

Summer 8-2020

## Black Teachers' Collective Wisdom as Social Justice Pedagogy: A Black Feminist Narrative Analysis

Jacqueline Cora Boone  
*Old Dominion University, jboon007@odu.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/teachinglearning\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/teachinglearning_etds)



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Boone, Jacqueline C.. "Black Teachers' Collective Wisdom as Social Justice Pedagogy: A Black Feminist Narrative Analysis" (2020). Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Dissertation, Teaching and Learning, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/3jps-js74  
[https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/teachinglearning\\_etds/65](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/teachinglearning_etds/65)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Teaching & Learning at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching & Learning Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

**BLACK TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE WISDOM AS SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY: A  
BLACK FEMINIST NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

by

Jacqueline Cora Boone  
B.A. May 1994, Norfolk State University  
M.A. 1999, Norfolk State University  
M.Div. 2005, Virginia Union University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION/EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
August 2020

Approved by:

Kristine Sunday (Director)

Angela Eckhoff (Member)

Felecia Commodore (Member)

## **ABSTRACT**

### **BLACK TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE WISDOM AS SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY: A BLACK FEMINIST NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

Jacqueline C. Boone  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Director: Dr. Kristine Sunday

In this age, 21<sup>st</sup> century, where social issues surrounding race and gender are impassioned and escalating, black feminists and Black Feminist Theory are leading the charge in bringing salience through activism and engagement. Doing post structural qualitative research aims to dismantle a myth of scientific knowledge that emphasizes triangulation and transferability of research with the use of multiple representations of experience. This research investigates critical issues in qualitative research, specifically the ontological challenge that researchers commonly encountered in depicting experience and social reality. The turn to experience and lived stories has expanded the modes of qualitative research by hearing marginalized voices, and thus increasing cultural awareness. It articulates understandings and assumptions of post-structuralism and explores how it empowers black female preschool teachers without voice and produces different knowledge than that undertaken by positivist approaches. Using a position within the early childhood education realm, Black female early childhood educators possess a platform to bring consciousness of their misplaced and/or ignored presence within the field. The tenets of Black Feminist Thought as a philosophical and ideological framework brings visibility to Black female early childhood educators and marshals their voice from the sidelines of social justice issues to the forefront. Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality conveys how oppressions, such as race and gender or sexuality and nation, work together in producing injustice. This research using narrative inquiry examines the efforts of valuing Black women in early childhood education as collective wisdom, essentially Black female early childhood educators' collective.

The narrative inquiry releases notions of subjectivity, agency, and the constructive nature of discourse. As poststructuralist inquiries Black Feminist Thought and narrative inquiry both converge to gain some understanding of ways we have come to perceive and accept knowledge; to question the legitimacy of these understandings of knowledge; and brings previously marginalized discourse to the forefront. Black Feminist Thought as a poststructuralist inquiry opens up the possibility of change by bringing an ontological dimension to understanding how Black female teachers identify race, which then shapes what they think and do in the classroom.

*Keywords:* Black Feminist Thought, narrative inquiry, early childhood education, social justice, collective wisdom, mothering, and activism

Copyright, 2020, by Jacqueline C. Boone, All Rights Reserved.

This work is dedicated to the pioneers and trailblazers who have paved the way before me. I am crossing bridges I did not construct with a desire to construct bridges for future visionaries to tread.

### **My Teachers**

Taft R. Boone (grandfather)

Herman & Elsie White (grandparents)

James Henry “Check” Brooks (grandfather)

Joseph “Daddy Joe” & Elizabeth “Duckie” Brooks (great-grandparents)

Joseph R. Brooks, Jr. (great-uncle)

Lillian B. Everett (great-grandmother)

Elnora Everett (great great-grandmother)

Vivian Dianne Boone (aunt)

### **My Mentors**

Ailene H. Williams

Elsie R. Campbell

Dorothy Askew

Sallie M. Webb

Lizzie Johnson

Dorothy Gardner

And finally, the woman who I think about every day of my life, Cora Emma Buffaloe Boone. Thank you, Grandma, for your grace and wisdom. I have never encountered such humility and strength. Though your traditional schooling was limited, your impartation extended far beyond any school walls! ‘Til we meet again, shalom.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the academic and professional support of the faculty and staff of the College of Education at Old Dominion University. I am especially indebted to Dr. Kristine Sunday, assistant professor in the Early Childhood department, who has been supportive of my career goals and who worked actively to provide me with the “space” and academic freedom to explore this area of research. As my teacher and adviser, she has exemplified more than I could ever give her credit for here. She has demonstrated, by her example, what an authentic researcher (and person) should be.

I am grateful to the members of my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Kristine Sunday – chairperson; Dr. Angela Eckhoff, member and associate professor in the Early Childhood program at Old Dominion University, and Dr. Felecia Commodore, member and assistant professor in the Educational Foundations and Leadership department at Old Dominion University. Each of the members has provided me extensive personal and professional guidance and mentored me throughout the dissertation process.

With inspiration from my Creator, the Giver of, “Every good and perfect gift...,” (James 1:17) I was called to do this work; thank you God. The Boone clan, you all rock! I thank my parents, Thomas and Elsie Boone, whose love and support are with me in whatever I pursue. They are the ultimate role models and have made invaluable sacrifices. My brother, Jeffrey and sister, Tootie, my sincerest appreciation to you both. And to all my friends you all have been encouraging, patient, and kind – Pastor William L. Davis, Jr. & Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, June Lightfoot, & Ellis Temple, the Shall Be Girls (Michelle, Rochelle, and Tara), the Whittaker/Askew/Simmons families, Uncle Lawrence, and the Norfolk State University – School of Education, and my mentor, Dr. Leon Rouson. Most importantly, I wish to thank my incredibly gifted son, Chris, who provides unending inspiration. Differently able, he’s my rock.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES .....  | viii |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....   | ix   |
| Chapter   |      |
| INTRODUCTION .....  | 1    |
| Black Women as Sources of Knowledge in Early Childhood Education and Care. .... | 5    |
| Collective Wisdom as a Tenet of Black Feminist Thought.....                     | 7    |
| Aims.....   | 9    |
| Structure of the Dissertation .....   | 13   |
| BLACK PRESPECTIVES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION .....                           | 18   |
| Social Justice .....  | 18   |
| Black Feminist Thought (BFT) .....  | 40   |
| Oral Tradition and Narrative Inquiry.....                                       | 59   |
| Narrative Inquiry .....   | 65   |
| Summary.....  | 71   |
| RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....   | 74   |
| Research Design .....   | 75   |
| Study Population.....   | 76   |
| Data Collection .....   | 79   |
| Data Analysis.....  | 86   |
| Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure Within the Study .....              | 92   |
| Limitations.....  | 97   |
| Ethical Considerations .....  | 98   |
| Summary.....  | 99   |
| DATA ANALYSIS.....  | 102  |
| My Story, My Struggle: Positionality.....                                       | 104  |
| The Teachers’ Stories .....   | 111  |
| Renee’s Story: Raising Mary McCloud Bethune .....                               | 112  |
| Teria’s Story: Raising Ida B. Wells-Barnette.....                               | 118  |
| Gwen’s Story: Raising Sojourner Truth .....                                     | 123  |
| Donna’s Story: Raising Marian Wright Edelman.....                               | 128  |
| Myra’s Story: Raising Anna Julia Cooper.....                                    | 130  |
| Teachers’ Collective Stories .....  | 135  |
| Lived Experiences as Narrative Analysis .....                                   | 137  |
| Conclusion .....  | 146  |



|   | Page |
|---|------|
| CONCLUSION.....   | 149  |
| Implications .....  | 153  |
| Future Research .....   | 156  |
| REFERENCES .....  | 158  |
| APPENDICES  |      |
| A – SELECTED IMAGES .....   | 169  |
| B – SAMPLE GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....                        | 171  |
| C – SAMPLE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....                   | 172  |
| D – INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR USE OF PHOTO/VIDEO MATERIALS .. | 173  |
| E – FORM OF CONSENT (ADMINISTRATOR) .....                         | 174  |
| F – FORM OF CONSENT (PARTICIPANTS).....                           | 175  |
| G – IRB APPROVAL.....   | 176  |
| VITA.....   | 177  |

**LIST OF TABLES**

| Table   | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Cladinin & Connelly, 2000)..... | 68   |
| 2. Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).....                          | 87   |

**LIST OF FIGURES**

| Figure   | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Sojourner Truth – Abolitionist and Social Activist. ....                | 169  |
| 2. Segregated Black School in the 1930s. Separate but equal. ....          | 169  |
| 3. Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, and Women Protesters. .... | 170  |
| 4. Colin Kaepernick, Former NFL Football Quarterback. ....                 | 170  |
| 5. As a Black female early childhood teacher, what do you do? ....         | 170  |

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In our society promoting social justice is a complex task, taking into consideration the amount of oppression our society is drowning in. The only way we can take a look at such a complex issue is to simplify it, then, hopefully we can act effectively against oppressive circumstances as they arise in our teaching and activism (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Micheli & Keiser; 2005; Moule, 2005; Oakes et al., 2013). To advance an education rooted in social justice requires a move toward critical awareness, or what Freire (2000) describes as a process of conscientization. That is, teachers becoming aware of the politics of education, and recognizes that education is not a neutral process. Moreover, historical and contemporary models that perpetuate the marginalization of “others” or non-mainstream groups need to be recognized. Teachers who are encouraged to critically reflect on their practice and their possible roles in perpetuating normalized discourses present possibilities for understanding how they might become, or act as agents of a liberatory education (Apple, 2004). In short, for teachers to gain critical consciousness and act as social justice activists, it is imperative that they facilitate the conditions for this transformation.

The U.S. Department of Labor forecasts a job outlook growth rate for 2018 to 2028 (the percentage increase in employment demand for an occupation) of 3 percent for kindergarten and elementary teachers, 2 percent for childcare workers and 7 percent for preschool teachers (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2019). As a result, early learning opportunities, most notably in publicly funded preschool programs for four-year olds, have drawn considerable attention as a key strategy in education reform, particularly for children living in poverty (Barnett, 2013). Yet teachers who work with children four years old or younger are typically not viewed by the public

as part of our nation's teaching workforce, let alone as drivers of a better educational system.

Most people imagine a teacher as someone who works in grades K-12; perhaps more importantly, much of the public is antipathetic to the idea that pre-kindergarten teachers require levels of knowledge and skill as rigorous as those of their counterparts who teach older children. This perception of teachers in early education as low-skilled stems in part from the developmental characteristics of young children. At its core, sound teaching demands the ability to establish and sustain a nurturing, trusting relationship with each individual child in the classroom (Barnett, 2013). Establishing such trust with younger children necessarily involves more caregiving functions than are required with older children.

And although intentional instruction is essential to effective teaching with young children, it is often embedded in children's play and daily routines, masking its presence to those who recognize teaching only in more didactic forms. This blend of caregiving and instruction, so critical to effective early childhood teaching can make it harder to discern the high degree of knowledge and skill involved, leading many to conclude, for example, that it is unnecessary to obtain a college degree and specialized training in order to teach young children (Whitebook, 2014). Limited requirements for ECE teachers in many settings further reinforce the idea that teaching young children requires limited pedagogical or content knowledge, even with respect to promoting children's mathematical and literacy skills. Research evidence suggests otherwise, repeatedly demonstrating that ECE teachers who have been educated on a par with K-12 teacher standards are more effective in promoting children's learning (Barnett, 2013). Further, it is well established that relationships between young children and teachers are the cornerstone of such learning. When a trusting and nurturing connection does not develop or is disrupted—too often due to the insufficient staffing and/or high levels of turnover that are common in ECE settings—

children suffer the emotional and educational consequences. A vicious cycle works to maintain a public view of teaching young children as requiring less skilled and knowledgeable instructors than teaching older children, which in turn permits ECE teachers' low status and pay to be viewed as acceptable.

Preschool and kindergarten teachers are most often employed by the child day care services industry (Barnett, 2013). Furthermore, ninety-eight percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are female, making them the more common gender in the occupation; and 72.1% of preschool and kindergarten teachers are White, making them the most common race or ethnicity in the occupation. Representing 18% of preschool and kindergarten teachers, Black or African American is the second most common race or ethnicity in this occupation (Data USA). Although one third to one half of early educators are people of color, Whitebook (2014) argues, "minority teachers typically hold higher expectations for minority children and are less likely to misdiagnose them as special education students. And minority teachers are often more attuned to the challenges related to poverty, racism, and immigration status that many children of color face in their communities. Additionally, compared with their peers, teachers of color are more likely to serve as advocates and cultural brokers; and develop more trusting relationships with students, particularly those with whom they share a cultural background (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

It is well-documented that the radically shrinking pipeline of Black educators in public schools coincides with the marginalization of prospective Black teaching professionals (Delpit 1995; Scott & Rodriguez, 2014). Consequently, far less attention is focused on meeting the professional and pedagogical needs of prospective Black teachers and overwhelmingly emphasizes the need to help European American, English-speaking young female teachers deal

with an increasingly diverse public-school population (Delpit, 1995). As a result, many Black teachers are intellectually marginalized from the learning environment in teacher education and subsequently struggle with leveraging their cultural knowledge and ways of thinking in the classroom (Scott & Rodriguez, 2014).

Often, early childhood educators who fail to frame their knowledge and voice in positivist traditions or theories of developmental psychology find themselves marginalized in their own field (Cannella, 2002). A reason for the lack of recognition or acceptance of critical theoretical perspectives in early childhood education is the Eurocentric domination of psychological and child development perspective and practices, in addition to the absence of the Black female voice in the field of early childhood. Working with practicing Black educators who consistently promote achievement for African American students may provide a productive way to help teacher educators understand the pedagogical needs of prospective African American teachers, and think carefully about how best to meet these professional needs (Irvine, 2002; Perry et al., 2003). Black educators enact a sophisticated and complex pedagogy linked to the social realities of African Americans as a cultural group and founded on a culturally specific ethics, or ways of thinking about teaching (Irvine, 2002).

The “invisibility” or silencing of Black women’s voices in early childhood education research is a pervasive absence that leads to a limited understanding of the Black woman’s varied experiences and histories within the education sphere. The research presented here examines ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept that gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact with society. In an attempt to construct equitable educational environments and to examine ways that power is translated in every day contexts, understanding the unique lenses

and experiences of Black women teachers within early childhood environments play a role; specifically, examining how the experiences of Black female educators shape the practices of social justice in their early childhood classrooms.

### **Black Women as Sources of Knowledge in Early Childhood Education and Care**

Systematically, their lived experiences of Black women are often counted as insignificant and sources of unreliable knowledge which contribute to their invisibility, silencing, and exclusion from research and scholarly work. In other words, according to Black Feminist Thought, from a critical pedagogical stance, the systems of oppression promote silencing of shared stories and collective wisdom. As the political climate toward social justice issues continue to vent, the need for spaces in economic opportunity and class position where race and gender combine to influence choices and chances of women of color in U.S. society; therefore, establishing a collective wisdom among Black female early childhood educators (Dill & Zambrana, 2009).

The childcare profession and teaching young children collide with the dominant culture's ideology of the profession. Caring for and educating young children comes naturally to women, so the thinking goes: women do that work by instinct and have been doing it forever – it certainly does not require any particular education or professional development. That attitude has been institutionalized in the field of early childhood education: there are only minimal requirements for childcare workers in most states – typically, passing a criminal background check and having a high school diploma. No specialized training, no internship, no particular experience needed. This also alludes to the competence of early childhood teachers as they are, in a patriarchal driven society, “that only a particular group of individuals will learn enough to administer knowledge” (Cannella, 2002, p. 143); hence, many early childhood teachers undergo technical



training and are constituted as subjects. “Insofar, women are positioned as emotional, lacking objectivity and viewed as nurturers, and education is viewed as a political neutral, the dominant views of early childhood education and its teachers, ultimately support the ideals of the dominant culture, perpetuating the status quo” (Canella, 2002, p. 168). In contrast, however, the pursuit of deconstructed early childhood education forward approaches to early childhood teaching and learning that are socially just, and thus requires a newly constructed profession of early childhood education that rejects a view of education and educators as apolitical, and instead accepts the power-orientated, political nature of schooling.

As a Black female early childhood educator-practitioner-researcher, I am becoming more acutely aware of how race and gender converge with respect to matrix of domination and oppression, creating the effects of intersectionality. The salience of racial identity, whether internally or externally imposed, forces one to live an intersected, double life, which is the case for Black women. Black women experience double oppression – race and gender. The early childhood education profession primarily consists of female teachers which historically has been informed by the perspectives of white males (Burman 2008; Cannella, 2002). This has resulted in the universalization of development courses, producing rigid constructions of childhood, and “othering” those who do not fit with in the dominant identity constructs, thus excluding the voice of marginalized groups (i.e. Black females). Many early childhood teachers tend to ignore their powerlessness and subjugation of and in the field of education as the field itself is controlled by policies, practices, pedagogy, theories, and research based on positivist ideologies (Cannella, 2002).

Poststructuralist theories are seminal theoretical frameworks to complicate the taken-for-granted meanings of experience. Notably, poststructuralist theories emphasize the multiple and

discursively constructed realities that are constantly produced in a particular setting, for a particular audience, and in a particular place (Chase, 2005). Poststructuralists challenge the singularity of reality in order to open up the possibilities for multiple, complicating, and unconventional identities.

### **Collective Wisdom as a Tenet of Black Feminist Thought**

U.S. Black feminism emerged during the 1960's social movement context of structural inequalities, mutually constructing systems of power and the centrality of the tenets of social justice (Crenshaw, 1989). Yet, when Black feminism thought arose into the academy it faced opposition to existing systems of thought from which knowledge and truth was produced and published primarily from a Eurocentric, White male perspective (Cannella, 2002). As a result, the exclusion, misinterpretation, and devaluing of Black women's voices is itself, an issue of social justice. Within the realm of early childhood education in which Black females possess a hefty platform, this absence not only continues to reify the marginalization of Black women by diminishing their right of voice and value, but also fails to acknowledge or investigate how intersections of race, gender, and class foster contradictions of the identity of Black women. In the absence of a viable Black feminism that investigates such issues, the angel of vision created by being deemed devalued workers often lead to internalized oppression (Collins, 2009). In contrast, however, Black Feminist Thought attends to the legacy of struggling, among U.S. Black women, and suggests that a collectively shared Black women's oppositional knowledge has long existed. As a framework and philosophical concept aimed at spurring on empowerment of Black women's vestige of producing collective wisdom and oppositional knowledge, it is this same disposition that mandates the need for Black female early childhood teachers to generate specialized knowledge within the field. Knowledge gained through telling and (re)telling

experiences that is acknowledged, (re)presented, and valued. This study draws upon Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to examine the experiences of Black female teachers' experiences in the form of collective wisdom which can and does serve as a platform for thinking about social justice pedagogy. Specifically, I will investigate the experiences of Black female early childhood teachers, whose voices are voided, and their perspectives to offer situated probabilities for interrogating and disrupting dominant beliefs and provoking change in society and the classroom.

Drawing upon the works of Patricia Hill Collins, this work situated Black Feminist Thought as a critical social pedagogy arguing that it is critical knowledge that generates a beneficial lens to understanding the experiences and practices of early childhood educators; and allowed for analysis, critique, and evaluation of how Black female early childhood educators are timeless and meaningful social agents. Black Feminist Thought is a critical knowledge philosophy that forwards activism within the early childhood classroom and can be employed to forward Black female teachers as meaningful social agents as they recognize teaching as an act of social action and activism. Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought, as a critical social theory, employs a pragmatic perspective to understanding intersections around race, gender, and the enactment of social justice education.

Black Feminist Thought has been embraced and endorsed by social scientists as a theory that captures the unique experiences and standpoints of Black women. It gives voice to a self-defined collective Black woman's standpoint about womanhood (Collins, 2009). Collective wisdom, networks of women who connect by sharing common experiences and construct a body of knowledge through lived experiences, are collectively shared and create a more specialized, oppositional knowledge. The study's guiding question is; *how does collective wisdom inform*

*pedagogical practice among Black female early childhood teachers?* This knowledge, in the form of collective wisdom, informs pedagogical practice among black female early childhood teachers.

The idea of personal stories, as ways of knowing is a base of collective wisdom. Davis Pollard's restatement of collective wisdom suggests, "Many cognitive, coordination and cooperation problems are best solved by canvassing groups (the larger the better) of reasonably informed, unbiased, engaged people. The group's answer is almost invariably much better than any individual expert's answer, even better than the best answer of the experts in the group" (Pollard, 2004). Collective wisdom manifests as a voice in which persons articulate and share their world, knowledge, familiarities, experiences, and engagements. In this way, teachers, as a collective group, collide with critical theory in such a way as to produce liberation, the possibilities of new and undiscovered thought and knowledge, and participants in the transformation process (Freire, 2000; Greene, 1998).

Based on nine years of research *The Power of Collective Wisdom* (Briskin et al., 2009) shows how we can reliably tap into the extraordinary collaborative potential that exists whenever human beings gather together. Stories and historical examples illustrate how collective wisdom has emerged in a range of cultures, settings, and traditions. As a professional learning community, Black female educators converge to address common challenges through community interaction and the interdependence shared in neighborhoods and organizations.

## **Aims**

The goals of this research project were: first, to situate myself within this body of research. This project is important to me because first, I am a Black female in early childhood education as both a practitioner and a researcher, who recognizes the value of our voices in

practice and in research (outsider within) (Collins, 2009). Second, I acknowledged a need for reformation in early childhood education and to challenge how early childhood experiences, institutions, and practices produce marginalization across and within non-traditional landscapes; therefore, I identified the need for reformation in early childhood education that acknowledges the voices and experiences of the “other.” And finally, it is important that this research is forwarded to demonstrate how Black Feminist Thought in action can be used to (de)construct research methods, children’s learning, pedagogy, and resources; in other words, to examine the practices of Black female early childhood educators in demonstrating collective wisdom as social justice teaching.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. This directly speaks to experiences, institutions, and practices produce marginalization across and within non-traditional landscapes. Additionally, these findings helped to examine how Black Feminist Thought in action can be used to (de)construct research methods, children’s learning, pedagogy, and resource. Further, this study examined ways in which Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a framework, critical social theory, and philosophical concept gives lens to the experiences of Black female early childhood teachers and ways in which they interact in within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impact pedagogy and filter into the classroom. Four tenets of BFT – social justice, mothering, activism, and collective wisdom – supplied support for grounding this research in BFT. As such, the four tenets offer agency for Black females which counters the dominant discourse within U.S. epistemology which has been defined by elite White men (Collins, 2009). The tenets set the stage for challenging dominant ideologies as the five

Black female early childhood teachers in this study shared their own stories and lived experiences as representation of new meanings. I examined lived experiences of Black female teachers, working in two Head Start classrooms in coastal Virginia and employ a critical lens to understand their intersections. Additionally, this study challenged the more widely accepted ideology of who creates knowledge and what knowledge is acceptable. The work of Dill and Zambrana (2009) demonstrates that much can be gained by using the experiences of women of color to develop new theories in education and other scholarly works. Such approaches sharply contrast with those that fit the experiences of women and men of different classes and races into a universal model (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The following research questions were selected to achieve the purpose of this study and to gather data of the experiences of Black female early childhood educators.

1. How does Black Feminist Thought contribute to an understanding of collective wisdom in early childhood classrooms?
  - a. How is collective wisdom a form of social justice?
2. In what ways does collective wisdom inform socially just pedagogical practice among Black female early childhood teachers?
  - a. How do experiences of social (in)justice contribute to teacher pedagogical practices?

The idea that Black women's voices are a significant source of knowledge production informs the decision to employ narrative research. Black Feminist Thought, as a theoretical movement for social justice, provides inspiration and resources for educators who connect their personal and pedagogical social commitments to the goal of transforming oppressive systems and structures. Scholars of Black Feminist Thought work to dismantle discriminatory and

patriarchal gender practices, specifically in the narrative tradition, which provides language and space for seeing and disrupting common sense ideologies and opening up new ways of understanding interlocking systems of oppression. Thus, the act of empowering Black early childhood educators toward creating bodies of knowledge, a voice within education, and channels for scholarly activity can be employed through narrative methodology.

Using narrative inquiry as a methodology, Black female early childhood teachers provided their understanding of social justice based on their lived experiences/histories and how these lived experiences/histories filter into the classroom, and thus, impact their teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006); which is in complete opposition to the notion of grand narratives as the gold standard. Teaching experiences by Black female educators develop out of Black women's experiences of multiple interrelated oppressions such as racism, sexism, and classism. Thus, Black feminists' teachings reflect a proactive and/or reactive stance of pragmatic activism which addresses those issues deemed harmful to the well-being of Black women (Stimson, 1989). Although Black women are often characterized as victims and/or unqualified persons (Collins, 2009; Stimson, 1989), narrative inquiry and Black Feminist Thought are methods of agency that provide them the opportunities to learn, think, imagine, judge, listen, speak, write, and act (Stimson, 1989) – which transforms the individual from victim and unqualified to activist and active social agents. Examining educational experience within a society provides an important framework for narrative inquiry. An individual's experience is essential data for narrative inquiry and narrative researchers rewrite stories within a chronological sequence of past, present, and future experience. Thus, qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry pays attention to the question of *what* difference each cultural group *has* with the premise of pre-existing cultural sameness/difference. Identity politics

emphasizes solidarity among “marginalized” group members for social transformation (Moon, 2016). This solidarity is founded upon supposedly shared experiences and collective memories. Therefore, in social justice education, maintaining experience is a sound and valuable way to construct knowledge. In the case of Black female early childhood educators, their experiences are collections of knowledge and truths which offset systems of power that are commonly recognized as truth.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 presented the argument that tensions of race, gender, and class persist causing a unique oppression that Black women face in the United States. Although Black women are a visible part of mainstream society, they are often forced into positions in which they are marginalized, specifically how their work is devalued, their practice of knowledge creation is quenched beneath the weightiness of the dominant, Eurocentric methodologies for determining the creation and dissemination of imperative knowledge; and thus, the voices of Black females are fundamentally subjugated to the sidelines. Black female early childhood teachers form a collective that represents a population of professionals that experience the faces of oppression. Consequently, these acts of oppression toward this collective group have the propensity to further ideals of cultural domination and powerlessness. Yet, by employing post structural qualitative research to counter and deconstruct dominant research practices that subjugate the flow of “others” contributions to bodies of knowledge, the literature reflects how Black Feminist Thought promotes an understanding of collective wisdom through their shared stories, as social justice pedagogy, in early childhood classrooms. Moreover, the efforts of valuing Black female early childhood teachers as they possess a rostrum to bring consciousness of their marginalization.



In Chapter 2, I present early childhood literature to review the existing body of scholarship focused on social justice education. Here I provide the reader with a general overview of early childhood literature with a focus on social justice in education and Black Feminist Thought. I review social justice, as a concept that operates both as a goal and a process of education by providing a brief description of the landscape and tenets of social justice and describe how it is situated and forwarded in early childhood; along with opposition to social justice within the current educational and political climate. I explore how, as Black women face unique oppression in today's climate and as we continue to stand at the forefront as activists for social justice, we remain marginalized and confined to limitations because of race, sex, and class. Because of such exclusion, I identify a gap in the literature from the Black feminist perspective and describe how throughout the United States' workforce, women of color experience the feeling of belonging without genuinely belonging. As a consequence of marginalization, Black women's voice in the field of education is infrequently heard and/or recognized which acts to suppress contributions of Black women. When considering the ways in which Black women communicate, I explore how oral traditions in the African American community influence how knowledge is created and disseminated. Lastly, I provide a foundational understanding of the origins and tenets of Black Feminist Thought and the ways in which Black Feminist Thought provides a beneficial lens to understanding the experiences and practices of early childhood educators.

Chapter 3 provides the reader with an overview of methodological considerations germane to my research project. I present narrative research and highlight how oral traditions present just and apposite approaches to researching with the participants, as it invites us into relationship with one another and with my research project. I attend to the vitality of my project

to faithfully represent this phenomenon of inquiry, with emphasis on honoring the “voices” of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012) as a means to focus on the ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact with society using narrative inquiry as a methodology. Using photo elicitation interview (PEI), the participants were shown a series of researcher-selected pictures along with pre-selected questions to generate discussion. Additionally, follow-up individual interviews took place based on video recorded classroom observations. Reflexive Thematic Analysis, a method of data analysis, which is conducive to questions related to people’s experiences, views, and perceptions.

I include discussion focused on Black female early childhood teachers’ shared experiences through storytelling and social justice practices in the classroom in Chapter 4. It is important that I shared my belief that education is not neutral and Black women’s pedagogy is fundamentally political and is an act of social justice. In the process of data collection, the common structural features to emerge from the PEI and individual interviews are collective wisdom, social justice pedagogy, activism, and identity.

