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# Memoir of a Black Female Social Worker: Re-Collections on Black Women Parenting and Parental Involvement in the Education of Black Children

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MEMOIR OF A BLACK FEMALE SOCIAL WORKER: RE-COLLECTIONS

ON BLACK WOMEN PARENTING AND PARENTAL

INVOVLEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF BLACK CHILDREN

by

JACQUELYN HODGES ANTHONY

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This study explores Black parental involvement by re-collecting my lived experiences as parent and social worker through memoir. Although the main characters in my stories are based on my family members and the parents and children I have assisted in various schools, I have fictionalized events, periods, and identities to protect myself and the people in my stories from the voyeuristic spectator. Fictionalizing also provides access within the intricacies of a lived experience and allows me to highlight ways of knowing that may expand epistemological standpoints regarding Black parental involvement.

Re-collecting allowed me to reflect upon my two selves as parent and social worker and reminded me of a generational othermothering that traversed Afrocentric traditions and found a new home among the decedents of African slaves in the United States (James, 1993; Collins, 1994; Walker & Snarey, 2004). Steeped within a rich tradition of parenting, othermothering counters conventional narrative that suppresses Black parents' involvement in their child's life. Exploring parent involvement through my personal and professional narratives provided an opportunity to for me to unearth those suppressed and silent hegemonic ideals to understand who I am in Black children's lives and how I affect their success in school.

There is a plethora of research that explores Black parental involvement as a means for

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increasing their children's achievement; however, few texts unpack the intersectionality of Black

parents' multiple social identities to examine the ways they are already involved in their

children's schooling. By exploring the gaps in research, this study problematizes Black parental

involvement as a means for interrogating the process of teaching and learning in American

schools. Drawing upon the work of Critical Race Theory (e.g. Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic,

2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Watkins, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002), I explore parenting from a

Black Feminist Thought standpoint (e.g. Collins, 1994; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Lorde,

1984/2007) to provide a revisionist interpretation of a communal mothering that nurtures the

growth and development of a child's physical, emotional and mental interconnected selves (e.g.

Case, 1997; Glenn, 1993; Henry, 2006; James, 1993; Lightfoot, 1978; Walker & Snarey, 2004).

I draw upon the works of memoir and fiction as my methodology to complicate narratives

in the home, school, and community (e.g. Harris, 2005; Braxton, 1989). The benefit of using this

approach is that it creates a space for imaginative activity in capturing a truth, a reality, a lived

experience (Morrison, 2008).  The use of memoir also freed me to write about experience

thematically as opposed to chronologically. I was therefore able to present Black parents' lived

experiences with their children's schooling as a school social worker or as a parent throughout

this study to expose a truth silent within research.

It is my hope that this study sparks an imaginative activity that reveals to policy makers,

educational researchers and practitioners that there is a need for Black orientations to parental

involvement in schools to redress universalization, hegemonization, and silencing of Black

parents' engagement in their children's schooling; to recognize all that is suppressed and silent to

gain insight of who they are and how they became who they are in the lives of Black children; to

dismantle those individual, structural, and political agendas and practices that are pervasive and

negatively affect Black children's success in schools and life; and to recognize how Black parents' varying identities inference their perceptions and interactions with their children's schools. This imaginative activity helps to construct a dialogical relationship between the home, school and community that honors multiple ways of knowing about Black communal parental involvement that inspires all Black children to reach their highest potential (Walker, 1996). A dialogical relationship would minimize barriers to Black parental involvement created by school personnel's hegemonic status and bureaucratic social structures. It would also foster knowledge about school functions, curricular and educational standards that Black parents seek in accessing expertise that will further their children's success in schools.

INDEX WORDS: Parent Involvement, Othermothering, Universalization, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, Hegemony, Autobiography, Memoir

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M.S.W., Clark Atlanta University, 1992

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the one who provided me with the creative spark and to those precious to me who gave me the inspiration to move on that spark. This dissertation is the result of God's creative spark within me. In my quest to bring something new and imaginative to research, I found a writing that I didn't think I was capable of.

To my children Xavier, Jacqueline, and Jasmine- thanks for putting up with me; you were right there with me experiencing my fall into the rabbit hole and my subsequent rebirth as I emerged from this disruptive experience a better scholar. To my grandmother Florence Henry- your wisdom and love has been a generational blessing, and even though you are no longer with us, I still benefit from all that you have given. To my parents Clifford and Pauline Hodges- you always made me feel I could do anything and for that I will be eternally grateful. Thanks for continuously asking me, "When are you going to be finished with that paper? You about ready to graduate yet?" In your minds, it was never a question of how is she going to do this…but when. To my sister Evelyn Hodges- thanks for keeping me among the living. Your tenacity in keeping me socially active has provided balance in my life. To all of you- you have been the inspiration behind the narrative shared in this study. I know that the inspiration you provided me will become a transformative work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Melvin, I am especially grateful to you for calling me and waking me up at 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning to ensure that I was putting some time into the writing; your opinions and feedback have been invaluable. Gerri, there are not enough words to express how appreciative I am of your othermothering of my children.

To the offspring of Sam and Florence Henry, thank you for paving the way for all of us. I have learned much from the examples you have set.

Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, thank you for contributing to the works of countless Black female writers. Your dedication to the craft has created space for fledgling writers like me. It is because of you that I had the courage to share my thoughts, dreams, and experiences on paper. I can only hope that one day this work will make a difference in someone's life the way your works have made a difference in mine.

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## PROLOGUE

## A Black Mother's Work: Biology vs. Charlie

It's late August and my child is failing 9th grade biology. Well…he's not actually failing. He has a "C" average, but in our home, anything less than an 80 is failing. After going online and reviewing his grades, I discovered three zero's in the place where grades should be marked for homework and class work.

"Charlie, where is your binder for biology?" "Why?" "Just give me the binder."

"Okay." As he hands it to me I can already see papers hanging out of the contraption, and scrawled doodling marks with some girl's handwriting adorning the thing. Then I open it. Um, um, um. I've seen better organization from a Kindergartner.

"This thing's a mess. How in the world can you find anything?" He says something to me, but I can't focus on his chatter (at least that's what it sounds like to me… chatter).

After organizing my son's binder I find a few graded quizzes- graded in the low 70's- which have comments from the teacher that are confusing, and daily warm-ups (some of which have the teacher's initials, some that do not).

"Charlie, these grades are pitiful. Let me tell you what I've seen you doing for this class. NOTHING! You haven't cracked open a book in biology since school started. (His eyes get big and he looks around the room - as if someone can help him- the deer caught in headlights look. Why do they always do that? He starts to speak).

"But mom..." "SHUT UP... I'm still talking! This is pathetic. I can't believe you're beginning your first year of high school this way. You need to tell me what you plan on doing differently. What're going to do to get yourself out of this mess?"

"Mom, it's not me, she gave us a quiz on a chapter we haven't even covered yet and when I look up from my paper, she always tells me to get back to work."

"Okay, that's two incidents; tell me what else has you struggling in that class."
"I'm not struggling."

"You're not struggling… you're kidding me right? Look at that computer and tell me what you see!"(I need him to remove himself- away from me- before I do something rash. I'm not a violent person, but I find myself wanting to hit him... I mean really do bodily harm. I just fold my arms across my chest to contain myself). He sits in the chair and scrolls down the litany of work and grades posted and says,

"Mom, my grades are not that bad."  Counting to ten before I speak through my teeth, "So you believe that having a "C" average is okay?" "It could be worse. I know kids in my class that are failing. At least I have a 'C'."

Lord, Jesus…what has happened to my little boy? When did he change? Where was I when it happened? How in the world does an A/B student who scores between 11.5 to 12.5 in reading, math, science, and social studies on the ITBS transform into a run of the mill 'at least I'm not failing' kid? The more I think about it, the angrier I get. Wait-A- Minute. Since he's forgotten, he needs to be reminded.

"I'm not raising those kids Charlie. Who do you know over there that's getting help with homework or research projects at this house? Huh, who"? (I don't even wait for a response). "Am I taking them to baseball and basketball practices and going to their games? Do I get up at the crack of dawn and stay up until the wee hours of the morning to make sure that those kids at your school are fed, clothed, or provided a roof over their heads"? (Still not waiting for a response, because he's quite the captured deer now).

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"Cause I don't understand why you're trying to compare yourself to other kids in that class as if that's supposed to make me feel better about what you're doing in biology."

At least he has an apologetic look on his face as he says, "Okay, okay mom… jeez." (Good, now I have his attention). I try to keep from smiling. (No need in letting them know you've got them over the barrel). "Alright, now that we understand who I'm concerned about in your classroom, I need you to answer a few questions. What are these comments on your quizzes saying? What do they mean?"

"I don't know. I can't read her handwriting."

"What about these warm-up assignments? Why are some of them initialed and others are not?"

"I don't know. She just looks at them and initials them sometimes".

"Did you ask your teacher about these assignments?"

"Nooo… you don't ask Ms. Johnson nothing. You just get your work out." (I find myself calling on the Lord again. I'm not going to get anywhere with this boy so I start developing a plan in my head…).

This is how we begin the school year in 9th grade biology. I know it's still early in the semester, but I don't want Charlie's bad habits to continue and become a set practice. I also don't want to wait for him to be failing before I hear from his teacher's mandated report to me that he's failing. I just go ahead and e-mail his teacher because at this rate, I'm going nowhere fast with Charlie. It boggles my mind about the level of energy I exert in each of my children's schooling. Having three children with three very different personalities is wearisome but rewarding too (the boy does have his moments). I try to remember that each child is different as I press the send button....

I mull over the changes in my son. What happened from middle school to high school… over the span of one summer? I wonder if other parents have to run behind their children the way I have to run behind him. How are they supporting their children being successful in school? Parents supporting education is not a new phenomenon. The U.S. Department of Education (2008) has produced a plethora of data regarding parent involvement. A review of the data presents four categories that remained consistent; attended a general school or PTO/PTA meeting, attended a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, attended school or class event, and volunteered or served on school committee. The disaggregation of data collected from those four categories in 2006-07 revealed that the percentage of elementary and secondary Black school children whose parents were involved in school activities as 87% attended school PTO/PTA meetings, 77% attended parent-teacher conferences, 65% attended a school or class event, and 35% volunteered or served on school committee. When compared to their corresponding race/ethnicities (Whites, Hispanics, Asian, and Other), the percentages of Black parents' involvement remained relatively the same as their counterparts in two areas; attended a general school or PTO/PTA meeting and attended a parent-teacher conference. However, their percentages began to vary from their counterparts in the areas of attended a school or class event,

and volunteered or served on school committee. This data suggests that Black parents participate in school based activities that are directly related to their child; however, it does not reveal the the multiple ways Black parents support their children's schooling.

Additional data produced by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement summarized that, "children with more family resources as measured by parents' education and household income are more likely than children with fewer resources to have parents who are highly involved in their schools, and children whose mothers and fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to have greater levels of social capital as measured by activities shared with parents and high parental educational expectations" (Winquist Nord, 1998, pp. 1, 2). This summary suggests that educational attainment and income provides parents with the resources necessary to participate in their children's education; however, what it doesn't take into consideration is that not all resources available to parents have to be material in order to support student education. The summary also makes the assumption that resources can be measured by education and household income. The data doesn't make me feel better. I know that historically, Black mothers who did not have the income or the degrees created their own resources; my grandmother taught me that through example. As I think about my grandmother's lessons, I'm remembering another time…

## Passing Knowledge from Mother to Daughter

The year is 1965 and I'm a little Black girl living in humid Jacksonville, Florida. Surrounded by sunshine, moss filled trees, and the smells from the paper mill, I live the care free life of a four year old child. I'm also surrounded by people who make me feel loved. For as long as I can remember, family has always been an integral part of my life. Both my mother and my father come from large families so a day never went by that I didn't see an aunt, uncle, cousin, or

grandparent. I see the adults- men and women- working every day. Even my grandparents still work… granddad still lives off his land by selling the fruits (and vegetables) of his labors and grandma cleans a wealthy White family's house (sometimes she takes me with her). The day in this wealthy family's home started off the same as always, but today I was curious.

"Good morning Loretta. I need you to polish the silver and stemware today. I'm expecting company in two days and I want this place in tip-top condition."

"Okay Miss Janis, I'll get right on that."

Miss Janis looks at me and says to my grandmother, "Oh Loretta, you always keep your grandchild so clean. I made some cookies. You can have a few before you leave today sweetie". "Yes ma'am".

After Miss Janis leaves to "run her errands", grandma looks at me and says, "It's gonna be a long day baby. Make sure you stay out've my way. And don't you dare eat none of them cookies she cooked. She got that ole cat running round this house while she cooking. We ain't got no time for you to be catching something."

I nod at my grandmother while she's looking out for my best interests and since she spoke to me first, I asked her a question (back then the children in my family were taught that they were meant to be seen and not heard). "Grandma?" "Hum?" "Why Miss Janis always call you by your first name?"

In our community, grandma was highly revered and everyone there called her Ms. Hall. I was confused as to why this White woman didn't do the same. She responded with a warm smile and said, "That's just the way thangs are baby."

At the time, my grandmother's response was accepted with a child's understanding and I didn't think anymore about it. As an adult, I can now look upon her response and understand

what Toni Morrison meant by the semantical difference between the word lady and woman in a White supremacist ideal.  Morrison (2008) espoused that "white females were ladies…and the quality that made ladyhood worthy was…softness, helplessness and modesty… Colored females, on the other hand, were women- unworthy of respect because they were tough, capable, independent and immodest" (pp. 18-19). Maybe the White woman that my grandmother worked for consciously or unconsciously embraced the lady/woman ideal because in the times my grandmother took me to work with her, I never witnessed the woman speak to my grandmother as if she were someone who was her equal. Although this woman shared the same sex, her race and her class would forever shield her from knowing 'work' that forces you to call someone half your age 'Miss', while the very same person- having no familiar relationship to a person- can call someone who is their senior outright by their first name.

As I reflect on those times spent with my grandmother, I am reminded of the work the women in my family do. Too young for the half-day state funded Kindergarten and having plenty of female family members as a resource (no need in wasting money on child care), I always went to work with one of my family members.  Since I was the oldest of the grandchildren not old enough to go to school, most of the time I went to work with my grandmother. All of the women in my family worked outside of the home as well as worked within the home. As a divorced parent of three children working full-time outside of the home, as well as working towards earning my doctorate degree, I now understand what it took for my mother, aunts, and grandmother to maneuver between the balance of work and home. The choices you make as a parent between your place of employment, your higher degree, or whatever it is that you do outside of the home to better yourself, sacrifices your time and energy with your children.

