognize the students that do well. Although schools, in my opinion overall do a good job, there is still more that they can do for our students.

Mrs. Harris stated to me that in my position that I was fortunate and that the system was fortunate to have me in this school district. Mrs. Harris was honest about the weakness she perceives from schools and the need to make adjustments so that students of color feel welcomed in returning after they graduate. Her views were constructed based on her observations of what has occurred in the past. Mrs. Nora shared another view of the school’s participation.

Sometimes the schools don’t understand that some of the parents may not have transportation or have other children, and that prevents them from being involved.
The parents would like to participate. When the parents are not visible at the schools, the schools may feel as though the parents are not contributing, but they really are, just in a different way. Schools can help by conducting home visits and sending activity packets home. Perhaps, the community needs to reach out to families more.

She shares that schools do not have the whole community working together. For example parents should be more supportive with assisting other families and their children. She states “basically, it’s not just the school, it’s the community too who needs to be involved in the children’s lives.” Ms. Samuels describes her view of the school’s participation. She believes that the schools should support parents in doing what is best for their children. She suggested that a strong partnership is essential for every student.

Just as when I got custody of my grandson and I did it for his sake, the schools must also be involved for the sake of the child. Technically, parent involvement, the parents doing things, is heavily influenced by the school’s level of support and engagement. They must keep me well informed. I am involved and I do it all. I always feel welcome by the school and they definitely make me feel comfortable. I give them credit they pay attention to suggestions or concerns. They respect me and know that I will be there. I am always there when they need me and they have been there for us.

Summary

There have been attempts by various researchers to define parental involvement, with the attempts varying widely. The African American grandmothers in this study navigated the educational process and became involved with ease. The sub-themes that
emerged: Primary role of the grandmother: to take care of everything; Differences between then and now; Clear expectations; Parent participation; Getting a good education: Not getting lost in the system; Family and community partnerships: educating the whole child; Academic and social learning: everyone is responsible; Facilitating factors for involvement of the grandmothers; We must learn together; Going the extra mile; and the Lack of opportunities: school leaders must do more, all tie directly tie into practices identified by the study participants. Indirectly, the grandmother’s responses were connected to their beliefs which surfaced around loyalty, trustworthiness, kindness, and the grandmothers’ perceptions of success for their grandsons.

Although my sample is biased in that they are each traditionally involved, as evidenced by this study, it is apparent that marginalized, low income, African American (grand) mothers and family members in varying ways, are involved in their children’s education and posses various forms of cultural capital and social wealth.

Some of the participants expressed concern that schools could do more for the African-American communities. Some culturally relevant activities/initiatives suggested highlighting Black History more than one month out of the school year, doing a little more to incorporate those who speak other languages and reaching out more to involve minority families in things such as the School Advisory Council or other councils so that parents do not think it’s limited to select groups. The participants suggested that African American parents may not always be aware of what’s going on at the school.

The grandmothers in this study see their involvement as critical to the success of the grandsons and have done a host of things to shape their involvement, and they each came to the realization based on their experiences as mothers and seeking to do and be
more in their roles as grandmothers. Behind their level of knowledge, they need to know that not only can they trust schools, but that there are certain things that they must each do themselves for the grandsons. They depend on family (familial capital), the community groups and the school for support. Although there are institutional barriers that may limit the involvement of African American families, the participants in this study seek out opportunities to help guide their grandchildren through schooling. Two of the participants are very sophisticated and savvy as it pertains to learning and knowing about school policy, governance, procedures and the way of work for schools and the school district (navigational capital). One participant is deeply involved in the humanitarianism aspect as she stresses the importance of her grandson learning to give back to his community (social capital). As suggested by Ogbu (1995), schools must begin to recognize and address cultural issues in order to bridge the gap between families and schools. It is equally as important to reconcile and build upon the culture of the home with the dominant culture exhibited by schools (Tatum, 1997). The experiences of the grandmothers involved in this study have afforded them first hand experience in what involvement looks like both at home and school and what it should be moving forward.
Chapter 5
Discussion

Overview

In this study, I set out to gain an understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support, maintain, and facilitate their involvement in the educational process of the grandchildren in their care. To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- How do African American grandmothers see their involvement in their grandchildren’s education?
- How have the grandmothers shaped their involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care? What influenced their involvement?
- What are their perspectives on the level of involvement in the education of the grandchildren under their care?
- What do African American grandmothers see as barriers and opportunities as they try to guide their grandchildren through formal schooling?