In Chapter 4 I provide, discussion focused on Black female early childhood teachers’ shared experiences through storytelling and social justice practices in the classroom. Part of the aim of this study was to position myself within the research, as I shared commonalities with the participants – Black, female, early childhood educator – with an explicit intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by presenting how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. Sharing my personal experiences through storying was a technique used argue my belief that education is not neutral; and Black women’s pedagogy is fundamentally political and therefore, an act of social justice. In the process of data

collection, the common structural features to emerge from the PEI and individual interviews are collective wisdom, social justice pedagogy, activism, and identity. As such, the four tenets of Black Feminist Thought establish credence in countering the dominant discourse within U.S. epistemology (Collins, 2009). The aim of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. Vital to this study is my belief that education is not neutral and Black women's pedagogy is fundamentally political and therefore, an act of social justice. Additionally, the participants experienced social justice in their personal lives giving way to them identifying social (in)justice, how it impacted and influenced their teaching, and how it filtered into their early childhood classrooms. Hence, the voices presented in this study, Black female early childhood teachers, are not intended to be secondary and supplementary voices to mainstream America, but rather we are relevant creators, contributors, and sustainers of ways of knowing.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion with implications, future research, and concluding remarks. This study stands to contribute to the literature by addressing this gap and by recognizing and inserting the voices of Black women teachers into mainstream channels of knowledge creation. It emphasized Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and the experiences and voices of the participants within the context of Black female's resistance to dominant traditions of the creation, transmission and knowledge while focusing on Black Feminist Thought tenets of social justice, activism, collective wisdom and mothering with regard to self-identity and empowerment. Furthermore, to add to the theoretical body of knowledge, I argue that implications stemming from the teachers' active involvement in social change and activism produce risk – risk of speaking up and out, risk in challenging authority, risk in reclaiming our

identity, risk in not compromising and moving forward. In order to illuminate the lived experiences and voices of Black female early childhood teachers, this study was conducted using narrative analysis as a methodology. The narrative analysis process through storytelling in this study further empowered and supported the credibility of Black women's reliance on alternative claims of credible research and knowledge (Collins, 2009). Possible directions for future research include researching with Black female early childhood teachers and examining their experiences and stories as activists in education with emphasis on pedagogy as educators and leaders; and illustrate how individuals who wish to rearticulate a Black woman's standpoint through Black Feminist Thought can be suppressed by prevailing knowledge validation processes.

## CHAPTER II

### BLACK PERSPECTIVES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

#### Social Justice

The meaning of social justice may vary according to different definitions, perspectives, and social theories. Most conceptions of social justice refer to an egalitarian society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The phrase “social justice” is used in school mission statements, job announcements, and educational reform proposals, though sometimes widely disparate ones, from creating a vision of culturally responsive schools to leaving no child behind. Social justice refers to the overall fairness of a society in its divisions and distributions of rewards and burdens. Most authors assert that they use it to designate a moral virtue. But most of their descriptions ascribe to social justice refer to one’s states of affairs – high unemployment, inequity of incomes, lack of a living wage is often cited as instances of social injustice (Adams, et al., 2007; Greene, 1998; Novak, 2009; Rizvi & Christensen, 1996). Some scholars who use the term, however, ascribe it not to individuals but to social systems. They use social justice to denote a regulative principle of order, especially the redistribution of wealth, income and poor. Their focus is not virtue but political economy and power (Novak, 2009). In turn, the implication in my research regarding social justice is *doing* social justice. In other words, social justice as *how we are* and *what we do*.

Despite all the rhetoric behind social justice, it is often unclear in any practical terms what is meant when we raise a vision of social justice. Not only is there a challenge with determining what is meant by social justice, but how this influences such issues as program development, curricula, practicum opportunities, educational philosophy, social vision, and activist work (Adams et al., 2007; Gewirtz, 1998; Moon 2016). We learn to pledge allegiance to

a country that supposedly stands for “liberty and justice for all,” yet the more we see people petitioning the idea of social justice, the less clear it becomes to what people mean, and if it is meaningful at all (Adams et al., 2007). When an idea can refer to anything, it loses credibility, especially an idea that clearly has such political dimensions. In fact, at the same time that we are seeing this term in so many places, we are also seeing a backlash against it. For example, just recently the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education removed social justice language from its accrediting standards because of its controversial, ambiguous, and ideologically weighted nature (Wasley, 2006, as cited in Bieler, 2012).

Novak (2009) argues that some of the difficulty we have making sense of social justice starts with the term itself. He writes that “whole books and treaties have been written about social justice without ever offering a definition of it. It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone will recognize an instance of when it appears” (p.1). Moreover, almost everyone in education seems to share at least a rhetorical commitment to social justice, especially as we religiously express the belief that schools should help to provide equity of opportunity. Rizvi & Christensen (1996) argue that the “immediate difficulty one confronts when examining the idea of social justice is the fact that it does not have a single essential meaning – it is embedded within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent political endeavors” (p.47). For example, Moule (2005) describes how she and her colleagues place a social justice vision statement on the first page of their teacher education program handbook, yet after they all agreed upon the statement, there was little discussion of how it would be implemented in practice and who would be responsible for what.

Notions of social justice typically find their beginning in Plato and Kant’s moral philosophy and in particular Kant’s concern that actions must be connected to moral

considerations (Novak, 2009). In other words, it is our experiences that shape our beliefs and actions. Our reactions and responses to situations and events in our lives are deeply shaped by our experiences. Our attitudes, beliefs, desires, and behaviors are altered or shaped by what we encounter. Plato believed who we are – our identity – is a culmination of our experiences. We all have had a multiplicity of experiences from pre-birth to present and they have had significant effects on who we are. And, thus, Plato and Kant suggest that it is not particularly the experience itself that is significant, but the value we assign to the experience. In other words, what is the story we (re)tell about the experience? Essentially, our stories influence who we are – our identity – the judgements we make, our behaviors and interactions, and how we filter and process ideas. However, one needs to remember that justice by definition is social. The shift in meaning occurs when the term “social” no longer describes the product of the various actions of many individuals, but rather the utopian goal toward which all institutions and all individuals are “made in the utmost degree to converge” by coercion: In that case, the qualifier “social” in the term “social justice” refers to something that emerges not organically and spontaneously from the rule-abiding behavior of free individuals, but rather from an abstract ideal imposed from above (Novak, 2009).

### ***Social Justice Education***

Social justice is an integral feature of democratic life. Those educators who strive for equity, self-determination, and freedom are social justice educators. They educate students to become just citizens, who are, as Parker (2003) notes, “principled and compassionate, who refrain from harming or exploiting others, and who believe it is their duty both to protect just institutions and to prevent injustice” (p. 54). The significant tradition with educational theory centers the concerns of democracy and social justice in how we conceptualize the purposes and

goals of schooling. This is seen most notably with the social constructivists in the first part of the twentieth century, and more recently in the work of critical pedagogues, cultural studies practitioners, and anti-globalization activists (Meier, 2002; Oakes et al., 2013; Young, 1993). Dewey (1938) argued that “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a model of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 93). His vision of democracy involved genuine communion, dialogue, give and take, the sharing of ideas and experiences, and the involvement of individuals in cooperative undertakings. Arguably one of the central purposes, if not the central purpose, of education in the United States is to help students develop the knowledge, habits, skills, and dispositions necessary for democratic citizenship (Cannella, 2002; Michelli & Keiser, 2005; Young, 1993). These include learning to think critically, to participate in public dialogue, to consider the rights and needs of others, to live in harmony with diverse groups of people, to act on important social issues, to be accountable for one’s choices and decisions, and to work to bring about the conditions in which all individuals can develop to their fullest capacities and potential.

According to Dewey (Cannella, 2002), democratic societies depend on a variety of important foundations: we create the conditions for free exchange of ideas, even when these ideas are unpopular, thus allowing us to make fully informed decisions; we have faith in our fellow citizens and in our ability to work collaboratively with them to solve problems and to imagine more enriching possibilities for living together; we employ habits of critical thinking, reflection, and analysis to assess ideas and options, instead of relying on narrow prejudices, uninformed opinions, and personal biases; and we are all concerned with the rights of individuals, the treatment of minorities, the welfare of both intimate and distant others, and ultimately, the advancement of the common good. Furthermore, Gerwitz (1998) provides an



understanding of justice that moves beyond an awareness of the ‘haves and have nots’, to an educational call for social action. First, we can determine what social justice education is not. Social justice education is not the same as the celebrations of diversity many schools conduct through multicultural units, assemblies, and the happenstance inclusion of ethnicity in curriculum (Nieto, 2000). Furthermore, social justice education is not something that can be easily reduced to worksheets and reproduced for classroom consumption. Nieto (2000) maintains that social justice education is about looking critically at inequalities, injustices that face students and others, analyzing procedures that maintain these injustices and actively confronting injustice encountered. In other words, the way educators approach social justice with students depends on how in(justice) is viewed, how parameters, if any are defined, and possible intervention.

Gerwitz (1998) sought to remedy the lack of explicit discussion of what social justice means, or ought to mean, by establishing “a definitive conceptualization of social justice in education...by mapping territory in order to initiate the productive debate” (p. 469). She begins by delineating various conceptualizations of justice, pointing out both the assumptions inherent to each conceptualization, and the approaches to intervention each conceptualization implies. The implementation of social justice education seeks to bring awareness and to remedy injustice requires educators themselves to be transformative in how they engage students and with students.

Similarly, Oakes et al., (2013) offer that social justice toward education does three things. First, it asks us to uncover, examine, and critique the values and politics that undergird educational decisions and practices, even as we explore the more influential issues of organizing curriculum and instruction. Second, it compels us to challenge educational common sense and to ask important questions about why we do the things we do in schools and who benefit from

them. Third, it calls for us to attend to the ways in which schooling often contributes to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of inequalities, particularly along lines of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and other such categories, ultimately so we can construct more empowering alternatives. As White and Talbert (2005) explain, education for social justice needs to move beyond functionalist and vocationalist-orientated perspectives of schooling (which stress education for jobs) to one where the traditional model of schooling becomes a transformational pedagogy.

Social justice education as a pedagogy requires educators to both understand issues of identity and oppression, and to invoke those issues in the classroom and staffroom. Social justice education requires educators to both transform and be transformed (Adams et al., 2007; Gewirtz, 1998; Greene, 1998; Meier, 2002). This pedagogy stresses the importance of facilitating strong empathetic relationships and moral dialogues to create space for diverse voices and conflicting ideas in conversation with students, colleagues, and parents. Social justice educators, participating in transformative action, encourage their students to develop a critical consciousness of social realities so that they might play a role in interpreting, constructing, and sometimes disrupting those realities. Social education curricula are conversations that welcome difficult knowledge, shifting identities, and dissenting and/or silenced voices. It is positioned to confront injustice by actively transforming social reality. Education has a role to play in the construction of a more socially and just world. Freire (2000) contends, “if education cannot do everything, it can achieve something in contributing towards the transformation of the world, giving rise to a world that is rounder, less angular, more humane” (p. 117); where we have smoothed out conflicts, where peace and justice would become commonplace and dignity for all would be a goal.

Social justice is often defined as both a product and process (Adams et al., 2007). The goal of social justice education is to provide people of all background to fully and equally participate in society according to their individual needs while, the process for attaining the goal of social justice...should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change (Adams et al., 2007). That is, we need to understand what social justice would look like when we have attained these goals (products), as well as how to achieve the goals of social justice (process).

The goals of social justice education include student empowerment, the equitable distribution of resources and social responsibility, and the processes include democracy, student-centered focus, dialogue, and an analysis of power (Adams et al., 2007). Social justice education does not merely examine difference or diversity but pays careful attention to the systems of power and privilege that give rise to social inequity, and encourages students to critically examine oppression on institutional, cultural, and individual levels in search of opportunities for social action in the service of social change (Adams et al., 2007). Clearly, this definition goes well beyond the celebration of diversity, the use of dialogues groups in the classroom, or even the existence of democratic processes regarding class goals and procedures. To be most effective, social justice education requires and examination of systems of power and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change and student agency in and outside of the classroom (Adams et al., 2007; Gewirtz, 1998; Kohl, 2001; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Novak, 2009).

Regarding the product of social justice, scholars differ. Social justice includes a vision of society which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure (Adams et al., 2007; Greene, 1998). Some experts define

teaching for social justice as having beliefs with an emphasis on ethical values, care, and respect (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Noddings, 2012). Additionally, Kohl (2001) argues that to create schools that are socially just, one must advocate for moral responsibility. Young (1993) explains that everyone in a just society should be able to “develop and exercise her or his intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive capacities” (p. 123). Similarly, Greene (1998) explains that in a just society everyone affected by a decision should have a part in making the decision.

For Greene (1998), community and its responsible interactions are the key to social justice. She believes that members of a community come together voluntarily to discuss matters of significance and must justify their preferences through arguments, explanations, and different modes of persuasion. Greene (1998) also reminds us that when the requirements for social justice are addressed, distinctions have to be made: “Equitable or fair treatment...does not mean equal treatment – certainly when that means treating people with widely disparate needs in the same way” (p. 57). When Greene (1998) speaks about social justice, and more specifically about ways we can teach for social justice, she embraces that interpretation of social justice that is concerned with basic human rights that all people are entitled to, regardless of conditions of economic disparity or of class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or health. She advocates that teachers become activists in raising their students’ consciousness of conditions of oppression and ways to work for the eradication of injustices and disparities in society.

Since the historic tragedy of 9/11, we often hear teachers repeating the patriotic phrase “...indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” What does that mean to children, teachers, teacher candidates, teacher educators, politicians, lawmakers, parents, or everyday citizens? And do people have a communal conception of social justice? Many people use the terms “social

justice”, “social justice education,” or “teaching for social justice”, but may not be explicitly aware of what these concepts mean. While many meanings surround social justice, it is well established that social justice education encourages students to take an active role in their own education and supports teachers in creating empowering, democratic, and critical education environments.

### ***Social Justice Education in the Early Childhood Classroom***

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socially. Children from non-dominant groups or non-traditional homes (children of color, children from immigrant families, children from gay and lesbian families, and others) often suffer educational disadvantages (Rikowski, 2000). Statistical analysis predicts that students from minority racial groups will make up over 50 percent of the U.S. school-age population by 2050; yet these students continue to score lower on standardized tests, drop out of school at higher rates, and experience higher rates of suspensions, expulsion, and referral for special education services than white students (Rikowski, 2000). Given these statistics, it is essential that early childhood educators continue to develop practices and pedagogies that address injustices that perpetuate at risk<sup>1</sup> characteristics of children, families, and communities – the historically marginalized groups; and that teachers examine the value laden messages in everyday practices in order to create more just learning environments.

Early childhood programs that put social justice teaching front and center share particular characteristics. Social justice teaching grows from children’s urgent concerns. If educators listen to the themes embedded in children’s play and conversations, we hear question about identity,

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “at risk” is a contentious concept, usually used to describe one heading in different situational circumstances that are guiding them towards failure in the educational system, and into the mass incarceration systems or low skilled jobs; also used as a label to describe one of lower socioeconomic standings, children with parents with little education, living in urban areas. Swadener, B. and Lubeck, S. (1995).

belonging, community and relationships and fairness. Children from very young ages internalize messages about power and privilege with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, language, and ability, which they perpetuate through their play and talk (Nieto, 2000; Ryan & Grishaber, 2004). While families are a critical piece in shaping children's values on such matters, classroom practices communicate to reinforce strong, subtle, and repeated social messages about what is and is not valued. The consequences of these messages are enormous not only for the individual children, but also for a society that strives for equity and justice for all.

In early childhood programs and in preschool it is critical for teachers to address injustice and develop equity-based pedagogies because children form ideas about fairness and their own sense of identity within the larger world during these early years (Boutte, 2002). Educators look at equity pedagogy, specifically culturally responsive teaching; and critical pedagogy related to curriculum transformation and democracy as models of pedagogy that position and forward the early childhood classroom (Milner et al., 2018).

Equity pedagogy is a broad term that encompasses many overlapping pedagogical models. It assumes that injustice is endemic and is sustained by the generally accepted structures, practices, relationships, and discourses that make up the fabric of daily life and function to privilege some groups and marginalize others (Ryan & Grishaber, 2004). Equity pedagogy assumes that if teachers and schools do not consciously attempt to counter injustice, then by default, they support it. Unless teachers are committed to examine and change the ways their everyday practices support a power hierarchy that privileges some groups and marginalizes others, they will continue using practices that inadvertently upholds inequity. The everyday nature of injustice is important because it implies that individuals can engage in conscious raising to identify their roles in injustice and being to work against it (Freire, 2000).

First, culturally responsive teaching is aimed at educational liberation for particular groups and advocates a pedagogy that is both culturally and politically relevant to children of that group (Ballenger, 1999; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Boutte, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner et al., 2018). Not only does culturally responsive teaching emphasize curricular transformation, but it also underscores beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions of teachers. In the sense of social justice, culturally responsive teaching includes thinking beyond teaching content to thinking about teaching students (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner et al. 2018). Culturally responsive teaching involves ways of educating students that will provide all students with learning opportunities, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or language (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner et al. 2018). Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching includes engagement with families and communities, high expectations for children, shared political struggle with marginalized communities, and raising critical consciousness among students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ballenger's (1999) research on her own classroom practices serves as an example of developing culturally relevant teaching in early childhood education. She describes how she became a better teacher for Haitian preschool children by reconsidering and deconstructing what counts as knowledge in the classroom and consciously adopting some of the cultural norms of the Haitian preschoolers and their families. Ballenger (1999) writes, "I think I was fortunate to be a minority of one, the outsider...I was forced to reconsider my beliefs, try to understand what lay behind them, and to work to hear the students and their parents better" (p. 30).

Ballenger (1999) notes that she was having trouble with classroom management as compared to her Haitian colleagues, who had little trouble. She spent considerable time observing her colleagues and the children's parents when they reprimanded the children. She

came to realize that in making requests of the children to behave, she was using a White, Eurocentric form of guidance. The Haitian norm was to ask the children a series of rhetorical questions in what Ballenger initially perceived as a harsh tone. Over time, as she adopted this cultural style, her classroom management improved drastically.

When confronting issues of culture and race, many educators rely on classroom materials to ensure that various cultural groups are represented (Aboud & Levy, 2000). Yet, presenting an occasional book about a racial or ethnic group when the majority of the books and images are based on whites or white norms reinforce the idea that groups other than whites are the exception, not the norm, and communicates to a child that some groups are seen as more valuable than others. Some early childhood researchers argue that relying on books as the primary source of literacy instruction reinforces a curriculum rooted in White, middle-class values, because children whose home literacy practices are primarily oral or based on popular media are at a disadvantage (Canella, 2002; Darling-Hammond).

The curriculum in most schools is dominated by a Eurocentric or white frame of reference (Cannella, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2017; hooks, 1994; Oakes et al., 2013; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). Most art, books and stories focus on white people. History is taught from a white frame of reference, and even everyday language practices privileged White or Eurocentric forms of expression. For example, Heath (1982) examines the language practices of two communities. She explored how children's language development is affected by the cultural communities they grow up in. The findings of her research revealed the need for culturally relevant educational methods to increase the success of minority and working-class students in schools. Likewise, stories and histories of racial groups other than Whites are sporadically



presented (i.e. Black History Month), the dominant message is that a Eurocentric experience is the most valued and central in education.

In contrast to the focus of culturally teaching on particular groups, critical pedagogy advocates for teaching and curriculum aimed at investigating critical understandings of power among all marginalized groups (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Moreover, it aims to train learners to invent tools for taking social action and to examine the institutional structures of the school and its relationship with the wider community. In the early childhood setting, issues of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation may seem too complex, advanced, or harsh for young children to explore. Yet, every day in preschool classrooms children ask questions and make statements regarding these real-life observations.

Many teacher-researchers have used tenets of critical pedagogy to help children make sense of and think about issues of racial justice and cultural power (McLaren, 2003). This helps learners uncover issues of injustice and recognize and value people of multiple social, cultural, and racial groups. The research centers on teachers' careful listening to children and asking pointed questions in order to establish a safe space for children to share multiple perspectives and discuss issues of justice and fairness. For example, Miller-Marsh (1992) documents her work in a kindergarten classroom as she implements the anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989). She describes how she used the curriculum to create themes based on social justice issues throughout the year and how the kindergarteners became increasingly adept at talking about issues of injustice related to immigration, Native Americans, and cultures around the world. The children even took action on some of the injustices they identified: they held a peace march to show their desire for more peaceful resolution of conflicts in the school and the neighborhood, they demonstrated to call attention to the need for more African American

crossing guards. Much of Marsh's classroom work used children's literature to generate conversation and help draw out children's thoughts on issues of equity and justice.

It is essential that teachers help young children see that gender, race, culture, class, and sexual orientation can be expressed in multiple ways and that some of these ways have more power than others. In acknowledging the power dynamic – whereby power structures exclude the marginalized – and its effects on young children, teacher's first role is to be sure that the children in their class who come from communities that have been historically powerless, marginalized, and silenced, underrepresented and overlooked in schools gain access to power – the power of being accepted and celebrated (McLaren, 2004). Teachers can address this imbalance through the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy. By attending to the empowered needs of children through culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers can engage all children in the class in exploring issues of fairness and justice and thinking about their role in making a more just world for themselves and others. With raised consciousness and a determination to identify and expose injustice, early childhood teachers can begin to create a more equitable society by teaching its youngest members to be advocates for justice.

Historically, classrooms have been the stage for social change, providing a venue to promote and accelerate new ideas. In addition to academic instruction, one of a classroom teacher's most important roles is to help students develop the critical thinking, collaboration, and self-reflection skills necessary to foster a better society. Children are fundamentally concerned with making sense of their social and cultural world. In a classroom where social justice is positioned, teachers and students are invited to work collectively in this pursuit, guiding them towards understandings rooted in accurate and empathic understandings (Noddings, 2012) – or we can leave them to figure out their questions on their own, coming to conclusions based on

misinformation and cultural bias (Beauboeuf-Lafantant, 2002; Boutte, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999). When educators engage with children in question about identity and equity, they participate in the work of reshaping our society.

Seminal social educators like Vivian Paley and Fannie Shaftel have inspired educators with their education and classroom practices. Through their literary works, storytelling and story acting, role playing and drama, and other curriculum practices, they have served as purveyors in promoting social equality and creating spaces which encourages richness of diversity through collaboration between teachers and students of different backgrounds and cultures. As purveyors of social justice work, they have inspired others to realize the implications of introducing and maintaining the causes of social justice and its value so that it is forwarded and positioned in the classroom.

Many educators and scholars are tackling social injustices, and their commitment to their students, communities, of a more equitable, more compassionate, and less violent society and world merit public recognition. These scenarios play out daily in early childhood classrooms across the country and as children interact with their lived world, they require an environment where these concerns can be met. In our current political climate incidents of racism are overt issues that young children of color experience, whether directly or indirectly. Young children see and hear about examples of racism in the media, on the news, in their communities, in their families and in their homes (to name a few). The acts of social injustice are alive and well; and now is not the time to shun away from having conversations about these realities. The media and the culture convey harsh and sometimes punitive messages about people of color. Many Black parents struggle to talk about and share stories of social injustices with their children as they produce

personal, negative recollections; and a desire to protect them from the cruel world. Yet, it is never too early to start. The stories Black parents tell their children lead to discussions of their identity in opposition to what they hear and see – counteracting messages that allude to beliefs that Blacks are inferior, uncivilized, and tainted. Black Feminist Thought seeks to counter such identifying characteristics and demands a more credible approach to identity awareness.

Critical to teaching social justice in early childhood settings are the practices and approaches that engender ways in which justice is approached; how diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice are actualized in early childhood classes. Conceptually and practically, social justice teaching in the early years is about affording young children the opportunity to meet lived realities. It helps them learn and participate in collaboration, and to develop a vocabulary of cooperation and problem solving; it helps them to listen to their feelings and to empathize with others' feelings; it develops their curiosity about and respect for human difference; and it cultivates children's love for and connection to the natural world (Aboud & Levy, 2000). The primary objective is to allow children to practice justice from the earliest years, and not so much about imparting information or equipping students with analytical skills, albeit that is important. Social justice teaching helps children articulate, in their terms, what is fair and unfair, and encourages action to the face of unfairness.

### ***Challenges and Implications of Social Justice***

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a critical time in our world, in our nation, and certainly in public education. The tense political climate and discourse and vastly contrasting ideas about the future of the U.S. educational system leaves many families, teachers, communities, and administrators

at a loss for how to best serve the students in their schools and our society as a whole. Equity and social justice need to move beyond merely buzzwords and catchphrases and instead become part of the lived practice in the classroom. However, positivist attitudes towards teaching and learning, schooling and education, and the system of education as a whole, shape the course of what is learned, where learning takes place, who teaches, how knowledge is transmitted and through what channels, or what information is important and to whom will it be delivered. The challenges of implementing social justice teaching speak to and challenges current trends in education such as democracy and children's agency, school readiness, the agency of children, and the credence of the profession.

First, in the field of education specifically, foundation scholars and curriculum reconceptualists have stressed the importance of multi-vocal and multi-conceptual narratives of learning and educational possibilities, diversity of life histories and knowledge, as well as the role of power and politics in decision making and educational practices (Cannella, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2017; hooks, 1994). Many scholars have challenged Universalist truths in fields directly tied to early childhood education. For example, Burman (2008) directly challenges Piagetian developmental psychology as well as stereotypically masculine ways of interpreting, supporting, and being in the world. Cannella (2002) seeks to “deconstruct early childhood education, identifying and evaluating the themes and forms of discourse that have dominated the field, leading to the construction of specific theories and forms of practice of that privilege particular groups of children and adults while oppressing others” (p. 2).

It has become increasingly common for education scholars to claim a social justice orientation to their work (Adams et. al., 2007; Apple 2004; Collins, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Delpit 1995; Moule, 2005; Nieto, 2000; Noddings, 2012; Oakes et al., 2013; Sleeter,

2008). Among the critiques, education that is grounded on a commitment to justice and the cultivation of democratic citizenship “is increasingly seen as superfluous, complicating, and even threatening by some policy makers and pressure groups who increasingly see any curriculum not tied to basic literacy or numeracy as disposable and inappropriate” (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. xix).

Some early childhood educators have proposed that the knowledge base used to inform the early education field actually serves to support the status quo, reinforces prejudices, and stereotypes, and ignores the real lives of children (Cannella, 2002; Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002). Delpit (1995), for example, states how child-centered pedagogy, and the resultant focus on discovery learning, privileges knowledge considered important by upper and middle class. Moreover, she suggests “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282) which includes the knowledge, communication of methods, strategies for the construction of self, and methods of personal presentation that are valued by the dominant power structure. Delpit (1988) adds, “Children from other kinds of families operate with perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power” (p. 283).

The creation of an egalitarian and just society for everyone is a vision for all empowering and egalitarian pedagogues. But it will remain a vision, muted expressions, or empty words in policy unless social justice in education is provoked. Sawicki (1991) states that one could argue that it is politically irresponsible to radically question existing theoretical political options without taking any responsibility for the impact that such critique will have without offering any alternative. A vigorous critique of the status quo of stratified school systems and an awakening of social injustice is needed.

Children's agency is another challenge to the mission of social justice. The notion of social justice has often been overlooked in the field of early childhood education because many teachers think that it is too early to introduce the concept to young children and their voices are insignificant, uninformed and they are too fragile or vulnerable for exposure to undesirable events. While children are active agents in the social world, it is even more valuable to respect them as agents with a voice beyond childhood. Their competence and agency are commonly questioned, causing them to be overlooked and viewed as paltry in efforts from identifying their feelings, making "adult-like" meaning and interpretation of the world and actively participating in experiences other than play. To withhold children from participating in areas beyond what is familiar to them discredits their ability to communicate from various experiences (Cannella, 2002).

Children are embedded in many areas of society, peer cultures and institutional networks. Because of the diverse places and experiences children are connected to, they should be considered social agents who shape, build, and affect the world around them. As such, children are seen as young citizens and equal stakeholders with adults and are capable. To this end, to view children as compulsory agents worthy of actively participating in the social world is to not exploit nor neglect their usefulness.

Young children are frequently marginalized and silenced by the hegemony of lingering positivist, neoliberalist approaches still apparent in some classroom settings (Apple, 2004; Cannella, 2002). Similarly, Cannella's (2002), reverberates this as she considers social justice in early childhood to reframe education from a dominant focus on academic skills that actually diminishes the capacity for critical thinking and offers instead an emphasis on thoughtful observation, reflection, and planning on behalf of children's dispositional and authentic learning

rather than subjugating young children to *universal child truths, power production*, and “*hidden disqualifying knowledge*” (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In presenting this notion of social justice and recommending ways to bring about positive change, Greene (1998) validates an articulation of the concept as it is understood by those who stand on the left of the political spectrum. Her understanding of the concept parallels with work of such critical theorists Apple (2004) and Sleeter (2008). Of course, people of other political persuasions have also claimed social justice as an ideal to be sought after, but in their interpretations, social justice will be realized by the individual efforts of free citizens to “exercise self-government by doing for themselves, and without turning to government, what needs to be done” (Novak 2009).

Furthermore, social justice teaching relocates the meaning of early childhood education from school readiness (Bieler, 2012; Meier, 2002) to social and emotional learning, critical thinking, and intellectual development (Aboud & Levy, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Nieto, 2000). It offers another way to understand childhood, reminding us that this is time when children ought to be developing core social and environmental dispositions rather than preparing for tests that lie ahead in future grades. The vision for a high-quality early childhood program is a stark contrast to the cultural belief system that now threatens early childhood education. Early childhood, as it stands today, is a time to get children ready for school and for work. Play is acceptable, however, the central focus for schooling is learning and skill development (Apple, 2004; Bieler, 2012; Dewey, 1938; Sleeter, 2008) and that intersects with memorization, drill, and testing (Bieler, 2012; Meier, 2002).

Additionally, pressures from federal policy has pushed assessment-driven, academic instruction into programs for the youngest children; most federal- and state-funded programs use



standardized, scripted curriculum packages that emphasize literacy and numeracy at the cost of time for play, and administer a barrage of tests to 4- and 5-year-old children enrolled in their programs (Bieler, 2012; Meier, 2002). Furthermore, this emphasis on a “teacher-proof” “drill-and-skill” curriculum communicates to families that early childhood ought to be about school and test readiness, defined to the narrowest and most revered academic terms. Families, in turn, are confused: should they comply with this vision for their children’s earliest years, hoping to ensure their children’s school success, or press for more generous and spacious experiences in the classroom that allow children the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that encourages diverse knowledge. Cannella (2002) considers knowledge as a cultural artifact.