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Growing up in the 60's and the 70's, the children were 'women's work' (an ideology that has not changed much) and as such, multitasking between the complex domains of work is a skill that Black women have honed since slavery. bell hooks (2000) best described the historical sacrifice of a Black mother:

> From slavery to the present day, Black women in the U.S. have worked outside the home, in the fields, in the factories, in the laundries, in the homes of others. That work gave meager financial compensation and often interfered with or prevented effective parenting. Historically, Black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity White supremacist ideology claimed Black people were incapable of expressing. (p. 133)

In a society that emphasizes the importance of work, should not the Black woman be considered the perfect employee? During slavery we were forced to place work even above our own children. After reconstruction we were forced to accept the unrewarding work of manual labor to supply the needs of our families. Post civil rights, the Black woman still works to break the glass ceiling of corporate America; works to attain equal pay for the same job our White counterparts are paid; works to better our educational attainment; works to keep our sons away from the drug, jail, and dropout statistics; works to keep our daughters away from the pregnant teen, unwed mother, and welfare statistics. I could go on and on about the work as it is never-ending; however, it is not the work more so than it is the woman who manages the work that should draw our focus. I am reminded of this freeing work as I focus on my son's situation…

**A Black Mother's Work: Biology vs. Mom**

Although I didn't receive an instruction manual when Charlie was born (nothing was given to me about how to raise a stubborn, bull-headed, know-it-all fourteen year old Black boy, let alone how to support that type of child's schooling), I use the resource that was modeled for me; a resource that was handed down from a lineage of mothering.

"Hey mama." " Hey Jacque, what you know good?" "Your grandson acting a fool up at that school."

"WHAT! He smelling hisself?" "Might as well be. He ain't doing nothing in his biology class…messed around and got himself a C."

"Um - let me talk to him." I smile as I call for him ('cause I know what's coming). "Charlie, your grandma wants to talk to you." As he picks up the phone, I almost feel sorry for him…almost.

"What's up grandma?" Whatever she's saying to him, he looks at me as if I've betrayed him. I nod with satisfaction as I walk off. Let him explain his foolishness to her...

Although my sister and I were raised in a two parent household, we could tell that daddy felt more comfortable with mama handling the school issues. That's probably why we always viewed her as the authority on schooling.

Being recently divorced and what feels like a full-time student, the demands of work, school, and home can be overwhelming. I call upon my mother and sister often to 'fill-in' for baseball games and practices, cheerleading at games and practices and even when I don't know I need help…they are there. "Can you help ____ find___ for their research project? "Honey, let me help you with your ____ homework". Just fill in the blanks and know that it's difficult within

two parent homes to raise children. So I rely on family- yes granddad too- for support. This collective 'parenting' of my children has been practiced for as long as I can remember, even when my ex-husband and I were still married. However, the women in my family have always been central to the mothering of children. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), "…African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers… traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p. 192). This makes me stop to think again about how I'm doing as parent. Data will not provide me any solace for my anxiety over Charlie. For the time being, knowing that I have the support of my family is enough. As for Charlie's schooling, I feel I'm doing the best I can by letting his teachers know that I'm available and keeping in constant communication with them regarding his education. I guess that's the best I can do for right now until I have some answers. I check my e-mail. Great! I received a response from his teacher. I'm finally going to get some answers to help me get this boy back on track…

-----Original Message-----
**From:** Brown High School - Johnson, M.
**Sent:** Friday, August 22, 2008 2:34 PM
**To:** Student Services - Anthony, J.
**Subject:** RE: Charlie's progress in class

Thank you so much for inquiring.  I'll call you tonight.

M. Johnson, Ed S.
Honors Biology
Brown High School

*Friday evening (8/22/08):*

Okay, it's 9:30 p.m. and I've checked both the cell and home voicemails… there's no message from the teacher. Let me check caller I.D., maybe she didn't leave a message. Nope, nothing's there either. Well… maybe she got sidetracked. There's always tomorrow…

*Saturday evening (8/23/08):*

After a full day of switching back and forth from double checking my cell phone and home phone, I realize around 8:00 p.m. that I'm not going to get a call today either…

*Sunday evening (8/24/08):*

I relax today. If we happen to miss one another, I'll just return her call. Around 9:00 p.m. I check the cell and home voicemail messages just to make sure….no phone call.

*Monday evening (8/25/08):*

I don't even think about Charlie's biology class until I'm getting ready for bed. I'll just send a reminder e-mail to his teacher tomorrow…

**From:** Student Services - Anthony, J.
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 26, 2008 4:13 PM
**To:** Brown High School - Johnson, M.
**Subject:** RE: Charlie's progress in class

Hey Ms. Johnson,
Maybe I missed your call. Please let me know which day/time works best for you to discuss Charlie's progress. My numbers are (5) 555-5555 (c) and (5) 555-5555 (h). Thanks!
J. Anthony

I think the e-mail is professional and non-accusatory. I'll just wait to see what happens. At least

Charlie is bringing his biology book home and completing homework, so for right now I feel a

little better about this class. The next day, my little 'feel good' changes pretty quickly after his

teacher responds to my e-mail…

-----Original Message-----
**From:** Brown High School – Johnson, M.
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 27, 2008 2:59 PM
**To:** Student Services - Anthony, J.
**Subject:** RE: Charlie's progress in class

Good Afternoon Mrs. Anthony

Thank you for writing.  Charlie and I tried to call you from class yesterday.  He also wrote a note indicating that he did not do his class work and he was off task!  Charlie constantly has to be reminded to get on task or get "back" on task.  As soon as I move to another area of the classroom he is back to daydreaming or picking at his fingers.

Please help me help Charlie by encouraging him to remain focused as much as possible. It is so easy to miss out on important info when you are talking while the teacher talks and when you are not concentrating on the assigned task.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

M. Johnson
Honors Biology

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***WHAT THE -  WHAT!!!*** Flames are shooting from my head (at least that's what it feels like) as I read this e-mail. I had to examine my anger over this teacher (who obviously didn't know that she was responding to a fellow school employee- a social worker no doubt). Who did she think she was talking too?!! As I allowed my anger to engulf me and slowly dissipate, I pondered over her response. I contemplated my identities as school social worker (working with parents), and parent (being worked with or over-depending on your vantage point). This experience with my son's science teacher forced me to move beyond my 'title' as school social worker to my other identity as parent. I'm no longer a fellow colleague who can hide behind my position or even a salient being capable of contributing to the education of a child. Rather, I have been reduced to a passive partner to educating said child who is in need of lecturing and admonishing for not following-up on my end of the one-sided relationship. In my identity as parent, I am subjected to the schools' ability to define how my involvement should present in my child's education; in this case, the teacher has decided.

A million questions run through my mind as I try to understand why his teacher responded the way she did.  Am I losing it or wasn't I the one who contacted her in the first place

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to find out what was going on with my child in her class? Did she even see me - the concerned parent - as she responded to my e-mail, or does she perceive all parents to be the same non-present, unconcerned entity to bestow knowledge about how we should help her with our children in her class? How could she dismiss my concern for Charlie's progress in her class and replace it with a generic representation of an unconcerned uninvolved parent that needed to be admonished to help her educate a child? The latter question I answer for myself. Drawing from the discussion of difference being rejected in a profit economy, Audre Lorde (1984/2007) espoused that "…we have all been programmed to respond to human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate" (p. 115). Thus, individual differences are ignored and are replaced with preconceptions of the human presented before us. Could this explain it, that this teacher had no other choice? She had to make me invisible by constructing an environment of sameness. Maybe my questions challenged her preconceptions of parents and presented her with a dilemma- difference was staring her down.

Maybe I'm over thinking it. Maybe she's just another educator who fails to acknowledge the multiple constructions of parenting because she needs to shift the blame of student failure (or in my case- Charlie's 'off task behaviors') on the parent rather than other factors such poor classroom management or low teacher expectations. Or maybe this teacher has a narrow definition of parent involvement. She wouldn't be the first educator to have such a narrow scope of this phenomenon. Whichever the teacher's reasoning, to me her response ignores the multiple identities that construct ME, a Black mother, and renders my involvement in my son's schooling as invisible.

As I contemplate my invisibility with this teacher, I dissect each sentence of her response. Why didn't Ms. Johnson mention in her first e-mail to me that we needed to talk about Charlie's 'off task' behaviors? Why did I have to send a second e-mail to prompt a response from her (which I didn't receive until a day later) that 'he's goofing off'? I don't have any messages on my voicemails, so when did she call? I wait a couple of hours before I reply and count to ten before I press the send button…

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**From:** Student Services - Anthony, J.
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 27, 2008 4:56 PM
**To:** Brown High School - Johnson, M.
**Subject:** RE: Charlie's progress in class

I appreciate the information that you have provided. I am sorry I missed your call. Did you all leave a message when you called (best time to return your call)? I still need to speak with you because this gives me general and I need to discuss specific:
- Warm-up assignments- (Which prompted my exploration into his progress in your class). I found a few that had your signature on them and a few that didn't.
- A couple of graded quizzes
- Homework/assigned readings/assigned work

Again, I am sorry we did not have an opportunity to talk. Charlie's off-task behaviors will be addressed. Is there a specific reason why he was asked to write a note about not completing his work and off-task behaviors?

I believe a conversation will best help me to help you, specifically, with the concerns I've raised above. What time is your planning period?
J. Anthony

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The next day, on Thursday afternoon, I finally receive a response that left me wondering even more what type of teacher I was dealing with.

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**From:** Brown High School - Johnson, M.
**Sent:** Thu 8/28/2008 12:12 PM
**To:** Student Services - Anthony, J.
**Subject:** RE: Charlie's progress in class

Well, I guess good things come to those who wait. I asked for a planning period time and I

received a phone number. I suppose I should be happy that I finally have a direct number to

contact Charlie's teacher, but this information does not put my mind at ease. I ponder over what

would have happened if I didn't have access to a computer at home to check Charlie's grades; if

my son and I didn't have regular discussions about his education; if I weren't persistent about

following-up with his teacher. Would my child have fallen through the cracks? Raised as a Black

child educated in American schools and raising Black children who attend American schools,

how does my race affect how I see my role as a parent supporting my children's schooling? How

have my experiences influenced what I feel is my responsibility in shaping my children's

educational future? As I consider these questions I am reminded of everything I have undergone

to become the parent I am today and I feel compelled to explore what it means to be a Black

parent involved in a child's schooling. In an effort to demonstrate what it means to be Black and

involved, I share my experiences as a Black female parent to emphasize how parents of color

navigate the various planes within the educational setting to support learning from home and

within schools.

### Reading the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of a prologue, five chapters, and epilogue which explore

the parent involvement phenomenon as it intersects Black parents' experiences with schools. I

use memoir as a means for articulating the interconnections of race to dominant ideologies which

situate Black parental involvement as invisible. This study is composed of several themes which

I feel are pertinent to unpacking the contours of Black parents' involvement in their children's

schooling. Therefore, the use of memoir is weaved thematically rather than chronologically throughout this study to either introduce the reader to the subject or to provide insight into a lived experience that is silent within research regarding parental involvement.

In the Prologue I tell my stories as a re-collection of accounts with schooling to reexamine, reinterpret, and rearticulate the parental involvement experience as it intersects research, narrative, and discourse. In Chapter One I provide the reader with a story of my experience as a school social worker and situate practices with schools, parents, and othermothering within the larger framework of educational research. In Chapter Two I introduce the review of literature with a fictionalized conversation with my children that touches upon the landscape of Black parenting and the parent involvement phenomenon. Chapter Three commences with my story as school social worker to highlight autobiography and fiction as my method for delivering the concepts of this study. I also explore this method as it is employed by Black female writers to emphasize the connection of Black women's literary forms to inquiry within Curriculum Studies. I then examine Critical Race Theory as a means for locating this study's standpoint for interpretation. As I attempt to unpack constructions of identity as race-d, I situate my storied experiences within this framework. I weave stories throughout Chapter Four to complicate the parent involvement phenomenon through an analysis of the function of schools, as well as exploration into axiological considerations placed upon social structures' and educational professionals' role in preventing successful parent involvement. I focus on this issue to ameliorate static epistemologies regarding parent involvement which obscures the contributions of Black parents' lived experiences with student learning. Chapter Five summarizes my findings from this inquiry and the Epilogue integrates several themes to illustrate the multiplicity of Black parental involvement.

# CHAPTER 1

## BLACK PARENTING VS. OTHERMOTHERING: MS. CLARK

**Not That Kind of Volunteer**

It's 10:00AM Wednesday morning and I'm still looking for the assistant principal. The custodian said she just saw Mr. Andrews on the 300 hall. Ms. Clark, the parent of one of our more challenging students, wanted to be more involved with her child's schooling. She just wasn't sure about what she could do because of her demanding work schedule. She called me because she already knew me from my involvement as the school social worker who conducted an anger management group with her daughter. I had some thoughts, but I wanted to share my ideas with Mr. Andrews. Speak of the devil, as I round the corner towards the 300 Hall, I find him in the middle of an impromptu meeting outside of the classroom with the very student who is the source of Ms. Clark's inquiry; Ja'netta Clark. Upon first view of the two I could tell it was going to be a battle of wills. Mr. Clark is a slender 5' 10" Black man and Ja'netta is a 5'10" average build Black girl. So sharing the same height, they were able to stare each other down.

After being pulled from class, Ja'netta - a gifted student with one of the worst discipline records in the school- stands with her right hand on her hip and a nonchalant look on her face as Mr. Andrews looks at her with his "don't start none, won't be none" expression while he's trying to provide her what I would call 'a teachable moment'. I know that stance quite well… she's ignoring him. She's known throughout the school for her quick temper and, because of that temper, every teacher knows the triggers that make her lose her self-control; unfortunately for her classmates, they don't. It's the blow-outs with classmates that initiate teachers' calls to administration regularly to pull her from class to prevent another office referral. When she sees

me approaching them, her whole demeanor shifts, she removes her hand off that hip and smiles and waves (poor thing, she thinks I'm rescuing her).

"Hey Ms. Anthony (cutting through Mr. Andrews's lesson)."

"Hi Ja'netta, Mr. Andrews sure must have something important to say to you to pull you out of class. What's he been talkin about?"

Shrugging her shoulders she says, "I donno."

I catch Mr. Andrews's eye when I say, "Oh, Mr. Andrews you better take some more time to explain to Ja'netta what you've been talking about." With a knowing look he responds, "Maybe you're right Ms. Anthony, I'll just take another 10 minutes to explain it to her."

As she rolls her eyes at the both of us she states, "Okay, okay, I get it!! You ain't got to spend no mo time phi-lo-so-phizing 'bout where all I could go if I change my attitude. I'm trying ain't I, why I don't get no credit fo that? All ya'll wanna do is git me fo what I ain't doin."