In line with black feminist/womanist caring theories, literature asserts that African American women (mothers and grandmothers) demonstrate their care in distinct,
pragmatic ways that are gender and culturally unique (Cooper, 2007). The findings in this study showed that the three grandmothers willingly and simultaneously, demonstrated love and care for their grandsons in a host of ways. The grandmothers demonstrated support by attending sporting events, involving their grandsons in community based activities, attending church, assisting with school assignments, engaging in learning activities at home, and participating in school-based functions, such as SAC, PTA, and volunteering in the classrooms. Research on African American families has helped to create an understanding that African American families are not deficient versions of white families, yet they involve themselves according to the principles which arise from their cultural heritage (Markides & Mindel, 1987). The support given to the schools contributed to the strong home-school relationships in which the grandmothers spoke of, which was instrumental in sustaining cultural capital and wealth; a necessary and beneficial connection for marginalized families. Additionally, the level of support given to the families from both the schools and community, helped to shape the grandmothers’ thoughts.

In spite of long standing oppressive conditions, institutional barriers and cultural incongruence, associated with African American parent involvement, the grandmothers in this study focused on ways to stay current with educational norms and practices, and connected to schools. The grandmothers did this through attending meetings, tuning into school board meetings, and maintaining frequent communication with school personnel; the cultural frame of reference in which the grandmothers discussed their involvement. The involvement they each discussed was a combination what Yosso (2005) describes in the cultural wealth and social framework. Their level and type of involvement they each
discuss is also reflected in Ogbu’s (1995) work which suggests that cultural issues must be prominent when it comes to home-school relations and parent involvement.

All three participants were eager to provide their perceptions/views on parental involvement for the purpose of this study. Each participant indicated that they had a significant level of involvement with the schools, and that school leaders and teachers were responsive to their needs. Due to the fact that the grandmothers were referred by persons associated in some fashion with the schools, I safely assumed that each study participant was involved at the school level, which reflected the navigational form of capital in which the grandmothers had learned to successfully maneuver through the social institutions for the benefit of their grandsons. As I reflected upon my own personal biases, which included frequently seeing a lack of, and perhaps an unwillingness, on the part of many African American parents to be involved in the educational process of their children in their care, I was pleasantly surprised at not only the level of involvement by the grandmothers, but with the depth of knowledge each had as it pertained to school policy, practices, and procedures. A presumption I had going into the interviews was that perhaps the grandmothers would have limited levels of involvement and/or little knowledge of how to successfully navigate the educational system. This was based on my experiences as a school administrator, in which there was often times a lack of participation among African American parents, as well as my personal experience, in which my grandmother was rarely involved in my schooling or school related activities and events. Each participant, in her own way, described parental involvement as teaching values, respect, manners, self-discipline, and supporting and encouraging their grandsons’ educational, social, and emotional well being. Mrs. Harris focused heavily on
family ideals and expectations of her grandson. Mrs. Nora focused a great deal on activities that would support her grandson in becoming well-rounded; giving back to the community and participating in a variety of activities outside of school. Ms. Samuels frequently described her involvement as doing everything, including seeking the help of extended family members for support. Reflecting on traditional definitions of parental involvement which varies greatly depending upon the setting and context (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010), the grandmothers, exhibited many behaviors associated with traditional forms of involvement, yet they used their own style and forms of cultural wealth and capital in doing so. It is important to note that although most of the involvement by the grandmothers was more traditional in form, some of their activities were more non-traditional and typically not seen in African American families. The newer forms of involvement (and cultural forms of wealth) included co-learning, in which the grandmothers and the grandsons would participate in learning activities together, and the regular communication. Based on my lived experiences, most communication in the African American culture is one way, versus bi-lateral, in which the adult speaks and the child(ren) listens.

The role of grandmothers raising their grandsons, as suggested by the study participants, is paramount to the grandchildren in their care. Those who serve in these roles are caring, committed, and involved in every aspect of the child’s life (academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually). The participants in this study overwhelming indicated that they have always been involved in their grandsons’ activities, they value open communication with the child, the school, and the community, they teach family values, and that the family as a whole bands together for the benefit of
the child— all various forms of cultural capital and social wealth. The grandmothers’ involvement reflects the ideas of the cultural capital/social wealth theory in that they are resourceful, have learned how to navigate systems and structures for the benefit of the grandsons, and they have a wealth of confidence in their parenting abilities. The grandmothers in this study also noted that it is their personal responsibility to be aware of the grandsons’ activities and educational needs, and that any support received from the school is supplemental to their roles.