While there have been educators calling for a social justice approach toward education, this vision has never been the dominant one. This is especially true in our current climate, where teachers are increasingly asked to focus on a specific and narrow set of goals, in particular, and raising standardized test scores. Presumably, high test scores show that schools are publicly accountable and give confidence that American students will be competitive in the global marketplace (Bieler, 2012). In the past decade, teaching and learning have become standardized at a seemingly relentless pace, while students are tested more frequently than ever before. Meier (2002) maintains that, “we are witnessing a radical redefinition of the task of public education, driven by the widespread belief that by focusing our attention on externally imposed tests we can both produce higher achievement and restore public trust in our schools” (p. 95). This almost exclusive attention to raising test scores has numerous problematic consequences that have been well documented. Weiler and Maher (2002) argue that social justice is difficult to achieve in a society where social inequality debates are dormant.

The childcare profession and teaching young children collide with the dominant culture's ideology of the profession. Caring for and educating young children comes naturally to women, so the thinking goes: women do that work by instinct and have been doing it forever – it certainly does not require any particular education or professional development. That attitude has been institutionalized in the field of early childhood education: there are only minimal requirements for childcare workers in most states – typically, passing a criminal background check and having a high school diploma. No specialized training, no internship, no particular experience needed.

The attitude that anyone can do this work (Cannella, 2002) is one reason for the current emphasis on “teacher-proof” curricula. Early childhood agencies provide scripted curricula in place of professional development for early childhood educators. This communicates a blatant disrespect for teachers' ability to generate engaging, thoughtful, meaningful experiences for children without a script to follow, and drives candidates from the field who are eager to engage intellectually with children, families, and colleagues. This form of social injustice exemplifies specifically ways in which the dominant culture perceives and considers marginalized groups (women in general and, women of color specifically) as they dominate the field of early childhood education.

In these ways, social justice becomes a form of resistance to the view that early childhood education is unskilled work, important only inasmuch as it prepares children to recite the alphabet, identify colors, and count to ten. Social justice teaching is intellectually and emotionally engaging work. And teachers are weighed down by the emphasis on narrowly technical teaching centered on discrete skills, which stands in stark contrast to the intellectually engaging work of reflective study and inquiry that marks teaching for social justice (Adams et al., 2007).

In addition to this daily intellectual and emotional challenge, childcare teachers and caregivers work with the constraint of low wages and no health care or retirement. In other words, the profession itself is not respected nor recognition. Their work is dismissed as unskilled, jobs that anyone can fill – an attitude born out of the view that early childhood work is women’s work. Moreover, Cannella (2002) contends, “the ways in which the discourses of professionalism [in early childhood education] support - the sexism, racism, and class division found in the patriarchal status quo and create disciplinary powers over women and regulatory power over children” (p. 138). In other words, a gender-oriented division of labor has placed women in positions with lower pay, less autonomy, and increased control as women have become the majority in the field of early childhood education.

Moreover, this also alludes to the competence of early childhood teachers as they are, in a patriarchal driven society, “that only a particular group of individuals will learn enough to administer knowledge” (Cannella, 2002, p. 143); hence, many early childhood teachers undergo technical training and constructed as non-intellectual, where women were emotional and lacking objectivity and viewed as nurturers. However, in pursuit of deconstructing early childhood education in a way that is socially just, the newly constructed profession of early childhood education would require a rejection of the view of education and educators as apolitical, accepting the power-orientated, political nature of schooling. And that political neutrality would ultimately support the ideals of the dominant culture, perpetuating the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

### **Black Feminist Thought (BFT)**

Black Feminist Thought is a framework and philosophical concept that gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact with society. The

“indivisibility” or silencing of Black women’s voices in the area of research, such as education, leads to a limited understanding of the Black woman’s varied experiences within the educational sphere. Black Feminist Thought challenges matrices of oppression that deal with race, class, and gender as well as structures that cause oppression (Collins, 2009). Its goal is to empower and activate Black women’s emerging power as agents of knowledge in spaces where they are normally silence and/or silenced. Feminist theories and theorists of yesteryear are not applicable to the experiences of Black women expressly, because the Black woman’s experiences are different and more intense (Evan-Winters & Love, 2015).

### ***Foundational Understanding of the Origins of Black Feminist Thought***

As a movement, Black feminism emerged during the mid1960s as a women’s social justice movement and as a continuation of an intellectual and activist tradition that began nearly two centuries before (Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Black women in the 19th century were conscious that true freedom required liberation from both racist oppression and sexist domination (hooks, 1982).

Contemporary Black women intellectuals such as Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Audre Lorde, Bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw and others consistently point to the contributions of 19th century African American women who participated in the struggle for racial equality and women’s rights. Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879), a free Black woman from Connecticut, is generally recognized as the first United States-born woman (of any race) to speak publicly to audiences of men and women about political matters (Giddings, 1984; Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Her speeches boldly admonished both Black men for their chauvinistic attitudes toward Black women and free Blacks for not doing enough to uplift the race (Giddings, 1984; Simien and Clawson, 2006). Stewart challenged African American women

to reject negative images of Black womanhood and produce a self-defined standpoint of self-reliance and independence (Collins, 2009). She emphasized racial pride and self-help strategies that could enhance educational and employment opportunities, so that Blacks would not have to depend on White society to solve problems of race (Simien and Clawson, 2006). Stewart was also passionate about Black women attaining leadership roles and insisted they use their roles as mothers to champion political action (Cole and Sheftall, 2000). Though her admonishment of Black men, free Blacks, and Whites resulted in a short-lived public career, Maria Stewart “articulated the precepts upon which the future activism of Black women would be based” (Giddings, 1984, p. 50).

Following the tradition of Maria Stewart, other important African American women, such as Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper, would express and act on ideas that liberated them from racist and sexist oppression. In 1851, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), who as a Black female in 19th century White society, was not attributed the qualities of womanhood, delivered her speech, “Ain’t I a Woman,” at a women’s convention in Akron, Ohio (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). Enduring the protests of White men and women who thought it unfitting a Black woman speak on a public platform in their presence, Truth became one of the first feminists to draw attention to the experiences of Black enslaved women (hooks, 1982). In her speech, Truth drew contradictions between her life as an African American woman and the qualities attributed to White women (Collins, 2009). She refuted claims that women’s weakness was incompatible with the right to vote (Giddings, 1984). Truth’s implicit links between race and gender in the lives of Black women highlighted the racist attitudes of White female suffragists (Giddings, 1984). In repeating her question ‘Ain’t I a woman?’ no less than four times, she exposed the class-bias and racism of the new women’s movement.

The Black women's club movement emerged during the 1890s. However, unlike White women's clubs, the Black women's club movement was motivated by both race and gender obligations (Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Black women's clubs, including the National Federation of Afro-American Women and National Association of Colored Women, developed both in response to the racism of White women and also to address the specific issues Black women faced (Giddings, 1984; Guy-Sheftall, 2000; hooks, 1982). While White women could focus their attention on education, charity, and what Giddings (1984) referred to as "upper class frustration" (p. 97), Black women were concerned with issues such as defending Black womanhood, racial uplift, poverty, anti-lynching campaigns, and improving family life, to name a few (Guy-Sheftall, 2000; hooks, 1982). hooks (2014) credits Anna Julia Cooper as being one of the first black activists to urge black women to articulate their own experiences and to make the public aware of the way in which racism and sexism together affected their social status. In 1892, Cooper published *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, a text regarded as the first book-length feminist analysis of the condition of African American women (Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Mary Church Terrell (1863 – 1954), like her contemporary and critic Ida B. Wells, was also well established as a spokesperson for women's suffrage and Black civil rights (Simien and Clawson, 2006). As founding president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Terrell worked diligently to involve Black women in the struggle for women's rights.

Black women have participated formally in feminist movements for decades and have long fought for gender and racial justice in the U.S.; however, acknowledgement and validation of their participation went largely disregarded (Collins, 2009). Within this participation, Black feminist critiqued overt and overt racism and classism within mainstream feminist movements for its focus on the needs of White middle class women, while ignoring the realities of women of

color and poor women, and engaging in racist ideologies within the movement itself (Hull et al., 1993). In short, Black women were being marginalized and openly discriminated against in both movements, and they were finding it difficult or impossible to build solidarity with those who were also acting as their oppressors. All too often, "black" was equated with Black men and "woman" was equated with White women; and the end result of this was that Black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were (and many would rightfully argue continues) to be ignored. Thus, Black Feminism is merely an effort, coping mechanism, and tool to be utilized by Black women who are racially oppressed within the Women's Movement, and sexually oppressed within the Black Liberation Movement, as well as within the patriarchal system of the Black community, which simply mimics the sexist ideas of the larger society. Collins (2009) suggest that from a social justice standpoint, Black Feminist Thought also emerged as intellectuals perceived political actions as a means for human empowerment. Thus, commitment to Black women's empowerment within the context of social justice help advance the similar theme of oneness of all human life. Similarly, Smith (2000) suggests the concept of simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality which is one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black Feminist Thought.

In the United States, the National Black Feminist Organization was created in 1973 in response to the need for Black feminists to have their own identity group. Black feminists sought specifically to develop antiracist politics, which were too often lacking in civil rights and Black liberation movements (Hull et al., 1982). The practice of identifying as a Black feminist involves a connection to specific historical legacy of Black women who were active in anti-racism and sexist struggles through first and second wave feminist movements (Collins, 2009). A Black

feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s.

The assumption that we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race, has so clouded the vision of American thinkers and writers on the "woman" question that most discussions of sexism, sexist oppression, or woman's place in society are distorted, biased, and inaccurate (Collins, 2009). Black feminism aims to empower Black women with new and critical ways of thinking that center on how racism and sexism work together to create Black women's social issues and inequalities that arise from mutually constructed systems of oppression (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Smith, 2000). Women such as Sojourner Truth exemplify Black feminist activism in the nineteenth century. The work of these and other Black women shows how Black community politics laid the foundation for social justice toward sexism from Black men, marginalization from White feminists, and disenfranchisement under White male privilege (Alexander-Floyd, 2012).

After Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality in 1989, it was widely adopted because it managed to encompass in a single word the simultaneous experience of the multiple oppressions faced by Black women. But the concept was not a new one. Since the times of slavery, Black women have eloquently described the multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender—referring to this concept as "interlocking oppressions", "simultaneous oppressions", "double jeopardy", "triple jeopardy" or any number of descriptive terms (Crenshaw, 1989; Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Like most other Black feminists, Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" Crenshaw (1989) suggests that when Sojourner Truth rose to speak, many white women urged that she be silenced, fearing that she would divert attention from women's suffrage to emancipation, invoking a clear illustration of the degree of



racism within the suffrage movement. When feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect women's experiences and *women's* aspirations do not include or speak to Black women, Black women must ask, 'Ain't *we* women?' which pivots towards postmodern thought and the counter narratives that speak back to grand narratives as well as first and second wave feminism.

Feminist postmodernism is interested in diversity of thought and in recognizing the value of context and language in all situations (Gergen, 2001). It is all about deconstructing old ways of knowing and reconstructing new ones (Gergen, 2001). It embraces a language of possibilities. Similarly, post-structuralism offers ways of studying how knowledge is produced (Prasad, 2005). Additionally, poststructuralist approach argues that to understand an object, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produced the object. In this way, Black Feminist Thought converges with postmodern and post-structuralism as it seeks to counter metanarratives of identity and the construction and interpretation of knowledge.

Thus, academics, second-wave, and third-wave feminists would likely agree that the Black Feminist movement grew out of, and more importantly, in response to, the Black Liberation Movement (itself an out-growth of the Civil Rights Movement), and the Women's Movement taking place in the United States (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). Black Feminist Thought was birthed out of the continuing marginalization perpetuated by the dominate class, even by and within feminist movements, capturing the intersection of race and gender and recognizing the oppressive nature of gender construct and of race as a social construct, which directly affect one's experience. It is Black feminist thought that helps give voice and a self-defined collective Black woman's standpoint about Black womanhood (Collins, 1989, 2009).

### ***Major Dimensions of Black Feminist Thought***

Collins (2009) argues that the dominant epistemology in the U.S. has been defined by the elite White men. In order for Black feminist epistemology to challenge those dominant ideologies, they must share their own lived experiences to represent new meanings, instead of searching and investigating new topics to talk about. Additionally, Collins (2009) states, “Partiality, and not universality, is the condition of being heard; individuals and groups forwarding knowledge claims without owning their position are deemed less credible than those who do” (p. 290). This statement illustrates Collins’ conceptualization of what she believes is true validated knowledge, not simply the knowledge that bolsters dominant ideas. Knowledge both from the past and new knowledge are both very important when it comes to combatting oppression and especially in black Feminist Thought. African American women thinkers press the idea of consciousness as a sphere of freedom and with consciousness comes knowledge.

Collins (2009) suggests that it is important to understand that Black women’s standpoints – the ideas and experiences that are shared by African American women that present a unique perspective of self, community, and society and philosophies that explain those events. In other words, there is both important and specialized knowledge created by African American women which is their standpoint, and the theory that is built around that knowledge. She highlights four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology that separate it from others: lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability.

The first dimension of Black feminist epistemology is that it expands what we deem “a criterion of meaning” beyond positivism’s constraints by acknowledging the cogency of lived experiences. According to Collins (2009), there are two types of knowing: knowledge and

wisdom. She writes, “This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to Black women’s survival... Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate” (Collins, 2009, p. 276). Knowledge is the type of information that positivism would recognize as valid: facts that can be verified by science, math, or logic. Wisdom, on the other hand, must be learned through experience. She explains, “Living life as Black women requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to U.S. Black women’s survival” (p. 275). Wisdom requires awareness and critical thinking skills to pick up on information beyond what can be scientifically, mathematically, or logically proven.

Furthermore, alternative epistemologies are found in the lived experiences of persons, beginning with “connected knowers.” Collins (1989) also calls the first tenet “concrete experience as a criterion of meaning. She states, “We must not remove ourselves from the experiences of our subjects and we must not objectify our subjects, because it is important to understand that not all people experience the same type or level of oppression” (p. 197). In other words, those who know gain knowledge from personal experience. For ordinary Black women, those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more authentic and trustworthy than those who have only read or thought about such experiences. Thus, concrete experience as a benchmark for trustworthiness frequently is invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims. For Black women, new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community (Collins, 1989, 2009). A primary epistemological

assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process.

Next, the second dimension of Black feminist epistemology is that it relies on dialogue as a tool for assessing knowledge claims. In this way, the use of dialogue is more beneficial than the use of debate. Collins (2009) suggests that through dialogue, social knowledge does not exist objectively, but rather through lived experiences. Often, in alternative epistemologies, the terms “I” and “we” are found, unlike in objective social science. The author often tells a narrative and is present in the text. Rather than disappearing, the author is central to and present in the text. In black feminist epistemology, the story is told and preserved in narrative form and not “torn apart in analysis” (Collins, 2009, p. 258). According to hooks (1989), “Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination” (p. 131). The use of dialogue has deep roots in an African American oral tradition and African American culture (Collins, 2009). Therefore, an emphasis on openness, dialogue, and connectedness are required for validating new knowledge. Rather than positivist knowledge which can be proven in solitude through science, math, or logic, Black feminist epistemological knowledge is often validated through processes centered on speaking and listening processes that require communication and connection with other people.

The third dimension of Black feminist epistemology is that “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process” (Collins, 2009, pp. 281-82). This theme of “talking with the heart” (Collins, 2009, p. 281) employs another dimension of an alternative epistemology used by African American women, the ethic of caring. This ethics of caring is comprised of three interrelated components. First is an emphasis on individual uniqueness. Collins (2009) explains, “Rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each individual

is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life” (p. 282). One of three interrelated components comprising the ethic of caring is the emphasis placed on individual uniqueness (Collins, 2009). Johnetta Ray, an inner-city resident, describes this Afrocentric emphasis on individual uniqueness: "No matter how hard we try, I don't think black people will ever develop much of a herd instinct. We are profound individualists with a passion for self-expression" (Collins, 1989, p. 766). A key part of the ethics of caring is respecting and valuing diversity and individuality.

The second component regards emotions as appropriate and necessary to dialogue. In the U.S. emotions are typically seen as an obstruction to rational thinking (Collins, 2009). However, research done on individuals with damage to certain areas of their orbitofrontal cortex has revealed that without emotions, our rationality essentially fails. Furthermore, Collins (2009) points out, “Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument” (p. 282). And good stories connect with our emotional lives. The third and final component is a focus on developing a capacity for empathy. Exercising empathy requires an ability to imagine someone else's perspective and to place one's self in that person's position.

These components of the ethic of caring: the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy-pervade African American culture. The emphasis placed on expressiveness and emotion in African American communities bear marked resemblance to feminist perspectives on the importance of personality in connected knowing (Collins, 2009). Separate knowers try to subtract the personality of an individual from his or her ideas because they see personality as biasing those ideas. In contrast, connected knowers see personality as adding to an individual's ideas and feel that the personality of each group member enriches a group's understanding. The significance of individual uniqueness,

personal expressiveness, and empathy in African American communities thus resembles the importance that some feminist analyses place on women's "inner voice."

The fourth and final dimension of Black feminist epistemology is an ethic of personal accountability. Collins (2009) explains, "Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims" (p. 284). This acknowledges links between an individual's knowledge claims and his or her character, values, and ethics. In other words, "all views expressed, and actions taken are thought to derive from a central set of core beliefs" (284). This dimension holds individuals accountable to their opinions and actions rather than their intentions. A characteristic of Black feminist epistemology, knowledge claims made by individuals who connect their morals and ethics with their ideas and actions carry more weight than knowledge claims made by those who do not.

Black feminist epistemology holds that personal accountability is necessary. Accountability is required due to the fact that knowledge is framed through lived experiences, and thus often based in individual beliefs, which are things that we assume to be true. If we assume something to be true then we must take personal responsibility for it, therefore personal accountability is intrinsic to black feminist epistemology. Because knowledge is built upon lived experience, the assessment of knowledge is simultaneous assessment of an individual's character, values, and ethics (Collins, 2009). This approach sees that all knowledge is based upon beliefs, things assumed to be true. And belief implies personal responsibility. Hence, information can be objective, and truth exists apart from any observer; and, two, all information finds its existence and "truth" within a preexisting knowledge system that must be believed in order to work (Collins, 2009). The first allowed for separation of personal responsibility from

knowledge—knowledge exists as an objective entity apart from the knower. The second places accountability directly on the knower.

### ***Black Feminist Thought and Early Childhood Educators***

Black Feminist Thought has been embraced and endorsed by social scientists as a theory that captures the unique experiences and standpoints of Black women. It gives voice to a self-defined collective Black women's standpoint about womanhood (Collins, 1989, 2009).

Collective wisdom is a collectively shared, Black women's oppositional knowledge, creating a more specialized knowledge. Networks of women who connect by sharing common experiences and construct a body of knowledge through lived experiences. Thus, the act of empowering Black early childhood educators toward creating bodies of knowledge, a voice within the profession, and channels for scholarly activity. Often early childhood educators who fail to frame their knowledge and voice in positivist traditions or theories of developmental psychology find themselves marginalized in their own field (Cannella, 2002). A reason for the lack of recognition or acceptance of critical theoretical perspectives in early childhood education is the century-long domination of psychological and child development perspectives in the field of early childhood. A second reason relates to the important separate institutional histories of early and elementary education in the United States within academia. Early childhood education is in a rich position to advance the field and offer important contributions to exploring context, behavior, motivation, and participation of Black women's agency in education.

Traditional knowledge and approaches to knowledge in the academy are not the only tool for measuring intellect and knowledge (hooks, 1994). Black women have achieved visibility by making self-initiated exposure of their ideas and experiences accessible to the masses (Collins, 1989, 2009) by way of fiction books, movies, and printed material. Furthermore, Black Feminist

Thought bridges pedagogy and theory for audiences receiving little or no exposure to such critical thought. It is reasonable to assume that this standpoint is essential for including experiences of a marginalized group, Black female early childhood educators in future research. Providing intellectual space for their voices to be heard in the community will aid Black women in advancing knowledge about their experiences, and to expose how their knowledge about experiences are marginalized within the academy. Black female early childhood educators have been relegated to the margins of society, yet as a racialized and gendered group, in a field dominated by Eurocentric views of education and child development (Canella, 2002), calls for the embodiment of a stream of consciousness and awareness of oneself as the proverbial other.

Since the ways of knowing and knowledge are inseparable, according to Collins (1989, 2009), implications on how we see ourselves, how we live our lives, and how we treat other people are present. Collins (2009) writes that there are three ways that these connections are especially important. The first way is that there is a difference between common challenges and diverse experiences. If we take the idea of “lived experience” to the extreme, we can exclude the collective standpoint in favor of an individual experience (Collins, 2009). There is also a difference between common challenges and diverse responses. Individual black women might respond differently but important issues, such as racism, misogyny, and poverty, can all be part of the individual’s self-identity through acknowledgement and integration. Furthermore, Collins (2009) argues that Black women occupy a unique standpoint on their own oppression composed of two interlocking components: (1) Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups; and (2) These experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality.



Although Black Feminist Thought is not a new concept there are few studies that have been conducted using Black Feminist Thought in early childhood education. Its pairing with narrative inquiry as a methodology is minimal in research endeavors. When deployed alternately, their powerful combination is what elevates their utility as a mechanism for personal growth, social and educational change; and to affirm and expand the work being done to examine lived experiences. Black Feminist Thought offers an ontological framework to increase our knowledge of Black women's lived realities using critical and alternative paradigm. It is my belief that Black Feminist Thought can provide a constructive lens to understanding the practices and experiences of Black early childhood educators: by encouraging "space" where they can be their full authentic selves; as bridge builders, perhaps the dominate group can hear and understand perspectives that they will be further equipped to serve in the profession; and through storytelling and collective wisdom, share practices and subsequent research that would be otherwise overlook or devalued.

Black women's self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects (Collins, 2009). The power to name one's own reality or self-define and safe spaces in which Black women can speak and name their own realities. Self-definition is synonymous with what hooks (1989) described as "talking back." Because Black women and their children are often forced to mask their struggles, or be kept silent, talking back—the act of speaking—is a form of resistance. It is important that Black women and their children exert their voice, and not one that has been scripted by White supremacy, but the voice that authentically belongs to them.

The proclivity of research to focus on White teachers – their experiences and practices makes Black Feminist Thought an appropriate framework to not only explore the practices and experiences as perceived and experienced by African American female educators and their view

concerning social justice, it also provides the space and tools so they can actively oppose oppression. By giving voice to their lived experiences, Black Feminist Thought urges Black women to create a self-defined standpoint that counters negative controlling images of Black womanhood (e.g., mammies, jezebels, and welfare mothers) advanced by mainstream society (Collins, 2009). That is, Black Feminist Thought creates the space for Black female teachers to refashion their conceptions of self and community—conceptions that will reject the deficit paradigm often framing their academic experiences (Collins, 2009). Although all African American women are not oppressed in the same way and are capable of being oppressive, the need for Black Feminist Thought arises because African American women as a group remain oppressed in the United States. As a framework that fuses theory and activism, BFT's theoretical identity lies in its commitment to social justice for Black women and other oppressed groups. Therefore, the aim of this research is to affirm and expand the work being done in examining lived experiences of Black females in early childhood education and employ a critical lens to understanding collective wisdom as social justice pedagogy.

Additionally, this study will challenge the more widely accepted ideology of who creates knowledge and what knowledge is acceptable. The work of Dill & Zambra (2009) and Dixson (2003) demonstrate that much can be gained by using the experiences of women of color to develop new theories in education and other scholarly works. Such approaches sharply contrast with those that fit the experiences of women and men of different classes and races into a universal model (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Therefore, in social justice education, maintaining experience as sound and valuable ways to construct knowledge. In the case of Black female early childhood educators, their experiences are collections of knowledge and truths which offset systems of power that are commonly recognized as truth.

With this understanding, Black female early childhood educators are distinctively situated to address issues that may arise in the classroom that no other group possesses. Their constructs as female, teacher, mother, and othermother, and Black (among others) converge into savvy activism. Collins (2009) explained the ways in which African American women see their work not just for economic purposes, but as a way to contribute to their children's survival and instill values that will encourage them to strive for more than what has been socially proscribed for their children. Overall, the theme mothers, daughters, and socialization of survival reflects Black women's efforts to provide a physical and psychic base that allowed their children to survive and thrive (Collins, 2009). Furthermore, community othermothers reflect the experiences of Black women nurturing children in extended family networks, in the community, as well as "mothering the minds" (Collins, 2009, p. 215), a practice in which Black women teachers develop bonds with students beyond the traditional mentoring. In this profession, Black females are not driven by economic stimuli, but because of motherly, nurturing instinct; thus, teacher is perceived as an unskilled, emotional, and subordinate object operating in profession dominated by Eurocentric male views (Cannella, 2002).

Foster (1997) documents the ways in which this inherited tradition of shared responsibility is apparent in the teaching philosophy and pedagogical practices of contemporary Black feminist educators. The role of these individuals extends beyond academics to include nurturing, kin-like relationships – wherein teachers attend to students' social, emotional, and psychological growth and development. Likewise, Beaufoeuf-Lafontant (2002) characterizes Black feminist educators' "embrace of the maternal" as one measure of their genuine commitment to the success of every student (p. 72). Commonly established home visits, recurrent collaborations with parents, and unreserved student activism and support, Black

women's othermothering is "not simply interpersonal, but profoundly political in intent and practice" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 77). This was apparent in a study conducted by Case (1997) in which the biographical portraits of two urban elementary school teachers revealed the entrenched nature of this "collective social conscience" in the everyday actions of teachers and their general educational philosophy with the determination for racial uplift (p. 36). The work of Black feminist othermothers with regard to the Black community is an example of their manifestation of precise and personal responsibility and a cultural-historical strategy reflective of their politicized ethic of care (Collins, 2009). Essentially, it is characteristic of Black feminist teachers to operate in the role of othermothers, as they supply mothering techniques within classrooms, possibly in the form of activism.

Following the footsteps of Black women activists who, historically used the activist potential of education to foster community development and institutional transformation, Black women teachers have taken on many roles that have placed them on the front lines of political battles for social justice and human rights (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Case, 1997; Collins, 2000; Dixson, 2003). Black women teachers represent a marginalized group whose voices have remained silent from educational discourse, until recent years. Black women teachers use their unique perspectives and experiences to shape their teaching which translates into social justice pedagogy and social activism.

### ***Social Justice and Activism Through Narrative Knowing***

I come from a culture of people who talk. By virtue, we, African Americans, rely on oral tradition to articulate our deepest thought and feelings, dreams, aspiration, and desires. My interest in this method connects with being raised hearing my family's stories and the intense connections with my community. By word-of-mouth, we tell and retell stories; we pass down old

sayings and proverbs; we sing songs; we speak from the heart, delivering addresses to familiar and unfamiliar audiences. With conversation, we navigate over the paths of our world with spoken word; and we often times intentionally take the scenic routes using colorful language within these conversations. African American history itself has hinged on storytelling. It encompasses an abundance of speakers with inspiring stories, and grandiose ways of telling the stories (Carter-Black, 2007). Words become vehicles for feeling and inspire a sense of shared experience in listeners and a means of producing powerful ideas with the intent of putting the lessons into practice.

Narrative inquiry is a ubiquitous practice in that, human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). People tell stories about their lived experiences. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. Storytelling provides an outlet for people to think about, and understand, their personal or other individuals', thinking, actions and reactions (Polkinghorne, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This is the only kind of study to give attention and meaning because narrative inquiry attends to the cultural tradition of Black Americans of storytelling.

In the African American culture specifically, the oral tradition has served as a primary vehicle for cultural expression and survival (Hamlet, 2011). African Americans have maintained a lively and widespread verbal art tradition. This has been possible because Blacks, for their survival and sanity, formed a separate culture within a dominant culture, one which remains predominantly oral (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black, 2007; Collins, 2009; Hamlet, 2011). African American oral tradition has been a way of resisting racial oppression by articulating experiences of resistance and struggle and articulating oppositional identities in highly creative

and vibrant ways (Hamlet, 2011). The hiddenness and curbing of Black women's voices in the areas of research, such as education, leads to a limited understanding of the Black woman's varied experiences and histories within the education sphere. Narrative research opens channels to analyze and understand stories lived and told. In an attempt to construct equitable educational environments understanding the unique lenses and experiences of Black women who find themselves within early childhood environments play a role.

Thus, because of the uniqueness of the participants of this study – Black females, and their instinctiveness to tell and retell stories, to reveal the values and beliefs of our culture, the things that hold to be true, and the lesson about life and how to live it, oral tradition is an organic vehicle for mining and unearthing Black Female teachers' works of social justice and activism in the classroom; the impact of identity on pedagogical practice in the classroom – specifically, their perceptions of their identity as it relates to social justice in the classroom.

### **Oral Tradition and Narrative Inquiry**

Specific to narrative inquiry, the use of storytelling and oral tradition as a research method allows the narrators to speak in their own words. These tiny stories as referred to by Denzin (2005) reveal inner feelings, with detail and meaning. The oral tradition as cultural expressions have been a way of resisting racial oppression by articulating experiences of resistance and struggle and articulating oppositional identities. Because of this dynamic, an understanding of the African American oral tradition is highly important to preserving legacy, heritage, and sharing ideologies with a particular interest in raising social awareness (Collins, 2009).

The oral tradition is particularly appropriate for narrative inquiry for several reasons. Oral narratives not only provide material about individual lives but also offer the opportunity to

explore how individual lives are shaped by society. Thus, narrative research using oral traditions offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives of individuals to society and societal issues. Oral traditions of African Americans and their families are personal narratives which are forms of analysis that can bring the experiences of African Americans, including teachers, into view in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences. Oral narratives not only provide material about individual lives but also offer the opportunity to explore how individual lives are shaped by society (Carter-Black, 2007). Thus, narrative research using oral traditions offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives of individuals to society and societal issues.