At that point I could feel what my colleagues and I would call 'the mama coming out of me'. With my right hand resting automatically on my right hip and my neck cocked to the left a tradition of othermothering passed down from generation to generation of Black women was about to ensue. I felt insulted, and you just don't insult your mother. How could this ungrateful little girl think no one gave her any credit? That's all most adults in this building have been doing is giving her credit. From Mr. Andrews providing Ja'netta with a teachable moment as opposed to writing her up, to the AD (athletic director) who allowed Ja'netta to try-out for the team with her terrible track record of behavioral concerns, the adults in the building

othermothered her throughout the school day to ensure that she benefited from the programs offered at the school. My next words would drive that home for her.

"Ja'netta, if we wanted to 'get you', you would have been written-up and sent to the front office a long time ago. Mr. Andrews, do you have a write-up in your hand?" "Nope."

"But Ms. Anthony…" "But Ms. Anthony- nothing. You're accusing us of not giving you any credit, but aren't you the one who asked Mr. Andrews if he would speak to the basketball coach about letting you try-out for the team?"

"Yeah." She has a sheepish look on her face now.

"He gave you enough credit for that and thought enough of you to follow-up with coach about you getting placed on the team, even though she usually won't let kids who cause trouble make her basketball team, - didn't he?"

"Yeah, but…"

"But, what Ja'netta?" Mr. Andrews interjected now. "I did what I said I would do and coach put you on the team under two conditions. What were they?"

Now she's looking at us as if she's sorry she hurt our feelings. "To make good grades and be a leader in the school by staying out of trouble."

"Right Ja'netta. Do you think you're fulfilling those conditions?" "I make good grades, I'm a straight 'A' student."

I can't tell her that coach would get down on her hands and knees and beg her to play for the team at the thought of losing her because she's the best defensive player on the team and has a killer jump shot, so I just look at her without blinking until she looks away.

"Look Ja'netta, you wanna play games, fine. But Mr. Andrews put a lot of faith in you and went out on a limb vouching for you by asking coach to let you try-out. Coach went out on a limb putting you on the team. Don't get me wrong, you got skills…"

"I know."

"And you're all humble too." She smiles at that. "But the reason why coach needs you to be a leader at school and stay out of trouble is because the same attitude it takes to be a leader at school is the same attitude that coach needs on the basketball court for you to be leader on the team. You get where I'm going with all of this?"

She nods in the affirmative. "Mr. Andrews is going out on a limb for you by not writing you up and trying to talk with you about making better choices before you go back to class so you can get to do the things you like to do here at school… like playing ball. So we need to hear from you that we're not wasting our time."

She has tears in her eyes that she won't let fall as she says, "I ain't gonna let coach down and I ain't gonna let you down Mr. Andrews, but ya'll betta get her (pointing to the classroom) before I hafta handle her myself." Mr. Andrews and I just look at each other because we both know she's just trying to save face now. Mr. Andrews takes a deep breath, interlocking his fingers as if in prayer in front of his face while closing his eyes.

I just shake my head and say, "Mr. Andrews, I can see you're going to need a little more time with Ja'netta. I'm going to follow-up with her mother." "What fo, I ain't do nothing!"

"Oh, so the only time we're supposed to call your mother is when you do something? While you're jumping to conclusions, I'm returning her phone call. Oh, and by the way, if you really felt that fighting was okay, you wouldn't be so worried about

me calling your mother." Now she has a cheap look on her face, like she's saying, "yeah, you right… I'm scared of my mama and don't want her to know about my clowning up here."

"Mr. Andrews, can you stop by my office when you finish? I need to share some ideas I have about a new parent volunteer?" He opens his eyes with excitement about the new prospect.

On the way back to my office I smiled to myself as I thought about the look Mr. Andrews would give me when he found out who the parent volunteer was. Finally in my office, I scan my desk for the list of students I need to meet with. My phone rings.

"Ms. Anthony?" It was our school's counselor. "Hey Ms. Turner." "I've just been notified by a student's teacher that she thinks she's pregnant." "I'm on my way." After hearing this, I feel as if my day is going to be a wash because the chain of events that usually ensues with this type of situation. We're going to have to develop a rapport with the student so we can find out from her what events led her to believe that she's pregnant. Based on the information provided, we'll determine whether or not the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and/or the police should get involved- consensual intercourse or not. The most difficult part of this process is informing them that their parent/guardian has to be notified and prepare them for their parent's reaction(s) - most times they don't want to tell their parent. The next difficult part of this process is calling the parent and breaking the news that their baby has had unprotected sex (consensual or not) and could be pregnant. We then wait for the parent to come to the school to pick-up the student (most times parents check them out of school). Once the parent arrives at the school we'll have to speak with them at length about not going crazy on their baby- DFCS referral prevention- and ask that they have an Individual Health Plan

completed if the student is pregnant so that we can have documentation of the student's medical condition and have strategies in place should contingencies arise. As a precaution we'll amend and/or have the student's class schedule changed (just in case they are pregnant) so they aren't exposed to strenuous and/or dangerous surroundings.

As I knock on the door and enter the counselor's office I find a scared looking little girl with her arms wrapped around her torso - as if to comfort or hold herself together - staring back at me. "Okay sweetie, we're going to try to get to the bottom of this." We spend over an hour and a half going through the grueling process of assessment and interventions with the student before I can make it back to my office.

I'm finally able to sit down and right on cue there's a knock on my door. When I look up, I see that Mr. Andrews still has that excited look on his face.

"Hi Mr. Andrews, the counselor and I just finished working with a student… I may need a minute to debrief."

"Okay, I just wanted to find out from you who the parent volunteer was. I can come back."

Inwardly I smile, "Oh, well hold on then. I can tell you right now; it's Ms. Clark- Ja'netta's mom."

My good news just wiped that excited look right off his face and replaced it with a sourness that can only be a likening to someone who just ate a lemon.

"Mm hmm, she must have went-off on you and you talked her into volunteering for the school didn't you? You should have known that's what you were gonna get; you know how she is."

I guess his assumption about her attitude shouldn't surprise me. Ms. Clark has been up to the school a couple of times. The first time she came to the school it was because Ja'netta was being recommended for 7<sup>th</sup> grade math for the up-coming school year because she made a 50 on the 7th grade placement test. So although she was a 6<sup>th</sup> grade gifted student, and each nine weeks she maintained at least a 90 average, the recommendation was that she be placed in 7<sup>th</sup> grade math instead of Honors math. When her mother received the "good news", the first thing she did was to come to the school to let us know a thing or two about our recommendation.

Before the front office staff could say good morning, they were blasted with, "Ja'netta made all A's for each nine weeks. How ya'll gonna r e c o m e n d (separating the syllables in that word) she go to regular math over one test? What ya'll expect? Ya'll know you had a substitute teacher in that class a whole month before ya'll gave the damn test. Now because of one test she ain't good enough for gifted no more?"

"Ma'am can I help you?"

"Yeah… you can help me find out who responsible for messin over my baby!"

"Front office to administration, we need an administrator to come speak to a parent."

Needless to say, Ms. Clark's "visits" are legendary at Smith Middle School. As I re-collected Ms. Clark's visit it placed her concern over her child's placement into perspective…

"Actually Mr. Andrews, she was exactly how I would have expected any parent to be when it comes to their child… she was concerned."

It might not have been the kind of concern we as educators wanted to experience, but I understood her outbursts at the school as advocacy that stemmed from the long contentious history schools have had with Black parents.

According to Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) for the American Black, "schools have always held out the promise and hope of liberation and enlightenment at the same time as they have been recognized as social and economic vehicles of oppression and denial" (p. 125). The carrot of social mobility has always dangled in front of Black America's view with the promise that education would be the means by which one could achieve it; however, such aspirations were only meant for a selected few. From the fields of slavery, to the No Colored signs of Jim Crow, to the promise of we shall overcome of the Civil Rights Movement, to the now there's no excuse you've got Obama era, Blacks have traipsed the precarious tightrope between two Americas; the land of opportunity and the land of racism and oppression. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/2008) spoke of Black's navigation through the two Americas as a double consciousness whereby,

> the Negro…gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (p. 12)

For the Black American, this double consciousness is a necessary survival skill which has helped negotiate systems of discrimination and power formulated through dominant ideologies. Historically, schools have been the structure for instituting ideological agendas which have made the American dream inaccessible to many Blacks in America. William Watkins (2005) espoused that education is analogous to "a battle of ideas and contested social knowledge... which translate

into action. The battle of ideas is at the core of social and political discourse" (p. 2). This battle of which he speaks has been a process by which the cultural capital of dominant groups' privilege have influenced the economic and political terrain for knowledge production and has therefore situated marginal groups' social mobility as secondary to their interests.

Looking at Mr. Andrews I can see that he has swallowed that proverbial dangling carrot whole and is not averse to making the passive parent choke on it. His next statement only validated my assessment…

"Yeah, I know all about her type of concern. Look, you gotta know you're just asking for bad news if you go down that road with Ja'netta's mama. If we gotta have her up here, let's make sure we keep it to a minimum- for things like field trips…now we need her to volunteer to help keep an eye on her daughter, or a personal invitation to the Curriculum Day that we're having next month; things like that she can get involved in."

"How about chaperoning at the next school dance?"

"Yeah!"

"Or even working on the schools' fund raiser?"

"Yeah, things like that she'd be perfect for!"

I can see my sarcasm was lost on him. I guess Mr. Andrew's attitude about involving parents like Ms. Clark in school functions was no different than most educators.  Conceptions of parent involvement have been used to justify students' lack of academic achievement and issues with behavior that either result in disciplinary infractions or placements in alternative educational settings. Cheryl Fields-Smith (2009) noted that when "…parents were identified and associated by their children's behavior, which frequently did not conform to school expectations, that they may [have felt] alienated from the school. This may be due to their children's poor behavior and

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even due in part to the teachers' response to that negative behavior" (pp. 162, 163). This suggests that parents' involvement may not present in school based activities when their child's behavior is not the model of the norm; however, Fields-Smith (2009) noted in her study that "children's challenging behavior in school did not limit parents' involvement outside the school" (p. 163). Thus, using a school based framework to define parental involvement restricts participation to prescribed activities that support school functions.  The addition of the intersectionality of Black parents' varying social identities only problematizes these forms of involvement as categories of race, gender, class, and power further estranges parents from prescribed activities in schools. These hierarchies are perpetuated through the institutional, political and economic structures (to name a few) which normalize and validate western beliefs. Schools as social institutions then act as bureaucracies that propagate these dominant beliefs.

During the course of our conversation regarding ways she could be more involved in her child's school, Ms. Clark shared that as a student growing up in Georgia, she was placed in Special Education just as integration was launched in schools. According to Ms. Clark, she had a quick tempter that kept her in the spotlight with teachers and school administrators. She always felt that she was 'railroaded' into that placement and she vowed that she would never allow the same thing happen to her daughter; this is why she was so distrustful of schools' motives with her child's schooling. Ms Clark also shared that she was a single parent who had to work two jobs to make ends meet. As a single Black woman with a meager income, her race, gender, and class placed her in double (no triple) bind. Race, gender, and class are social identities that construct power and privilege in the United States; schools reproduce these power and privilege constructions through the stratification of parent groups (Apple, 1995). Ms. Clark's race situates her in a history rife with Blacks' perilous journey through systems of discrimination in places

such as the polling place, housing market, and employment offices. Black parents' issues with educating their children in public schooling situates them in yet another location of subordination and therefore has created a contentious relationship between them and schools (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 1995; Du Bois, 1903/2008; Hale, 1994; Harris, 1994; Lightfoot, 1978; Woodson 1933/2009; Smith & Chunn, 1991; Tate, 1997; Watkins, 2001).

Ms. Clark's caste within society placed her within an economically disadvantaged class which made it necessary for her to maintain two jobs in order to meet her monthly financial obligations. Consequently, her work schedule affected her involvement in school-based functions and rendered her activities in the building as nearly nonexistent to the untrained eye. Thus, her identity as a low wage earning woman, locates her within yet another matrix of dominance that is rife within a historical struggle for access to middle income and unionized jobs that her male counterparts received routinely in the workforce. Julie Bettie (1995) noted that "as employment shifted from heavy industry to nonunion clerical and service-sector jobs, employers found themselves irresistibly attracted to the non-unionized, cheaper labor of women, and thus, increasingly to that of married women and mothers whose labor had been made cheap, in part, by the historic working-class struggle for a male breadwinner wage (p. 133). Thus, the class stratification of women like Ms. Clark is reproduced in schools as school-based frameworks of parental involvement restrict economically disadvantaged parent groups' participation to periods during the school day when most are unable to take leave from their jobs.

Single parent women are yet another category of social identity which is situated within a matrix of domination in schools. Hemogenized representations of single mothers reify their contribution to social ills of society (Bettie, 1995). This may be explicated by theorists who espouse that the care of children has typically been perceived as the role of women partly due to

dominant patriarchal Western ideologies regarding gender functions (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). School personnel who internalize these hegemonized ideals of care of children relate to parents of different genders accordingly. The inclusion of the intersectionality of Black parents' varying social identities removes parents like Ms. Clark further away from a homogeneous construct that typifies parent involvement as the same in schools.

Several scholars question the discourse of 'sameness' as a means for not recognizing the relationship between gender, race, class, and culture to education (Anderson, & Collins, 2004; Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984/2007; Purpel, 1999). When schools operate in a system of neutrality to the social identities of parents and students, efforts to improve the quality of education for subordinated groups are redirected. Although race, class and gender are diverse social identities, they are interconnected through their representations of difference and intersect phenomena (specifically parent involvement) which impact students' achievement in schools. A parent like Ms. Clark will constantly have to fight ideologies which either repress her involvement in her child's life or relegate it as nonexistent.