**Linguistic and Aspirational Capital**

Interaction and effective communication between the grandmothers and their grandsons, and the grandmothers and the schools resonated throughout the data. Frequent and personal contact was a recurring theme in a number of situations during the study. The grandmothers specifically mentioned two-way communication which included use of the agenda books, phone calls, emails, and face-to-face conversations. It was evident that the communication expectations were clear between both home and school. The participants in this study were actively and meaningfully involved in the schooling process despite research (Hynes, 2006; Ingram et al., 2007; Lareau & Horvet, 1999; Trotman, 2001; Wolfe & Lieberman, 1999) that depicted minority parents as being less likely to be involved or demonstrate different forms of involvement. This form of cultural wealth, referred to as navigational capital, is crucial in building, strengthening and maintaining strong home-school partnerships. It is important for schools and school leaders, due to the great influence they have, to empower, embrace and welcome the
participation of the mothers (and grandmothers) in all forms and levels, and to capitalize on their social and cultural wealth.

Information gathered during the study was used to help me understand and make sense of my discoveries and to synthesize my findings. The findings of this study filled in several gaps that may have problematic in the past and are significant because as researchers have suggested, there have been limited studies investigating grandmothers’ role in children’s learning (Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory, & Arju, 2007). The findings of this study showed that the grandmothers and their grandsons treated each other as equal partners in the educational process of the children involved. The specific examples that appeared prominent all had interconnectivity to Epstein’s (1990) typology of parent involvement; parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaborations. Although Epstein’s model of parent involvement engenders cultural specific renderings that marginalized parents are not involved in their children’s schooling, the grandmothers in this study defy her theory through their involvement. For example, Mrs. Harris shared that she encourages her grandson to use multiple resources such as books, magazines, and computers, to enhance his learning, and that she expects him to locate the answers first, on his own. Afterwards, they discuss the work together. It appears that although Mrs. Harris believes in joint responsibility for her grandson’s learning, that she willingly takes the lead in helping him to achieve and reinforces what is being taught in school. Mrs. Nora stated that many time she reinforces what her grandson has learned in school, and often times he does not realize that he is actually learning. She stated that she does homework with him, plays instructional games, and that many home activities assist with his academic skills. Additionally she
shared that she takes courses to help show her grandson the importance of education (regardless of age or level). She stated that they are in the learning and growing process together. It appears that Mrs. Nora is helping her grandson stay connected to and excited about education, and she is demonstrating the importance of education through her constantly pushing and working alongside him. There is always something new to learn.

Within the cultural wealth framework it is important to note that although the grandmothers in this study took a host of measures in supporting and assisting their grandsons in accomplishing tasks at school, education often times extended beyond formal schooling, including being educated at home and in the community. Mrs. Harris stated that she engages her grandson in a variety of activities which support his education. She mentioned various types of music genres, forms of art, science and geography. Mrs. Nora, as previously mentioned discussed community based activities and church. Formal schooling is one avenue for engaging students and for parents to become involved, but as the findings show, education engenders so much more that what takes place within the walls of a school. Mrs. Harris in her interview stated that she does not want her grandson to get caught in the “black male problem.” My interpretation is that she wants her grandson to get a solid education and to not fall into the statistics that are typical of black school-aged males (ex: low achievement scores, discipline issues, suspensions, etc.), therefore she takes it upon herself to educate him at home. On the other hand, Ms. Samuels set the example for her grandson’s achievement, yet she used more family interconnectivity in doing so. She stated that she gives hands on assistance, she is active in whatever he does, and regardless, he gets whatever he needs. Although this is traditional parent involvement that should continue to be welcomed and embraced
by leaders and schools, research (Broussard, 2003; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Kunjufu, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Pena, 2000; Trotman, 2001) tells us that school and teacher practices will continue to affect parents’ involvement, and clearly as the some of the findings suggest, schools can and must do more.