In the African American tradition oral communication is the dominate form of communication (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black 2007; Fabius, 2016; Turner, 1990). The nature of the oral tradition in the African American community is historical. The oral tradition refers to stories (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black, 2007; Fabius, 2016; Turner, 1990), old sayings (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black, 2007), proverbs (Banks-Wallace, 2002) and other cultural products that have not been written down or recorded (Carter-Black, 2007). The forms of oral tradition cultures are kept alive by being passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next. These diverse forms reveal the values and beliefs of African Americans, the things they hold true, and lessons about life and how to live and survive (Carter-Banks, 2007).

As Carter-Black (2007) suggests, “oral tradition, performance narrative, oral literature and/or folklore, storytelling is a complex, dynamic, integral component of the process by which children are socialized into their cultural world” (p. 33). Oral tradition occupies a central and indispensable position in African American history and culture. As a vessel for remembrance and

commemoration, the oral tradition carried African narratives to a new continent and sustained them through bondage; as a political catalyst, speech defined the struggle for freedom and moved ordinary people to extraordinary acts of courage; and as an art form, the word has conveyed itself forcefully and dramatically by drawing on the rich African American oral tradition heritage (Allen, 1995).

First-persona accounts have long been employed by individuals to encode and record the experiences of African Americans, and such accounts have served as a valuable source of information for both scholars seeking to understand the African American community and for the African American community itself (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Traced back to the African-American slaves, oral tradition was brought to America in slave ships during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they endured what poet Robert Hayden has described in the Middle Passage as a ‘Voyage through death to life upon these shores’” (Turner, 1990, p.8). Dependence upon the oral tradition is based on dominate control of the white slave owner. Most slaves could neither read nor write; and many slave owners, acting according to law and custom, prevented slaves from learning to read or write (Turner, 1990). Therefore, slaves became conditioned to rely on oral tradition which continues to flourish today in the African American community. The oral tradition is, in fact one of the cultural vestiges African transported to American (Carter-Black, 2007).

Stories and oral tradition are not only key to the African American community, but it is the foundation of qualitative research (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Yet, the development of qualitative methods entrenched in oral traditions remain largely uncharted by researchers. The contextual (Banks-Wallace, 2002) and historical influences (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black, 2007; Turner, 1990) on storytelling are distinctive characteristics of the African American oral



tradition that are frequently mistreated and/or disregarded in qualitative research (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black, 2007). Oral histories and oral stories have been overlooked in academia for several reasons. Turner (1990) suggests several reasons that have caused scholars to discredit or overlook oral histories and accounts. He postulates that first-hand accounts are invalidated because the stories told are motivated subjectively to stray from truth which may cause misinterpretation or misleading evidence. A second reason that oral tradition of African American has assumed insignificant importance in research is the belief that individual memories have limited value (Carter-Black, 2007; Turner 1990).

Historically, research on the African American family has been based on a deficit or cultural deficit model (Carter-Black, 2007). The cultural deficit model is a method of appraising, judging, or evaluating a group based on the collective group's lack and deprivation is a result of the group's culture (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). W.E.B. Du Bois (1898) argued that factual, accurate and just understanding of African Americans is not possible without considering the influence of significant historical, economic, political, and sociocultural forces. Yet, a review of the research literature has revealed that, in the past, social scientists repeatedly appraised and attempted to comprehend African American families by analyzing and interpreting them through simplistic and rudimentary comparative models (Carter-Black, 2007). Prior to postmodernism, grand narratives or metanarratives were the authoritative framework (Prasad, 2005) provided by the dominate culture or status quo which excluded the *others* (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Jean-Francois Lyotard's coined the term to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events experiences, and social and cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or values (Prasad, 2005 Swadener, 1995). Carolyn Finney (2015) cautioned that,

we have to go below the intellectual paper record to get the stories; the stories have something to tell us about how we are and to help us move forward and engage a more diverse audience.

The significance of African American oral tradition is announced by the expanse of postmodern thought. The stories, accounts and descriptions used to communicate life events that sometimes “go against the grain” or fail to fit within the parameters of the status quo, have a place within postmodern counter narratives. Although grand narratives, institutions of slavery and racism have attempted to silence generations of African Americans, oral traditions have given opportunity to maintain identity, survival and resisting oppression and exploitation, as well as a tool for freedom. They showcase personal stories and reflections and offer African Americans a platform from which to define experiences and viewpoints apart from marginalizing systems.

The process of conducting narrative research in the oral tradition and the political and ethical dilemmas that arise when interpreting life stories are the subject of intense debate. One of the central issues in this debate is whether outsider or insiders (individuals from the same culture) are better suited to conducting research in communities of color. While belonging to the same cultural community as one's narrators can facilitate the recovery of authentic accounts, even interviewers and narrators who share social and cultural characteristics are nonetheless diversified.

The art of research, especially in the field of education requires one to realize the connection among research and practice. Not only does research require a specialized skill set and knowledge to operate within the boundaries of research and the research community but also to appreciate how research processes are conjoined with problems of practice, and how research practice provides a vehicle by which one's professional work is appreciated and viewed as

valuable to emerging knowledge. Theories and concepts of cultures, societies, traditions, and systems do not simply arise, but they develop from the researcher's stance or position he/she transfers to the study. In other words, an unbiased approach and objectivity are difficult to preclude. It takes careful consideration and ethical practices to manage biases, determine research position (inside/outside/space in between) while remaining true to self and the research. Although the field researcher is immersed in the subject matter (living with it or within it), there must be some detachment from it. Insider-outsider research suggests striking a balance to create space in between (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, insider research enables a situated consideration of the population within a dynamic, natural, social environment giving the researcher close-at-hand scrutiny of the participants. Oral tradition/approaches in narrative methodologies allows research to become privy to narrator's emotions, feelings, behavior, and openness. As important, an outsider position gives the researcher the ability to engage with the population from a distance with respect to not having little to know experience with the population (going in cold).

Consequently, social scientists using the comparative methods of research erroneously concluded that many of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior characteristic of minority racial/ethnic groups were best deviant and most often pathological (Carter-Black 2007). And as Allen (1995) cites of these findings, "portraying the positive as negative, the patterned as chaotic, and the normative as deviant" (p. 579). By instituting White, middle-class family form as the gold standard; and to continue the conservative rhetoric that appeal to the *haves* who seek to keep the good (protection) and to avoid the bad (prevention) (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995) will almost always result in a determination of deficiency (Carter-Black 2007), victimization or at-

risk (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). In retrospect, none of those concepts were used to characterize my childhood and they altogether conflict with what was instilled in my environment.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry, a relatively new qualitative methodology, is the study of experience understood narratively (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). It is a way of thinking about, and studying experience, where narrative inquirers think narratively about experience throughout inquiry. Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflective process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field text (data) to interim and final research texts. Commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place create a conceptual framework within which different kinds of field texts and different analyses can be used. Narrative inquiry highlights ethical matters as well as shapes new theoretical understandings of people's experiences.

Currently, most academic work is non-narrative, and in many disciplines the most prominent theories, methods, and practitioners continue to do work that is based quantitative data and positivist assumptions about reason, result, and evidence (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Yet, modern entry of narrative into the domain of research reflected the shifting of forces in the world of scientific inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provided the first overview of narrative research for the field of education. In their informative, classic article, *Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry*, they cited many social science applications of narrative, elaborated on the process of collecting narrative field notes, and discussed the writing and structure of a narrative study.

Storytelling as an act of narrative inquiry positions narrative research largely within the postmodernist paradigm. Postmodernism came into use during the late 20th century and questions the modernist philosophical assumptions of rationality and universal truth, and the

application of scientific empirical methods to problem solving. Postmodernism succeeded the modernist philosophy that assumes rationality and universal truth, and application scientific empirical methods to problem solving (Gergen, 1985; Prasad, 2005). Critical reception of Jean-Francois Lyotard's (1994) rejection of "grand narratives" was characteristic for the gradual rehabilitation of the alternative, small, forgotten, and untold stories, often first in feminist studies. If quantitative research emphasized dominant trends, stories were to theorize the particular. The post-modern suspicion of authoritative professional, scientific, and institutional truths legitimated the search for new voices. Second, the new metaphoric discourse on life as narrative suggested that narratives should have unique role in the study of human lives, action, and psychology (Polkinghorne, 1998). The new theoretical perspective was not easily reconciled with the dominant, formalist, structuralist, formal and scientifically orientated methods of research.

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience based on the principles of continuity of past, present, and future experiences and interactions within situations provided the philosophical roots for narrative research (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They have substantially developed narrative inquiry as a methodology focused on understanding experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) ground narrative inquiry in Dewey's ideology that the ultimate aim of research is the study of human experience; and thus establish a strong case for narrative as epistemological stance and research methodology, capable of attaining the substance of human lives. Furthermore, critical to experience are the personal and social dimensions of people. Narrative inquiry was chosen because of its critical theoretical origins, its consistency with poststructuralist aims, and an intersection with the theoretical lens (Black Feminist Thought).

### ***The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure***

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) development of narrative inquiry as a research methodology was deeply shaped by philosopher John Dewey. As a philosopher of experience and an educational theorist, Dewey, based his principles on interaction and continuity, theorizing that the terms *personal*, *social*, *temporal*, and *situation* were important in describing the characteristics of an experience. For Dewey, to study life and education is to study experience; that is, education, life, and experience are one and the same.

Dewey (1938) used the three-dimensional space narrative structure approach (Interaction, Continuity, and Situation) to find meaning and this approach is central to his philosophy of experience in a person and social context. This approach suggests that to understand people, we need to examine not only their personal experiences, but also their interactions with other people. Dewey's three-dimensional approach has had a profound influence in the study and practice of narrative inquiry in many disciplines including education. The fluidity of storytelling, moving from the past to the present or into the future, is at the heart of Dewey's theory of experience in the field of education.

Based on Dewey's theory, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advanced three aspects of this narrative approach: personal and social (Interaction); past, present, and future (Continuity); and place (Situation), as shown in Table 1. The narrative space shaped in the meeting of storied lives is the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space which draws attention to multiple directions simultaneously: temporality to past, present, and future; sociality to the dialectic between inner and outer – the personal and social; and place to the concrete physicality of the place or places in which experiences are lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Using this framework, the researcher analyzes the story for both the personal experience of the storyteller and his/her

interactions with other people (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These other people may have different intentions, purposes, and point of view which may inform the analysis. As participants and researchers work conjointly within this three-dimensional space, they attend to their lived and told stories of experiences and, thus, experience channels for composing lives with greater and promise and possibility. The three-dimensional space narrative structure consists of *interaction, continuity, and situation*.

**Table 1. The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Cladinin & Connelly, 2000)**

| Interaction  |  | Continuity  |  |   | Situation/Place  |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| Personal   | Social   | Past  | Present  | Future  |  |
| Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions | Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and point of view | Look backward to remembered experiences, and stories from earlier times | Look at current experience, feeling, and stories relating to actions of an event | Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines | Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with environmental and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view |

First, within the three-dimensional space narrative structure approach, *interaction* involves both the personal and social aspects of the experience. Narrative inquirers attend to both personal conditions and, simultaneously, to social conditions. By personal conditions, “we mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) of the inquirer and participants. Social conditions refer to the milieu, the conditions under which people’s experiences and event are unfolding. These social conditions are understood, in part, in terms of cultural, social, institutional, and linguistic narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, a second scope of *interaction* directs attention to the inquiry

relationship between the researchers' and participants' lives. Narrative inquirers cannot remove themselves from the inquiry relationship.

When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education. Thus, stories reported in narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant. The intent is that, as a researcher, and as a participant, our professional, educational, and personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions to form understanding. In poststructuralist feminist work, storytelling is used deliberately to disrupt and resist discourses that marginalize and oppress. Instead of seeking to uncover and understand the authentic self, subjects are encouraged to embrace contradictory and multiple subject positions and employ critical thinking to challenge world views (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). As a critical pedagogical tool, narrative can be employed to bring a critical new lens to teaching practices.

*Continuity* or temporality is the second component of the Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure and is central to narrative research. When analyzing a story, the researcher considers the past and present actions of the storyteller and these events are likely to occur in the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Connelly and Cladinin (2006) describe this process as, "Events under study are in temporal transition" (p. 479). Directing attention temporally points inquirers toward the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events under study. The importance of temporality in narrative inquiry comes from philosophical views of experience where the formal quality of experience through time is seen as inherently narratives (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

The third component of Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure is *situation or place*. Situation/place is as "the specific concrete, physical and



topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The key to this commonplace is recognizing that “all events take some place” (p. 481). Indeed, for narrative inquirers our identities are intimately linked with our experiences in a particular place or in places and with the stories we tell of these experiences. Narrative inquiry is a more favorable method of research when individuals are willing to tell their stories and when stories are being reported. By conducting narrative research, researchers establish a close bond with the participants. This helps reduce a commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that research is distinct from practice and has little direct application. Additionally, for participants in a study, sharing their stories may make them feel that their stories are important and that they are heard. Telling stories is a natural part of life, and individuals all have stories about their experiences to tell others. In this way, narrative research captures an everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to individuals. Throughout history of the Black culture narrative has been used to retell historical events and pass on family stories, traditions, and values (Collins, 1989, 2009). It has also become a valid method of inquiry, providing an alternative to more positivist research methodologies where the researcher as expert/outsider observes and analyzes the “other” from a distance. Sharing stories builds greater awareness of the self and others and provides perspectives leading to change.

To paraphrase Jean Paul Sartre (1964), “People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and their stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories. And they try to live their lives as if they were recounting them.” My research will offer a view of storytelling of experience as a form of narrative inquiry based upon poststructuralist and Black Feminist Thought. Viewed from this position, stories of lived experiences (data) was co-constructed and negotiated between the people involved as a means of

capturing complex, multi-layered nuanced understandings of Black female early childhood teachers with regard to their experiences of social justice issues and classroom practices. This research addressed issues of relationship, methods, collaboration, and ways of knowing. The significance of narrative storytelling in the lives of the Black community will be an important contribution to research that focuses on the lives of Black teachers. Whereas grand narratives serve to silence certain voices – narrative inquiry invites them. How we hear the individual and collective voices of Black teachers in the discussions of social justice is just as important as why we need to hear them. Three-dimensional narrative space allows for fluidity as it considers directionality (backwards and forward, inward, and outward), giving richness and thick descriptions to inquiry. In contrast to grand narratives which places limitations on who has voice and how the voices are heard, interpreted, valued; therefore, limiting inclusion of people, places and events, narrative inquiry spatializes voice, communication, and knowledge. According to Butler and Scott (1992):

Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct, unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent objects. In this conceptualization of it, the visible is privileged; writing is then put at its service. Seeing is the origin or knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission – the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience. (p. 22)

## **Summary**

My research focuses on Black female early childhood educators' lived experiences as ways in which interpret and understand social justice and how it filters into early childhood classrooms. The literature review centers the practices and voices of the participants within the framework of Black female early childhood teachers' ideals of their identity and acceptance

within the field of early childhood education. Furthermore, the literature review, underscored roles they play as social justice educators, other mothers, agents of collective wisdom, and activist with answering the call in countering and resisting social injustice. In this chapter, I reviewed literature that informs my research. “Black Perspectives in Education”, embraced four major areas: one included literature that provided an overview of social justice where social justice in education, social justice in early childhood classrooms, and challenges and implications of social justice were highlighted. The second area of the literature review explored Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a framework, critical social theory, and philosophical concept. This section included the origins of Black Feminist Thought, major dimensions of Black Feminist Thought, and Black Feminist Thought and early childhood education. Next, I reviewed literature persistent to oral tradition in the African American culture and narrative inquiry. Finally, narrative inquiry/analysis as a qualitative methodology was explored. I reviewed the three-dimensional space narrative structure – temporality, sociality, and place – which legitimated the contestability of knowledge and knowledge production as it will weave the teachers’ personal experiences of social justice with the way they perceive teaching and as an intersection of their personal experiences and teaching practices.

This study stands to contribute to the literature by addressing the gap I identified in the literature from the Black feminist perspective and describe how throughout the United States’ workforce, women of color experience the feeling of belonging without genuinely belonging; and additionally, adding voices of Black women teachers and recognizing them as activists. It emphasized Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and the experiences and voices of the participants within the context of Black female’s resistance to dominant traditions of the creation,

transmission and knowledge while focusing on Black Feminist Thought tenets of social justice, activism, collective wisdom and mothering with regard to self-identity and empowerment.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this qualitative study, as stated in Chapter One, was to examine ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept that gave lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interacted in within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impacted pedagogy and filtered into the classroom. The tensions of race, gender and class exists placing Black women in unique positions for knowledge creation and dissemination as well as being identified as significant contributors to research. Although Black women are visible participants in conventional places in society, we are traditionally compelled into positions of marginalization – with emphasis on devaluing our work and voice suppression.

Specific to this study is the invisibility or silencing of Black women’s voices in early childhood education relating to the pervasive absence of their voices and leading to a limited understanding of the Black women’s varied experiences and histories within the education sphere. This study stands to contribute to the literature by addressing this gap by adding more voices of contemporary Black female early childhood teachers’ collective wisdom, activism, mothering in relation to Black Feminist Thought.

To achieve the above-stated purposes, the following research questions were developed.

1. How does Black Feminist Thought contribute to an understanding of collective wisdom in early childhood classrooms?
  - a. How is collective wisdom a form of social justice?

These questions were developed to examine the extent to which Black female early childhood teachers identified themselves as creators and curators of wisdom in the form of

mothering, caregivers, professionals, and experts. Furthermore, this inquiry revealed Black female early childhood teachers' acquisition and contributing to knowledge; thus, positioning them at the forefront of Black Feminist Thought which pivots towards postmodern ideology and counter narratives that speak back to grand narratives.

2. In what ways does collective wisdom inform socially just pedagogical practice among Black female early childhood teachers?
  - a. How do experiences of social (in)justice contribute to teacher pedagogical practices?

These questions were developed to examine how the participants experienced social justice in their personal lives giving way to them identifying social (in)justice, how it impacted and influenced their teaching, and if it filtered into their early childhood classrooms. This question also functioned as a conduit for their roles as leaders within the schools' communities and as activists, while positing teaching as a political act and education as non-neutral – requiring action and activism.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative, narrative inquiry/analysis research design was selected for this study. Narrative analysis seeks to learn from individual's lived stories and thus make meaning from his/her experiences that can be shared and more importantly understood (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Moon, 2016). My narrative approach emphasized the contestability of knowledge and knowledge production as it wove the teachers' personal experiences of social justice with the way they perceive teaching and as an intersection of their personal experiences and teaching practices. By utilizing the narrative inquiry approach to collecting the experiences of Black female teachers, my research project explored and documented the constraints and supports in

their personal lives and examined how their personal experiences have impacted their teaching career, specifically through the lens of social justice in the preschool classroom.

### **Study Population**

The participants in this study were Black female early childhood teachers. Early childhood teachers for this project consisted of teacher who instruct children within the age range of two years to five years old. For the past nine years, I have served as a university supervisor where approximately 90-100 early childhood education, non-licensure childcare option (NCOP) students have conducted their practicum experience in a preschool setting, many of which are Head Start facilities in coastal Virginia. The nature of this position permitted me to visit student teachers at assigned teaching facilities and work with cooperating teachers in guiding and evaluating the progress of prospective teachers. Essential to this position is monitoring classroom experiences of the student teacher in an effort to encourage educators.

Over the course of years working in this capacity, an estimated 98% of the students were Black and 100 percent female. A recurring theme and concern within the population of Black female early childhood educators centered around the necessity in addressing social issues that filter into the classroom, many of which are located in mainly high-poverty, urban locations, and the relevance of their voice within the profession to speak about their experiences with social justice issues (i.e., the Black Lives Matter movement, racial profiling, systematic racism, authority of black life and topics of critical need that few want to honestly talk about let alone teach. Therefore, the population of participants in this study consisted of Black female teachers from two coastal Virginia Head Start early childhood educational settings. Teachers were chosen based on locations in coastal Virginia in addition to the relationship and history of these facilities, former pre-service students (students who have graduated from the early childhood

program), and the Department of Early Childhood/Elementary and Special Education at Norfolk State University. This affiliation generated access to this population of participants. The age of the participants ranged from 27 to 58.

### ***Selection of Study Population and Head Start***

The participants in this study were selected purposefully, the goal being to obtain thick descriptions of their lived experiences as Black female early childhood teachers. The teachers and sites selected were based on previous experiences with the teachers and placements. Over the years in the role as a University Supervisor, I monitored and supervised student teachers generally assigned to urban Head Start sites. Many of the sites are in low-income neighborhoods with a high concentration of African Americans. These settings provided the opportunity to collaborate with the population compulsory to the study.

Head Start, established in 1965 is a federally funded education program that supports school readiness for children birth to age 5 in low-income families by providing services – (educational, nutritional, health, social, and emotional) to foster holistic development. According to the U.S. Office of Human Services, *Head Start Program Facts: Fiscal Year 2019* report, in 2018, Head Start was funded to assist approximately 1 million children and pregnant women in centers, family homes, and in family child care homes in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the U.S. Head Start served a diverse population of children, families, and pregnant women. The report specified that 37 percent identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino, and 30% were Black/African American. Additionally, about 127,000 staff members provided children developmental services to children, including early childhood teachers, assistant teachers, home visitors, and family child care providers; and 72% of all Head Start center-based preschool



teachers had a baccalaureate degree or higher in early childhood education, or related field with experience.

In fiscal year 2019 Virginia was awarded \$141,690,923 funded enrollment was 14,029 (U.S. Office of Human Services. Head Start and Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center: Fact Sheet, 2018). Currently, programs in Virginia are divided into four regions that offer Head Start and Early Head start services. The locality of the Head Start centers in this study are located in the southeastern region, specifically coastal Virginia. The cluster of centers in this study are supervised by the educational manager who supports and helps teaching staff to strengthen and improve effective teaching practices; his/her responsibilities also include allocating and distributing funds across his/her centers, serves as the curriculum specialist, and oversees the knowledge, training, experience, and competencies of all staff, consultants, and contractors.

The teachers selected in this study are former student teachers with which I have established an on-going professional relationship. I initially contacted six teachers and discussed my research study. All except one agreed to participate. With their consent, I contacted their education manager for his permission to allow the teachers to participate as well as to gain access to the facilities he oversaw and to video record. The education manager later granted written permission to do so.

### ***Study Population's Ethnicity***

Several populations of people are excluded from this study. Black males, Caucasian males and Caucasian females and other ethnicities outside of Black females were excluded. Through examining Black female educators' stories and experiences, their knowledge, skills, and perceptions were subsequently unaccepted and/or excluded from academia as valuable

information – to create theories, practices, praxis, regulations, and curriculum. Although other ethnicities contend with social justice issues within education, yet my familiarity and relationship with many Black female educators who have openly expressed their encounters with social injustice, specifically their identity as a professional in the early childhood education and as a Black female situated in a profession that recognizes them as caregivers or babysitters without acknowledgement of their participation in social activism as activist and their unique experiences as Black female early childhood teachers. Their primary concerns intersect with race, gender, and class.

### **Data Collection**

This qualitative study was designed to enable the documentation and interpretation of naturalistic phenomena from the perspective of those being studied for the advancement of educational knowledge and practice (Merriam, 2002). I relied on narrative study through audio and video recordings and interviews with participants that allowed me to also have an emic view of the participants' experiences and stories and environments (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Cladinin and Connelly 2000).

### ***Data Collection Tools***

Storytelling regarding social justice can happen in a variety of ways. In this study, I incorporated interviews and conversations with the participants focusing on collaboration. Collaboration in narrative research means that the inquirer actively involves the participant in the inquiry as it unfolds (Clandinin & Hubert, 2010; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This process included explaining the purpose of the project through written and oral communications such as letter of intent, project description, and an outline of project events. The participants and inquirer collaborate by negotiating changes from gathering data to writing the story and arranging ways

to intermingle with participant is the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way collaboration lessens the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The interviewing instrument allowed for reflection on previous discussions, and aid as a springboard for additional conversations. Questions were constructed to solicit responses from participants which focus on their experiences with social justice, their roles as teachers, and their identity within the field of education. Because Black Feminist Thought and narrative research speak to experience and knowledge it is important that their voice, emotions, recollection of people, and events, relationships, significant life influences, values and beliefs, ideologies, and issues and ideas are foregrounded within the data.

Narrative interviews are characterized as tools, in-depth with specific features which emerge from life stories of the participant and inquirer in context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The type of interviews conducted aimed to encourage and stimulate the participants to inform the inquirer about important, events of their lives and the social context (Clandinin, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Based on the idea of reconstructing social events from the standpoint participants the inquirer documents and (re)tells the events.

Interviews and conversations were generated through questions, personal stories, photos, and images. In this way, using everyday communication of recalling, telling, listening, and re(telling) stories is the functional method that reframes the time lived, the things of life, and concomitantly to it, brings out the historical past of people from his/her own words (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I audio recorded the interviews and later transcribed them. To compose the narratives, these stories were translated from oral tradition into written tradition as I listened for concepts from their shared stories and examined common structural

features and interpretations by focusing on elements and ideas that emerge. Common structural features include: BFT, social justice, activism, and collective wisdom.

### *Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI)*

First, in the photo elicitation/group interviews, participants were shown a series of researcher-selected photos consisting of civil rights events, females engaged in activism and social justice symbolic representations to generate oral discussion relating to identity, life experiences, and activism. The group interview consisted of 7 pre-selected questions (see Appendix B). Photo elicitation in an interview generates verbal discussion to create data and knowledge (Epstein, et al., 2006; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002); different layers of meaning can be discovered as this method evokes deep emotions, memories and ideas (Epstein, et al., 2006; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002); and they contribute to trustworthiness of and rigor of the findings (Epstein, et al., 2006; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002). The PEI was an opportunity for me to employ reflexivity and insider research – as a black female educator with congruent knowledge and experience with the participants. I conducted the PEI as an open-ended interview, to allow for processing of feelings of both the participants and interviewer (Campbell, et al., 2010).

I acquired personal experience stories which incited past, present, and future events of the Black female early childhood teachers. During the focus group interview, I introduced photo elicitation which included four photos and one image – Sojourner Truth (see Appendix A, figure 1), segregated Black school in the 1930s (see Appendix A, figure 2), Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King with women marching (see Appendix A, figure 3), Colin Kaepernick (Appendix A, figure 4), and the question mark (see Appendix A, figure 5) – to generate discussion. The photos

depicted a progressive narrative of social justice and the position between activism and negotiation.

Photo elicitation was based on the idea of inserting photographs into the research interview. The implication of inserting photographs into the interviews was to add an additional dimension of openness to the conversations. According to Harper (2002):

The difference between interviews using images and text and interviews using words alone lies in the ways respond to these two forms of symbolic representation. This has a physical basis: the part of the brain that process visual information is evolutionarily older than the parts that verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words. These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview (PEI) seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information (p.13).

Furthermore, the inclusion of PEI to elicit Back Female teachers' viewpoints was a natural bridge between the purpose of the research and reaching the participants by generating verbal discussion (Epstein, et al.; 2006; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002; Kable & Hazelton, 2017). Personal experience allowed us to have conversation, both personal and social for the sake of teachers' stories lending personal accounts of their own personal experiences where I reported their stories to capture an inner perspective of the teachers' lives. As Harper (2002) suggests photo elicitation interviews can create a richer and in-depth talk. She suggests that much of the work and outcome of photo elicitation interviewing is a collaborative effort more than an individual effort by the researcher and therefore involves mutual theorizing positing

which occurs in the interview. In summary, by incorporating photo elicitation, I acted as a facilitator during the interview process and extract what is needed from the participants and assisted them to scaffold and express their responses (Jenkins et al., 2008). Therefore, PEI is a trustworthy methods of data collection and a reliable form of data analysis (Glaw et al., 2017).

### ***Classroom Video Recording: Observations***

Within six days I recorded each teacher in various instructional settings (classroom, playground, hallways) as they engaged in different instructional activities (circle-time, whole- and small-group instruction, organized games, read-aloud, centers, free play). On average, I spent 133 minutes or 2.23 hours capturing footage from each teacher. Prior to the classroom video observation, the participants consented by way of the Informed Consent Document for Use of Photo/Video Material was used, which stated the participants' willingness to video record classroom observations (see Appendix D). Additionally, consent to record classroom observations was obtained from the program administrator (see Appendix E).

Observations are a primary source of qualitative data (Hays & Singh, 2012). They can stand alone as their own method; however, in this research project classroom observations supplemented PEI and individual interviews. I observed the classrooms of selected teachers from the individual interviews. The classroom is the most desired environment for the research project for several reasons. First, according to Hays & Singh (2012), for a naturalistic observation to take place, the observation should involve invariants, or naturally occurring behaviors. Although teaching and learning takes place in diverse settings, the classroom is a normative environment providing an authentic and comfortable surrounding for both teacher and student. Using the classroom for exploratory purposes is the next reason for incorporating classroom observations (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The classroom setting yielded data which spoke to or against the stories told during the PEI of activism, identity, and pedagogy intersecting with social justice themes. Observations are beneficial in the exploration of unexplored or underexplored phenomena are studied (Hays & Singh, 2012). Within the classrooms, I observed teachers and students in their natural environment to collect data to capture and understand the context of teachers' perceptions and behaviors that align with the stories told in the PEI and individual interviews. Furthermore, I captured moments in the classroom where teachers may not have been aware of particular dynamics of the research project, or even more, that certain biases about the setting due to their idiosyncratic and active involvement.