**Why Black Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement is a topic that was propelled to the forefront of educational discussion when one-room school houses were replaced with state-run public schooling. As the industrial revolution was birthed from our nation, extensive research was conducted and written on the subject of parent involvement to better define the roles of families in children's lives. Specifically, immigrants, lower income families, and single parent families (mother head of household) were the targets of efforts to improve parental involvement because it was believed that this socialization would eventually increase their children's upward mobility in society (Berger, 1991, pp. 213-217). However, school's ability to transform the upward mobility of

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certain groups remained elusive. Black children, in particular, were not expected to benefit from all the advantages schools had to offer. Through economic, political, and social-cultural systems of discrimination, the United States of America has a history of systematically restricting Black children's access to schooling and constructing teaching and learning strategies based on deficit paradigms (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 1995; Du Bois, 1903/2008; Hale, 1994; Harris, 1994; Woodson 1933/2009; Lightfoot, 1978; Smith & Chunn, 1991; Tate, 1997; Watkins, 2001). According to Carter G. Woodson (1933/2009),

> when a Negro has finished his education in our schools, then he has been equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized White man… While he is a part of the body politic, he is in addition to this a member of a particular race to which he must restrict himself in all matters social…. While being a good American, he must above all things be a "good Negro"; and to perform this definite function he must learn to stay in a "Negro's place". (pp. 226-227)

Because Blacks were classified, sorted, and punished for being "other"; their place in American society was relegated to that of second class citizen. As such, the discourse of what is the "norm" was used to describe and then confine Blacks as pathology. The disease was then arrested and controlled by creating a homogeneous concept of family of which the Black family did not meet. This stereotyping constructed an ideological standpoint for the educational training of dominant and marginalized groups. Black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois (1903/2008) and Woodson (1933/2009) espoused that the purpose of American schooling was to indoctrinate Blacks to accept their status as an inferior in society. Accordingly, William Watkins (2001) espoused that philanthropies, missionaries, and various interest groups were interested in developing education to ensure that "the Black population…was prepared ideologically and practically for their role in

a new America" (p.23). Thus, Blacks would never receive the education that their White

counterparts benefited from and upward mobility for the Black child was denied.

United States' history is deeply rooted in policies and practices which subordinate Blacks

as a marginal group.  These practices have affected Blacks' interests at the polling place, at the

personnel office, on the housing market, and specifically in education. Diana Slaughter and

Valerie Kuehne (1989), speak to research that "points to a history in which the children of slaves

were, by national and local policy, to be kept uneducated and illiterate. Further, in Northern

states, Black children were generally legally forbidden to attend schools with White children,

and public dollars were not, without repeated struggles by Black parents and communities,

allocated for the separate but equal education of Black children" (p.60). These policies were

constructed from dominant Eurocentric, patriarchal ideologies which separated children by race

(*and class)* and prevented the educational improvement of Blacks. Even the basic tenets of

desegregation that were constructed to negate the effects of segregation in schools were

susceptible to issues of racial balancing as opposed to improving the quality of education.

Derrick Bell (1995) espoused that, "whether based on racial balance precedents or compensatory

education theories, remedies that fail to attack all policies of racial subordination almost

guarantee that the basic evil of segregated schools will survive and flourish, even in those

systems where racially balanced schools can be achieved. Low academic performance and large

numbers of disciplinary and expulsion cases are only two of the predictable outcomes in

integrated schools where the racial subordination of Blacks is reasserted in, if anything, a more

damaging form" (p. 10). Although there was a presumption that racial balancing would offset the

damaging effects of segregation, it has been cited by researchers such as Bell that racial

balancing only ensures integration of schools; it does not ensure that the quality of education will

be improved for children of color. Thus, schools are the contested terrain with which the Black family and the nation-state continue to fight over.

**They Don't Have to Volunteer**

As I considered the varying categories of social identity of students and families with which schools use to measure parent participation and the contested terrain of schools, I felt compelled to draw Mr. Andrew's focus to the multifaceted forms of parent involvement. Ms. Clark's concern about her child's schooling, although expressed in an atypical manner, was one of those forms of parent participation.

"Mr. Andrews, I hope you understand that I was being facetious when I suggested that Ms. Clark volunteer at a school dance or help with the next school fund raiser".

He looked genuinely surprised to hear that. "Well I thought those were good ideas."

"I'm sure they were good ideas back in the 40's and 50's when the general consensus of a conservative America was that a woman's place was in the home and Jim Crow was still alive and well. But we're in the 21st century now and with the economy the way it is now, physically being here at the school to participate isn't practical to most people's work schedules."

When I told him this, I was thinking about the recent updates emailed to me from the National Education Association (NEA). In particular, one of the updates stated:

**Parents Increasingly Resisting Schools' Requests For Volunteers.**

The New York Times (12/2, D1, Stout) reported on the front of its "Home & Garden" section that mothers nationwide "are becoming emboldened to push back against the relentless requests from their children's schools for their time." In recent years, "as local and state economies continue to struggle, budget cuts to rich and poor school systems" have increased schools' "reliance on unpaid parent help." Some schools either have or are considering mandatory commitments "to a small amount of volunteer time." According to the Times, "the heightened need and expectations are coming at a time when many parents have less and less time to give." Gary Parkes, the PTA president at Carmel Elementary School in Woodstock, Georgia, told the New York Times, "People are so busy trying to stay afloat, they just do not have as much time as they would like to give."

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While the backlash of the economy resulted in cuts to school systems' budgets, it also resulted in a shift to the socio-economic classifications associated with upper to middle class parents' involvement in schools. Schools can no longer afford to retain antiquated ideas of parents' participation if they expect to keep up with shifts in family's participation in schools.

Mr. Andrews was looking at me as if the analogy I depicted regarding beliefs of an earlier time and the reality of today that created a shift in those beliefs had touched a nerve. His next comment validated what I saw.

"Now hold on Ms. Anthony, I'm as up to date on what's going on in education as anybody, but when a parent comes up here causing a disturbance, we've got to maintain some kind of control over the situation."

I wanted to say to him to remember to control the situation, not the person, but what I ended-up saying was, "You're right Mr. Andrews, we've got to control the situation, but where do we go from there once the situation is over? Do we wait for the next situation to pop-off and work as reactive school personnel?"

"No, I'm not saying that."

"Okay, then if we're not about being reactive, then what I'm saying is that we need to concentrate on what we can do to be proactive in minimizing situations that cause parents like Ms. Clark to distrust the school's motives."

"Well good luck with that one."

I sighed as I said, "Mr. Andrews, we don't need luck. Since you've been othermothering Ja'netta throughout the school year, we can use that as a base to build upon communication with Ms. Clark and establish some trust with her."

"Other-mother…what? What's that supposed to mean? Are you telling me that you think I was being some sort of mother to Ja'netta?"

I know he's trying to wrap his brain around what he may feel is me confusing gender roles because he probably doesn't see himself in a mothering role. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) stated, "Many Black men also value community-based child care but historically have exercised these values to a lesser extent…differences among Black men and women in behaviors concerning children may have more to do with male labor force patterns and similar factors (p. 195). So although Mr. Andrews provides a form of communal care for a child, his attitude regarding the term othermothering could be tied to beliefs rooted in patriarchal ideals of gender roles and employment. I'm going to try to open his mind to the possibilities.

"Why not, single parent fathers operate in that role all the time. You just extended it beyond the biological bond of child and parent."

As educators, we have the authority to operate in loco parentis. According to Todd DeMitchell (2008), with "…in loco parentis, educators have the right to act as parents when controlling students; concomitantly, they have the duty to act like the parent when protecting students from foreseeable harm (http://www.sage-

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ereference.com/educationlaw/Article_n207.html). Incorporating othermothering as a means of enhancing parent involvement in schools would only take in loco parentis one step further. Are there educators who because of their family histories, values, religious beliefs (and any other influences that determine behavior) have distorted the tenets of in loco parentis? Yes. For them, incorporating an othermothering standpoint will be all the more difficult as they may have difficulty recognizing the paradigmatic shift required to cultivate and nurture a child within the context of their community and school. However, from my observation, Mr. Andrews does not have that problem. He has been taking steps all year long with Ja'netta by doing exactly what he did this morning with her.

"You've sort of adopted Ja'netta and you look-out for her to ensure she stays on the right path. Take this morning for instance; you pulled her away from what could have been a volatile situation to use it as a teachable moment."

"You could have written her up for not following instructions and being disruptive, you certainly would have been justified, but you didn't because a disciplinary referral wouldn't have helped her to work through her poor decision-making."

"You got her to calm down and process her thoughts about the situation. And although she may have had a little more difficulty verbalizing the best way to handle it, you were able to get her to start thinking about how to learn to think before she acts and make better choices when handling situations that could turn volatile. And Mr. Andrews, you've been doing that all year."

"Well I don't consider that as other-mother stuff. I'm just being a good administrator."

"Okay and in being a 'good administrator' you were othermothering this child. We just need to ensure that we keep open lines of communication with her mother to let her know that we've extended parenting bond beyond home and carry it over within the walls of this school building. I believe that's the way we begin to build trust and open lines of communication with parents to extend parent involvement beyond the parents to school personnel as well."

I can see him thinking about all that I've just said and I hope I've cracked open the door to his mind so that he can begin to see the possibilities for what parent involvement can be. "Okay Ms. Anthony, you've got me curious. Let's see where this all goes."

Within the past few decades, policy makers, educators, communities and parents have placed a great deal of emphasis on student achievement. This emphasis has lead educational researchers to examine parents' participation in schools and the affect their participation has upon student achievement. However, research is sparse on the multiple experiences that construct parental involvement in schools. Black Americans, in particular, have a history that is deeply rooted in dominant ways of knowing which have disregarded the multiple identities that construct our participation. Numerous studies have assisted in defining parental involvement as "bake sales, back to school nights, volunteering in schools, attending school activities, chaperoning field trips, fund-raising, attendance at parent teacher conferences, participation in parent-teacher associations (PTAs), help with homework, influence over children's selection of courses, supervising children and monitoring how they spend their time out of school, and talking about school and what children are learning" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). This dissertation will explore the experiences of Black women as

mothers and fictive kin to widen the scope of parent involvement discourse and redress parent involvement generalizations in an effort to assist educators in better understanding how to enrich teaching and learning experiences for Black children.

## Key Research Issues

I have explored several key issues that are central to my research. The overarching question is: How do universalized conceptions of parent involvement affect communications and relations between the school and the Black parent? Specific questions are: What is the relationship between race, sex, class and the experiences of parents with their children's school? How can school social workers and educational practitioners re-collect multiple experiences to improve the educational process for Black children and their families? How do the experiences of Black women contribute to the dialogue regarding parent involvement? Since there is a plethora of educational research which supports that parent involvement increases student achievement, I am exploring these questions within my inquiry because I believe we need to recognize how Black parents have been involved in their children's schooling to understand that achievement is multifaceted.

Oftentimes, when Black children fail to achieve at the same rate as their counterparts, their failure is viewed as an issue with which to be dealt with either internally (within the child/family) or externally (within the school itself). Rarely is their failure used as a catalyst for interrogating the process of teaching and learning in American schools. It is for this reason that instead of questioning how to improve the involvement among Black parents to increase student achievement, I focus on questioning how the experiences of Black parents (specifically othermothering experiences) can add to our epistemological orientation(s) to improve teaching

and learning experiences for Black children. I believe that this focus will be beneficial in opening the dialogue between the school, home, and community to address the achievement of students.

## Autobiographical Roots

My passion for conducting this research is derived from personal encounters as a child and parent experiencing communal approaches to child-rearing. As I reflect upon those experiences I become overwhelmed by the manifold complexities of thoughts and actions which have shaped and continue to shape the person I have become. Conducting this study forces me to confront my past, assess my present, and contemplate my future to enhance the personal and professional. As the days slowly turn into weeks from reflection and writing, I am overcome with exhaustion from this harrowing process and I finally turn to someone who is going through the same thing I am going through.

"Look Mark, I feel like I've written and rewritten this section a thousand times. I'm really having a hard time figuring out what to write and where to start. Do I start with my work experiences or my personal experiences? Which experiences are the most important to share and how much do I share- cause it's a lot? How are those experiences important to my research? So much has influenced my thoughts and feelings about parent involvement that I don't know where to begin. What do you think?"

I know that I'm asking him a lot, but since he's writing his dissertation too he understands the techniques for writing and the processing of thoughts for scholarly contribution… I need a sounding-board. Always slow to respond, I wait patiently as he thinks about what I've asked.

"I don't know Jacq... I haven't started writing my autobiographical roots yet because for me, it would be a very emotional process. But for you, since you're using memoirs as your methodology, you get to fictionalize and, for the purpose of your

writing, can play God - create a world that speaks to your research without having to worry about revealing anything personal."

"That's easier said than done Mark."

"Not really Jacq. Somewhere in your experiences you've been lead to your research. Beyond your work environment, beyond the parenting of your own children, it started somewhere. You just need to figure out the source and let that guide what and how you write about those work and child-rearing experiences that led you to your research."

 I knew he would ground me. He was right; the recollecting of my experiences moved beyond my work and parenting practices. I needed to remember where it all began. What was the origin of my research? I think about my first year at work, college years, high school experiences, and then I remember the first time I became aware…

It was 1970 when my parents sat me down one evening and told me, "Jacque, we're expecting." Expecting what? At nine I found out that I was going to be a big sister. When my parents left Jacksonville, Florida, they left behind all their family support to seek better employment opportunities in Atlanta, Georgia. Gone was the loving supportive network of Black women consisting of aunts, cousins, and grandmothers to be replaced by another kind othermothering described by Patricia Hill Collins (2000). I remember Black women like our next door neighbor, Miss Janet, who would fix my hair for me and take me to dance recital sometimes because, as my mother put it, she wanted to impart some wisdom on me. The fact that she had grown sons and no daughters would not have been a problem if somewhere in her experiences someone taught her how to fix a little girl's hair (I always looked a hot mess when she finished). I remember Miss Eula Mae who sat on the Mothers' Board at Zion Hill Baptist Church. She took

it upon herself to make sure I knew the Lord by asking me each Sunday before Sunday school to quote a scripture from the Bible. If I said the scripture correctly I would be rewarded a dime, but if I didn't I would receive a two hour lecture about the importance of Jesus in my life (okay I'm exaggerating, but it sure felt like two hours). I remember teachers like Mrs. Stroud, who nurtured my love of reading and who checked-up on me long after I had been promoted from her class. I remember all of these Black women and more who made up the fictive kin that provided communal care for me.

So at nine, when my parents informed me that they were expecting, the groundwork for my place within this communal othermothering had been laid. Since, there were different expectations of me now, my parents, Miss Janet, and Miss Eula Mae especially, began preparing me for the day my little brother or sister would come home. One such remembered discussion for my preparation was procreation. God bless them, my parents tried to explain it to me, but they kept using metaphors like birds and bees. This confused me and led me a many a day to question Miss Janet and poor Miss Eula Mae for a better understanding. This is when I first became aware – aware that I had many mothers watching over me and guiding me. My tutelage within the long tradition of Black women caring for others' children began then.

Now as a school social worker, over the years I've witnessed severed relationships and feelings of mistrust between the school and parent either because of poor/lack of communication or because of conceptions of parent involvement that either dismiss or repress multiple ways of knowing. When the parents' and the schools' epistemological orientations clash, the school and home relationship becomes toxic to teaching and learning experiences.  As educational professionals, I would imagine that Michel Foucault (1975/1995) would assert that our role is to assist schools in normalizing their power over the docile body (p. 304) and that Michael Apple

(1995) would assert that we are well intentioned actors pushing the curricular and guidance programs that classify, sort and punish difference as deviant. However, when schools encounter parents who are neither docile nor classify their experiences as different or deviant, then the intersections of what Apple (1995) termed ideological contradictions became evident.