In continuing to examine and synthesize my findings, a commonality noticed among the participants was that they provided the love, attention, and reassurance that their grandsons needed to be successful. The grandmothers shared and believed that the schools played an important part in the lives of the children in their care. In an ideal world, the grandmothers indicated, they would like to see the teachers and schools continue to help with the growth and development of the children, to help keep the students in school (preferably seven days a week), to listen to the kids more so that they perform better in school, and to stay connected with the parents rather than waiting or assuming that parents do not want to be involved in their children’s education. It resonated heavily throughout the study that the grandmothers had a great deal of cultural wealth, particularly navigational capital, which was instrumental to their grandson’s school success, yet they were each willing to challenge the system when necessary. The study findings extend the cultural wealth of the grandmothers and revealed a number of conditions that facilitated their involvement.

The grandmothers were distinctly different in how they demonstrated various forms of cultural capital, skills, and assets. Ms. Harris was unique in that she had a deep sense of connectivity to other family members with similar issues. She maintained many social contacts and was instrumental in sharing school related information with other families as well as the school principal. This clearly demonstrated her familial capital.
Mrs. Harris frequently made it a priority to watch school board meetings, become familiar with school-related information and to empower other parents, family members and school personnel by sharing the information. It is also worthy of mentioning that she also exhibited forms of resistant capital. She suggested in her comments that her grandson and other African American students are often times devalued because they are not recognized for their academic talents and performance, whereas students of other races are. This comment lent itself to a form of distrust in the school system. Trust is vital in developing collaborative relationships between home and school and therefore should be examined.

Ms. Nora was distinctly different in that she demonstrated many traits associated with the familial and navigational forms of cultural capital. She was deeply connected to the community and knew how to be resourceful with outside social organizations. She shared that her grandson was in the church choir, a group called Stir Up the Gift, and a member of K-Kids. It was obvious from her comments that she made it a priority to have community organizations play an integral role in supporting her grandson’s education and that she utilized her skills to facilitate, set and meet certain goals for her grandson. Additionally, she stated that she was on the PTA, a member of the school’s advisory council, and that she was a regular classroom volunteer. I believe Mrs. Nora’s goal was to help ease the teacher and school’s workload and to assist in the overall educational process involving her grandson and other members of the class and school. She focused heavily on the concept of him being the best he could be and giving back to the local community to show his appreciation.
Ms. Samuels was unique in that she had a strong bond with family and depended heavily on extended family support – familial cultural capital. She felt as though schools openly communicated with their family and ultimately there was established trust and mutual appreciation amongst them.

The participants discussed ways in which they demonstrated cultural wealth and how they constructed their perceptions of school involvement that supports success in relation to the schools their grandsons attend. The participants denoted that they form their perceptions based on district and school policies and practices, and overall how well the schools receive their opinions and suggestions. Generally speaking, the grandmothers in this study defined parent involvement as parents helping out in every way possible and believed that the schools defined parental involvement as persons volunteering their time in and outside of the classroom, parents sending in class goods and supplies, the parents being a part of the child’s education, and the parents doing everything. The grandmothers based their perceptions on their personal experiences with their grandson’s schools. Notably, the grandmothers each saw value in both their definitions and the perceived definitions of the schools as it related to parental involvement.

In reflecting over their journeys, as grandmothers, the participants shared that they would not change or do anything differently. One participant indicated that it is a blessing that she has been allowed to show her grandson love, and she believes everything she has done will help him be a better person as he grows older. Another participant shared that it is a pleasure helping her grandson and caring for his well-being. The third participant emphasized that she would continue to work with her grandson, have patience with him, and show him lots of affection. The actions of the grandmothers
in this study clearly demonstrated that they each uniquely have the knowledge, and
abilities to navigate the school and community for the advancement of the grandsons
under their care- all forms of cultural capital and social wealth.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were noteworthy limitations to this study. First, the sample included
grandmothers who voluntarily participated in the study. Given their participation in this
study, these were likely women who perceived their involvement in their grandchild’s
education in a positive light. Secondly, the sample of this study was limited to three
participants, during a common time period. Thirdly, although beyond my control, the
recruited participants may have included grandmothers who were active being that names
were submitted by either school staff members or school partners. Those making the
recommendations may have sought grandmothers who would follow through and be
willing participants due to my role as a district administrator at the time of the study.
Lastly, there was the potential for researcher bias being that I could personally and
professionally relate to the factors and barriers that have historically limited African
American parental involvement in schools. For instance as an educator, I believe the
following: that sustained parental involvement across all races must invite parents to be
involved with decision making, student advocacy, and volunteering. In doing so, schools
must be committed to viewing parental involvement through different lenses other than
the traditional models, which limit parental involvement to school-based activities;
parents who are aware of school related issues and concerns can provide a greater
contribution to their child’s education. When there is a lack of or absence of parent
involvement and the parents and schools are not working towards a common goal, I believe that the support level and systems for students weakens. I believe that parents and schools should work together and students, particularly African American males need a strong network of support and from home, school, and the community to help them reach optimal levels of success. Studies indicate that parents of different races and cultures favor different forms of involvement. However, I believe that once educators and school leaders begin to acknowledge, address, and value the cultural differences, wealth and capital that African American parents possess, that the involvement of African American parents in the entire schooling process, and academic and social performance of African American males will improve.