### ***Individual Classroom Interviews***

Next, follow-up individual interviews took place. The individual interview involved the semi-structured interview protocol where the interview was based on a dialogically-based or interactive interview (Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hays & Singh, 2012; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994); an interview where questions were asked to evoke discussion. Interactive interviewing allowed for exchanges of narratives where the participant and I engaged in conversation with the expectancy of complex narratives that examined experiences and the interviewee's reflection and interpretation of those experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). This bi-directional encounter reflected the social and historical contexts of African American oral tradition whereby oral communication, telling, and (re)telling stories is the central an organic method for collecting data. Individually, each teacher and I viewed their videoed class recordings which added an additional layer of trustworthiness and verisimilitude to the data collection.

According to Esterberg (2002) and Patton (2002), semi-structured does not ensure consistency of data collection experience across participants, but it makes up for this

disadvantage by including more participant voice, as appropriate, to provide a richer picture of the research. The PEI and individual interviews allowed the participants to (re)tell stories and share supplementary story details that were not explicit during the PEI. Furthermore, the individual interviews provided space for me and the individual participant to engage in intimate discussion, captured the richness and new insights of their stories and the stories of other participants, and furthered validated the trustworthiness of this qualitative research. The individual interviews consisted of 4 pre-selected questions providing structure and guidance during the interview (see Appendix C). The individual questions consisted of background/demographic questions; behavior/experience questions; opinion/value questions; probing questions; and feeling questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Chase, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Within the observational period, during the PEI, individual interviews, and classroom observations, I recorded field notes. Field notes created an accurate and thorough written record of what was observed in the field. According to Hays and Singh (2012), data collections, especially observation, are assumed to be a representation of purposeful behavior and actual expressions of feelings and field notes are assumed to be salient records of that information. Field notes, as part of the reflexivity process, also identified my reactions to the participants as a way of bracketing assumptions and subjectivity. Bogdan & Biklen (2003), suggest that reflective field notes should be infused throughout descriptive field notes to capture assumptions, impressions, attitudes, and ideas.

My reflective field notes included references to my own personal experiences as a Black female teacher, how this spoke to and against worldview and/or perspective on my identity and activism in and out of the classroom, my relationship with the participants, thoughts about



teaching and learning social justice in the classroom setting. Furthermore, my reflective notes may potentially lead to new, unforeseen information and how this new information supplements my knowledge of this subject; what patterns and themes emerge, and future points for clarification that relate to additional data collection sources, and revised research questions (Hays & Singh, 2012). This concluded the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis**

For this qualitative research project, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), as shown in Table 2, was implemented as the approach to data analysis. This method of data analysis was selected as it is conducive to questions related to people's experience or people's views and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Respectively, Reflexive Thematic Analysis suits research questions significant to this research project regarding Black female early childhood educators' experiences such as 'How does experiences of social justice contribute to teacher pedagogical practices?' or 'In what ways does collective wisdom inform socially just pedagogical practice among Black female early childhood teachers?' It also converges with questions related to knowledge, understanding, and interpretation, such as 'How does Black Feminist Thought contribute to an understanding of collective wisdom in early childhood classrooms?' It also engages with questions relating to the construction of meaning, such as 'How is social justice a form of collective wisdom?' According to Clarke and Braun (2019), the Reflexive Thematic Analysis involves a six-phase for conducting analysis in order to facilitate a rigorous process for which data are systematically interrogated and engaged. The phases for this study are listed below.

**Table 2** Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019)

| Phase                         | Description of the process  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Familiarizing with data    | Transcribing, reading, and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.  |
| 2. Generating initial codes   | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each code.            |
| 3. Searching for themes       | Gathering data and collecting codes into potential themes.  |
| 4. Reviewing themes           | Checking the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.                   |
| 5. Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis to refine each theme and generate clear definitions and names for each theme.  |
| 6. Producing the report       | Selection of vivid, compelling text extracts relating to the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report. |

**Phase 1.** I first transcribed the audio recordings of the focus group. The data extracted from this iteration of the process was transcribed into written form with each respondent's name, corresponding interview questions asked (Q1-Q9) and field notes. Once all transcriptions were complete, I read each response to become familiar with the data; hence, beginning Phase 1 of *Reflexive Thematic Analysis*. This phase involves reading and re-reading the data to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content (Braun & Clarke, 2019). No coding was conducted as recommended by Braun and Clarke, 2019 that researchers read through the entire data set at least once before beginning coding, as ideas and identification of possible patterns

may be shaped as researchers become familiar with all aspects of the data. The second- and third- reads produced personal notes of ideas and insights valuable for coding and the subsequent phases of data analysis. I noticed patterns, themes, voice, and interests among the participants which lead to a potential model for organizing the data. I repeated the same procedure for data extracted from the individual interviews.

**Phase 2.** The *coding phase* of data analysis involved generating codes that identified significant features of the data. Clark and Braun (2019) add that codes which emerge might be relevant in answering research questions. Because my research questions contain specific terms relating to the research, coding started with a pre-defined set of codes that materialized from tenets of Black Feminist Thought – social justice, activism/risk, mothering/other mother, and collective wisdom. During this process I began initial production of codes by constantly revisiting the data. Noticeably, by starting with some predefined codes, I recognized that a bias as to responses would emerge to answer the research questions.

I made notes throughout coding that included my thoughts and ideas that evolved. This reflexive process allowed me to preserve developing interpretations of the data and their connectedness. My journal notes, as referred to by Braun and Clarke (2019), as a *reflexive journal* became evidence to support the trustworthiness of the study.

**Phase 3.** I coded the transcribed data from the focus group and individual interviews, collated all the codes and relevant data extracts together for analysis – resulting in generating a codebook using four tenets of Black Feminist Thought. The codebook consisted of several pages labeled according to each theme and outlier themes labeled “Other 1”, “Other 2” and “Other 3”. Braun and Clarke (2019) recommended the creation of a “miscellaneous” theme to temporarily house the codes that do not seem to fit into main themes. In other words, it was during this phase

of the process where I collated data relevant to each theme, so that I could manipulate the data and review the viability of each theme.

I noticed that once identified, the themes appeared to be the constant bridge that I used to categorize and sort associated data together. A detailed analysis of each response from the participants also included research question(s) closely associated with the responses, the participant's name, and comments I made during the interview (field notes). When participants were asked to explain "separate but equal" based on social justice and the photo of Black children and teachers in a one-room classroom, many responded using terms such as, "overlooked, "access/limited access", "degrading", "are we really equal", "this is reality today". These comments specifically support and add credence to the associated research question and also illuminating the contextual nature of the theme.

**Phase 4.** The fourth phase "reviewing the themes", once the themes were developed I examined the themes against the data to determine if the data and the themes connect and correspond with the expectations that a persuasive story will emerge and that the story satisfies the research questions. I reviewed the coded data for each theme to discover coherent patterns. For example, 100% of the participants reacted to Q5 (the quality of Black womanhood) and the photo of Sojourner Truth, with similar responses – *unappreciated, frustrated/frustrating, sexism, overlooked, low-end of the totem pole*; thus, providing legitimacy to the theme and that the themes accurately support and reflect the meanings evident in the data set. Braun and Clarke (2019), resolve that in this phase, themes are typically redefined which sometimes involves them being split, collapsed, combined, or discarded. To this end, it became evident during this phase that data for theme "collective wisdom" was scarce compared to data of other themes.

Furthermore, during this phase “activism” was refined. After review of the data set for this theme, a subtheme “risk” emerged which produced a more coherent pattern. As such, the iterative nature of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis process also ensures that the themes reflect the participants’ voice – in that each data set was triangulated using raw data, codes, and themes. Therefore, the relationship between the codes and themes became richer; essentially, presenting how the data supported the themes, the themes were defined as patterns of shared meaning, and the central idea of the research project was strengthened by their connectedness.

**Phase 5.** “Defining and naming themes”, the fifth phase of the analysis process began with determining which aspects of the data each theme captured and identifying what is of interest about the themes and why (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I wrote a detailed analysis for each theme that included how or if each theme aligned with the research questions with emphasis on capturing aspects of the photo elicitation process in the focus group discussion and the discourse from the individual interview. At this juncture, I also identified the story that each of the themes expressed while reflecting on how each them belonged and complemented the central story about the data set, again in relation to the research questions.

I reviewed each of the themes to determine whether they were reliable across each data set. Additionally, each theme was analyzed, and some re-ordering took place based on the data set, to ensure that a well-organized and meaningful story is told. And finally, I re-examined the names of each theme, concentrating on ensuring that the words of the participants corresponded with the names. For example, “collective wisdom” was renamed collective wisdom/expertise which reflects a richer description and interpretation of the data set for that theme. Participant responses for “collective wisdom” included *community teacher*, *shared interests*, *decision-making*, *an outlet for our expression and voice*, and *what we know matters and is important*.

These coded patterns along with my personal reflections revealed how the theme names provide a sense of what the theme is about.

**Phase 6.** The sixth and final phase of *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts and contextualizing the analysis in relation to the literature. The write-up of the thematic analysis provided a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and thought-provoking account of the data within and across themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). My write-up includes direct quotes from the participants to support and enhance the understanding of specific points of interpretation and to demonstrate the preponderance of the themes.

Since the method of research for this project is narrative inquiry, by embedding extensive passages of quotations from the participants, it gives the reader feeling, flavor and intimacy of the initial text. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), extracts of raw data need to be embedded within the analytic narrative to illustrate the complex story of the data and convincing the reader of the cogency and merit of the analysis. In the narrative stories, all the themes are discussed, and I built a valid argument for choosing each theme by referring back to the literature. Therefore, the narrative stories of the participants' lived experiences intermingle with the literature, in which the constructed stories are situated with value and soundness. Furthermore, by analyzing and writing the stories, it was revealed that the literature supported and confirmed research findings as well as provided an opportunity to add to literature. For example, a fifth story is exposed through data analysis; therefore, creating invisible stories of the data that could potentially open up conversations about next steps in research and future direction.

### **Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure Within the Study**

My narrative approach emphasized the contestability of knowledge and knowledge production as it weaved the teachers' personal experiences of social justice with the way they perceive teaching and as an intersection of their personal experiences and teaching practices. According to Evans-Winters and Love (2015), the scholarship of Black Feminist Thought collides with fundamental 'othering' and opposed thought of the dominant narrative. Therefore, three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, *continuity*, *sociality*, and *situation* specify dimensions of an inquiry and serve as a conceptual framework which serve as narrative techniques for countering Eurocentric discourse concerning knowledge production. By utilizing the narrative inquiry approach to collect the experiences of Black female teachers, my study explored and documented the constraints and supports in their personal lives and examined how their personal experiences have impacted their teaching career, specifically through the lens of social justice in the preschool classroom. Over the years, I have developed a relationship with former Non-Licensure Childcare Option (NCOP) students in childcare settings and with childcare program administrators, who in many cases are former students. These relationships served as a gateway to conducting my research as it aligned with the Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

An aim of this study was to bring to surface how teachers define, perceive, and interrogate social justice issues, even if they were unaware of the tenets of social justice; or, if their experiences with social justice extended into their teaching practices. To promote authentic storytelling from teachers, I embraced the following topics: social, economic and cultural milieu of the teachers' families and communities; encounters or experiences of injustice, poverty, violence, homelessness, racism, classism, profiling; upbringing, academic preparation and

teaching experiences; teachers, friends, mentors and other influences on their lives; reasons for choosing the teaching profession; philosophies of teaching and learning; perceptions of students, understanding of teachers' roles; and changes the profession has undergone.

I provided Black preschool teachers the opportunity to voice and communicate their experiences; and with this undertaking, to move their world from invisible to visible. An example of the three-dimensional space narrative structure (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was the insertion of photo elicitation during the focus group interview. I acquired the teachers' personal experience stories to incite past, present, and future events using the photographs; how a person takes up and moves forward from past experiences to present and future experiences – *continuity*; *interaction* involves both the personal and the social aspects of experience; and *situation* is the set of experiences that include the time, place, and space, according to Clandinin & Connelly, 2000. The five images – Sojourner Truth (see Appendix A, Figure 1), segregated Black school in the 1930s (see Appendix A, Figure 2), Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King with women marching (see Appendix A, Figure 3), Colin Kaepernick (see Appendix A, figure 4), and the question mark (see Appendix A, Figure 5) – were used to generate discussions during the focus group interview. The teachers' narratives were explored and the three-dimensional approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was realized wherein the experiences of the participants were layered within their narratives. The following exemplifies the use of three-dimensional space narrative structure (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) within the study, during the photo elicitation interview (PEI). Collectively, the photos historically tell a story of the expanse of oppression – racism, sexism, and classism – in the United States. The photos (re)presented social activism, social in(justice), and collective wisdom which elicited the teachers' discussions



featuring their ideologies of identity as Black females in America. It is important to include the premise of a historicity that speaks to the need to “act” and “respond” in the face of injustice.

First, Sojourner Truth, former slave, and was an outspoken Black women’s rights activist and abolitionist. One of her most notable acts of social change was in her speech which used the rhetorical question, “Ain’t I a Woman” to encapsulate the discrimination she experienced as a black woman. Her legacy of courage, faith and fight for justice and equality caused me to consider my status as a progressive Black female educator, and to use my platform and influence in the university classroom to counter dominant notions of racial and gender inferiority by encouraging other Black female early childhood educators of our robust history as influential and pronounced people. As such, within the teachers’ discourse, a strong emphasis of time and place (situation) situated their experiences. For example, after viewing Sojourner Truth’s picture, one teacher recollected an incidence of sexism on the job. She responded, “seeing this picture reminded me of how these things (acts of discrimination) still exist and Sojourner Truth’s claim, ‘ain’t I a woman’ is still true. Consistent with the aims of narrative inquiry, interviews were constructed to produce rich stories related to experiences with injustice, and questions functioned as a means of eliciting memories that participants crafted into coherent stories. Further and consistent with the temporal nature of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), interviews were designed with an eye toward the past and the present.

The fight for equity in education has long been a social justice issue for African Americans. Educating students in a fair and just manner and preparing them to become socially conscious are foundational to the educational process. The second photo focused on the premise that women have played an integral part in the fight for our children within the classroom. Schooling and education have long been institutions of racism, classism, and sexism – and in the

Black culture, teachers led the charge. Children, at an early age, faced oppression and oppressive conditions. In this regard, teachers needed to be equipped to face the challenges that surfaced because of discrimination while keeping in mind the backlash that could emerge by engaging in social change. Yet, in spite of current conditions, Black female teachers today are in a unique position to rethink how education is done – based on their own experiences as students and as teachers. This photograph provided an illustration of *interaction*, where the teachers looked inward (personal) to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions; and looked outward (social) to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their interactions, purposes, assumptions, and point of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Martin Luther King, Jr.(MLK), Coretta Scott King, and the women protesting open up discussions about feminism. The third photo displayed Mrs. King's position during the Civil Rights Movement – not merely beside MLK as a wife and at home as a mother, she was positioned on the front lines of the Movement which further promotes the idea of women actively and collectively involved in addressing critical issues. As the political climate toward social injustice issues continue to rise, the need for spaces to come together and establish opportunities for collective wisdom is a necessity. Through collective wisdom, Black female teachers experience opportunity to collectively share a more specialized knowledge of social justice pedagogy. Black female teachers' knowledge and skills shared collectively through storytelling and then played out in the classroom is foundational to them seeing themselves practicing social justice and being significant change agents in the fight against social injustice. This opportunity allowed the teachers to realize past and present experiences of their own in relation to challenges they face as a 'leader' and 'activist' within their respective schools –

looking backwards to remembering experiences from earlier times; and looking at current experiences, feelings and stories related to activism and social engagement.

The last, image contradicts each of the others. It is contemporary and includes a male at the center. It is the only photo where the person is not standing; he is kneeling. As an icon in the fight against police brutality and social injustice in America, Colin Kaepernick protested by not standing for the National Anthem. His display of protest was captured in photography and in interviews as he stated, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color.” His activism sparked controversy as opponents missed the point of why he refused to stand. His refusal to stand was him taking a stand for civil rights and exercising his First Amendment Right to freedom of Speech. It had nothing to do with disrespect, but using his platform and status to raise awareness to issues affecting minorities in the U.S. Like Kaepernick, we too, have to accept at some point that, activism is a means to a greater end, as he suggests,

To me this is bigger than football...there are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.” What is necessary for us to understand, as Black women living in America, is that our activism can inspire others to participate; and at the same time, “believing in something, even if it means sacrificing everything (Kaepernick, 2016).

Last, the question mark image suggests space for the teachers to tell their stories as they situate themselves within the grand scheme social justice as they use their platform within early childhood classrooms to serve as social justice agents. I want them to be reflective of the first four photos and provide personal stories of their interpretation. However, the last image is an attempt to propel the women’s thoughts to answer the question, “teachers, what do you do?”

Each of the other photos displays acts of heroism, participation, and activism with the hope of inspiring the teachers to see themselves as activists in social justice and creators of knowledge. The teachers' responses and eventual stories relating to the photo of Kaepernick and the question mark indicated the compulsion for activism and engagement, and thusly, spoke to each of the three components of the three-dimensional space narrative structure. Their responses revealed that previous experiences affected current situation and interactions within their situations. Feelings, emotions, environment, relationships, experiences, time, and place were significantly exposed as the teachers shared their stories.

The focus of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. This directly speaks to experiences, institutions, and practices produce marginalization across and within non-traditional landscapes. Within this aim, the continuity of their experiences of social justice, mothering, collective wisdom, and activism, depended upon understanding past experiences, reflecting on how those situations affected the present, and continuous engagement within the classroom situation to imagine the future.

### **Limitations**

Influences impacting the results of the study included time constraints, sample size, and instruments utilized. The study was conducted over a 12-month timeframe, with two months of pre-interviewing and interviewing, nine months of data collecting, analysis, and reporting. It included Black female teachers from two Head Start preschool in coastal Virginia. The small sample size, a total of five teachers participated in the study. The interviewing instruments consisted of research questions and focus questions generated by me. The data I collected was

rich, complex, and multi-faceted. While my efforts to justly process the participants' individual stories, I was concerned about which stories to re-tell and include and whether I chose their best stories. Many of the shared stories included critical and sensitive information which may have had the propensity to create disruption; therefore, some of the stories were excluded and I was unable to speak freely.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics in narrative research is a set of responsibilities in human relationships, responsibilities for the dignity, privacy, and well-being of the participants. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) urge narrative inquirers to move beyond the institutional narrative of *do no harm* by learning the skill of empathetic listening, by not being judgmental and by suspending their disbeliefs by attending to the participants' stories. The narrative researcher is in a dual-role – in an intimate relationship with the participant and in a professionally responsible role as a scholarly community (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The participants expressed willingness to participate in the study after I stated the purpose and process of the study. The participants were contacted by letter and emailed before the interview process began as to ensure their participation (see Appendix F). I informed the participants of the particulars of the study, including its duration, its activities, location, and how much time the study required. Afterwards, an informed consent form was given to the participants for signature.

The informed consent contained the participants' willingness to take part in the study and is free to withdraw at any time. The form also stated the participants' willingness to have their interviews audio and/or video recorded. The participant was assured that every endeavor will be made to keep the study materials confidential by only sharing with the people involved in working with me on the research project, with the participant's name, places, and identifying

information removed or disguised (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Negotiating research texts creates a space where the participants' narrative authority is honored (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dwyer & Buckler, 2009). Furthermore, issues of anonymity and confidentiality take on additional importance as the complexity of lives are made visible in research texts. Strategies such as fictionalizing and blurring identities and places were used.

The relational aspects of narrative inquiries compel narrative inquirers to pay attention to particular ethical matters as research texts are written. Narrative inquirers understand that people's lived and told stories are who they are and who they are becoming, and these stories sustain them (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This understanding shapes the necessity of negotiating research texts that respectfully represent the Black female teachers' lived and told stories.

Within narrative inquiry as a methodology, it is important that I was transparent about my own interests in order to ensure a trustful relationship with the participant (Dwyer & Buckler, 2009). Prior to the start of the study, I provided a full explanation of the study so that the participants would not feel surprised or deceived later on when they read the published report.

## **Summary**

I am an African American female educator who placed myself within the research study process – by interviewing other African American female educators and eliciting their stories concerning social justice inside and outside of the classroom; specifically, how or if their personal experiences occupy space in preschool classrooms. Although we may share these similarities, there are characteristics that separated us - me, as the interviewer, and the teachers as the narrators. Dissimilar characteristics included religious affiliations, degree of education, political views, geographic affiliations, and social class. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009),

the insider membership role in research, “enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist” (p. 57). However, concerns about objectivity and authenticity of a research project are increased because of closeness to a project. Nonetheless, insider participation gave me an edge in legitimacy, stamina, and prompt acceptance by the participants (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

As a Black woman, the opportunity to identify with the subjects in this research – other Black women - provided a correlation of experiences that included the intersectionality of race and gender in the field of education. This study placed me in a position to view how these intersecting qualities played a role in silencing the voices of black women which tend to perpetuate reluctance to share ideas and practices outside the circle of Black women educators. In other words, because of our share commonality of being Black and female, we more comfortably navigated through sensitive terrains of injustices with little resistance from outside influences which may have contributed to reluctance to openness and authenticity.

Centralizing the voice of Black female teachers through storytelling and giving this priority for Black female early childhood teachers to participate in research is a direct challenge to normative research practices. Choosing to focus on Black female teacher storytelling related to social justice issues rather than directly on other areas of early childhood education (i.e., outcomes, best practices, readiness, curriculum, theory, etc.) is not normal in early childhood education and in doing so is a risk in an educational milieu that is increasingly about maintaining the status quo. Within this study the target population was Black female teachers, a population of people that is generally excluded from traditional worldview. However, this study centers the experiences and voices of Black female early childhood teachers through narrative analysis – their shared stories – within the context of the inclusion of an underrepresented group. Much of

the discussion I provided in this chapter focused on narrative inquiry/analysis and storytelling as the method employed in this study. I also presented my researcher positionality within the study.

In the next chapter, I present stories of five Black female early childhood teachers and my own. They represent the unique expressions of our lived experiences through shared stories. I organize the stories around themes and concepts that emerged from the life stories and examine them for contextual meaning and resonance.



## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS

*Realizing that each of us is inextricably connected to each other, the stories should remind us of our humanity (Boutte, 2002, p. 12).*

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived stories and experiences of Black female early childhood teachers with regard to ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept that gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact in within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impact pedagogy and filter into the classroom. To achieve the above-stated purposes, the following research question were developed.

1. How does Black Feminist Thought contribute to an understanding of collective wisdom in early childhood classrooms?
  - a. How is collective wisdom a form of social justice?
2. In what ways does collective wisdom inform socially just pedagogical practice among Black female early childhood teachers?
  - a. How do experiences of social (in)justice contribute to teacher pedagogical practices?

I was specifically interested in understanding how Black female early childhood teachers' life experiences have informed how they navigate through social justice issues within and without the education profession, the classroom, and the community. Additional interest included an understanding of how Black female early childhood teachers describe their life experiences in their roles as 'other mothers' and mothering, as leaders and activists in relation to their roles and practices as teachers. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, I employed narrative inquiry/analysis through storytelling as a methodology because of its congruent and complementary nature to the

theoretical paradigm and framework of Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Through the reflexive process and at the conclusion of this study, I observed the use of narrative inquiry/analysis through storytelling as an empowering vehicle for ‘knowing’, and conscious-raising, in the sense that it provided spaces for me to insert my voice throughout the research process and simultaneously accenting the voices of each Black female teacher.

The vocal affirmations (i.e. ‘amen’, ‘that’s exactly right’, ‘can I add’, ‘I never saw it that way’, and ‘me too’) and other affirming gestures (i.e. tears, hugs, and patting and holding hands) further solidified the commonalities each of us share as well as justification for employing narrative inquiry/analysis with storytelling. Narrative analysis provided the space for us to communicate, verbally and non-verbally particulars of life that are sometimes difficult to express or even forgotten.

The next section reveals a personal story of my own journey as I navigated through this research project. I begin with my story – a journey of self-reflection – that situates me within this fertile ground of exceptional, yet uncertain fields of possibility. My story includes a paradox of my voice and participation in this study – as participant and researcher. I attempted to address this complex relationship and voice by placing my story, centrally, among the findings of this study, while also inserting reflections of my own life experiences throughout this chapter. As participant and researcher, my identity, experiences, history, perceptions, and perspectives work as a framework in this postmodern age for implementing narrative inquiry/analysis and my attention to, the importance of personal narratives, the power of stories, and the importance not only of whose perspective, but also of whose voice is being expressed and whose is being heard (Kridel, 1998).

### **My Story, My Struggle: Positionality**

As a child growing up in a predominately Black community where most of the people in the community where many were my relatives, I had limited exposure to racism, classism, or sexism. I was, however, exposed to lively stories told by my grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Usually, those shared stories were of noteworthy accomplishments of family members and friends; depictions of neighborhood and church events; and simple conversations focusing on one's wellbeing and welfare. As I got older, I recall the stories being not as simplistic and more sophisticated – replete with topics regarding discrimination, war, hardship, and controversy. Little did I realize at the time that the complexity of the stories was a direct indication of the flow of life, usually beginning modestly and transcending to a more muddled state. Essentially, lived experiences shape who we are, what we perceive and interpret, and how internalize and respond.

The lived experiences of people influence stories, and those stories impact the owners of the stories and the storytellers who (re)tell them. And the process of storytelling becomes reiterative. In this way, the owners of the stories produce meaning and decides what is important to withhold or tell; and the storyteller produces meaning based on the owners' experiences intertwined with the his/her experiences, and then the storyteller decides what to (re)tell and re(present).

The act of storytelling is a method of creating and circulating knowledge, and thus, as a credible arm in narrative inquiry. Yet, currently, most academic work is non-narrative, and the most prominent theories, methods, and practitioners continue to do work that is based on quantitative data and positivist assumptions about reason, result, and evidence (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin 2013). In this study, I have attempted to

address the gap in research to address the infrequency of Black female early childhood teachers voice in research and literature. This study examined the to examine ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept that gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact in within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impact pedagogy and filter into the classroom. The tensions of race, gender and class exists placing Black women in unique positions for knowledge creation and dissemination as well as being identified as significant contributors to research. Although Black women are visible participants in conventional places in society, we are traditionally compelled into positions of marginalization – with emphasis on devaluing our work and voice suppression.

By examining the life experiences of these Black female early childhood teachers through their lived stories, I sought to examine their interactions in educational settings to gain access to their position as political activists in education and using their platform to promote social justice. A significant part of this discussion concentrated on how these women construct, justify, and maintain their identities as leaders and activists, and how they adapted their roles as leaders and activists over time.

This study was conducted using narrative inquiry/analysis through storytelling as a methodology with the purpose of highlighting the lives and voices of five Black female early childhood teachers. Additionally, this study stands to contribute to the literature by addressing this gap by adding more voices of contemporary Black female early childhood teachers' collective wisdom, activism, mothering in relation to Black Feminist Thought. Consequently, because Black Feminist Thought and narrative research speak to experience and knowledge it is important that their voice, emotions, recollection of people, and events, relationships, significant

life influences, values and beliefs, ideologies, and issues and ideas are foregrounded within the data.

While I pursued justice in capturing the participants' stories, I was frequently apprehensive about which stories to include and also the whether I captured the essence of their stories. Another concern in conducting this study was my professional and personal relationship with the participants and how it would impact the process and outcomes of the study. However, my relationship to the women and participation within the research facilitated a space where Black female early childhood teachers could share very personal thoughts and experiences that may have otherwise been neglected. We were vulnerable in revealing professional and personal facets of our lives that precipitated robust, authentic, and empowerment information. I believe the use of narrative inquiry/analysis through storytelling and Black Feminist thought were pivotal and necessary in facilitating the success of this study as reliable systems that enable and rouse the marginalized and silenced. This work has inspired me, and hopefully others, to contribute to on-going negotiations and scholarly work on Black female early childhood educators and our input. The inspiring words from the movie, *Hidden Figures*, of Katherine Johnson, a Black female mathematician for NASA, "you have to see what she becomes".

I am a member of a unique and precarious group. I am a middle-class, black female educator born and raised, and currently reside in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America – some 57.5 miles from the site where African slaves were brought to North America. My immediate family has lived within the same community for over 50 years, and having my paternal and fraternal grandparents, maternal great-grandparents and great-great grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and caregivers within walking distance. This familial context heavily influences how I navigate and negotiate the world and how I make meaning of it. Within the

sphere of kinship in which I grew up faith, education and relationship were pillars and set as cornerstones for what is important for surviving and thriving within our culture.

I have taught in a variety of school settings: from childcare facilities, to elementary schools and an early childhood instructor at a four-year Historically Black College and University (HBCU). In my research, I am interested in the stories of struggle, resistance, and hope; especially in relation to the tension that lies in the experiences of Black female early childhood educators. While this introduction feels awkward to me, after 20 plus years in education and entrenched in Western structures of education and research, I know this is a necessary endeavor; yet I feel exposed, vulnerable, and burdened. This type of research – narrative analysis and storytelling, explore personal and intimate accounts of self and situates the researcher in a place where introductions are the genesis for communication and discourse, and establishes the foundation of relationship. The responsibility of sharing personal details in the introduction is risky and disruptive. I am placing myself in the midst of the research, by presenting my ancestry, history, and status. Unlike Western conventions in research that rely on third person voice to denote a more acceptable and formal presence, I use first person – my voice – to challenge Eurocentric consciousness, Graveline (2003) explains the importance of first person voice, speaking what is truth, and telling our own stories. Therefore, I have the power to speak from my own personal experiences and knowledge; and can only speak for myself. This gives me the privilege and authority to situate myself in my work.

*Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown, and Jill came tumbling after.* The children’s nursery rhyme, “Jack and Jill”, a traditional English nursery rhyme are used in pre-schools and early childhood spaces to teach literary concepts and poetic devices such as rhyming words, rhythmic patterns, and sight words. It elicits effects of

heroism and adventure. While the nursery rhyme “Jack and Jill” is a pre-primary rhyme I learned – and is one of the earliest pieces of literature I recollect, the title “Jack and Jill” evokes fond memories of learning in a 1970’s preschool space situated in my Baptist church. The Black female, middle-age teachers, Mrs. DuPree, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Braxton led the charge of teaching the basic yet essential disciplines - reading, writing and arithmetic with their best efforts. The expectations of them from the primarily Black parents were to care and instruct the three, four and five- year olds in their care. The expectations my parents held were to place me in a safe environment with trustworthy, caring people and for me to receive some foundational tools in education – reading, writing and arithmetic.

There was a deep and distinguishable expectation of the Black female teachers to instill discipline, shape character and form relationships. What biological mothers could not give, surrogate, community mothers or other mothers were willing to offer, and they represented themselves as an extension of biological motherhood. Oprah Winfrey once said, “Biology is the least of what makes someone a mother.” In our school, these educators were more than teachers. They bandaged scraped knees; broke up playground scuffles; collected donations for rent and clothes; instilled images of ethnic pride and dignity and provided a firm hand of discipline. They were responsible for creating an environment where imagination, creativity, and courageous thinking were not only allowed but expected – our morning affirmation, spring productions and pageants were ideal examples of how they undergirded our spirit, enriched our lives, and kept us active.

Their presence went beyond the boundaries of what is normally expected in a pre-school program – providing experiences in cognitive, social, emotional, and perceptual development. They invested themselves as loving surrogates and I thank them for their selflessness, courage,

and generosity. I thank them for their audacity to care – to help us grow and blossom, even though we came to them from wombs that was not their own. I thank them for holding our hands during a critical and formative stage of our lives – early childhood, when we needed to explore, discover, and absorb the world around us. And because of the very notion of large extended families caring for one another and the existence of “other mothers” throughout our bloodline is deeply rooted in our culture, tradition, and history. What my parents may not have anticipated, as I perceive, is that Jack and Jill, the preschool I attended from 1973 to 1975 would set in motion threads of connected events, actions, experiences, thoughts, and approaches to education. The efforts of those three Black female teachers, some with backgrounds in education, but for the most part caregivers in their biological families, other mothers and nurtures in the community are, like many women of that era and even today, were perpetuators of social justice and committed to a profession centralized in activism, risk-taking and other mothering. Looking back to what these women accomplished and their contributions to our community, my research seemed a daunting and troublesome task.

In preparation for this research I struggled with reconciling the weightiness and risk involved. Delving into this research, I struggled to move beyond the confines of the data, data representation and analysis. Although I was eager to gather and share the stories of others, the weight from the responsibility to my research participants in merely collecting approvals, consent forms and transcribed data. As a Black female educator and doctoral student I have a relational/communal accountability for how my research is conducted, specifically regarding how I maintain pre-established relationships with the participants, as they were former students, and now research partners. This relationship was judiciously guarded from the inception of the topic to representation of the outcomes and future research. Weber-Pillwax said:



The most serious consideration for me as a researcher is the assurance that I will be able to uphold the personal responsibility that goes along with carrying out the research project in the community I have decided to work within. Once the decision has been made to enter a community with the intention of ‘doing formal research,’ I am accepting responsibility and accountability for the impact of the project on the lives of the community members with whom I will be working. (p. 79).

I want my research and the results to honor and respect the participants. I want my research to honor and respect my community and my ancestors. I want my research to make a difference in my community. I want my research to cause the participant to see themselves as the change agents they are. The Black female educators in this research and I are intertwined in this work. We are in relationship, and relationships are founded on care, respect, trust, and duty. As I have always attempted to do as a teacher, I have the responsibility to care; therefore, I have a responsibility of care to the participants sharing in this research.

According to Noddings (2012) care ethics involves attentiveness, recognition, receptivity, response, and reciprocity. In these ways, I see myself and the participants in a relationship beyond the researcher, the project, and the participants. It is on this premise that I found myself in conflict – ensuring that lines are not crossed or blurred in maintaining the well-being of myself and remaining authentic to the research and caring for the participants.

Another struggle that consumed me was the ability to see myself in the academic institution. I am grateful to have found Black female scholars and scholarship that re-imagines research in relationally fortified and sustainable ways. Black feminist such as Venus E. Evans-Winters and Bettina Love who taught me the importance of learning to embrace, resist, adapt and reconceptualize education research. The philosophies of Patricia Hill-Collins, bell hooks,

Gwendolyn Brooks, Septima P. Clark and Gloria Ladson-Billings have urged me to become attuned to my position in the world; my purpose in this space, at this time; caring for and attending to others; my significance to my culture and to the world; being disciplined; to know what matters; to take care of my mind, body, spirit and soul by listening to and learn from them. The struggle was also with connecting to those who came before me, in sharing ways of knowing, being and doing.

For me, this journey has led to areas of vulnerability which did not begin with wanting to know myself – particularly who I am, where I am going, where I come from and what my responsibilities are. To know myself involved a fluid process involving reflexivity. Reflexivity, as Martin and Mirraoopa (2009) describe, reflexivity challenges us to claim our shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights, and mistakes, to re-claim our lives and make strong changes to our current realities. Being reflexive ensures we do not compromise our identity whilst undertaking research (p. 212). With both the scholars and research participants, I am holding myself accountable to them. I have a duty that extends well beyond ethics approval and data collection. This research involves care. The additional weight comes from holding myself accountable to the knowledge that my familial communities, my research communities, and the academic community are holding me responsible for my work.

In the next section, I will explore the stories of each of the five Black female early childhood teachers.

### **The Teachers' Stories**

The stories of these women captured their multifaceted and complex collective lived experiences which are foundational to foundational to the Black community's historical and cultural tradition. I emphasized the lived experiences of these Black female early childhood

teachers, coupled with their race, gender, and class to actualize their lived experiences with regard to ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept that gave lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interacted within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impacted pedagogy and filtered into the classroom. Their stories are famed within the context of four tenets of Black Feminist Thought (social justice, mothering, collective wisdom, and activism). These stories represent unique expressions of the lived experiences of Black female early childhood teachers. They capture some of the complexities of being a part of a unique group – Black and female – innate into Black Feminist Thought. The stories also articulate my standpoint as a participant within this research. As a Black female educator/researcher, my assignment is answering the call of as other vanguard Black female sages have done.

Prefacing each of the five participants are names of some of the vanguard Black female sages – Mary McCloud Bethune, Ida B. Wells-Barnette, Sojourner Truth, Marian Wright Edelman, and Anna Julia Cooper. As I capture and read their stories, I assigned the teachers names of these trailblazers based of their character, actions, and presence. “Despite this suppression, U.S. Black women have managed to do intellectual work, and to have our ideas matter” (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 5), and these women, no less continue in the fight – doing the work. Hear them speak; listen to their stories.

### **Renee’s Story: Raising Mary McCloud Bethune**

Renee, a 31-year Head Start veteran teacher lives by the motto, “No matter what a child is going through at home, my job is to be there for them to help them learn, recover and to be proud.” Her classroom transports you back to an era when teachers were ingrained into the

community. A time when their care and compassion extended beyond classroom walls. She hugs, greets, and call each student by their birth names. She said, “There is power in calling children by their real name. It gives them the spotlight and positive attention they deserve.” When asked about Black females in leadership roles and how her feelings affect her teaching, Renee’s focus is on children’s readiness socially, emotionally, culturally, and academically – in that order. She said, “My personal experiences, being a single-mother, depending on others in my family and in the community to helped me and my kids survive. That’s why I put all I have in when I work with my kids. My goal is to reinforce things that will prepare them to live beyond the classroom. It is my duty to work with them, pay attention, listen, and discipline all my children. It is obvious as a Black feminist educator, Renee’s approach to education is intertwined with social justice realism, the act of mothering as another mother and activism and at times Renee’s approach to teaching is a call to action.

Renee: I step in and when my children or parents need me. Working with my kids is just like teaching my own grandchildren. When parents are doing the best they can – they may not have time to assist with homework or other things their children need – so I have to step up. My personal life (at home) and how I interact with my own grandchildren puts me in a position to serve my children at school. These parents are hard workers and they love their children and want the best for them. But life happens. They may not have all the resources at home necessary. And then I take on the role – whatever that may be, whatever they need – just like I would do for my own grandkids. If I can help or if I can give, I will.

Entering her class is comparable to going to ‘Big Mama’s house for the day. Not

so much in terms of physical aesthetics, but the atmosphere is rich with care and respect. Physical contact is a rarity in many of today's classrooms, due to the litigious and precautionous nature of society – with school's 'no-touch policies' some forbidding hugs or high-fives. Yet, in her class, Renee's students are praised with high-fives and hugs along with words of encouragement and motivation. One of her four-year-olds, Jeremiah, was engaged in writing J's. He struggled in his attempts but kept practicing. Finally, he said, "I can't do it, Mrs. Renee. I can't do a J." With a smile, Mrs. Renee leaned close to him and said, "Keep trying, Jeremiah." I know you can do it because you're the best." Jeremiah picked up his pencil tried two or three more times with difficulty. Mrs. Renee sees his struggle, wraps her hand around his and engages in hand-over-hand assistance all the while talking Jeremiah through the strokes. After a while, Renee gradually releases Jeremiah's hand and he began to write J's independently. Renee hugs Jeremiah repeatedly and exclaims, "You did it Jeremiah. I told you, you could. You did it all by yourself. See, I told you, you were the best." "I did it Mrs. Renee", Jeremiah replied. "I'm going to keep writing. I'm not going to cry anymore because I can do it and you helped me." During the individual interview, I asked Renee, why she chose to respond to this incident the way she did and how was her decision influenced by policies of her local Head Start, current political and racial climate and/or based on her expertise. She responded,

I am a parent first and a teacher second. I have raised African American boys and girls. And being a Black mother it seems like it takes a different kind of, you know, a different way of parenting our children. We have to make sure our children, especially the boys, that we have to work twice as hard and we can't afford to get into get caught up in the system. I carry that same attitude into my classroom. I have to teach my kids at school the 'ways of the world' with an academic twist. Successful teaching deals with high

expectations. I expect my children to work independently in centers while I'm working with small groups or giving one-on-one instruction. I'm teaching responsibility and accountability and problem-solving by working independently from me. They might come to me while I'm working with another group and want me to figure out something. Usually, ask them if they worked it out with a friend or asked a friend for help. This usually works. I focus on that student who needs one-on-one while the others work in centers. This is taught, practiced, and reinforced throughout the year. My kids want to learn, so I follow their lead. Sometimes they get frustrated and want to give up. But it is my job to instill pride, self-confidence, and a good work ethic – for them to keep trying, ask for help when they need it, accomplish something, and never give up. And you better believe when they try, I encourage them. When they work out their differences, I praise them. Or when they help someone else, I let them know how special they are. I know how tough it is out there and this kind of treatment may not be given to them. So I feel like if they are in my care 8 hour a day, 5 days a week, I want to make sure they understand that somebody is on their side.

Renee's gravitation to actions are intricately woven into the African American historical context for mothering. She inserted herself into the situation to teach and care; just as community 'othermothers' exercised continuation of care beyond the biological family (Collins, 2009).

Renee is not much of a talker; her actions speak volumes. When asked about practices that support young children navigate challenging, they may experience outside the classroom, one of the first words that she uttered was 'risk'. Risk involves seeing beyond expectation and acting upon it, many times at a cost. In observing teachers in a New Jersey School, she witnessed over-worked and struggling teachers with scarce resources in the classroom and parents wanting

to do more for their children, but because of a multiplicity of socio-economic factors (i.e., low paying jobs, poor medical care, under-employment, multiple jobs, under educated) they were forced into a cycle of deficiency. “That’s when I knew I had to do something,” she says. “That’s when I decided I wanted to become a teacher – to make a difference in children’s lives and families.” I couldn’t stand by and keep watching this happen without doing something. And that something for me was to get involved in the fight.”

Seeking an education toward earning a degree in early childhood education was the risk Renee accepted. Some risks occurred as a student – her seasoned age compared to the younger median age of her college colleagues, but her focus was on finishing and getting her own classroom. Yet, the greatest risks were assumed after tenure in the classroom – from parents and administrators. During the focus group, a picture of the children in a 1-room schoolhouse with the caption ‘separate but equal’ (see Appendix A, figure 2) generated Renee’s response, “this particular picture causes me to ask the question, how are you going to be separate, but equal? We know where the money is and everything (resources) is going. That picture speaks to me even today. I know there is money available. But we don’t get it – not our equal share anyway. We, some teachers speak out about it and take a risk with administration and we do get some backlash but if we don’t say anything, they will never know how we feel. I know the money is there.”

After a few years in Head Start, spending from her own pockets was quite noticeable and “making-do” with what was distributed to her in terms of resources. Of this she says, “I had to resort to being creative; although this is what we, Black women, especially single Black women, have done over the years. We have always had to be resourceful. I realized I didn’t have much to work with – supplies and other resources, but I used what I had and didn’t dwell on what was

lacking. I used my personal money all the time to do what I could to make my classroom and children ok. But it taught me how to be creative, not depend on store-bought materials and think outside of the box.” Her optimistic, strength-based approach to teaching and learning forged a path toward what she called ‘creative transfer’ – teachers’ uniqueness and creativity transfers into the classroom to impact his/her instruction. And this style of pedagogy involves life experiences, theory, and practice. As Renee puts it, “I use all that I have; all that’s in me to make a difference. Everything I’ve been through as a person – the good and bad made me a better teacher.

“I am willing to take a risk if it means helping somebody.” Renee’s relationships with parents have come with a price. She recalled an incident with one of her students, an African American boy who displayed behavioral challenges. The relationship Renee developed with parents allowed her the freedom to share with the parent. However, according to policy, teachers were discouraged from talking to parents about ‘behavioral matters. Renee asked the father to let her work with the child in her own way and that she would keep him abreast. After a few weeks of implementing her ‘homemade’ behavior plan, the father thanked her, acknowledging he was glad he stepped back, trusted, and allowed her to, “handle her business”. He also stated he was glad he did not remove the child from her classroom. She took a risk in two ways. First, she was mindful of the policy; but decided to intercede anyway to gain trust from the child’s father. As a result, the child was helped. Second, it was a risk in telling the father of the child’s behavior issues which may have resulted in backlash from the parent. She aligned this story with the picture of kneeling Colin Kaepernick with the caption ‘I’m not going to stand up and show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way’. She explained,



You have to be real in what you are doing and mean it. He's kneeling and believes in what he stands for. Enough of being fake. I have to tell the whole story, even when people may not want to hear it or if people don't want it told. I have to tell the whole story to parents and that may mean taking a risk. Sometimes you win and sometimes you don't, but if it is what you believe and know is true then you always win.

For Renee, Black women in early childhood education having to teach African American children to survive. Teaching life skills, social-emotional skills are critical. Sometimes outside events and actions dictate what and how we teach. As Black early childhood teachers we realize the responsibilities attached to teaching African American children – our boys particularly. Parents are primarily young, single mothers with the responsibility of parenting black males. So, we parent parents and their children. This is a heavy and tough responsibility because it sometimes seems like the world is against them. “My voice is making a difference in my classroom with my children and in the neighborhood with my parents”.

### **Teria's Story: Raising Ida B. Wells-Barnette**

“Everyone's a winner”. Each of us is successful at something; therefore, in that regard each of us is a winner. With 23 years in education, Teria described herself as a valuable contributor to education where her mission is to “catch children and offer uplifting programs to children and families.” Day-to-day experiences and learning opportunities in her class of 18 three- and four-year-olds from diverse backgrounds involves games, literacy, exploration, and discovery – days filled with chances for students to make their own choices, community talks, and collaboration. Although this was her first time implementing the newly adapted Creative Curriculum, her reasons and motives for teaching remain true to her mission, “I fight for my kids and I want them prepared to face the world outside the community.” She promoted a democratic

and inclusive classroom where students play an active part in decision-making as well as made choices based on their individual interests. She said, “I work with children who come from poverty, witness crime and violence – social justice issues, but I want my children to know there’s more to life than this.”

On this particular day, the students had completed a letter review lesson and were transitioning to ‘centers. A few students gathered around Mrs. Teria, jumping, and hugging her with a book. It was obvious they knew she had a book prepared to read and they were ready to listen. Before engaging in reading she asked the remaining students in which center they would like to work. Some chose to work in the science/discovery center, some in with blocks and Legos and others crowded around the assistant teacher to participate in a letter review activity. As children worked in their respective centers, Mrs. Teria read a book. Her unique supervisory skills involved walking around the room while reading the book and students following her. At first it seemed strange to see the children following her in duckling formation, but as she peered in each center and sometimes making stern eye contact, it became clear this was one of her unique classroom management strategies. Teria explained how her pedagogical decisions are influenced by her expertise and collective wisdom. Teria replied.

Teaching calls for me to look at every aspect of children – behavior, attention, academics, their social-emotional skills, and their interests. Not only was I walking around to monitor and supervise them, but I was taking mental notes of who they were working with, what they were doing, how they interacted with their peers, how long it would take them to lose interest. All of these things are important to me because I have to use this information to set up my classroom, provide materials and resources that I know they would be interested in, monitor behavior and re-direct if needed. I even use this

information to share with parents in case there are situations at home where children are not getting along or when parents need advice. I want to keep the lines of communication open between home and school. And for parents to feel like they can come to me with their concerns. It matters that children feel safe and they have the things they need and like in my class. When children are happy and excited about school, I know I am doing my job.

Teria's mindfulness of her children demonstrated value, respect, and inclusivity. These are essential components of social justice. And while she may not have realized her efforts overtly, by integrating the multiple knowledge construction process or differentiated instruction, Teria presented a way of teaching in an early childhood setting which promotes the stance of the expertise Black female teachers possess while at the same time challenging the perception of early childhood teachers as babysitters. In this case, Teria had earned a four-year degree in early childhood education which included 300 clock hours in the practicum, has amassed hours of training and professional development, and has over 20 years of teaching experience. Yet, in many cases she, like other Head Start teachers, faced devaluation of their expertise which leads to a plethora of issues of social injustice that perpetuate feeling Black female teachers have – as unappreciated beings, who are inapt to perform beyond childcare. One in particular that Teria was open to discuss was Black women in leadership positions and “the struggle to get ahead as a Black woman.” She provided this example,

I was a student at NSU working on my bachelor's degree. I had a white supervisor and when he found out I was going back to school he intentionally created obstacles and hardships to deter or stop me all together from finishing school. I really think he was trying to get me to quit school. When it was time for me to register for classes, he

wouldn't be flexible so I could attend morning classes. Then, when it was time for me to do my practicum, I was told I had to re-apply for my position. If he really wanted to, he could have worked with me. And I am the type of person who puts in extra and does extra, so I wasn't like I was trying to get over. I was on a path to better myself, but that wasn't anything he was concerned with.

Along with the struggle to get ahead, Black women also contend with diminishing or not fully understanding their worth. The same supervisor who created obstacles for her in completing her degree, delivered messages of discouragement that she would not do well, nor would she graduate and surely would not graduate with honors. No one other teacher in the center had a degree and it was apparent that he would deter her from achieving her goal. Teria's experience with denying one an opportunity to excel raises questions concerning privilege, inequity, oppression and oppressive systems, human dignity, equal rights, equity, and equality. I asked in the group interview, a question regarding the work together with colleagues to make decisions about pedagogy, in other word collective wisdom.

“There is jealousy, but we (Black women) who are continually denied have to encourage each other”, said Teria. And one way she endorsed the idea of building a teaching community was by sharing with her colleagues - sharing ideas in pedagogy, comparing teaching strategies, offering advice and guidance, and the idea of having a space to coming together to discuss professional and personal experiences. She viewed herself as a community teacher, where she assists teachers and students who are not in her class.

One example of Teria operating as a community teacher occurred while several classes intermingled on the play field. She was engaged in a parachute activity that included her students and students from other classes. The lessons provided guidance and modeled directionality

“up/down”, “over/under” and speed “fast/slow”. She reinforced instructions, rules, and behavior during the activity, encouraged on-lookers to join the fun and monitored children engaged in other activities on the field. I noticed, however, that other teachers were distant from the activities, sitting in chairs and observing while Teria managed the 12 or so children at the parachute and the other children scattered about the field. For about 15 minutes Teria engaged with different groups of children during the outdoor play. In response to her actions as a communal teacher, she stated.

Sometimes I do take on the responsibility as the community teacher. Now that I see it on video, the other teacher is at a distance, sitting and I’m just having fun with the kids. I’m here to help anyone, but I have my limits. I didn’t realize how extreme this was until I saw it. I don’t mind helping, but we have to do better. At the time all I thought about was working with the children, giving them space to run around and have fun, and getting some fresh air.

Once I left for the day, some of the on lookers wanted to know what was going on and why I was videoing her. She explained to them that she was part a research project that focused on the experiences of Black early childhood teachers. Interestingly, they openly shared that they thought I was evaluating her, and they preferred not to get involved. However, once they made aware, they became fascinated that someone was concerned enough about them to conduct research. bell hooks (1994) describes this communal coming-together and sharing of minds as “building a teaching community”. Part of the description of a teaching community, according to hooks (1994) is:

...that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for

intervention...to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.

In sharing with the teachers that day they participated in building a community of teachers. Furthermore, the space created opportunities for collective wisdom and to exhibit the power in Black women's expertise, knowledge, and viability. Teria imparted that they – she and her colleagues - share many commonalities professionally and otherwise coming together provided a safe place for expression. While at times their knowledge and awareness about teaching and education is often questioned or overlooked, their participation is both necessary and critical to their self-preservation. Teria explained, “We have to remind each other why we are here and what's important. We must share what we have experienced in teaching, but it is also important that we share what we have experienced from administration and the ‘higher-ups’. We have to remind each other of our self-worth and what value we contribute.” According to Collins (2009), the oppressed are viewed and accepted as less human than their rulers and are therefore less capable of interpreting their own experiences. The subjugation Teria, as well as the other Black female early childhood educators in this study and others, face expressively call for the need to assemble with the intent of sharing information amongst one another and taking the risk in distributing it and leveraging it to influence dominant knowledge constructs within Head Start and abroad. The force behind collective wisdom is empowerment – that its participants are individually empowered to make a difference and collectively empowered to take a stand.

### **Gwen's Story: Raising Sojourner Truth**

“...sometimes I wonder if my efforts are in vain. There are days I go home frustrated because I wish I could do more,” says Gwen, a Head Start teacher with 10 years in education –

two and a half years in Head Start. As a student, Gwen's nature leaned toward what is right, fair, and just. I recall discussions in class where Gwen shared many personal experiences as a way of connecting theory and principle. She would naturally share events that shaped her thinking, perception, and beliefs about her plight as an older Black woman in the blue-collar workforce dominated by men – specifically discrimination and sexism – without causing debate but meaningful discussion. Of course, she could compare the education system she experienced as a young girl growing up in the 1950's and 1960's to today's system with regard to the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege. She reported first-hand the unjust motivations for conserving fiscal funds to purchase new books and maintain well-kept schools in affluent neighborhoods, when students in schools 'across the tracks' read and learned from hand-me-down textbooks or else did not have enough books for each student to have; and their schools were on the edge of dilapidation. But the caveat lay with her saying, "And don't think this isn't happening today. It's just out here in different and sometimes clever, subtle ways." The intimate connection with real life experiences created an atmosphere where students in higher education were drawn into these classroom discussions filled with wisdom and acumen. In a sense Gwen was instrumental, even as a non-traditional college student, in creating a space to produce collective wisdom among her much younger colleagues.

I saw the same essence in her classroom – in her teaching style, where she engaged in teaching a lesson and before you knew it, she would tell a story. This connection with her students created a classroom environment that felt relaxed, casual, and welcoming, yet an expectation of hard work, discipline, and no nonsense. And in this sense, her feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed were invasive as she expelled great energy, time, and resources into teaching.

Preparing children to become whatever they desire is her passion, but their reality – their experiences, and their beliefs based on what they have witnessed, endured, and come up against was evident in her teaching style and content. Gwen’s students primarily live in low-income urban neighborhoods. The ‘norms’ her four-year-old students encounter are quite unlike those of the average four-year-old in America would face. So, the necessity to adjust pedagogy to address needs that the curriculum may not expressly consider is one-way Gwen prepares children for equal opportunities in education and ways she creates equity in her classroom. In the focus group interview Gwen stated:

Bridging the gap between students who been exposed to the ‘good life’ what people consider positive, like taking family vacations all over the world, exposure to cultural activities, or something as simple as having a meal together and those who may be classified or looked upon as being expose to the ‘not so good life’ is very important to me. I realize most of my kids enter school with all sorts of things going on that cause me to cry and because of that I tend to focus on the strengths each child brings to the classroom. Milestones are important, but self-confidence, respect and positive self-image go a long way. We can teach the curriculum all day long, but if a child does not appreciate or have pride in themselves or their culture, I feel like we’re losing the battle.

With the weightiness and absolute presence of social justice issues young children face today, the need for Black female educators to determine ways to integrate children’s real-world experiences with the formal curriculum without backlash from administration or perceptions that the teacher is policing children calls for action. Consequently, teachers choosing the path of activism in response to the diverse needs of children may collide with the localized Head Start’s standard methods of operation, more specifically classroom management techniques. Gwen,



through collaborating with other Head Start teachers, the need to emphasize rules and provide behavior re-direction is often required, and the frequency for re-direction, monitoring and supervising could be perceived as policing. One conversation concerning policing evolved during our individual interview as Gwen and I viewed a scene captured on the play yard where Gwen walked around the yard monitoring and supervising student and reminding several students of rules and safety. On several occasions, she repeated the same rule about sliding down the sliding board on the students' bottom instead of coming down backwards. After several reminders, she implemented a behavior management technique that involved: (1) either the student or teacher identifying the issue; (2) asking the student to verbalize what he/she can do to correct; (3) helping the student come up with choices for re-direction. At times Gwen's call to action required her to draw on her years of experience and expertise,

I have to keep in mind that they might not get it the first time, so I had to do something different. I also know that many of them respond differently to authority. What I mean is, in their neighborhoods they have negative thoughts about rules because they associate being told what to do with police and other people in authority who may have done negative things. Or they hear people saying things like, 'ain't nobody gonna tell me what to do'. So I have to take a different approach to reinforcing rules without them viewing this as punishment or intimidation. We came up with this when other teachers were having the same issue and we wanted to at least try something that made sense to us.

This example of using collective wisdom to problem-solve does not happen as frequently as teachers would like. However, it clearly shows the positive and strengthening effects of pooling

resources and at the same time recognizing the significance of students' domesticity and how these filters into the classroom.

Gwen's classroom is replete with student duties and expressions of manners and accolades. Social and emotional development are the norm. For instance, the lunch helper assists by passing out lunch plates and each child says, "thank you" when their plate is received. She says, "Teaching manners is old-school, I know. But good manners and conduct go a long way – they can take you where your education may not be able to". The line leader helps Gwen count students going to and headed from the play yard, teaching responsibility, and showing care and concern for others. She congratulated students when attempts were made, and praise was expressed throughout the process of working on a project.

Social-emotional skills are top priority in Head Start, but they are especially important when it comes to our kids because we want them to grow in these areas as much as academically. We model working together and respecting each other. I use books, tells stories, and practice it in school. They often see and hear things that cause them to feel bad about themselves and treat others unkindly. Sometimes it seems like I'm going overboard with all of this and I do it too much. But I want them to see and hear positive from me and their classmates and hopefully it will stick.

A small group of children were working on a Hungry Caterpillar project and the buzz from the children using kind words, the freedom and space to self-express, and praising and helping each other exemplified methods Gwen has modeled and implemented as strategies to improve the lives of children. The careful consideration she took with presenting social justice exemplifies how early childhood educators are equipped to challenge dominant positions which endorse teaching the marginalized to accept their deprived status in live. Moreover, her platform

as a Black female early childhood teacher in Head Start empowered her to realize and embrace collective wisdom and to value and respect different ways of knowing and sharing knowledge.

### **Donna's Story: Raising Marian Wright Edelman**

Mrs. Donna or 'Mother Hen', is a person who sees the need of others, looks after another person, and worries about them in an affectionate way. She is soft-spoken, calm, and benevolent. Quick to give hugs and offer words of consolation. Her classroom may seem a bit chaotic, but there is a method to her madness. Children were welcome to venture off to explore areas in the classroom at will, but with almost a whisper she commanded their attention and they moved to a designated spot with little resistance. She has worked with Head Start three years and six years total in education. Currently, Donna is a Head Start teacher and with her 12 three- and four-year olds, they illustrate varied paradigms of how relationships between mothering, teaching and the commitment to childcare networks is reflected in early childhood classrooms. The nurturer in her gives way to be their protector, caregiver, advisor, corrector, mom away from home and teacher. She wears many hats, but says of this position, "Not being able to use my platform and expertise in dealing with behavior problems is troubling. When we see behavioral changes, I will take a risk and speak up."