As a Black woman mothered and othermothered by Black women, I want to interrogate universalized parent involvement conceptions to somehow provide a wider scope for educational professionals to view this phenomenon. I find that our involvement in children's education is demonstrated in a myriad of ways that are not recognized by dominant ways of knowing. Somewhere between schools' failure to understand multiple ways of knowing, experiencing parent involvement, and my othermothered experiences, the birth of my research interest was conceived.

# CHAPTER 2

# BLACK PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF BLACK CHILDREN:

# MY MEMOIR

## The Same Stories My Parents Told Me about School

It's 7:00 and the girls and I are in the kitchen on Thursday night mixing the batter for the chocolate chip cookies that Brianna needs for her 5th grade class party. Since Charlie keeps asking us if they're ready yet, we're making him help. I always try to use whatever time we're together in the same room to discuss what's going on with them in school (if it's not done casually, the kids get defensive and start tuning me out). So Brianna was my lead-in for the discussion because she was so excited about the A she received on her paper about the civil war that she couldn't wait to tell me about it as we drove home.

"Brianna did I tell you that I thought you did a good job on that civil war paper?

She looked at me quizzically as she said, "Yeah mom, you already told me that I did a great job." I can see from my peripheral vision that Charlie's bracing himself.

"So tell me Brianna, what did you learn from that assignment?" Charlie just nods in the affirmative like he's saying *I knew that was coming*.

Exasperated now she tells me, "Mom, you already know what I learned. You saw what I wrote in my paper."

"Sweetie your paper only tells me what you reported, it doesn't tell me what you learned."

Andrea decides to chime in now, "Yeah Brianna, it doesn't tell mom what you learned."

"Andrea, since you're so interested in Brianna's learning, why don't you help

your sister out by sharing what you know about the civil war." Charlie and Brianna are

by the refrigerator doubled over with laughter now.

"Come on mom I didn't have an assignment on the civil war…Brianna did."

"Well I didn't know that you needed an assignment to be knowledgeable about a

part of history that has affected so many of our ancestors as well as our lives." Now all

the kids have rolled eyes and are huffing and puffing as if to say *okay, here we go again.*

But I ignore the looks and say, "Do you kids realize that this wasn't just about a war

between the North and the South to free slaves, this war was also about economics at the

dawn of the industrial age to ensure that a privileged few continued to have control over

the labor market."

Andrea cuts me off by saying, "Mom why do you always do this?"

"Do what?"

You always bring up something that we do in school and either give us more

information about it when we get home or make us go research it some more."

"Because I want to make sure that you understand the subject in its entirety. The

school only provides you a snippet of the information and if you don't see it in its entirety

you'll leave the subject with a skewed version of events."

Brianna chimes in and says, "Okay mom, but that's what the internet is for. You

act like we can't get what we need to know off the computer."

"Looka here little girl, humor an old lady. What's on the internet doesn't always

come from reliable sources. So how do you know whether or not you're being fed a

whole bunch of hooie? That's why I try to point you all in the direction of where to go to

find information. When I was your age, we didn't have internet, we had to use

encyclopedias and go to the library to research topics. We couldn't just go running off to a computer to get the information."

Charlie had to go and say, "And besides Brianna, they hadn't even invented computers yet. Back then the closest thing they had to it was a device called a typewriter." How that boy managed to keep straight face while he said that…I will never know.

"Anyhoo, my point is that modern technology isn't the same as having meaningful conversations with each other. Everything is text messaging, Facebook, and Twitter with you guys. I turned out just fine by not having the convenience of that kind of technology at my fingertips when I was growing up."

Andrea points her finger at me as she says, "You sound like grandma and granddad mom. They're always talking about the good ole days and how good us kids have it." They all just burst out laughing when she said this. But I remember my parents saying the same thing to me and my sister growing up.

Lisa and I would hear things like, "Ya'll just don't know how good ya'll got it. When we were your age we had to walk two miles to school going and coming each way, in the rain, in the cold, and sometimes it even snowed. And ya'll got a bus that comes right up to your driveway to take you back and forth to school. Humph, just don't know how good you got it."

Or they would say things like, "Ya'll got central air conditioning and heat in that schoolhouse. What ya'll complaining about? When I was your age, we had a wood burning stove to keep us warm in the winter and we let the windows up for some fresh air during the warm months. Shucks we thought we was doing something when the church

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raised some money and bought the school a couple of fans to place throughout the building."

Or they would say, "Let me not have my homework, or goof-off in that classroom, or make a bad grade in school. First the teacher would get ya on them hands, or on that behind, or both. Then when you got home, you were gonna get it again. I don't know how they found out so quick, but word traveled fast with grown folk. You knew next time to straighten up and fly right."

Back then, my parent's stories evolved with detailed history of their school experiences as my sister and I matured to ensure that we understood school's impact upon generations of our family. We were not allowed to take schooling lightly because we were constantly reminded of our ancestors sacrifice and struggle to support not only family but a community of people to better themselves. Being who they were, my sister and I wouldn't have dared poked fun at our parents the way my children have done me, but we sure were thinking the same kinds of things that my kids just voiced to me. The main thing we used to ask (when we knew our parents were out of earshot) was, "why do they keep telling us these stories of the hard times they used to have in school?" Now having experienced an epiphany through my conversation with my children, I get it. My parents wanted us to understand the struggle they and many others of their generation went through to receive what my sister and I took for granted; what my children think they can just obtain from a click of a mouse on a computer. They wanted us to appreciate what it took to get from there to here, and to understand what we needed to do to take the struggle even further for future generations' schooling. I think about the countless number of Black people who had to sneak to learn to read and write; who had to struggle to make ends meet and then sacrifice to send their children off to school when their labor in the fields or factories could have been used

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towards the income of the household; who had to march and protest for equal rights to improve the social condition of the Black race; who had to keep a watchful eye on the very system they turned to that was supposed to better their children's lives. Yes I understood the stories now and will pass this oral tradition down to my children with my own stories.

So I just look at them before I place the cookie dough in the oven and say, "See your grandparents got it right. Ya'll really don't know how good ya'll got it. When I was your age…"

"Aw mom, not another story!"

I tell this story to highlight an aspect of parent involvement that has just as much of an impact on students' schooling as school-based frameworks that define parents' involvement in schools; parents talking with their children about school. In this discussion of schooling, I draw attention to conversations between grandparents and parents with their children to compare and contrast similarities and differences of a generational practice in this Black family that is meant to help shape children's understanding of the struggle, sacrifice, and dedication of a people to reach their highest potential (Walker, 1996). And although there are similarities and differences within the discussions, the goal is still the same; to engage the children in a conversation about school. While this is a generational practice that is specific to this family, many Black families have a practice exclusive to their parentage which supports children's schooling. In this sense, this story highlights a small portion of the multiplicities within the Black parent involvement phenomenon.

In this chapter I review several bodies of literature which speak to the multifaceted contours of the parent involvement phenomenon. While this review of literature is not exhaustive, I try to explore varying aspects of parent involvement that capture the perspectives of

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Black families. I am interested in exploring constructions of parent involvement narrative and how such narrative converges with the experiences of Black women and children's schooling. I believe that this focus will allow me to examine narrative and discourse that speak to the multifaceted experiences within Black parenting and how such parenting supports students' progress in school.

My review of literature will commence with an explication of terminology I believe to be central to this inquiry. I continue with a review of literature which I feel responds to parent involvement among Black people in America; how such involvement contributed to the education of Blacks in the South; representations of Black mothering, and parenting among Black women as a specific form of involvement ingrained within an Afrocentric standpoint of mothering. I then follow with an exploration into the landscape of parenting within Curriculum Studies literature delineating its connect and disconnect to Black parents' involvement in schools.

## Afrocentric Standpoint on Mothering, Re-Collections, and Universalization

Since the U.S. Department of Education (2010) has documented several areas, including math, reading, and graduation rate, where Black children are achieving at lower percentages than their counterparts, it is important that educational researchers and practitioners begin to question practices that impede their progress rather than focus on the student/family or the individual school for their failings. I therefore examine the parent involvement phenomenon in hopes of adding to research an area that has received little to no attention; approaching parent involvement through a cooperative spirit whereby multiple locations are responsible for supporting student learning. This study reveals a counter-narrative to universalized constructions of parental involvement. Through this counter-narrative, our gaze is therefore broadened to view this

phenomenon holistically; parent involvement becomes an activity that includes the home, school, and community converging copiously to enhance teaching and learning. I define the term universalization as a construct that conceals constructions of social identity and normalizes experience to that of privileged groups. Subordinated groups are neutralized within universalized constructs and are refashioned into mainstream ideals.

Othermothering will be explored as a holistic approach to parental involvement to demonstrate how families, schools, and the community can use an Afrocentric standpoint on mothering to widen the scope of how we define involvement in schools. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) defines othermothers as "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities [which is] central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p. 192). The term othermothering is used in this study to depict the acts/work performed to othermother children and youth. By using othermothering as a form of approaching parent involvement holistically, I do not imply that this process is limited to the Black community. Using this approach is meant to open dialogue regarding the use of multiple groups' experiences with parenting to redress western ideals regarding participation in schools.

I use memoir as an autobiographical form of re-collecting a history of mothering in the Black community. By re-collecting othermothering as a long-standing tradition of mothering in the Black community, I draw attention to a pedagogy lost upon traditional forms of parent involvement discourse. I use the term re-collect as a means for describing a process for going back into a space that will allow the writer and the reader to draw upon a culture's knowing for understanding. It is a gathering, a remembering, or a bringing back of what was once forgotten, or lost upon history, or even hidden or lost upon one's own consciousness (Morrison, 2008). Therefore, by using memoir to re-collect, I am allowed to tell counter stories of silenced Black

women in traditional parent involvement discourse and speak to a culture of participation in the education of our children. I find that by using memoir as a method, I can story experiences via fiction thus allowing me to construct a location for addressing the interconnections between parenting, schools and our children. Additionally, this method will allow me to fictionalize the characters to protect the privacy of the characters in my inquiry.

## Black Parental Involvement

A precursory review of our history reveals that the Black family has been susceptible to ideological vacillations which have dictated policy and programming in America. Specific to the education of Black children Diana Slaughter and Valerie Kuehne (1991) espoused that, "Black families have historically been particularly vulnerable to shifting ideological trends and perspectives on the roles of parent involvement in schools because of racial oppression and because disproportionate numbers of Black families are also impoverished (p. 72). Accordingly, the Black parental involvement phenomenon has been predisposed to the continuous ideological shifts of educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners since the establishment of the Civil Rights Bill (Slaughter & Kuehne in Smith & Chunn, 1991; Lightfoot, 1978).

The era during the civil rights passage was critical to the integration of Black parents' involvement within mainstream schooling. At the time of the civil rights passage race relations were contentious and Blacks had been treated as pathology within research. Research and policy development were processes central to funding for programs that would address Blacks as problematic and public education was not immune to this process. One of the processes employed by the President at that time underscores how ideologies dictated policy and programming. President Lyndon Johnson "needed an analysis of the Negro problem to present at the White House Conference on Civil Rights"

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(http://partners.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/specials/moynihan-report.html, p. 2). As a result of the analysis, a document entitled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (commonly referred to as the Moynihan report) was written by a staff member from the Department of Labor. Daniel Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy and Research, asserted in his report that the Negro family was the source of the Black American's negative experiences (http://www.Blackpast.org/?q=primary/moynihan-report-1965). Moynihan's biased stance was noted by Lightfoot (1978) as "racist in its assumptions…This external comparative view of Black families presents a picture of Black life that is seen as a grotesque distortion, an ugly and incomplete mirror of white life, rather than its own unique combination of elements reflecting culture, history, and experience" (p. 168). Thus, the knowledge created in this report disregarded the larger societal problems such as discrimination at the polling place, at the personnel office, on the housing market, within America's educational system, etc. which were the more accurate sources of Black's negative experiences and consequently placed the source of these negative experiences as a problem within their families. Reports such as this underscore the importance of interrogating research and policy in unpacking raced ideological perspectives of the authors whose work affect practice within schools.

The capacity for social structures to create knowledge which negatively affect socially vulnerable groups is not a new concept. Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggest that government's role is to validate knowledge production. They espoused that, "government and corporate sources also have the great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige." (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 19). Thus, knowledge produced from reports such as Moynihan's served a purpose; production of information from a governmental agency that would be perceived by the masses as credible and could therefore be disseminated to the public without

questioning the reliability of that information. Practices such as these have laid the foundation

for the Black family's ambivalence towards social structures' capacity to dictate policy and

programming which have affected the roles of these structures within their lives. This shaping of

roles is of particular importance within public education as the Black family continues to

question schools' "influence upon their children's learning and development" (Slaughter &

Kuehne in Smith & Chunn, 1991, p. 60).

Recent governmental influences upon the roles of parents in schools include the No Child

Left Behind Legislation (NCLB). SEC. 1118. (d) of NCLB- PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

which states in part that,

> as a component of the school-level parental involvement policy developed under
>
> subsection (b), each school served under this part shall jointly develop with parents for all
>
> children served under this part a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the
>
> entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student
>
> academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and
>
> develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards.
>
> ([http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1118](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1118))
>
> *The Appendix provides the NCLB regulation under section 1118 for parent involvement*
>
> *in its entirety.*

Since the NCLB provision for parent involvement is funded through Title I, it was

established to improve the academic achievement of 'minority and disadvantaged' students.

Thus, the suggested purpose of parent involvement under part (d) is to assist schools with

increasing the achievement of those students (K-12…beyond Head Start) who are economically,

racially/culturally, mentally and/or physically disadvantaged. The language written within NCLB

and Title I make assumptions regarding the families they have identified for assistance in that the provisions of legislation do not account for the ways theses families are already involved in their children's schooling. Therefore, their involvement becomes invisible within a universalized conception of what it means to be involved in schools. Specific to Black parental involvement, it becomes incumbent for educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to evaluate underlying assumptions which may ignore the cultural and social experiences of Black families and cause ideological conflicts over the education of children.