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to gain an understanding of African American grandmothers’ perspectives on parental involvement, and to identify strategies that support their involvement in the educational process of the grandchildren in their care. There is much research on grandmothers raising grandchildren, parental involvement models, and parental involvement among low-income African American families, but there are relatively few studies on the parental involvement perspectives of African American grandmothers who are solely responsible for the care of their grandchildren. Scholars have regularly noted that African American parents are generally framed as being inactive or disconnected from school activities. The findings from this study however indicate that marginalized minority grandmothers take pride in and are deeply involved their grandchildren’s education. Furthermore, the grandmothers in this study
showed aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and navigational capital. These findings support Yosso’s framework as these forms of capital were evident. However, the grandmothers did not provide ample data to suggest resistant capital. This might be due to the questions I posed and the grandmothers selected in the study. Despite this the grandmothers were vocal in their critique of the lack of recognition of academic achievements of boys of color.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

As a result of this study’s findings, recommendations may be made in regards to practice for subsequent leadership implementation as well as future research. Research indicated that the nature of parent involvement maybe considerably different than typically conceived (Jeynes, 2010). Furthermore, an increasing body of research suggests that the most key aspects and qualities necessary for schools to foster parental involvement are frequently subtle. That is, whether teachers, school leaders and staff are loving, caring, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents (Mapp, Johnson, Strickland & Meza, 2010; Sheldon, 2005). For parents and students to feel connected to the school educators need to adopt an attitude of self-sacrifice (Peck, 2000).

In terms of practice, there are a host of subtle actions that are of importance if school leaders are to more completely involve parents, including rethinking some of the taken-for-granted practices of schools and the effects on diverse families (Graue & Hawkins, 2010). Among the actions are creating a loving and supportive school
environment, ensuring that teachers and staff display customer friendly behaviors, demonstrating love and support in parental involvement programs, and teachers having and maintaining high expectations. Currently most school programs designed to enhance parental involvement focus on the more overt expressions of parental involvement, such as homework assistance and attending school activities (Jeynes, 2010). Given some of the noted comments in this study, educational leaders must begin to focus on identifying actions that are most likely to draw in and keep parents involved. Current research must begin to focus on supporting and facilitating parent involvement. As suggested throughout this study, the school experiences and opportunities are what helped to shape and mold the participants’ perceptions of involvement. If then, the subtle aspects of parent involvement are the most salient components then they clearly should be examined by school leaders, as they will have implications for the future practice of parental involvement. It is also equally as important that the school leaders engage in reflective practice as it relates to parental involvement opportunities for marginalized families.

As the African American population in America increasingly grows, understanding how persons of color construct, perceive, enact certain roles and cultural wealth will become more relevant in scholarly work and research. Studies indicate that parents of different races and culture favor different forms of involvement and therefore, educators and school leaders must begin to acknowledge, address, and value the cultural differences that African American parents possess. Future research considerations may also include the perspectives of African American grandmothers who have not been actively engaged in the actual school settings, those who have multiple grandchildren,
those who have granddaughters, those who have grandchildren in non-Title I or low poverty schools, and those who have extended or blended families in which the grandmothers are raising grandchildren and other relatives in the same household.

Final Reflections of the Study

In reviewing my field notes and thoughts, a few impressions, surprises and questions were revealed. The participants’ perspectives seemed to stem from their wide-ranging experiences with the schools, as well as from their personal lives. Mrs. Harris, although she praised schools in general, held a certain belief that schools should do more to promote and celebrate African American students who perform well. She stated the lack of African American student promotion, is perhaps one reason why very few African American students return to the county to work or live after they graduate from high school. My take-away was also that Mrs. Harris holds strong to the belief that parents should own more of the responsibility to learn about school policies and procedures that may potentially impact their children’s or grandchildren’s education. It did not appear that Mrs. Harris’ being involved with school activities and acquiring as much information as possible was associated with anything less than her passion for wanting her grandson to not get caught in the “black male problem.”