Although Donna is quite mild-mannered in the classroom with her children. There have been instances for which she has had to take a stand as child advocate, speak up and take a risk. She observed one of her student's change in behavior which caused her to go directly to the parent. This is action is prohibited and teachers are expected to only re-direct behavior. Donna intervened in this way because she said, "I noticed he was acting out and so unlike himself. And when we tried to ask him about it, he'd shut down, which caused me to look to the parent for answers. I knew something was going on at home because this was so unlike him." Donna

discovered through the parent that the mom had given birth and there was a new baby in the house. The Head Start policy at this particular center concerning behavior, seemed to negate teacher's knowledge and expertise by not allowing teachers to explore options when attempting to assist children who demonstrate uncharacteristic or improper behavior. This is an example of how policies are made and handed-down without considering teacher's competence, which makes it difficult for classroom teachers to gather information that may help with addressing children's needs; and as all of the teachers in this project declared, it makes them feel devalued and oppressed as a professional. Donna responded to this subject,

I build a strong relationship with my parents because I realize that parents can be your best allies. When they know you have their children's best interest at-heart, they will come out and support you. So, for them (administration) to make policies like this it seems like we are being put in a box, oppressed by the system not allowing us to use our parents as valuable resources. It's like they don't trust what we see every day or what we hear. But for me, and a few others, we go to our parents for information and they come to us for advice and support. Our voice is important, and we have to believe that in order for changes to happen and we have to take risks sometimes, go against the grain to make sure we are heard. If we are here to represent children and families, then let us do that!

Fundamental to teaching in early childhood settings are care and concern, equity, and respect. Donna's interpretation of the quote, "...ain't I a woman" by Sojourner Truth (see Appendix A, figure 1) conveyed what many marginalized children bring upon entrance to school and when social justice issues filter into the classroom. Yet the experienced, skilled and nurturing teacher, like Donna, finds ways to navigate through sometimes sensitive terrain. She tells of an incident with her student, Jaydon (not his actual name),

His mother often brought him in to school a little late, but before breakfast was over. So he would come into class, sit at the table, and eat breakfast. One morning, his mother got him there earlier than normal and we had not begun breakfast. All of the children were playing with manipulative toys, but after a while I announced that it was time to clean up. He suddenly became very upset and said to me, “You forgot about me.” I asked him what he meant, and he told me I had not given him anything to eat. I responded, “Have I ever forgotten you?” He said, “No.” I told him I would never forget to give him breakfast. I explained that he was early, and breakfast was next. His outburst about me forgetting him kind of reminded me of Sojourner Truth’s question about being a woman too. She was referring to how a man would open the door for a white woman, but not for her. When I think back to that day and Jaydon’s remark about how I had forgotten him, it made me think that he felt he was being neglected, overlooked even though he was a student too – he was part of the class and no different from anyone else. He was just like everybody else and he should be allowed to eat as well.

### **Myra’s Story: Raising Anna Julia Cooper**

*Learn for yesterday,  
Live for today,  
Hope for tomorrow.*  
- Albert Einstein

Myra, an early childhood educator and over thirty years in the profession, has occupied many positions – substitute teacher, office assistant, camp leader for a children’s college program at a four-year university, lead teacher in Head Start and is currently a Head Start center director, practice base coach and an adjunct instructor in child development at a local community college. Since 2000, she has been employed with Head Start. One could say, she is a constant in early childhood education. In the classroom she was quick on her feet, upbeat, and systematic.

Student work was scattered throughout the classroom and as a guest immediately knew what was being taught. There were posters with positive affirmations, pictures of the current president and vice president, and a variety of literature. The one resource that was absent in Myra's class is technology – no computers, smartboard, digital cameras, or i-pads; yet, teaching and learning were achieved in an intimate way. The learning center achieved Gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED); and is the first building in the city to qualify for the LEED level. Even more inviting, tucked away at the extreme end of a hallway, Myra's class is situated where a natural waterway is viewed on both sides – an ideal setting for teaching and learning.

Myra's teaching style varies. Some days she is very verbose, and other days her facial expressions and accounts of non-verbal communication make quite an impression as students respond to 'waving a wand' which means children move to a designated place in the classroom, sign language, or her standing still with a straight face. Today the children gather on the circle rug for morning activities. After the Pledge of Allegiance, they engage in a call and response "I Am" affirmation. Myra says she began this years ago as a way of instilling pride, self-respect, self-esteem, and love.

The 'I Am' affirmation generates positive vibes and we speak into existence who we are. This gives students a "voice" to repel negative self-thoughts and defend their true identity against others who use degrading words to describe them. We say, "I am", it empowers them to stand up for themselves, even to parents. I believe in teaching healing – using healing words that create positive vibes – they feed their sometimes-broken souls. The "I Am" affirmation goes against every harmful and dishonoring word or action my children encounter. The 'I Am' Affirmation: I am somebody. I am capable and loveable. I am

teachable; therefore, I can learn. I can do anything when I try. I respect myself and others. I will be the best I can be each day. I will not waste time because it is too valuable. I am too precious and bright. I am somebody.

African American children and children of color encounter communication, images, and actions with potential venomous effects. They are victims a world around them which overtly and covertly send messages intended to stereotype, emasculate, and penetrate the very fabric of their humanness. Collins (2009) contends, "...controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p.77). Myra's insertion of the 'I Am' affirmation into her daily routine is one technique to teach social justice and in doing so create a material reality that speaks back to oppressive structures and discourse. Such thinking lends to the politics of Black Feminist Thought as it confronts systems of social injustice by intentionally crafting strategies to rebuff negative claims and images of Black women through, "self-definition of self-reliance and independence" (Collins, 2009, p. 3). In other words, Myra's call to address social injustice authorizes and empowers her children to make decisions to encapsulate their true identity and 'knowing self' Collins (2009).

Her own personal experiences with social injustice have been contributory to who she says she has led her to become a 'teacher/advocate and scholar'. She recalls incidents of racism in the form of having others diminish personal progress to earn a master's degree; viewed as a threat to co-workers and superiors and denied promotion because of a desire to work hard and advance collegiately. These experiences move Myra to use her platform as a Black female educator to champion for early childhood by advocating for awareness and honor of the profession – professionalizing the profession, particularly to current teachers and pre-service

teachers. Her aim as an early childhood change agent, is to inform in hopes of re-conceptualizing a profession that has lost its authority and respect, to enlighten others of its value and significance and dispel the notion that early childhood educators are babysitters. She uses her voice and expertise in areas where others may not have expertise in early childhood education but make decisions about its course. For example, she sits on the board of directors for an early childhood center where she contributes to policy- and decision-making. She posited, “If I’m to make a difference inside the class, then I have to be willing to take a risk and speak to make a difference outside of the class”.

Depending on her platform as an adjunct instructor at a local community college in child development, Myra uses her voice in scholarly ways to bring to light politics in education and the politics of education. She advocated for President Obama’s “Every Student Succeeds Act” as it was designed to improve achievement for marginalized groups – minorities, students in poverty, special education students and English language learners; however, critical of it in that it excluded pre-k. Her objective in higher learning is to present ideas to pre-service teacher candidates as to what is happening in education and how political education is. For example, she recalled a class lecture where students were asked to discuss the appointment of Betsy DeVos to Donald Trump’s cabinet as the U.S. Secretary of Education. Some students had faint knowledge, but the majority were unaware. In her deliberation, she concluded,

The school is directly impacted and sometimes a product of what happens on the outside – policies, laws, theories, content, funds – are all created and secured more than not by people on the outside. So it is that important for us who want to preserve the true purpose and of schools and education, to fight for it. And fighting may not always mean



protesting or outward demonstration. Fighting for and advocating for could mean reading about, researching and awareness.

Inside and outside of the classroom, Myra's love for teaching and passion for education can be described as acts of activism. Her activism materializes in various forms – her voice in administration, pedagogical decisions in the classroom and scholarly contributions epitomize Black Feminist Thought in exploring and analyzing the scope of Black female presence (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015) in early childhood education. In Myra's class, Carl is comforted after an explosive outburst when she hugs and consoles him and sits beside him in circle. We know he is well now because he says, "I'm happy. You are right beside me and I feel better." On another occasion, she allowed Carl to "be her partner" holding his hand to keep him from hurting others while walking around helping her children. She constantly gives instructions and layers instructions with modeling, "So they have many opportunities to 'get it' and to be successful. They may not understand or 'get it' the first time, so I 'repeat and show'". She provided space for children to express themselves without judgement, whether those expressions are outbursts or endearments. Even with minimal technology, she promotes creativity, independence, exploration and ingenuity pride and respect.

The composition of Myra and the other four Black females all possess a deep appetite for nurturing and supporting children and families. Each is compelled, in their own distinct ways and on their own terms to "Do something" and that 'something' translates into engagement. Engagement is driven by acts of social justice in teaching, mothering, collective wisdom, and risk all in the name of Black Feminist Thought. For as much as Black women in early childhood education are often marginalized and invalidated, instead, they are as, "All U.S. Black women

who somehow contribute to Black Feminist Thought...and are deemed to be intellectuals”  
(Collins, 2009 p. 17).

### **Teachers’ Collective Stories**

In a country built on core values that the Constitution exists to achieve democratic government, effective governance, justice, freedom, and equality, small reminders like Jaydon’s cry for recognition, inclusivity, dignity and equity; and Donna’s activism by taking a risk and defying policy on behalf of her children, characterize the existence of social justice issues depicted in early childhood classrooms and how early childhood teachers answer a call to action. While teachers sometimes work in isolation and manage to pilot through situations with minimal assistance, there seems a sisterhood between teachers Donna, Renee and Gwen exists – one in which each is comfortable to bounce ideas between each other, particularly conversations regarding unequal distribution of wealth among between Head Start Centers under the umbrella of a particular executive director. While this method of wealth distribution may only be in practice within these Head Start facilities, the issue remains that the unequal distribution of wealth between these centers is a noticeable occurrence, and this unfair treatment operates oppositional to the mission of Head Start universal. Their discussions disclose the realities of privilege, resources – or the lack of, and other barriers present that create or deepen marginalization and expand the reach of oppressive systems. The teachers described their position relating to how early childhood education sustains or disrupts ‘separate but equal’. Their responses differed yet, the common threads were the power of privilege and wealth distribution.

Renee: Resources are available. They are bought and then given to centers, but not ours.

The pay is unequal, materials and resources, facilities are not the same. So this can’t be

equal. To me it is an injustice to teachers and students by limiting their exposure to technology, materials, resources, learning experiences such as field trips.

Teria: The big difference of separate but equal – that’s obvious. It’s money. One center may have, and another may not; it’s like the haves and the have nots. Even with the gaps and favoritism, we work together (teachers) and learn to work with what we have. We think of alternatives and creative ways to make it work.

Gwen: After a while ‘making do’ gets frustrating – especially when we know there’s more. So we get together and find ways to pool our individual resources and supplies so our children won’t be affected.

Donna: I have learned to be creative and resourceful in my classroom because we don’t have everything that we need for effective instruction, but I realize the value and importance of me giving my children what they need. Parents are depending on me to give their babies something more than they can – to give them what they need to be better, to make it. One of the teachers threatened to quit because of inadequate resources that a disabled child required. Then, all of a sudden, her requests were given, and questions answered. But why did it have to take the teacher threatening to quit – to go to that extreme for something to be done? We (teachers) must make them (administration) understand that our African American kids are not getting the same kind of education and educational opportunities as others, which places them at a disadvantage when they enter and transition into public schools.

Myra: My biggest concern is effective instruction and care for students with disabilities. Administration must take into consideration the diversity of students in our classrooms when funds are distributed. I have to buy supplies out of my own pocket to make sure my

students get what they need. And those who go without are my special needs students. If the center accepts students with disabilities and administration doesn't fund their education experiences, then we, the teachers have to step in and take up the slack. Teachers who care and go the extra mile incur expenses to supplement the lack of materials and resources necessary to make learning 'alive' and interesting to all young children. But it become very frustrating, very frustrating.

After this discussion, Donna tearfully admitted that her ultimate goal in teaching is rooted in caring for her children in whatever way they need, and in spite of that, the extent to which early childhood educators go is demanding and exhausting. And yet, she could not think of anything else she would want to do. Amid the high demands, physical and emotional tolls as Black early childhood educator, there exists a higher level of resilience that undermines established beliefs held of early childhood educators – as babysitters, unskilled and voiceless workers which attempts to cast them to the sidelines. To the contrary, black female educators' ontological experiences vastly qualifies them as contributors to pools of knowledge in education, in addition to them performing in the capacity as activists, other mothers, agents of social justice and keepers of collective wisdom.

### **Lived Experiences as Narrative Analysis**

The lived experiences of the teachers are encapsulated in story form as narrative analysis, as they seek to learn from the women's storied lives and thus making meaning from their experiences that are shared and understood. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) noted that "personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (p. 1). The stories of the participants centers on the experiences and voices of Black female teacher's invisibility and marginalization within the

context of early childhood education and thus draws on the tenets of Black Feminist Thought – mothering, social justice, activism, and collective wisdom as a pathway to offer contemporary and active insights to the paradigms, systems, prevailing concepts, and epistemological customs of the Eurocentric, male oriented worldview; while unearthing new knowledge about the experiences of Black women and creating space for them to define their own realities, thus becoming empowered (Collins, 2003).

### ***Social Justice - Equity, Integrity, Inclusivity***

The language and philosophy of social justice emit a sense of power and progression. Terms such as upward mobility, social mobility, equal opportunity, equity, fairness, and equality often emerge when social justice is referenced. These terms are often used in place of or to describe a political version of what constitutes an objective and ethical society. Social justice requires one to identify and interrogate social inequalities, especially in relation to income and wealth. As we, educators, serve children and their families within urban communities, we get introspective looks into the different types of neighborhoods where people live, how much money they earn, their health and also their well-being.

Our shared stories about our collective years of experience in early childhood education reveals that when inequities exist among the adult population, the impact is felt among the children. The five participants in this study shared stories ranging from parents who reside in low-income communities having less access to adequate public libraries, playgrounds and green spaces, internet access, food deserts, or suitable living conditions. As a consequence of limited resources, children's social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language and speech development are affected; yet, within the context of these teachers' classroom exists a devotion to promoting 'at-promise' education rather than deficit theory in education. The teachers and I identify as female

leaders within the community and classrooms who struggle against silencing, invisibility, and marginalization. Yet, we locate common ground in terms of the frontline role we play in the struggle to construct more socially just systems, discourse, attitudes, and behaviors.

We see the need for us to provide a safe place for children and to understand issues of identity and oppression with the aim of, participating in transformative action, encouraging their students to develop a deep, critical consciousness of social realities so that they might play a role in interpreting, construction and sometimes disrupting those realities (Dixson, 2003; Oakes et al., 2003). For example, Myra's story illuminated the practice of encouragement where she and her students recite an affirmation statement emphasizing promise, potential, and imagination. Similarly, the teachers created space for social justice practices where students made choices and were allowed to make mistakes, explored freely, investigated, and felt included. The impact of allowing children to verbalize feelings and emotions sends a clear message that they are significant and important. Equally, these Black female teachers postulated social justice tenets such as respect, equity, democracy, and inclusivity that filtered into their classrooms which speak against oppressive structures, systems, and discourse.

A glaring inequality in education is school funding and the way resources are between centers are allocated. Each of the teachers expressed the unequal distribution of funds between Head Start centers operating within their cluster of centers. Adams et al. (2007) cited equitable resources as a product or an attained goal of social justice. However, their stories revealed the unequal distribution of fund's impact on teachers and students and in unfair and unjust way to educate by limiting exposure to resources (i.e. technology, materials, supplies, field trips) strongly needed for under-represented students who are not getting the same kind of education and educational opportunities as others, placing them at a disadvantage upon entry and transition

into public school. This also hindered teachers from effectually teaching and having to resort to purchasing materials using their own money. The lack of support and indifference to their needs – both to the children and teachers – often lead to them feeling unappreciated, unnoticed, and devalued which furthers widens the gap of social injustice standpoints of marginalization and invisibility. I contend that the teachers’ resilience and resolute approach to social justice and as Black female teachers comes when lives are reconstructed to promote social change, when self-identity and self-discovery are made. Therefore, social justice as a Black Feminist tenet affords us, Black female teachers, the space to share lived experiences as contemporary leaders and change agents for women of color with racialized social locations and provide illustrations of the subjectivities of Black female early childhood educators.

### ***Activism - Conscious-raising, Engagement, Commitment***

Beauboeuf-LaFontant (2002) contends that “in order to understand the caring demonstrated by Black female teachers, it is critical that we contextualize their thoughts and actions within their particular cultural and historical legacies” (p. 280). While I intentionally recruited Black female teachers who possessed a resilient and established sense of accountability and obligation to teaching Black and other diverse populations, the research question concerning activism was salient to the politics of early childhood education – in the education of children. As I listened to their stories about their own childhood and the roles played by family members, othermothers, and community members and surveyed them within their social and historical context, the synergistic character of their roles as activists materialized.

Black female teachers, working in the trenches of education, are frequently positioned as second-rate members of the profession, especially those working with young children. Yet, they are masterful activists, serving in the classroom and outside the school by advocating for

children, families, taking risks as professional educators when administrative policies seek to marginalize them and the people they serve, as well as helping communities where they work. In this project, you have five Black female teachers, including myself, working in early childhood education, and who have witnessed fractures within early childhood education caused by social injustices having profound impacts on the shape of our individual journeys towards developing critical consciousness raising and awakening in the political commitment to teaching and viewing teaching early childhood education as political engagement. As I examined each of the teacher's stories and mine, evidence that life-long personal and professional experiences, family/community/social networks, and interactions were seeds of activism planted, impacting how we engage as social activists – resulting in every day activism; every day Black women who approach teaching this way. Renee witnessed the 'cycle of deficiency' among parents and over-work, under-paid and under-appreciated teachers in New Jersey and used these to ignite a determination to get involved by earning a four-year college degree to become a more effective early childhood educator. Furthermore, Renee recalled, as a single mother, her reliance on family and community resources as she learned to advocate for herself and family. She views community life as a network or an extension of family life as contributing factors to her becoming that for others. Moreover, Myra and I viewed ourselves as teacher/advocate using our platform in higher education as provisions of opportunities to re-conceptualize early childhood education requiring a rejection of patriarchal discourses of professionalism that entails rebutting the view of education and educators as apolitical. To further their role as activists, Donna, Renee and Teria provide evidence of their behavior and attitude concerning administrative policies discouraging them from providing professional care, advice and guidance to children and families.



Each teacher in her own way expressed behaviors, practices, experiences, and opportunities highlighting their sense of responsibility and political commitment to teaching and education. Our mantra as activists stands: to improve living conditions, reconstruct lives, and help children and families see beyond their condition. It is clear we campaign and operate as provocateurs in education. Although traditional social science research typically focuses on public, official, visible political activity as activism, I am suggesting that a Black female's standpoint is in the role and tradition of Black women's activism as prefaced in Black Feminist Thought. Additionally, I am suggesting that the combination of Black females' social and historical experiences, behaviors demonstrated as well as the established opportunities to practice those behaviors and understandings, were integral in these and my actions towards critical consciousness and engaging in every day activist work that somehow goes unnoticed; and the ideology of every day, unofficial, informal and private acts of activism may appear invisible in traditional terms, yet they are equally important.

***Mothering - Othermother, Nurturer, Caregiver***

Historically, African American women have performed the task of 'other mothering' and 'mothering'. Since the days of enslavement, Black women have nurtured, reared, and educated other people's children, while leaving their own children at home or in other places to be cared for by others. Black female teachers take on the responsibility of mothering in the classroom environment. Black female teachers find themselves not in competition with biological parents but gaining their respect to where they value and honor their professional opinions and child rearing wisdom. The Black female teachers in this study display acts of compassion and care as they console children with hugs, provide space on their lap for children to sit, wipe tears, or whispers and sometimes shout words of encouragement and praise. On the other hand, these

‘other mothers’ realize it also takes doses of disciplinary actions such as strong words of reprimand, long hard gazes and a “good talking to” to re-direct their children.

Hill et al. (1993) argued that historical dependence on kin and fictive kin networks for a broad array of assistance including child care has played an important role in ensuring the survival and upward mobility of African-Americans the concepts of ‘mothering’ and ‘other mothering’ or community parenting has been proposed by African-American feminist theorists to characterize the extended nature of caregiving in the African-American communities – care networks and the need for others. The teachers in this study, whose emphasis on nurturing and ethic of care is historic to African American women, is relatively fluid and carried over into the early childhood classroom and community. Their stories indicated a desire to practice what they experienced in their own neighborhoods and schools – a reciprocal effect. Also, their stories uncover parents’ desire, or need for mothering with as an act of responding to oppression and social conditions and offering resilient lifelines to families and communities as other mothers.

While these teachers valued and inserted practices of othermothering, there was evidence of instances where ‘over mothering occurred. By-in-large, these teachers’ practices of mothering may have developed from their own experiences as mothers, the cultural manifestations of child-rearing and child care within the African American community, as well as protective instinct, which filtered into their classrooms. Yet, in some instances there appeared to have been times when they displayed acts of over-mothering, babying, and sheltering which appropriated the agency of mothering. In this sense, the teachers’ perspective for othermothering bordered becoming an enabler and in direct opposition to their pledge to empower children and engage in the support of their growth and development. Probably unintentional, their mothering practices,

at times, resembled that of an over-protective and hovering caregiver, rather than a vanguard in early childhood education.

In sum, African American female teachers' motivations for providing education opportunities in center-based childcare programs such as Head Start, shape the definition of mothering and the extent to which they include children, parents, and even communities as community mothers. Additionally, the Black female teachers working in formal, professionalized settings (i.e. Head Start) have often experienced situations that conflicted with family expectations and institutional expectations, rules and policies and that extensive professional input and involvement with family-related issues may even threaten some standpoints of professionalism. In other words, the teachers shared that there were incidents where their role as the 'other mother' was opposed to family and/or organizational norms. Not only were children recipients of mothering, but parents also benefited from the teachers' willingness to mother. Parents sought their advice and relied on their professional wisdom. Essentially, parents were being parented partially based on maturity and age of the parents, their knowledgebase, and familiarity/comfortability with the teacher.

It suggests that cultural norms and behavior patterns influence how mothering is practiced by Black Female teachers from cultures characterized by more interdependent values common among African American (Collins, 2009) and, internalized norms that reinforce connections and responsibility to others. In sum, Black female educators' way of mothering and activities as early childhood teacher's activities go beyond teaching to uncover a great deal of invisible work that early childhood educators carry out. Relative to Black Feminist thought, the Black female teachers' acts of mothering meet specific political, economic, and social challenges of the day.

### *Collective Wisdom – Group, Communal, Expertise*

Throughout history, Black teachers have been hired primarily to teach Black students because of segregation practices (Foster, 1997). Collecting the experiences and knowledge of black teachers evolved from vested realizations of guardianship of a particular expertise – black teachers’ wisdom. The process of coming together, united in sharing thoughts, ideas, and experiences, for a common cause, often translates into vast reservoirs of wisdom. For example, as Teria shared her story, she identified herself as the ‘communal teacher’ often sharing ideas and thoughts relating to discipline, pedagogy, curriculum, and parental involvement. She also recognized that sharing knowledge may sometimes be obstructed because of jealousy, confidence, or acceptance – jealousy within the collective group of teachers; teachers’ lack of self-confidence effectuated by administration’s dismissive or devaluing attitudes and actions; and being accepted by one’s peers. The teachers value the tenet of collective wisdom whose sole purpose is to positively impact the lives of their constituents – children, families, communities – people were the common thread among the women in this study. Collins (2002) describes a Black woman’s standpoint as collective wisdom on how to survive as Black women that emanate from common experiences fighting against the intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender that predisposes them to a distinctive group consciousness.

As the teachers shared their experiences with working with parents and how they resolved challenges, a greater respect for what each knew, and their expertise emerged. I shared with them how collective wisdom engenders and strengthens relationships between a unique group. I submit, that this dynamic relationship rests on being Black and female and affords us the gift of sharing and gaining wisdom from the inside – amongst our most common bond – black and female; and this knowledge is enmeshed in our stories and experiences that other

outside groups cannot accept, understand or distribute as they do not or have not shared our experiences from the perspective of being a Black woman.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described findings, through narrative inquiry in the context of lived stories, related to the two research questions presented at the beginning of this study. The aim of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. This directly speaks to experiences, institutions, and practices produce marginalization across and within non-traditional landscapes. Additionally, these findings helped to examine how Black Feminist Thought in action can be used to (de)construct research methods, children's learning, pedagogy, and resource. Further, this study examined ways in which Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a framework, critical social theory, and philosophical concept gives lens to the experiences of Black female early childhood teachers and ways in which they interact in within the early childhood classroom; and how their perceptions of social (in)justice impact pedagogy and filter into the classroom. Four tenets of BFT – social justice, mothering, activism, and collective wisdom – supplied support for grounding this research in BFT. As such, the four tenets offer agency for Black females which counters the dominant discourse within U.S. epistemology which has been defined by elite White men (Collins, 2009). The tenets set the stage for challenging dominant ideologies as the five Black female early childhood teachers in this study shared their own stories and lived experiences as representation of new meanings.

The first series of research questions explored the extent to which Black female early childhood teachers identify themselves as creators and curators of wisdom in the form of

mothering, caregivers, professionals, and experts. Furthermore, this inquiry revealed Black female early childhood teachers' acquisition and contributing to knowledge. As connected knowers – mothers, other mothers, teachers, advisors, mentors – to children, parents, colleagues, and others, they situate themselves within Black Feminist Thought which pivots towards postmodern ideology and the counter narratives that speak back to grand narratives. The findings suggested that though they share commonalities – race, gender, and social class, and professionally – that their ways of constructing knowledge differ. The years of experience in the profession, worldviews and perceptions, position within the organization unearthed the process of who creates and sustains knowledge; and builds upon the ideology that early childhood teachers are experts in their own right. The experiences considered most significant were those that contributed to ethic of care and social justice. These experiences also provided the momentum for the teachers' conscious-raising toward activism. In short, these are every day Black female early childhood educators who approach teaching as a call to every day activism.

The set of questions examined how the participants experienced social justice in their personal lives giving way to them identifying social (in)justice, how it impacted and influenced their teaching, and how it filtered into their early childhood classrooms. The research questions also functioned as conduits for their roles as leaders within the schools' communities and as every day activists, while positing teaching as a political act and education as non-neutral – requiring action and activism. Every day activism comes in many shapes and forms – responding to children's needs, inserting expertise and professionalism, speaking up and out in defense of children's and families' rights and privileges, advocating for the marginalized – even when they, themselves are marginalized, using their voices and collective wisdom to protest against inequitable and unjust policies and procedures, and with each act, notwithstanding the risks

involved. Within the context of early childhood education and within many early childhood classroom pedagogical practices demand displays of every day activism from early childhood teachers in response to local pressures and situations. It unearthed that though Black women are a homogenous group, yet they gravitate toward what they perceive as significant which ultimately filters into the classroom. Each teacher embraced each of the four tenets; however, the data depicts nuances between participants' thoughts and actions suggesting individuality and uniqueness of experiences.

In Chapter 5, I will summarize Chapters 2, 3 and 4, discuss the implications of this study. I will also offer suggestions for future research and concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As a Black female in the United states, we face tensions of race, gender, and class persist causing a unique oppression that Black women face. While we are a standard fragment of mainstream society, we frequently function from socially subordinate positions. We are constrained to positions in which we withstand marginalized, specifically how our expertise and work are devalued, and muzzled voices. This study embraced Black female early childhood teachers whose call to reject deficit notions of Black women as agents of knowledge and acumen. Further, the women in this study illuminated the utility of Black women's connected experiences in their professional and personal lives to provide communities for Black women's activism in education, realizing it as political engagement; thus, achieving self-determination.

Consequently, the acts of oppression toward this collective group had the propensity to further ideals of cultural domination and powerlessness. Yet, by employing post structural qualitative research to counter and deconstruct dominant research practices that subjugate the flow of "others'" contributions to bodies of knowledge, the literature reflects how Black Feminist Thought promotes an understanding of collective wisdom through their shared stories, as social justice pedagogy, in early childhood classrooms.

In Chapter 2, I presented early childhood literature to review the existing body of scholarship focused on social justice and social justice in education. Here I provided the reader with a broad overview of early childhood literature with a focus on social justice in education. I reviewed social justice, as a concept that operates both as a goal and a process of education by providing a brief description of the landscape and views of social justice and described how it is situated and forwarded in early childhood; along with opposition to social justice within the



current educational and political climate. Next, I explored how, as Black women, face unique oppression in today's climate and as we continue to stand at the forefront as activists for social justice, we remain marginalized and confined to limitations because of race, sex, and class. Because of such exclusion, I identified a gap in the literature from the Black feminist perspective and describe how throughout the United States' workforce, women of color experience the feeling of belonging without genuinely belonging.

When considering the ways in which Black women communicate, I explored how oral traditions in the African American community influence the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Since many marginalized and alienated groups are made to feel distrustful of their own voices and their own way of making sense (Greene, 1995), the oral tradition in the African American community serves as a way of resisting racial oppression by articulating experiences of resistance and struggle and articulating oppositional identities in highly creative and vibrant ways (Hamlet, 2011).

Lastly, I included a foundational understanding of the origins and major dimensions of Black Feminist Thought and the ways in which Black Feminist Thought provided a beneficial lens to understanding the experiences and practices of early childhood educators; with particular focus on the tenets of social justice, mothering, collective wisdom and activism. As a consequence of marginalization, Black women's voice in the field of education is infrequently heard and/or recognized which acts to suppress contributions of Black women's knowledge, skills, experiences, and craft; well disputing the notion of Black women as caregivers and unskilled workers. Although the concept of 'othermothering' is well-documented in the African American culture as a form of caregiving whereby community parenting is an extension of providing care to children outside of biological parenting; and 'mothering' the belief that

parenting is a community effort which embraces the notion that childrearing is an expectation for caring for non-relative children (Collins, 2009) set the model for acts of ‘mothering’ for Black early childhood teachers. In other words, ‘mothering’ is a connection to the Black historical-cultural context; although in some instances their othermothering techniques bordered enablement. Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought authenticates Black women’s place in activism and advocacy. Whereas Black women’s standpoint has generally been in marginalized spaces, Black Feminist Thought encourages one to look to knowledge and improvement as vehicles for social change; thus creating spaces which create imaginative responses to social economic, and political injustice (Collins, 2009). And consequently, at the heart of Black Feminist Thought is the assumption that all U.S. Black women who contribute to Black Feminist Thought as critical social theory are deemed to be intellectual activist.