**Ideological Conflict over the Educating of Students**

According to Michael Apple (1995), "...ideologies are filled with contradictions… They are sets of lived meanings, practices, and social relations that are often internally inconsistent… Because of this, ideologies are contested; they are continually struggled over… Particularly, institutions become the sites where this struggle takes place and where these dominant ideologies are produced" (p. 14). Apple's exploration into the realm of ideologies reiterates the complicated relationship between schools and parents. For the most part, the school community consists of the school staff, the student, and the parent which represent the 'stakeholders' of student education. Interactions between the stakeholders can become problematic as social identities of race, culture, gender, and class are considered. Various social identities brings about multiple sets of experiences which construct the ideological contradictions between schools and parents. Accordingly, Evelyn Glenn (1994) espoused that "an ideology is the conceptual system by which a group makes sense of and thinks about the world. It is a collective rather than individual product. Groups develop ideologies which are distillations of experience, and, because their experiences differ, so do their ideologies" (p. 9). Thus, it is our lived experiences that affect thought and simultaneously become what we think about our experiences. Eventually our

thoughts become action and create a space for experience to portray for us 'what is' reality. Unfortunately for the marginalized parent, their reality may not be germane to the function of schools. Of particular concern is the clandestine function of schools in reproducing the reality of a stratified labor force. According to Apple (1995),

> the school naturally generates certain kinds of deviance. This process of natural generation is intimately related to the complex place schools have in the economic and cultural reproduction of class relations- on the one hand to the school's function as an ideological state apparatus and through this in producing agents…to fill the needs of the social division of labor in society, and on the other hand to the place of educational institutions in producing particular kinds of knowledge forms required by an unequal society. (p. 38)

As such, schools function to acclimate marginalized students into their identified roles within a capitalistic economy. This acclimation is rationalized by schools as supporting students' best interests. Michelle Fine (1993) made this point clear when she espoused, "what is justified as 'good for all'…tracking, labeling, education for employment, discipline and order… is constructed through a discourse of efficiency, privileging the interests of capital and the state rather than the needs, passions, desires, strengths, and worries of parents and their children" (p. 685). Those families who do not benefit from class and labor assignments are left with the choice of either acquiescing to the clandestine agenda of schools or advocating on behalf of their children's interests.

As Black parents continue to struggle over the inequalities in their children's education, prevailing parent involvement discourse directs our focus to the lack of participation in schools. Such focus situates Black parents' experiences with their children's schooling as marginal within

dominant constructions of parent participation. Knowledge is therefore legitimated by parent involvement discourse and accepted by educational practitioners as reality. Literature is replete with the importance of parent involvement for increasing student achievement; however, texts are deficient in their analysis of how, "parent involvement discourse reproduces, rather than reduces the inequalities in education" (Nakagawa, 2000, p. 443). Hence, when discourse produces representations that are constructed from deficit paradigms, a toxic reality is prescribed for the Black student and their family. It becomes crucial then to identify processes that transmit dominant ideologies which are widely accepted.

Antonio Gramsci developed the term hegemony to describe the process by which marginalized groups' behavior could be prescribed. Carl Boggs (1976) espoused that "by hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things" (p. 39). These influences legitimate the dominant culture's reality through social institutions and cultural norms which become embedded in the unconscious to manifest in the beliefs, attitudes, and/or ideas of the marginalized. Edward Olivos quoted Feinberg and Soltis (2006) who stated that "hegemony exists when one class controls the thinking of another class through such cultural forms as the media, the church, or the schools" (p. 30). This is important because if the masses accept this reality without question from entities such as schools, which operate as a diminutive systems within the larger system of the state, then

the masses give these same entities the authority to determine what 'is' reality. Thus, information is accepted without question because it has been internalized as truth by the masses.

American history is rife with the effects of schooling upon marginalized groups' quality of life. From the time the colonists landed on Virginia, to the enslavement of Blacks, and further on to the normalizing of students in schools, colonization and acculturation were moral acts rationally justified as necessary to reeducate the savage, the inhuman, and the poor. Such rational justification can be explained by turning to Max Weber's (1958/2003) spirit of capitalism. According to Weber (1958/2003), the spirit of capitalism was more than the enterprise of pursuing money; rather, "everything is done in terms of balances: at the beginning of the enterprise an initial balance, before every individual decision a calculation to ascertain its probable profitableness, and at the end a final balance to ascertain how much profit has been made" (p. 18). Thus, a systematic process is enacted to assess, plan, and produce an outcome that can be rationally justified for pursuing an endeavor. If it can be demonstrated that there is an increase from that endeavor's beginning, then probable profitableness has been achieved. Certainly, the conquering of the Indians, the enslavement of Blacks, and the normalization of students in schools takes Weber's (1958/2003) spirit of capitalism, to the extreme; now probable profitableness only benefited the privileged. Dominant groups benefited from conquering the Indians with the profit being the appropriation of Indian lands. The profit gained from the enslavement of Blacks was the free labor necessary to build wealth for the privileged. Within the context of public education, the profit acquired was specified knowledge for the privileged and practical knowledge for the "deviant". If we apply this misuse of the spirit of capitalism to marginalized parents' experiences within schools, it becomes apparent how culture has been commodified to benefit dominant groups' hierarchical position in schools.

Apple (1995) espoused that , "…certain groups in society [ability] to transform culture into a commodity, to accumulate it, to make it what Bourdieu has called 'cultural capital' [could] be thought about in similar ways [as] economic capital" (p. 17). This correlation between cultural capital and economic capital becomes especially important to the Black American as a socially vulnerable group in that, "the period during which African Americans were in slavery was a very bad time to have been inactive economically…in a capitalistic economy, the name of the game is accumulation of capital, which then works to produce more wealth" (Hale, 1994, p.13). As wealth production was proscribed by dominant groups within public education, the cultural capital of the privileged parent advanced the reification of probable profitableness in that "cultural capital can be cashed in schools so that their dominance is preserved" (Apple, 1995, p. 41). Within this context, the Black family's cultural capital is immediately devalued to an inferior schooling. Therefore, as a means for addressing this devaluation, many Black parents have established forms of involvement that are not visible to school officials. Various forms of Black parental involvement should be explored to illuminate activities that support schooling beyond school based activities.

**Black Parents' Multiple Forms of Involvement**

Although there is a girth of parent involvement discourse that tends to universalize models of participation in schools from a dominant western ideological perspective, there are a few studies which support that there are parents within varying social groups who support learning in schools in multiple ways. Several texts speak to the parental involvement of Black students that encourages learning from home and school (Watkins, 2009; Thompson, 2003; Thompson, 2010; Fields-Smith in Tillman, 2009). These studies will be delineated to illustrate

how parents of Black students support learning from home and school as exemplars of activities which may not be visible to schools.

Gail Thompson's study (2003) included Black parents' responses from interviews and questionnaires regarding how they assisted their children academically. Several activities were identified from their responses; some of which can be associated with parent involvement activities that have been identified with more universalized conceptions of involvement. However, a few activities indicated that they supported their children's schooling in unique ways. According to Thompson (2003),

> nearly 60 percent or more of the parents/guardians [in the study] said that they talked to their children about school, contacted teachers, encouraged their children to attend college, helped them with homework, advised them to check over their schoolwork, limited television viewing, and helped them study for tests on an ongoing basis. Moreover, during the interview phase of the study, Mrs. Pulver pointed out that she routinely took her foster son to a historically Black college…Ron explained that he took his three children to the university library to study with him, sat in on his son's classes, and encouraged his son to read African American literature. (p. 67)

Thus, numerous activities identified by Black parents included strategies that supported learning beyond everyday classroom experiences. Additionally, findings from the study suggested that several activities positively correlated with each other in assisting their children academically.

In another text written by Gail Thompson (2010) the involvement of two parents of Black children can be identified as advocacy. Their advocacy was prompted by the mistreatment of their children by schools which they both associated with racism. One of the parents was a White mother of a biracial child, "…a boy [who] had merely been labeled as Black" (Thompson, 2010,

p. 62). This mother indicated that "the problems started almost from the very beginning of his K-12 education…and how year after year of insanity wore him down [to depression]; he was eventually hospitalized for six months" (Thompson, 2010, pp. 62, 63). Repeated instances were described where school officials post-scripted her son's high intellect with negative feedback regarding his behavior in school. Although her son is no longer a student, "this mother's pain over his experiences had spurred her to action. She wanted to expose the racism that many students routinely experience and her goal was to continue to try to do [her] part to educate [her] people about privilege and oppression and how those play out in institutional racism" (Thompson, 2010, p. 63). While her son may not benefit from such advocacy, this mother's actions may reveal to educators ideologies that need to be examined to improve home and school relations.

The other mother identified by Thompson (2010) indicated that, "shortly after she moved her family to Texas, one of her sons started having problems at his new elementary school" (p. 64). One incident in particular was discussed whereby a White teacher would not allow her son to go to the bathroom when he asked permission. When he subsequently urinated on himself, the parent confronted school officials in person regarding the trauma he experienced. This specific act of advocacy, while immediate and short-lived, communicated to school officials that behaviors which ignored her son's basic needs would not be tolerated. Although the racism experienced by these two mothers' children was dissimilar, both parents were compelled to support student learning by speaking out against the unfair treatment of their children.

Audrey Watkins (2009) conducted a study which "explored the educational experiences embedded in the home, school, and work lives of five Black women in a large urban Midwestern city" (p. 1). These women shared, among other things, the roles their parents played in fostering

informal learning from home which they felt influenced their schooling and prepared them for life as adults. Informal learning is explicated by Watkins (2009) as knowledge provided by the parent from home. This form of learning emerged from a range of practices which Black parents felt were necessary for their child's development. Watkins (2009) espoused that "education in participants' homes occurred through parents' conscious efforts as well as by parents' practice and the context of the family environment. Many life skills were learned informally through family communication. Orientation to formal education, to work, self-reliance, and industriousness are also features of family education" (p. 38). Of the life skills identified, self-reliance and industriousness were notable. Self-reliance was a life skill taught by parents to instill within the child values and morals that would require them to assume responsibility for their own education. Industriousness was yet another life skill that oriented children to the value of hard work. The immediacy of their lesson provided tactile experience to their children that could be compared to the kinds of partnerships schools seek with companies to offer hands-on experiences to high school students.

In her study, Cheryl Fields-Smith (2009) conducted interviews with 30 Black parents who identified many of the activities addressed in the studies previously discussed. However, there were a few practices that were identified as invisible which differed from previous studies which deserve attention. According to Fields-Smith (2009), "parents engaged in learning activities unseen to most teachers that were not necessarily aligned with school curriculum. These activities included conducting Bible studies, researching context surrounding historical events, studying Black history, learning sign language, and memorizing and reciting poetry…Parents stated that the activities reflected their children's interests or content that they believed their children needed, but would not get in school" (p. 162). Thus, Black parents in this

study engaged their children in experiences that they felt would enrich their learning beyond school-based curriculum. This suggests that Black parents have specific ideas about the knowledge their children should acquire.

The information from these studies is revealing in that we can surmise that there are multiple forms of involvement that parents and family members practice which are not visible to discourse that universalizes parent involvement. Parent and family involvement may present as participation in multiple ways amongst marginalized groups.  This does not mean that if participation is not visible (according to universalized models of parent participation) that marginalized groups do not care about their children. It does suggest that they vary in their ability to participate in school sponsored activities. According to López, (2001) "traditional involvement roles may be outside the cultural repertoire of some parents- especially marginalized parents- who may have limited exposure to schools, lack of socio-economic resources, and/or prior negative experiences with school organizations…Regrettably, lack of participation in school-based activities has led school staff to perceive marginalized parents and family members as being uninvolved in their child's education (p. 417). If parent involvement is to be meaningful and inclusive, then we must begin to examine underlying ideologies which predispose research, policy, and practice to universalization that limits involvement to attendance at school sponsored events or a strong volunteer program.

### Black Parental Involvement in the Education of Blacks in the South

The battle over the education of Blacks in America has been an ongoing matter of concern among parents and children, policy makers, researchers, and educational practitioners. Issues, including student achievement, graduation rate, and participation in educational programs have instigated discussions which have sought resolutions to the interactions Black parents and

children have with schools. However, "a more comprehensive understanding of the origins of interaction among Black communities, families, schooling, and education will begin to elucidate the resounding themes and patterns that have merged over time and may point to their modern expression in political, social, and intellectual battles being waged today" (Lightfoot, 1978, p.130). Therefore, an exploration into dominant themes which have shaped Blacks' education in this country should be considered. Although schooling was eventually established in the Northern and Southern regions, I concentrate on the education of Blacks in the South because "the vast majority of African-Americans resided in the South until the 1950's….Although Black Southerners were formally free during the time when American popular education was transformed into a highly formal and critical social institution, their schooling took a different path" (Harris, 1994, p. 144). I seek to examine the divergent path of Black schooling in the South to illuminate how schooling reproduced the social reality of Blacks and tease out how those experiences may have affected interactions between parents, their children, and schools. I will attempt to explore the schooling of Blacks in the South from periods during slavery and post slavery, referenced hereto as ante-bellum and post-bellum. I chose these two periods because they encompass emergent ideologies which shaped the dual conceptions of education for those who were privileged and others who were either second-class citizens or marginalized people. The privileged citizens in the colonies usually included propertied, well –endowed free people (White males in particular), and the marginalized were usually free non-propertied laboring citizens and people of color (children of slaves in particular).

Researchers address the early undertakings of missionaries and clergymen in the instruction of slaves for the purpose of transforming their "heathen" values to the more "suitable" values of Christianity, it is clear that there was a paradigmatic shift regarding

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education as the industrial revolution "…transformed slavery from an essentially patriarchal to an economic institution" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 136). A precursory review of history will reveal that the dual conceptions of education for both the Northern and Southern states and even between the classes were vastly different. "When Northern states experienced a successful movement for the establishment of free public education, most Southern states steadfastly clung to their traditional belief that education was the province of the privileged, the well-endowed, propertied class" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 135). During the ante-bellum period, education was entrenched within caste systems and reflected the stratification among genders, classes and races. This stratification was even more evident for Blacks in the South. According to James Anderson (1988), "the successful campaign to contain and repress literacy among enslaved Americans triumphed just as the crusade for popular education for free people began to flourish" (p. 2). Indeed, acceptance of ideologies that supported states providing a formal education for free people while making it a crime to teach Blacks to read or write became so popular during the ante-bellum period that Southern states enacted legislation to uphold this way of life as Northern states fought to segregate Blacks within universalized schooling. When Black parents ignored the segregated schooling provided in the North and tried to integrate their children within the same schools as White children, Lightfoot (1978) espoused that

> often the hostility of Whites to the presence of Black children in the same classroom as their own was so overwhelming and violent that Black parents were forced to withdraw their children from school and acquiesce to the formation of separate schools. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most Northern communities had provided Blacks with separate schools, although not with funding equal to that allowed White schools. (p150)

While disparities in access to and funding for universalized schooling flourished between the Black and White races of the North, the Southern dominant caste firmly maintained denial of schooling for Blacks.