On the other hand, my impression of Mrs. Nora was that she seemed to have a strong belief that students should work hard for what they achieve, including outside of the school setting. Ms. Samuels held a strong belief that she and other family members must remain involved to support the goal of her grandson graduating and hopefully moving on to get a post-secondary education.
Although there was an underlying descriptor of the grandmothers being low-income, my impression was that their income level nor their minority status overall did not appear to hinder their level of involvement. Yet, the grandmothers prominently conveyed through our discussions, that they prioritized their involvement and the influence it had on their grandsons. The participants all spoke of their personal yearning for their grandsons to get the best education possible, which would in various ways help them be productive members of society and contributing members to their communities.

The biggest surprise that surfaced for me was the level of involvement and the knowledge each grandmother had in regards to schools and related practices and policies. My personal experiences, raised under similar circumstances, as well as my experiences as a parent and educator, added to the construction of my beliefs going into the study. My internal conflict (and belief system), in combination with the grandmothers’ commentary, greatly helped me acknowledge some of the same deficit thoughts typically displayed amongst teachers and school leaders. Although not surprised, I was pleased that the home environments, in which we met and spoke, were very welcoming and comforting. I have very often times heard from many that school personnel are uncomfortable visiting and going into low-income minority communities, let alone visiting their homes. I had a complete level of comfort doing both, perhaps due to my lived experiences and my past and present situations.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher gathers the data in a number of ways - through observations, interviews, and the examination of related artifacts or documents.
During this study it was important that I share the qualifications, experiences, and the viewpoint that I brought to the study (Patton, 2001) to help readers understand my biases as well some of my connections and understandings to past and present research and the experiences of the study participants.

At the time of the study, my role included providing leadership, training, and oversight to the overall Title I program and supervising all personnel (school and district-based) whose salaries were paid for through Title I, which included a District Coordinator of Parent Involvement, Homeless Student Social Worker, No Child Left Behind Coordinator, A Lead Math Coach and 5 School Improvement Facilitators. At the school level, positions included Parent Educators, Instructional Coaches, Instructional Resource Teachers, and Computer Lab Managers. I previously worked as the State-wide Project Coordinator/Administrator for the Florida Parental Involvement and Resource Center (PIRC) at the University of South Florida and served 18 years in the Florida public school system as a school principal, assistant principal, and classroom teacher. Additionally I served (and continue to serve) on a host of district, university, and state level cadres.

My interest in African American parental involvement stems from my personal and professional journey. Having been raised by my maternal grandmother, I can relate to a great deal of the research that I have encountered. I can vividly recall the barriers that prevented my grandmother from being more actively involved in my education, or in ways which were more traditional among other groups of parents. So indeed, this research study was also a personal quest which allowed me to gain an understanding of
African American parental perceptions on education, parent involvement, and strategies that will support, maintain and facilitate their involvement.

My role as the researcher of this study was of importance. I conducted the interview discussions, carefully reviewed and analyzed the documents, and maintained field notes of my observations, impressions, and questions. Having the field notes allowed me to document my thoughts as they emerged throughout the data collection process. I utilized my own technique and thoughts in reflecting on the information that was gathered from the study participants in a way that helped me synthesize my findings and make sense of the data. This study was based on the perceived levels of involvement of the grandmothers, and their responses overwhelmingly demonstrated evidence that they were highly and proudly engaged. However, it is still important to note that the findings may provide a greater understanding of how to support their continued efforts in and out of school, and how to capitalize on their untapped cultural wealth and social capital. Potentially, my only unanswered questions were those posed in future research, and were not addressed in the discussions with the grandmother’s in this study. The recommendations noted in future research may lend themselves to areas other than the cultural wealth framework which guided this study.
References


*Education Canada, 43*(1), 8-10.


Appendices
Appendix A

Participant Invitation to Participate in Study

November 2011

Dear Parent:

My name is Felita Grant Lott, Supervisor of Title I Programs, Hernando County Schools. I am presently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at the University of South Florida. I am requesting your participation in my study: Parent Involvement Perspectives of African American Grandmothers.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the education and parental involvement perspectives of African American custodial grandmothers. The proposed study will provide insight into the variables that influence African American parent involvement. In addition, the proposed study will identify strategies and interventions that may encourage or increase African American parent participation. Currently, one of the biggest challenges facing schools is low academic performance of African American students and successful school strategies which support, maintain, and facilitate their parents’ involvement in the educational process.