Chapter 3 provided the reader with an overview of methodological considerations germane to my research project. I presented narrative research and highlight how narrative inquiry/analysis through storytelling present just and apposite approaches to researching with the participants, as it invited us into relationship with one another and with my research project. I attended to the vitality of my project to faithfully represent this phenomenon of inquiry, with emphasis on honoring the “voices” of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012) as a means to focus on the ways in which Black Feminist Thought as a framework, critical social theory, and a philosophical concept gives lens to the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they interact with society using narrative inquiry as a methodology. Although differences exist in the method qualitative researchers utilize the narrative method, this study focused on narrative analysis/inquiry to produce stories as the research process. The exclusion of certain voices from the narrative mainstream in itself is an act of social injustice. And as Lankshear and McLaren,

1993 revealed, this exclusion from history and culture has tremendous educational and political implications as silencing of these voices, as has been done traditionally, results in sentencing their lived meanings representations of their lives, conditions, and struggles to exile at the margins; at the same time these silenced voices are restrained against criteria and demands of the dominant culture. Therefore, in this study, I obtained stories from each teacher as information that influenced the construction of knowledge that provided descriptive answers about the experiences and practices of Black female early childhood teachers; and allowed for critical analysis of how this population are agents of social change as activists.

In Chapter 4, I included discussion focused on Black female early childhood teachers' shared experiences through storytelling and social justice practices in the classroom. The aim of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. It was important that I shared my belief that education is not neutral and Black women's pedagogy is fundamentally political and therefore, an act of social justice. In the process of data collection, the common structural features to emerge from the PEI and individual interviews are collective wisdom, social justice pedagogy, activism, and identity. As such, the four tenets of Black Feminist Thought establish credence in countering the dominant discourse within U.S. epistemology (Collins, 2009). The aim of this study was to situate myself within the research with an intent to identify the necessity for reformation in early childhood education by challenging how Black female early childhood teachers are perceived and accepted. Vital to this study is my belief that education is not neutral and Black women's pedagogy is fundamentally political and therefore, an act of social justice. Additionally, the participants experienced social justice in their personal lives giving way to them identifying

social (in)justice, how it impacted and influenced their teaching, and how it filtered into their early childhood classrooms. Hence, the voices presented in this study, Black female early childhood teachers, are not intended to be peripheral additions to mainstream voices. Rather, they are presented as primary perspectives on the world because they merit attention as their stories and educational implications of social justice.

### **Implications**

This study stands to contribute to the literature by addressing the gap in the literature from the Black feminist perspective and describe how throughout the United States' workforce, women of color experience the feeling of belonging without genuinely belonging; and additionally, adding voices of Black women teachers and recognizing them as activists. It emphasized Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and the experiences and voices of the participants within the context of Black female's resistance to dominant traditions of the creation, transmission and knowledge while focusing on Black Feminist Thought tenets of social justice, activism, collective wisdom and mothering with regard to self-identity and empowerment. wisdom and mothering with regard to self-identity and empowerment.

The subjects of this study demonstrated a strong commitment to education and educating as in the capacity of activist with connection to their socio-historical context. Through their shared stories, they revealed that past and present family and community relationships, and professional experiences contribute to a sense of responsibility and commitment to activism and engagement toward education. As activists, they tend to draw on social oppositions to challenge the status quo and engage from self-definition, self-valuation, and a movement toward self-reliance. Their classrooms and within the community account for a worldview that sees lived Black experiences as important to creating a critical Black consciousness and seeking political

change (Collins, 2003, 2009; Dixson, 2003). From a traditional perspective their acts may not be considered activism; however, these women exercise every-day actions and experiences in activist work.

While activism was a prevalent theme and one of the Black Feminist tenets in the study, the term ‘risk’ or concepts relating to risk were often present or associated with every day activism in the teachers’ stories. The risks outlined in the teachers’ stories tell of anticipated threats – devaluing of knowledge and expertise, denying promotion and advancement, reprimand, or job loss – resulting from engaging in activist work. Some stories were modified and even excluded to avoid potential costly risks to the individual. Therefore, I discovered that in order to stand tall and engage in every day activism through the lens of Black Feminist Thought, one may assume the involvement of risk. In any conscious-raising or revolutionary actions, in any efforts of liberation, acquisition and challenge, or disruption of dominant existence exhumes the possibilities of threat, danger and chance. The risks involved in this work included vulnerability – both with the participants’ willingness to participate and expose themselves to areas of sensitivity and fragility in their personal and professional lives. And the risk I confronted in writing to empower, and in authenticating a silenced group. Essentially, being Black and female puts us at odds with society resulting in conflict and struggle. Wallace (1975) puts it this way,

We exist as women, who are Black, who are feminist, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle – because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world. This work challenged traditional

form of knowledge production by reaching outside of traditional parameters by giving voice to the voiceless by providing a platform of re-articulation in liberated space (p. 6).

To add to the theoretical body of knowledge, I argue that implications stemming from the teachers' every day active involvement in social change and activism produce risk – risk of speaking up and out, risk in challenging authority, risk in reclaiming our identity, risk in not compromising and moving forward. Their call to action as every day activists displaces the traditional notions of activism – protesting, boycotting, or marching– as transformational social change agents, these early childhood teachers invest their time, talent, and treasures into classrooms and communities as leaders, advocates, abolitionists, and nurtures. Their efforts in fighting social injustice come in the form of practicing equitable pedagogy, promoting democratic classrooms and inclusivity, calling out oppressive structures and systems, and defending the marginalized. Overall, these are black female early childhood teachers who approach teaching in response to everyday life situations that filter into their classrooms.

My interviews with the Black female early childhood teachers revealed an understanding that they have developed the perception of Black females' role in leadership where their voice matters and has effect. As they faced opposition from administration, parents, and sometimes among other teachers, despite potential high personal costs they persist in nurturing, caregiving, and fostering an ethic of care that filter into their classrooms. The study further relates Black women's innovative and practical approaches to mothering under oppressive conditions which often bring recognition to foster their empowerment (Collins, 2009). Acknowledging their commitment to social change provided a sound basis for these Black female early childhood teachers to practice collective wisdom. Traditional practices of knowledge validation cancel out knowledge that is created and/or maintained outside of dominant groups. Yet, intertwined within

their experiences are stories of Black female early childhood professional's contributions of their expertise as collective knowledge. Their knowledge is forged from their coming together in time of need and sometimes desperation, for encouragement or a laugh fosters a space for communion and familiarity often in the same space where resistance and hostility abide. The teachers recognize the need to uplift and encourage each other, to build confidence in the face of opposition and resistance. Through their professional contributions of collective wisdom, others are able to explore, document and implement the experiences of their professional lives and to examine knowledge and experience; and have a record of how knowledge and experiences have changed over time. The narrative analysis process through storytelling in this study further empowers and supports the credibility of Black women's reliance on alternative claims of credible research and knowledge (Collins, 2009).

In order to illuminate the lived experiences and voices of Black female early childhood teachers, this study was conducted using narrative analysis as a methodology. Their stories along with my stories provided knowledge of social realities, cultural standpoints, and constructs. Knowledge gained in this way is situated, transient and characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, meanings, and truths. It included some of my part in conversation in order to be transparent about the relational nature of my study., and the ways in which the stories were shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well as providing a reflexive layer with regard to my position as the researcher and yet, contributing to the storytelling.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest several possible directions for future research in studies that examine Black female early childhood teachers shared stories and experiences.

First, further research of the experiences of Black women teachers to illustrate how individuals who wish to rearticulate a Black woman's standpoint through Black Feminist thought can be suppressed by prevailing knowledge validation processes, is suggested. Further research that examines ways in which Black female early childhood teachers' experiences as activists have informed how they carry out their roles as educators, given current educational disparities. Furthermore, additional research of the contributions of Black female educators to the development of theoretical frameworks specifically models for Black activist teaching is a consideration.



## REFERENCES

- About, F. & Levy, S. (2000). Interventions to reduce prejudice and discrimination in children and adolescents. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 269-293). Erlbaum.
- Adams, M., Bell, L., & Griffin, P. (2007). *Teaching for Social Justice*. Routledge.
- Apple, M. (2004). Creating difference: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the politics of educational reform. *Educational Policy*, 18(1), 12-44.
- Alexander-Floyd, N. (2012). Disappearing acts: Reclaiming intersectionality in the social sciences in a post-Black feminist era. *Feminist Formations*, 24(1), 1-25,
- Allen, W. (1995). African American family life in social context: Crisis and hope. *Sociological Forum*, 10(4), 569-592.
- Ballenger, C. (1999). *Teaching other people's children: Literacy and Learning in a bilingual classroom*. Teachers College Press.
- Banks-Wallace, J. (2002) Talk that talk: Storytelling and analysis rooted in African American oral tradition. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(1), 410-426.
- Barnett, W. (2013). *Expanding access to quality pre-k is sound public policy*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <http://nieer.org/publications/nieer-working-papers/expanding-access-quality-pre-k-sound-public-policy>
- Beauboeuf-LaFontant, T. (2002). A womanist experience of caring: Understanding the pedagogy of exemplary Black women teachers. *The Urban Review*, 34(1), 71-86.
- Bieler, D. (2012). Possibilities for achieving social justice ends through standardized mean. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 39(3), 85-102.

- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Boutte, G. (2002). *Resounding voices: School experiences of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589-597.
- Briskin, A., Erickson, S., Callanan, T., Erickson, S., & Ott, J. (2009). *The power of collective wisdom and the trap of collective folly*. Berrett-Koehler.
- Bureau of Labor and Statistics. (2019). *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.  
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.
- Burman, E. (2008). *Development: Child, image, nation*. Routledge.
- Campbell, R., Adams, A., Wasco, S., Ahrens, C., & Sefl, T. (2010). What has it been like for you to talk with me today? The impact of participating in interview research on rape survivors. *Violence Against Women, 16*(1), 60-83.
- Cannella, G. (2002). *Deconstructing early childhood education: Social justice & revolution*. Peter Lang.
- Cannella, G., & Kincheloe, J. (2002). *Kidworld. Childhood studies, global perspectives, and education*. Peter Lang.
- Carter-Black, J. (2007). Teaching cultural competence: An innovative strategy grounded in the universality of storytelling as depicted in African and African American storytelling traditions. *Journal of Social Work Education, 43*(1), 31-49.
- Case, K. (1997). African American othermothering in the urban elementary school. *The Urban Review, 29*(1), 25-39.

- Chase, S. (2005). Narrative Inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (pp. 651-679). Sage.
- Clandinin, D. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Taylor & Francis.
- Clandinin, D. and Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. Peterson (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (436-441). Elsevier.
- Connelly, F., & Clandinin, D. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J.L. Green, G. Camilli, P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 477-487). Erlbaum.
- Clandinin, D., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In Clandinin, D. (ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-75). Sage.
- Cole, J., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (2000). Gender talk. *Souls*, 2(4), 38-47.
- Collins, P. (1989). The social construction of Black Feminist Thought. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 14(4), 745-773.
- Collins, P. (1995). The social construction of Black feminist thought. In B. Guy-Sheftall (Ed.), *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American feminist thought* (pp. 338-357). The New Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2003). Toward an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. In, Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (Eds.). *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 47-72). Alta Mira Press.

- Collins, P. (2009). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalization the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8), 138-167.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teaching for social justice: Resources, relationships, and anti-racist practices. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 19(3). 133-138.
- Data USA. *Preschool and kindergarten teachers*. <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/252010/> / .
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children. Cultural conflicts in the classroom*. The New Press.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in education other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-298.
- Denzin N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Derman-Sparks, L. and ABC Task Force (1989). *Anti-bias curriculum: Tools for empowering young children*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Education and experience*. Simon and Schuster.
- Dill, B., & Zambrana, R. (2009). *Emerging intersections: Race, class, and gender in theory, policy and practice*. Rutgers University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Education and experience*. Simon and Schuster.
- Dixson, A. (2003). Let's do this! Black women teachers' politics and pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 38(2), 217-235.
- Dwyer, S., & Buckle, J. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 8(1), 54-63.

Eisenstein, Z. (1978). *The Combahee River Collective Statement*.

[https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition\\_Readings.pdf](https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf).

Epstein, I. Stevens, B., McKeever, P., & Baruchel, S. (2006). Photo elicitation interview (PEI): Using photos to elicit children's perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 1-11.

Esterberg, K. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. McGraw-Hill.

Evans-Winters, V., & Love, B. (2015). *Black feminism in education: Black women speak up and out*. Peter Lang.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

Fabius, C. (2016). Toward an integration of narrative identity, generativity, and storytelling in African American elders. *Journal of Black Studies*, 47(5), 423-434.

Finney, C. (2015). African Americans in the great outdoors.  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Sdm1og9BsEE>.

Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. New York Press.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.

Gergen, K. (2001). Psychological science in a postmodern context. *American Psychologist*, 56(10), 803-813.

Gewirtz, S. (1998). Conceptualizing social justice in education: Mapping the territory. *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(4), 469-484.

- Giddings, P. (1984). *When and where I enter: The impact of Black women on race and the sex in America*. Bantam Books.
- Glaw, X., Kable, A., Hazelton, M., & Inder, K. (2017). Meaning in life and meaning of life in mental healthcare: An integrative literature review. *Issues of Mental Health Nursing*, 38(3), 243-252.
- Graveline, J. (2003). *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Fernwood.
- Greene, M. (1998). Introduction: Teaching for social justice. In *Teaching for Social Justice*, W. Ayers, J. Ann Hunt & T. Quinn (Eds.), Teachers College Press.
- Grissom, J., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open*, 2(1), p. 1–25.
- Guy-Sheftall, B. (2000). Black feminism in the United States. In W. R. Scott & W.G. Shade (Eds.), *Upon the shores: Themes in the African American experience 1600 to present* (pp. 347-365). Routledge.
- Guy-Sheftall, B. (1995). *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. The New York Press.
- Hamlet, J. (2011). Word! The African American oral tradition and its rhetorical impact on American popular culture. *Black History Bulletin*, 74(1), 27-31.
- Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures. A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13-26.
- Hays, D., & Singh, A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford Press.
- Heath, S. (1982). *Ways with words*. Cambridge University Press.

- hooks, B. (2014). *Ain't I a woman*. Routledge.
- hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Hull, G., Bell-Scott, & Smith, B. (1993). *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies*. The Feminist Press at CUNY.
- Irvine, J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally-specific classroom practices*. Palgrave.
- Kaepernick, C. (2016). Colin Kaepernick explains why he sat during national anthem. <https://www.nfl.com/news/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem-0ap3000000691077>
- Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 138-157. Sage.
- Kohl, H. (2001). Teaching for social justice. *Rethinking Schools Online*, 15(2).
- Kridel, C. (1998). Landscapes, biography, and the preservation of the present. In W. Ayers & J. Miller (Eds.), *A light in dark times: Maxine Greene and the unfinished conversation* (pp. 122-123). Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teaching for African-American students*. Jossey-Bass.
- Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. (1993). *Critical literacy: Policies, praxis and the postmodern*. State University of New York Press.
- Lyotard, J. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester University Press.
- Marshall, D., & Oliva, M. (2005). *Leadership for social justice: making revolutions in education*. Allyn & Bacon.

- Martin, K., & Mirraoopa, B. (2009). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist research. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214.
- McLaren, P. (2003). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Meier, D. (2002). *In schools we trust: Creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardization*. Beacon Press.
- Merriam, S. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 3-16). Jossey-Bass.
- Michelli, N., & Keiser, D. (2005). *Teacher education for democracy and social justice*. Routledge.
- Miller-Marsh, M. (1992). Antibias early education: Toward a stronger teacher. *Practice* 29(3), 167-173.
- Milner, H., Cunningham, H. Delale-O'Connor, L. & Kesteborg, E. (2018). *These kids are out of control: Why we must reimagine classroom management for equity*. Corwin.
- Moon, S. (2016). Poststructural theorizing of experiences: Implications for Qualitative Research and curriculum inquiries. *Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(1), 33-65.
- Moule, J. (2005). Implementing a social justice perspective in teacher education: Invisible burden for faculty of color. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(4), 23-42.
- Nieto, S. (2000). Placing equity front and center: Some thoughts on transforming teacher education for a new century. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 180-7.
- Noddings, N. (2012). The language of care ethics. *Knowledge Quest*, 40(4), 52-56.



- Novak, M. (2009). Three precisions: Social justice. *First Things*. 108, 11-13.  
<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2009/12/three-precisions-social-justice>.
- Oakes, J., Lipton, M., Anderson, L., & Stillman, J. (2013). *Teaching to change the world*. McGraw-Hill.
- Parker, W. (2003). *Teaching democracy: Unity and diversity in public life*. Teachers College Press.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage.
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African American students*. Beacon Press.
- Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, J. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically. In Clandinin, D. (Ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. (pp. 1-34). Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1998). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. New York University Press.
- Pollard, D. (2004). *Tapping the wisdom of crowds: an integrated model*.  
<http://howtosavetheworld.ca/2004/11/15/tapping-the-wisdom-of-crowds-an-integrated-model/>.
- Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting qualitative research*. Sharpe.
- Rikowski, G. (2000). *Education and social justice within the social universe of capital*.  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001618.htm>.
- Rizvi, F., & Christensen, D. (1996). *Disability and dilemmas of education and justice*. Open Education Press.

- Rosenwald, G., & Ochberg, R. (1992). Introduction: Life stories, cultural politics, and self-understanding. In G. Rosenwalk & R. Ochberg (Eds.), *Storied lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding* (pp. 1-20). Yale University Press.
- Ryan, S. & Grieshaber, S. (2004) It's More than Child Development: Critical Theories, Research and Teaching Young Children. *Young Children*, 59(6), 44-52.
- Sawicki, J. (1991). *Disciplining Foucault*. Routledge.
- Scott, S., & Rodriguez, L. (2014). A flying in the ointment: African American male preservice teachers' experiences with stereotype threat in teacher education. *Urban Education*, 50(6), 689-717.
- Simien, E., & Clawson, R. (2006). The intersection of race and gender: An examination of Black feminist consciousness, race consciousness, and policy attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(3), 793-810.
- Sleeter, C. (2008). Equity, democracy & neoliberal assaults on teacher education. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 24(8), 1947-57.
- Smith, B. (2000). *Home girls: A Black feminist analogy*. Rutgers University Press.
- Stimson, C. (1989). Setting agendas, defining challenges. *The Women's Review of Books*, 6(5), 14.
- Swadener, B., & Lubeck, S. (1995). *Children and Families at Promise: Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk*. State of New York Press
- Turner, D. (1990). African-American history and the oral tradition.  
<http://ir.uiowa.edu/bal/vol53/iss1>.
- U.S. Office of Human Services. Head Start and Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>.

- Villegas, A., & Irvine, J. (2010). Diversifying the teaching force: An examination of major arguments. *The Urban Review*, 42(3), 175–192.
- Wallace, M. (1983). A feminist's search for sisterhood. In B. Smith (Ed.), *Home girls, A Black feminist anthology* (pp. 6-7). Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.
- Whitebook, M. (2014). *Building a skilled teacher workforce: Shared and divergent challenges in early care and education and in grades K-12*. Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. University of California, Berkeley.
- Wasley, J. (2006). Accreditor of education school drops controversial 'social justice' language. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Accreditor-of-Education/119021>.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2004). Indigenous researchers and indigenous research methods: Cultural influences or cultural determinants of research methods. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 2(1), 77-90.
- White, C., & Talbert, T. (2005). Comfortably numb? Rethinking social studies for social justice. In L. Hughes (Ed.) *Current Issues in School Leadership* (pp.57-71). Erlbaum.
- Young, I. (1993). Justice and communicative democracy. In R. Gottlieb (Ed.). *Radical philosophy: Tradition, counter-tradition, politics*. Temple University Press.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A – SELECTED IMAGES

**Figure 1.**

Sojourner Truth – Abolitionist and Social Activist.



“Nobody ever helps me into carriages, over mud puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain’t I a woman?”

- Sojourner Truth

**Figure 2.**

Segregated Black School in the 1930s.



Separate but equal.

**Figure 5.**

Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, and Women Protesters.



“Not enough attention has been focused on the roles played by women in the struggle. By and large, men have formed the leadership in the civil rights struggle...but women have been the backbone of the whole Civil Rights Movement.”

- Coretta Scott King

**Figure 7.**

Colin Kaepernick, Former NFL Football Quarterback.



“I’m not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way.”

- Colin Kaepernick Quarterback

**Figure 9.**

As a Black female early childhood teacher, what do you do?



**APPENDIX B – SAMPLE GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How did you become involved in the education field?
2. Why did you choose education?
3. Can you recall a time when you felt unappreciated as a Black woman?
  - a. How did you respond?
4. In what ways do you think early childhood education sustains and/or disrupts separate but equal?
  - a. How do you prepare children for equal opportunities in education and beyond?
5. What are your feelings/opinions about Black females in leadership roles?
  - a. How are you as a teacher, a leader for/of the community?
6. Can you tell me about a time when there was a cause that required our action or attention?
  - a. How do calls for action influence you, as a teacher?
7. How do use your platform/position as an early childhood teacher to improve the lives of children?

**APPENDIX C – SAMPLE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

2. Can you tell me a little about why you exercised this particular action(s) in the video?
  - a. How was your decision influenced by the policies of your center, the current political/racial climate, and/or expertise/wisdom of you and/or your colleagues?
3. Can you talk about how/why you chose to respond to this particular action(s) in the video?
  - a. How was your decision influenced by the expertise/wisdom of you and your colleagues?
4. How did you see this particular action(s) supporting young children to navigate challenges they may experience outside the classroom?
  - a. How do you see this particular action(s) supporting a social justice framework?
5. How do you work together with your colleagues to make decisions about pedagogy (teaching and learning)?

**APPENDIX D – INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR USE OF PHOTO/VIDEO****MATERIALS****STUDY TITLE:**

Black Teachers' Collective Wisdom as Social Justice Pedagogy: A Black Feminist Narrative Analysis

**DESCRIPTION:**

The researcher would like to record video of five (5) teachers employed at Head Start facilities, in their individual classrooms, in order to illustrate the research in teaching.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

You would not be identified by name in any of the videotapes. Even if you agree to be in the study, no videotapes will be taken of you unless you specifically agree to this consent. All videos will be destroyed within five-years after the study analysis ends.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

You are granting to the researcher the rights to use your likeness, image, appearance and performance – whether recorded on or transferred to videotape, film, and slides – for presenting this research. No use of video images will be made other than for professional presentations. You can withdraw your voluntary consent at any time.

If you have any questions later on, then the researcher should be able to answer them: call or email Jacqueline C. Boone at (757) 407-2045, [jboon007@odu.edu](mailto:jboon007@odu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Kristine Sunday, who is overseeing this research, at (757) 683-3702, [ksunday@odu.edu](mailto:ksunday@odu.edu) or Laura Chezán, current chair for the Institutional Review Board Committee at (757) 683-7055.



**APPENDIX E – FORM OF CONSENT (ADMINISTRATOR)**

**TO:** Education Manager  
Head Start/Early Head Start Program

**FROM:** Jacqueline C. Boone  
Doctoral Student  
Old Dominion University

**RE:** Consent to Videotape

**DATE:** March 10, 2019

Dear Education Manager,

I am a doctoral student in the Darden School of Education at Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA) in the process of conducting research with Black female early childhood teachers focusing on and examining social justice and their teaching practices. I have selected five (5) Head Start teachers from two (2) of the facilities you oversee to participate in the research. As their former University Supervisor in the Non-Licensure Child Care Option (NCOP) program from Norfolk State University (Norfolk, VA), their participation in this research project is vital as they are a unique group (Black female early childhood teachers) who can provide data to capture the context of their perceptions and behaviors regarding social justice and pedagogy.

One component of the research requires videotaping teachers interacting with students in formal and informal ways (i.e. circle time, whole/small group activities, center time, and other classroom interactions). I plan to conduct classroom observations by videotaping each of the 5 teachers; two classroom observations per teacher at 30 to 60 minutes per visit, per teacher. The anticipated classroom observations will be conducted between May and June 2019.

To ensure confidentiality of students, I will focus the camera on the teachers and work to video teachers interacting with children. I will position and operate the camera to minimize the children's presence in the videos. Additionally, the participants will only view their individual classroom observations and will not have access to others' videotaped classroom observations.

There is a consent form to be signed which gives the researcher permission to videotape 5 of your Head Start teachers in their classroom setting.

If you have questions about teachers' participation in this study, please feel free to call or email me at [jboon007@odu.edu](mailto:jboon007@odu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Kristine Sunday, who is overseeing this research, at (757) 683-3702, [ksunday@odu.edu](mailto:ksunday@odu.edu) or Laura Chezán, current chair for the Institutional Review Board Committee at (757) 683-7055.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline C. Boone  
Doctoral Student  
Darden School of Education  
Old Dominion University

**APPENDIX F – FORM OF CONSENT (PARTICIPANTS)**

Title of Research: Black Teachers' Collective Wisdom as Social Justice Pedagogy: A Black Feminist Narrative Analysis

PI: Jacqueline C. Boone  
Doctoral Student  
Old Dominion University  
Darden School of Education

Date: March 10, 2019

Dear Perspective Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jacqueline C. Boone from Old Dominion University – Norfolk, VA.

I am asking you to take part in this study because I am examining Black teachers' perceptions and behaviors regarding social justice and pedagogy.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Black female early childhood teacher who works at a Head Start facility within an urban community. I will conduct a group interview consisting of 5-10 questions related to social justice, identity, and teaching practices along with showing you a series of pictures to generate discussions. The group interview will convene in April/May. Next, I plan to conduct two classroom observations and videotaping you during formal and informal instructional activity, at 30 to 60 minutes per visit. The anticipated classroom observations will be conducted between May and June 2019. Last, you are asked to participate in individual interviews for 60 to 90 minutes to view your classroom observations, followed by 5-7 open-ended questions and discussion.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are permitted to refuse to participate in this study. Even if you agree now, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits to your participation. However, a gift card will be issued to you at the end of your participation in this study. You will be given a copy of this form. If you have any questions about this research study, please contact: Jacqueline C. Boone at (757) 407-2045 or [jboon007@odu.edu](mailto:jboon007@odu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Kristine Sunday, who is overseeing this research, at (757) 683-3702, [ksunday@odu.edu](mailto:ksunday@odu.edu) or Laura Chezán, current chair for the Institutional Review Board Committee at (757) 683-7055.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline C. Boone  
Doctoral Student  
Darden School of Education  
Old Dominion University

**APPENDIX G – IRB APPROVAL**

From: **Laura Chezan** <[no-reply@irbnet.org](mailto:no-reply@irbnet.org)>

Date: Fri, Apr 5, 2019, 8:42 PM

Subject: IRBNet Board Action

To: Jacqueline Boone <[jboon007@odu.edu](mailto:jboon007@odu.edu)>, Kristine Sunday <[ksunday@odu.edu](mailto:ksunday@odu.edu)>

Please note that Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1410217-1] BLACK TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE WISDOM AS SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY: A BLACK FEMINIST NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Principal Investigator: JACQUELINE BOONE, PH.D.

Submission Type: New Project

Date Submitted: March 12, 2019

Action: APPROVED

Effective Date: April 5, 2019

Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Laura Chezan at [lchezan@odu.edu](mailto:lchezan@odu.edu).

Thank you,

The IRBNet Support Team

[www.irbnet.org](http://www.irbnet.org)

## VITA

### **TEACHING: NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY – Norfolk, Virginia**

2009-Present **FACULTY INSTRUCTOR**  
 Department of Early Childhood/Elementary and Special Education  
 Norfolk State University (Norfolk, VA)

*Courses Taught:* Introduction to the Profession (ECE 110)  
 The Study of Young Children – (EED 274)  
 Introduction to Early Childhood Special Education (ECS 300)  
 Creative Activities for Young Children (ECE 232)  
 Teaching Practicum – (ECE 495)

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES:**

2019-Present **Co-Director**  
 Future Teacher Academy – Norfolk State University

2019-Present **Board Member**  
 Kairos Freedom School of VA

Jan. 2018-Present **Mentor & Teacher**  
 Classic Upward Bound program – Norfolk State University

2012-2019 **Education Consultant & Site Test Manager**  
 Children’s Defense Fund – Kairos Freedom School of Norfolk

### **PRESENTATIONS:**

May 2019 Keynote Speaker “Rejuvenating the superhero”  
 Children’s Harbor – Virginia Beach, VA

October 2018 The International Congress for Critical Pedagogy and Transformative  
 Leadership, Bilbao, Spain. Panelist “Congress Dialogues on Critical  
 Pedagogy”

### **GRANTS AND AWARDS:**

April 2019 Katharine Kersey Award for Early Childhood Education  
 Old Dominion University

July 2018 Co-Principal Investigator – U.S. Department of Education: Child Care  
 Access Means Parents in School Program (C.C.A.M.P.I.S.) \$586,124.00  
 (funded)

June 2018 Recipient – Robert W. Blake Memorial Social Justice Scholarship \$500.00  
 (funded)

March 2018 Recipient – Old Dominion University Doctoral Student Literacy Center  
 Travel Grant \$400.00 (funded)

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS:**

Council for Exceptional Children  
 National Association for the Education of Young Children  
 National Head Start Association  
 National Association for Multi-Cultural Education  
 Southern Early Childhood Association