During the ante-bellum period, it was a punishable crime for Blacks to learn how to read and write in the South. Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) espoused that "the laws not only made the instruction of slaves in reading and writing by Whites an indictable offense but also forbade slaves to teach one another and prohibited the assembly of slaves… Even the giving or selling of books or pamphlets to slaves was prohibited" (p. 137). The passing of such laws helped to establish a way of life that stratified education among races (Blacks and Whites) as a means for maintaining hierarchies of social order and inequality in the South and establishing a means for the dominants' oppression of subordinate groups (Woodson, 1933/2009; Anderson, 1988; Takaki, 1993; Lightfoot, 1978; Harris, 1994, Watkins, 2001). The rationale behind withholding education from enslaved Americans was to maintain compliant workers for the landowners of the South (Takaki, 1993; Lightfoot, 1978). Many propertied Southerners believed that education would enlighten the slave and make them less compliant to the demands of the brutal physical labor and inhumane living conditions forced upon them daily. According to Lightfoot (1978),

the Haitian revolt of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the slave rebellions in the South (i.e., Gabriel in Virginia in 1800 and Vesey in South Carolina in 1822) led to an extension of restrictions and constraints on the education of Blacks… Nat Turner's insurrection completed the reactionary course and triggered the post-insurrection panic of 1831 to 1832. This movement led to the enactment of severely repressive laws in every Southern State by 1835… Thus, ignorance was viewed as an ultimate and purposeful form of "social control" imposed on Blacks. (p. 137)

Consequently, the slave insurrections of the early 1800's confirmed plantation owners' concerns of slaves' resistance and the withholding of education became crucial to the assurance that the slave would accept their place within the hierarchies established in South's social order. We can surmise then that these early ideological constructions of schooling in the South vastly contributed to Blacks' progression (or lack thereof) within state supported systems of education.

Although Southern states established laws to prevent the education of Blacks, some within the slave populations pursued an education even with the threat of punishment or death. The Slave Narratives (2002) provide actual accounts of how Blacks defied laws meant to prohibit their access to schooling. The secrecy with which slaves had to obtain an education is underscored by the recounting of former slaves such as Fannie Moore who recalled that her, "daddy slip and get a Webster book and den he take it out in de field and he learn to read", and Robert Glenn who recalled that one of the plantation owner's children, "once in an undertone asked how I would like to have an education…he at once began to teach me secretly…He furnished me books and slipped all the papers he could get to me" (Jones in Yetman, 2002, p. 91; Matthews in Yetman, 2002, p.48). Narratives such as these provide insight as to the tenacity and resourcefulness of an enslaved people who pursued an education despite overwhelming odds. Lightfoot (1978) offered several possibilities for slaves daring efforts in acquiring an education. I found that the most compelling possibility attributed their efforts to "…a combination of functional and psychological factors that led to a perception of education as preparation for emancipation…Moreover, education decreed a sense of psychological liberation to the slave" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 142). Certainly the testaments of many former slaves corroborate that for many of them, the hope of a better life was inextricably tied to an education. Eventually their hope for freedom, if not adequate schooling, became a reality.

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The burgeoning industrial age brought on the Civil War between the North and the South when negotiations between the two spheres proved unsuccessful. William Watkins (2001) espoused that "the Civil War was the defining event in the shaping of industrial America. It represented at once an end to outdated agriculturalism, semifeudal social relationships in the South, divisive regional governments, and international isolation" (p. 13). From this war, the North's victory brought with it the Reconstruction period for assimilating the freed slaves into the larger society. Slaves' emancipation brought a newfound hope for a better life in the post-bellum period and "in 1868 federal legislation mandated the establishment of the Freedman's Bureau to facilitate the transition of the newly freed slaves into the social life of the country" (Watkins, 2001, p. 14). Reconstruction provided a few years of freed slaves' full participation in government; however, full access to schooling was not realized. Janice Hale (1994) espoused that, "while white immigrants were taking advantage of free public schools for their children after the Civil War, African Americans were struggling for basic literacy" (p. 17). Whereas dual conceptions of education for the two classes originated during the antebellum period, ideologies of the Northern industrialists and the Southern plantation owners began to shape dual conceptions of education during the post-bellum period. With the North's focus on the reordering of society to meet the demands of industrial capitalism and the South's focus on maintaining hierarchies of social order and inequality, public schooling finally took form in the South with a specific ideological function for the freed Blacks.

According to Watkins (2001), "the YMCA, philanthropies, and an assortment of missionary societies soon joined the Freedman's Bureau schools in establishing rudimentary education for Blacks" (p. 14). However, freed Blacks had already begun to shape the parameters of schooling prior to these efforts. The era of Reconstruction empowered Blacks with the support

to officially pursue universal education. Anderson (1988) espoused that "ex-slaves did much more than establish a tradition of educational self-help that supported most of their schools. They also were the first among native Southerners to wage a campaign for universal public education" (p. 19). One of the most effective of the campaigns waged was the 'educational clause'. As plantation owners fought to maintain what Anderson (1988) termed the 'agrarian elite' by exerting control over the ex-slave labor force, "…ex-slaves withdrew a substantial portion of their labor power…This reduced labor supply had a profound impact on the ability of the South to produce cotton…Assisted by Northern troops, ex-slaves were able to use their labor power to give weight to their educational demands" (p. 21). Although ex-slaves' demands for education could not be ignored, the agrarian elite were able to thwart Blacks' efforts in gaining access to and funding for the schooling of their children.

After years of denied access to schooling, Blacks were finally free to participate openly in the educational process; however, despite ex-slaves' efforts to attain equal access to universal schooling, Southern land owners erected formidable roadblocks to undermine those efforts. With the eventual removal of federal troops from Southern states, the agrarian elite gained full control of state governments by the late 1870's. "With both state authority and extralegal means of control firmly in their hands, the planters, though unable to eradicate earlier gains, kept universal schooling underdeveloped. They stressed low taxation, opposed compulsory school attendance laws, blocked the passage of new laws that would strengthen the constitutional basis of public school opportunities, and generally discouraged the expansion of public school opportunities" (Anderson, 1988, p. 23). Thus, the overall resistance of land owners solidified the stratification of the races and maintained hierarchies of social order and inequality in schooling.

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Although White patriarchal Southern ideologies contributed to the slow development of universal schooling in that region, of the two races, Blacks' schooling suffered more than laboring Whites. According to Anderson (1988), "the education of Blacks in the South reveals that various contending forces sought either to repress the development of Black education or to shape it in ways that contradicted Black's interests in intellectual development" (p. 285). With the removal of Northern troops, those who supported industrial interests acquiesced to the race relations of the South to unify the country. Accordingly, "the industrialization and simultaneous reunification of the United States overshadowed and shaped all other events. The new corporate hegemonists needed to work toward their political and policy objectives… The conquering of the South could be mollified with the continuation of racial and social privilege…Blacks must learn their 'place' in the new industrial order" (Watkins, 2001, pp. 22, 23). It was exactly the ex-slave's place in the new social order that was to shape ideals regarding how Blacks were to acquire their schooling and which type of schooling they would receive.

During the post-bellum period, Northern industrialist and the Southern land owners struggled over ideological conceptions of schooling. Although Northern industrialist regarded universal schooling as key to the stability of the political economy, many of the Southern plantation owners held fast to the stratified caste system of the pre post-bellum period and were resistant to laboring Whites and ex-slaves' schooling. According to Anderson (1988), "…the South's landed upper-class and their allies…depended for their wealth and power on large classes of illiterate, exploited agricultural laborers. The planters' views on socializing and controlling labor developed in the context of pre-modern modes of social control that rested on coercion. They therefore resisted the idea of universal education on the grounds that it would inflate the economic and political aspirations of their workers and thereby spoil good field

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hands" (pp. 80, 81). Thus Northern industrialists began their campaign to reform Southern education to assist ex-slaves' acceptance of their role within the new social order and persuade the Southern land owners to Northern ideologies regarding universal schooling. A few of the reoccurring themes that arose as major contributions to the shaping of Blacks' education during this time were Southern state statues and political agendas that supported racist ideologies, Southern Whites' contestation of universal schooling, and Northern business men and philanthropists' push for the industrial education of Blacks.

Although the land owners fought to repress universal schooling for Blacks, they eventually reconsidered their opposition to formal education in the early 1900's. Up until that time, a great deal of Black children were employed as agricultural laborers and provided land owners with cheap labor for their crops. During the Reconstruction era Blacks that were able to donate labor, materials, land, and financially from their meager incomes, constructed shanty school houses in rural areas. However, discouraged by school terms that were formulated around agrarian economy, little to no state funding for schooling for Blacks, and hardly enough schools for Black children to attend throughout the Southern states, many Blacks began to migrate to Northern and Southern cities.

> The migration, which started in full force in 1914, was also a key factor in forcing the Southern white agrarian classes to reconsider the idea of universal schooling for Black children…As the migration of Blacks from the rural South to Southern and Northern cities accelerated, white landowners, fearful of losing a critical mass of cash tenants, sharecroppers, farm laborers, and domestic servants, returned larger shares of public tax funds to support the construction of rural schoolhouses for Blacks. (Anderson, 1988, pp. 152, 159)

With the threat of the Black laborer relocating to cities, agrarian elite began to utilize their influence within state statues and political agendas to control the development of universalized schooling for Blacks that would meet their need for a continuation of cheap labor and a stratified caste system. One of the most influential state statues that shaped how Blacks were to acquire their schooling was the decision of the Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case of 1896 yielded a decision that Louisiana's statues, "which mandated that all railway companies carrying passengers shall provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races" was constitutional (http://laws.lp.findlaw.com/getcase/us/163/537.html). This decision was the impetus behind the separate- but-equal laws adopted by Southern states and helped shaped segregation of public facilities and most other areas that affected citizens' way of life based on racial discrimination.

Specific to universalized schooling, the separate (if not equal) statues were upheld in Southern states by the early 1900's and the stratification of educational attainment for Blacks was appallingly apparent. Access to schooling between White and Black children were disproportionate in several areas including funding for school buildings and supplies and denial of secondary schooling for Black children. Anderson (1988) espoused that

> during the period 1900 to 1920, every Southern state sharply increased its tax appropriations for building schoolhouses, but virtually none of this money went for Black schools…In the early twentieth century whites all over the South seized the school funds belonging to the disfranchised Black citizens, gerrymandered school districts so as to exclude Blacks from certain local tax benefits, and expounded a racist ideology to provide a moral justification of unequal treatment…Since the end of Reconstruction era Black Southerners had adapted to a structure of oppressive education by practicing

double taxation. They had no choice but to pay both direct and indirect taxes for public

education. (pp. 154, 156)

This practice of double taxation was of value to racist agendas in that financial, material (i.e.

land, labor, building materials, etc.), and practices prescribed by agrarian elite and internalized

by Blacks accommodated their subordination to the social order of the South. Data collected by

Anderson (1988) revealed that "from 1914-1932 schoolhouses were located in 883 counties

across fifteen Southern states and together with teachers' homes and industrial shops cost in cash

was $28,408,520. Of this amount…the Julius Rosenwald Fund gave 15.36 percent, rural Black

people contributed 16.64 percent, Whites donated 4.27 percent, and 63.73 percent was

appropriated from public tax funds, collected largely, if not wholly, from Black taxpayers" (p.

153). Frustrated with the dismal number of schools that their children and youth could access in

the rural South, Black's taxation without representation was finally discontinued as they

migrated to the cities of the North and South. Anderson (1988) provided data that disclosed that

by1915 there were twenty-three Southern cities with 20,000 or more inhabitants (Atlanta,

Macon, and Savannah among them) that did not have public high schools for Black youth nor

were they enrolled in the public high schools available to White youth within the same cities (pp.

194, 195). Consequently, the very same migration from rural South to the urban Southern cities

caused Whites to reevaluate the economic and social ramifications of excluding Black youth

from secondary education.  According to Anderson (1988), "…as the region's urban Black youth

populations grew rapidly during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the sheer

magnitude of the problem forced a new attentiveness to the question of Black secondary

education… If they [Black youth] were not in school, generally there was little else for them to

do but roam the streets. This led invariably to intolerable numbers of juvenile delinquents and

posed serious social crises for youth, families, and cities" (p. 203). Southern Whites' outlook on prolonged schooling for Black youth changed as the question of what to do with the increased numbers of Black youth within their cities arose. Faced with this new question, Southern educators began to collaborate with Northern philanthropist and businessmen to reform schooling for Blacks in the South.

Both Watkins (2001) and Anderson (1988) credited Samuel Chapman Armstrong for providing the blueprint of industrial education that would formulate which type of schooling Blacks would receive as a part of conditioning them for their place in the new social order. It was Armstrong, who as a former officer was appointed to help control the Negro during Reconstruction, that "purchased the property known as Little Scotland comprising of 159 acres…On April 1, 1868, Hampton opened its doors with 15 pupils, alongside one teacher and a matron…Within a month, the student population, drawn from 'colored refugees' or 'contrabands', doubled" (Watkins, 2001, pp. 47, 48). Although Hampton offered many ex-slaves the promise of an education denied to them prior to Reconstruction, as well as food and shelter as a dislocated citizenry, the clandestine purpose of the Hampton model fostered debate over educational ideologies between the Northern industrialists, the agrarian elite of the South, and Black intellectuals. According to Watkins (2001) Armstrong's school was "…a manual labor school. Students engaged in manual labor in the morning and studied in the afternoon and evening. Young men did farm work, while young women did domestic tasks…[The school was to] provide character building, morality, and religion to 'civilize' the 'childlike' and 'impetuous' Negro" (p. 48). Armstrong considered this form of education as the best means for integrating the ex-slave within the stratified caste of the South. Watkins (2001) espoused that "the Hampton notion of education and social organization was above all else successful in achieving its

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objectives. It trained thousands of teachers in accomodationist social, political, and religious outlooks. It became the model for the ideological training for the Black South…Most important, it helped ready a labor force for its position in the new industrial era" (p. 61). Thus, as a training and socializing mechanism in preparing Blacks to accept their place within the new social order as agricultural and menial laborers, Hampton's model of schooling was preeminent in spreading ideological hegemony to students.