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 or any foreseeable risks will be minimal. Please respond to the researcher at 813-833-6616 regarding your acceptance or denial no later than November 30, 2011. My email address is felitalott1@aol.com.

I am confident that your participation in this study will contribute valuable information for the advancement of African American parental involvement and ultimately the academic achievement of African American children.

Sincerely,

Felita Grant Lott
USF Doctoral Candidate
Appendix B

Informed Consent for an Adult Form

Research at the University of South Florida (USF) studies many topics. This study investigates the parental involvement perspectives of African American grandmothers. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to be interviewed and to take part in this research study.

**Title of research study:** Parent Involvement Perspectives of African American Grandmothers

**USF IRB# Pro 5986**

**Person in charge of study:** Felita Grant Lott

**Where will the study take place?**
This study will take place in an urban K-12 (Title I) school or the grandmother’s home.

**Why is this research being done?**
The purpose of this study is to describe the perception of custodial African American grandmothers as it relates to their grandchildren, schools, and family involvement.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**
You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a custodial grandparent of a school-aged child.

**How long will it take to participate in this study?**
Participating in this study may last 1 ½ - 2 hours. Potential participants will have approximately 2 weeks to notify the researcher on whether or not they are willing to participate in the study.

**What will happen during this study?**
You will be asked to respond to interview questions relating to your background, family history, family roles, and your perception and involvement with your child(ren)’s school(s). The researcher will also make and record written observations of interactions within the home or school. There will be two interviews, with a minimum of two weeks separating interview one and two. Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by the Primary Investigator to ensure confidentiality of the data. Participants will be contacted after the two interviews for verification of the information recorded.
Appendix B (Continued)

**What are the potential benefits if you take part in this study?**
We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

**What are the risks if you take part in this study?**
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**What happens if you decide not to take part in this study?**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may elect to skip a question. You are free to withdraw from the interview session(s) at any time without penalty. Should you withdraw from the study, all data generated must be retained for a minimum of five years after the close of the study with the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Who will have access to the data you provide?**
To maintain security of the data, the researcher will maintain all data collected in locked secure files for a minimum of five years. Others who will be allowed to view the records will be the research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff and certain government and university staff who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety: This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff.

**You may get the answers to your questions**
If you have questions about this study, please contact Felita Grant Lott at (813) 833-6616. If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in this study, please call the USF Research Compliance Office at (813) 974-5638.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this consent form prior to the day of the interview.**

____________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person taking part in study          Date

____________________________________
Printed name of person taking part in study
Appendix B (Continued)

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization       Date

________________________________________
Printed name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization
Appendix C

First Interview Protocol

Questions for the First Interview

1. Participant’s name
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your yearly household income, and primary source of income?
5. What is your marital status?
6. How many people live in your household?
7. What are the age of the grandchild in your care?
8. Tell me about your role as your grandchild’s primary caregiver.
9. Tell me about your relationship with your grandchild’s school.
10. Describe what life is like for your family on the day and night before the first day of school. Feelings? Priorities?
11. Tell me about your experiences with your grandchild’s schools since he/she has been in your care.
12. What does the term parental involvement mean to you?
13. What has influenced your actions in regards to your grandchild’s education?
14. What are your goals for your grandchild with respect to school?
15. How do you show your grandchild that education is important?
16. Do you do everything you can as a grandparent to be involved with your grandchild’s school? How do you know this?
Appendix C (Continued)

17. Do you do everything you can as a grandparent to be involved with your
grandchild’s school? How do you know this?

18. What do you think is the main purpose of schooling? Are outcomes positive or
negative?

19. Who/what ensures your grandchild’s academic success? Why do you think so?

20. Who/what ensures your grandchild’s social success? Why do you think so?

21. What does it mean for your grandchildren to be successful in school?

22. To what extent do you think that your grandchild have been successful in
school? Why or why not?

23. What do you do at home to assist your grandchild with school/education?

24. What do you think teachers and school leaders know about your grandchild?

25. What do you think teachers and school leaders should know about your
grandchild? Why?

26. What roles should educators (teachers, administrators, etc.) and grandparents
play in helping children succeed in school?

27. How do you think these roles are connected?

28. Describe the ways that you are involved with your grandchild (development,
schooling education, preparation for adulthood, etc.)

29. Do you consider yourself to be an involved grandparent? Why or why not?
Appendix C (Continued)

30. Why do you think grandparents get custody of their grandchildren? How did you come to have custody of your grandchild?

31. Do you notice any differences in your involvement as a grandparent versus when you were a parent?

32. Is there any specific history in your community or school that may have impacted your involvement?

33. How often do you talk to your grandchild about homework and about school?

34. How important is it for your grandchild to go to school?
Appendix D

Second Interview Protocol

Questions for Second Interview

1. What type of interactions and involvement do you have with your grandchild’s school?

2. If you are involved and employed, does your employer honor your parental role? Why do you think so or not? Please share examples.

3. In what ways are you involved in other extra or co-curricular activities with your grandchild?

4. In what ways are you involved in the social, cultural, emotional, or spiritual development of your grandchild?

5. How often do you communicate with or receive communication from your grandchild’s school? Describe the communication between you and school.

6. What access to technology and technological literacy do you have?

7. In what types of involvement through technology have you been involved?

8. When was the last time that you were involved in a school related activity?

9. Tell me about the times when you have contacted your child’s teachers or schools. What was their response?

10. When was the last time your visited your grandchild’s school? Describe that experience.
Appendix D (Continued)

11. Has the school asked you to participate or volunteer in their activities at school or elsewhere (for example parent’s workshops, conferences, PTA, school board meetings, fundraising activities, etc)? Explain.

12. Why do you think school members did or did not invite your participation?

13. How culturally relevant are the parent involvement programs and school initiatives?

14. In what contributions and decisions regarding school policies or activities have you been involved?

15. In what other forms of education outside of school is your grandchild involved?

16. How is your involvement with these resources the same or different from your involvement with your grandchild’s school?

17. How welcome do you feel by your grandchild’s school?

18. Do you feel comfortable talking with your grandchild’s teacher or members from the school? Explain.

19. Do you feel that the school pays attention to your suggestions? Explain.

20. What keeps you from becoming more involved in your grandchildren’s school?

21. What does your child’s teachers or schools do that increase or inhibit your involvement?

22. In what ways do you facilitate others to enact the various types of school involvement rather than assume all of them yourself?
Appendix D (Continued)

23. What do you perceive to be the most important things that you do to help your grandchild with school and in general education?

24. In an ideal world, what would you like to see the teachers or schools do that would benefit or complement your parenting needs increase your parental involvement?

25. In an ideal world, what would you like to see the teachers or schools do that would benefit or complement your parental involvement?

26. In reflecting over your journey as a custodial grandparent, is there anything that you would change or do differently given the opportunity?

27. What do you think the school’s definition of parental involvement? On what is this perception based?

28. Do you see value in their definition?

29. In what ways do you construct your perceptions of school involvement that supports success in schools in relation to the school your grandchild attends? District policies and practices operating through the school?

30. What is your definition of parental involvement?

31. What do you see as the value in your definition?

32. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
This is a dissertation research study that seeks to develop a theoretical explanation for understanding the Parental Involvement Perspectives of African American Grandmothers.

This study seeks **GRANDMOTHERS** who:

- have only one child in their care (male and non ESE)
- have been the primary caregiver of their grandchild for a minimum of 3 years
- have one grandchild who attends a Title I school

There is no cost or compensation for participation in this study.

The research is conducted by Felita Grant Lott, who is currently enrolled at the University of South Florida.

For Information Please Contact: Felita Grant Lott
Primary Researcher
813-833-6616 Phone
Felitalott1@aol.com
Appendix F

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 (813-833-6616) or via email at (felitalott1@aol.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.

Felita Grant Lott

*This form was adapted from a sample member check from Janesick (2004, p. 227).
About the Author

Felita has been an educator in the state of Florida for almost 20 years. She taught elementary school for 5 years prior to becoming an administrator. Felita has experience as an Assistant Principal, Principal, Administrator at the University of South Florida, and Supervisor of Title I (Federal) Programs. Her diverse experiences include elementary, secondary, charter, as well as work with the Florida Department of Education as the Chair of the No Child Left Behind Committee of Practitioners. Felita earned a Bachelor of Arts degree (Elementary Education, with a minor degree in Primary Education) from the University of Florida, a Master of Science degree (Educational Leadership) from Nova South Eastern University, and her Doctorate degree (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies) from the University of South Florida.