Because Armstrong was able to promote Hampton's model of education as a means of "keeping the Negro in their place", Northern industrialist endorsed this model and campaigned to persuade White Southerners to accept Hampton's industrialized education as the model that should be used as universalized schooling for Blacks. Although, "the dominant white South could agree that Blacks should be trained to work efficiently in the fields,…[they] did not see the necessity of sending them to school for that, especially inasmuch as they had performed such tasks for centuries without any schooling" (Anderson, 1988, p. 101). Robert Ogden, George Peabody, and William Baldwin were Northern businessmen who were the most influential in working to change dominant White South's perspectives on the education of Blacks. Through their business connections and influence, they were able to garner support for industrial education from businessmen, politicians, wealthy philanthropist, and educators by coordinating conferences in cities throughout the country including Capon Springs, West Virginia, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Athens, Georgia, Birmingham, Alabama, and Lexington, Kentucky (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). These conferences helped to shape the landscape of Southern educational reform and were crucial in promoting Hampton's industrial education model. Although Ogden, Peabody, and Baldwin were influential in garnering support to shape the educational policy and programs of the South, Booker T. Washington was perceived by Northern

industrialists as instrumental in garnering the support of Blacks in accepting industrial education as their model of schooling in the South.

Anderson (1988) and Watkins (2001) both acknowledged the influence that Armstrong had over the educational ideals of Washington. The relationship between the two was described by Watkins (2001) as being "…tailor-made for each other. Armstrong was looking for students who would quickly and enthusiastically embrace his views on Negro socialization and education. Washington was looking for decent Whites not committed to the slaver's whip…Washington was thus a loyal and lifelong disciple of Armstrong and the Hampton ideal" (pp. 59, 60). Washington, an ex-slave, embraced Hampton's industrialized education and graduated from the school with the commendation of Armstrong who later provided the recommendation that would place Washington over the Tuskegee Institute. Anderson (1988) espoused that, "from this post Washington worked closely with Northern philanthropists, and following Armstrong's death in 1893, he became the chief spokesman for the Hampton-Tuskegee Idea" (p. 102). Thus with financial backing and media support from philanthropists and businessmen, Washington's popularity as the "face" of industrialized education brought him to the attention of Black leaders and intellectuals who strongly advocated for classical liberal education. Many of these influential Blacks believed that a classical liberal education "…was not so much the imposition of an alien White culture that would make Blacks feel inferior as it was a means to understanding the development of the Western world and Blacks' inherent rights to equality within that world" (Anderson, 1988, p. 30). It was the differences between the Northern industrialists and Black intellectuals' educational standpoints that brought about criticism from Washington's most verbal opposer: W.E.B. DuBois.

Anderson (1988) described the conflict between DuBois and Washington as debates "to educate, organize and direct the same segment of Afro-America, the 'talented tenth' or the Black intelligentsia…[and] the struggle for ideological control of the Black intelligentsia" (p 104). Since backing from White politicians and philanthropists propelled Washington as the Black spokesman for industrial education, he was instantly engaged in an ideological debate over his views; so much so that DuBois dedicated a chapter in response to Washington's views in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (DuBois, 1903/2008; Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Anderson (1988) espoused, "Whatever the secondary concerns of DuBois, the philanthropists, and Washington, they were all concerned primarily with the training of Black teachers and leaders and the ideological persuasion of that class. For the exceptional persons to guide the race, DuBois looked to colleges like Atlanta to produce egalitarian social critics and Washington looked to industrial normal schools like Tuskegee to produce leaders who would endorse and advance the Hampton Idea" (p. 105). Because W.E.B. DuBois, spoke openly about the unequal distinctions between the Black and White races within education and advocated for higher education for future Black leaders and teachers, dialogue was initiated between Northern industrial supporters of industrial education and Black leaders and intellectuals. The stark differences between the ideologies of Northern industrialists and Black leaders and intellectuals led to contested debates over the future of schooling for Black children. As such, the repercussions of these deliberations reverberate to present discussions regarding parents and the education of Black children.

Current discussions over Black parents and their children's interactions in schools have generally focused on problem-centered approaches as a solution to issues including student achievement, graduation rate, and participation in educational programs. However, these

problem-centered approaches are typically centered on pathologizing the family and child rather than considering historical socio-political systems that have disenfranchised Blacks from schooling. From the ante-bellum period to post-bellum period, Blacks were either prohibited from being educated or were met with formidable opposition from access to and funding for schooling. Further, dominant Northern industrialist and agrarian elite ideologies regarding how Blacks were to acquire their schooling and which type of schooling they would receive developed universal education under caste systems that reflected stratification among classes and races and reproduced the social reality of Blacks.

Although Black parents' response to clandestine agendas and racist practices regarding their children's schooling reflected tenacity and resourcefulness, this would not be enough to reverse the damage that had been done to impede the educational progress of Black students. If we view Blacks' interactions with schooling from this context (post civil rights), it suggests that only two generations of Blacks have had consistent equal access to schooling. To focus on measures of achievement and educational attainment of Black students and compare these measures to the progress of their counterparts without interrogating the history of socio-political systems which have disenfranchised Blacks and effected their educational progression since universal schooling was introduced is foolhardy at best. Instead, analysis of how ideological debates over industrial education versus classical liberal education affected decades of Black students' educational progress as well as analysis of state statues and policies that were used for practices such as gerrymandering school districts, enforcing school terms that supported Black child labor, and excluding Black youth from secondary education should be performed to interrogate clandestine agendas that marginalized and developed Blacks' schooling under such contexts. By providing such analysis, we can begin to examine reoccurring themes which have

affected Black parents' and children's experiences with schooling so that we can begin to understand how those experiences reflect within the school setting to enhance the process of teaching and learning.

<div align="center">**Parenting among Black Women**</div>

**Hegemony, Race, Gender and Class, and Black Motherhood**

What it means to be a parent, and in particular a Black female parent, should be explored to interrogate epistemological standpoints that universalizes and hegemonizes motherhood. Representations from multimedia including music, television, internet, advertisements, and texts can articulate a mainstream reality to the masses. Stuart Hall (1996) explicated mass media's role in creating an uncontested reality when he noted that "it is the space of homogenization where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur" (pp. 469-470). Once the masses abdicate their right to articulate their reality, the information is internalized and accepted. Thus, mass media assumes the authority to determine what truth is, how it is disseminated, and when.

Raced representations have been universalized to ideological conceptions to inform the masses of phenomena hegemonically. Thus, ideological constructs which have shaped representations of the family ideal do not account for the intersectionality of race, gender and class and have consequently affected the masses perceptions of Black motherhood in particular. The heterogeneous social identities of race, gender, and class are articulated as representations of "other" or "difference" in relationship to the discourse of dominant ideologies. According to Hall, (1996), "the point is not simply that since our racial differences do not constitute all of us, we are always different, negotiating different kinds of differences- of gender, of sexuality, of

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class. It is also that these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation" (p. 473). Thus, in order to negotiate multiple differences, including race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., the gazer should understand that these differences are interconnected. To view our diverse social identities as separate and unequal constructs of our self would be a disengagement from our multiple selves. We are not entirely one identity or another, but a unified whole of intersected selves. The challenge then is recognizing and understanding that there are diverse identities which represent multiple realities. Through understanding, subordinated groups (in this instance Blacks) may rearticulate representations of the interconnected self to recast narratives and discourse constructed from deficit paradigms.

Specific to Black motherhood, popular culture stereotypes representations of family based on dominant Eurocentric, middle class, patriarchal paradigms.  Julie Bettie (1995) makes this point clear as she notes, "by offering the traditional family as a solution to 'larger' social malaise- rising crime, juvenile delinquency, welfare fraud, et cetera (for which single mothers are routinely blamed, and Black single mothers in particular) - public debate on 'the family' (read heterosexual and nuclear) often works to displace economic analysis of social crisis and of women themselves" (Bettie, 1995, p. 133). Here, dominant ideologies regarding family are based on deficit paradigms. Our view is directed towards the failing family who does not meet the norm as opposed to examining the social-cultural constructs of larger societal problems which impact subordinated groups' experiences.

Collins (1994) observed that "while the significance of race and class in shaping the context in which motherhood occurs remains virtually invisible when White, middle-class women's mothering experiences assume prominence, the effects of race and class on

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motherhood stand out in stark relief when women of color are accorded theoretical primacy" (p. 62). Therefore, multiple groups' experiences should be considered regarding motherhood to broaden the narrow focus from dominant Western conceptions of mothering. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) noted that

> a particular definition of mothering has so dominated popular media representations, academic discourse, and political and legal doctrine that the existence of alternative beliefs and practices among racial, ethnic, and sexual minority communities as well as non-middle-class segments of society has gone unnoticed…Indeed, for most of the twentieth century an idealized model of motherhood, derived from the situation of the white, American, middle class, has been projected as universal. (pp. 2, 3)

Black women in particular have been laden with popular images which have reduced them to representations such as the superwoman, matriarch, mammy, and welfare mother (Collins, 2000). Such representations have obscured our epistemological orientations regarding mothering within subordinated groups and have devalued their experiences within multiple environments, including schools.

## Black Women's Labor and Othermothering

*This task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination...It does not matter that sexism assigned them [Black women] this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another, for children, for Black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom.*
*-bell hooks (1990, pp. 43, 44)*

I think bell hook's discussion of homeplace raises interesting points about Black women's construction of sites of support for Black people. One point that I feel is central to

dialogue is the labor performed by Black women to develop environments which sustain a people who traverse systems of discrimination. In this sense Black women's laboring repositions homeplace from a specified locale to a creation of space for care and nurturance which deepens communal relationships, reinforces positive self image, and fosters resistance against oppression within multiple locations. This labor is born from various domestic roles in which women in general have assumed the primary responsibility; mothering being one of the most contested roles among dominant western ideals and the ideations of marginalized groups. Accordingly, "as Third World women, women of color, lesbians, and working-class women began to challenge dominant European and American conceptions of womanhood, and to insist that differences among women were as important as commonalities, they have brought alternative constructions of mothering into the spotlight" (Glenn in Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994, p. 3). Dominant western conceptions of a mother's role within the nuclear family have generalized mothering to "natural or biological explanations" (Glenn, in Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994, p. 4) and have obscured subordinated groups' constructions of motherhood which reveal that "mothering, like other relationships and institutions, is socially constructed, not biologically inscribed" (Glenn, in Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994, p. 3). Specific to Black women, when compared to dominant American conceptions which universalizes a maternal ideal, mothering has been regarded from deficit paradigms (Collins, 2000; Lightfoot, 1978; Walker & Snarey, 2004; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994). Audrey Thompson (2004) espoused that "assuming a supposedly generic maternal ideal and then reading the oppressive conditions under which Black mothers have had to labor as excusing or explaining away a failure to achieve this maternal ideal obscures the creativity and richness of the caring values characteristic of Black feminist traditions" (p. 34). Thus by considering a Black feminist standpoint regarding othermothering as a longstanding

tradition of parenting among Black women, it becomes clear that there are multiple ways for understanding mothering and care.

Patricia Hill Collins (1994) addressed mothering as a labor that cannot be separated as distinct public and private realms of work. Collins (1994) noted that "since work and family have rarely functioned as dichotomous spheres for women of color, examining racial ethnic women's experiences reveals how these two spheres actually are interwoven…women of color have performed motherwork that challenges social constructions of work and family as separate spheres, of male and female gender roles as similarly dichotomized, and of the search for autonomy as the guiding human quest" (pp. 46, 47). From this standpoint, feminist theorizing regarding mothering is interrogated as the experiences of women of color reveal motherwork as a mutually constructive act that "maintains family life in the face of forces that undermine family integrity" (Collins, 1994, p. 47). Accordingly, motherwork is a term used by Collins (1994) "to soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one's group" (pp. 47-48). Thus, motherwork shifts the labor of mothering from a universalized western ideal of privatized isolated relationships within the nuclear family to a multifaceted interconnected social system of care between individuals, families, and communities.

Stanlie James (1993) traces othermothering to a tradition cultivated from African ethos and the oppressive conditions of slavery. Within African communal societies, James (1993) stated that "while mothering does indeed incorporate a nurturing component for one's biological offspring, it is also not uncommon for African women to undertake nurturing responsibilities for children other than their own immediate offspring…childcare responsibilities were also diffused

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through the common African practice of fostering children" (pp. 45, 46). Therefore, African

women shared in the mothering of children to assist each other with domestic responsibilities,

and to foster mutually supportive relationships that sustained communal beliefs. In this sense,

othermothering became a system for passing African traditions from one generation to the next.

According to Annette Henry (2006), "epistemologically, Black women negotiate a space at

complex and multiple intersections, a type of Middle Passage that has remained in the Black

imagination...That is, it emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial

continuum between African and the Americas" (p. 330). As such, the Black woman emerges as

the mediator between social, political, cultural demands which have shaped family life from

slavery to present Black American communities. To understand this mediation we would have to

consider how a tradition of othermothering was not lost upon enslaved Africans who were

resilient in their care of children within a system of domination in America. James (1993)

highlights this point when she referred to research regarding the transmission of African

traditions within the slave family; she espoused

> …some traditions, including the emphasis on the interconnectedness and interdependence
>
> of communities, appear to have been adapted within the enslaved communities as a
>
> means of coping with slavery's highly destructive system of exploitation and
>
> oppression…If enslaved children were orphaned through the death or sale of their
>
> parents, other women within the quarters often assumed the additional responsibility for
>
> their care. Thus the African tradition of fostering was adapted to meet the needs of the
>
> enslaved communities in the USA and has since become known as othermothering. (pp.
>
> 46, 47)

Such efforts demonstrate how Black women as a subordinated group adapted shared beliefs to meet the needs of their community. Accordingly, the diffusion of the rich tradition of othermothering from African ethos to the oppressive conditions of slavery was refashioned within present Black American communities and became evident in multiple locations including biological mothers, othermothers, and community othermothers.

Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher (1997) describe mothering as an interconnected process in which respecting and recognizing that the biological and environmental are equally important to the preservation of life and the communities in which we live. Baker-Fletcher (1997) state that "the womb and the village, the embryo and the environment communities live in are interrelated, whether urban, rural, or suburban. The physical, socioeconomic, and political environments in which we raise our children are as important as generating new life. New life cannot flourish in oppressive conditions" (p. 179). In this sense, mothering is concerned with the nurturing, cultivating, and caring for people as well as the spaces they inhabit because it is understood that one cannot exist without the other; to have life without ensuring liberated, healthy, safe sites to sustain that life is unconscionable. As such the process for mothering life and community becomes generational. "To be generational involves more than the biological acts of conceiving and bearing children. To be generational is to be mindful of the effects of one's everyday and extraordinary acts for future generations. It involves concern for those children one has physically borne into the world and for the children of entire communities" (Baker-Fletcher, 1997, 179). Thus, being generational requires activity that is concerned with preserving present and future lives, communities, and environments. To be generational is to work to ensure that the conditions of our children's children environments are healthy, safe, and liberated from systems of oppression.

By regarding mothering as a communal act, motherhood shifts from the exclusive undertaking of one woman to an inclusive participative function of multiple women. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) espoused that "…othermothers- women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities- traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p. 192). It is important to note the centrality of relationships among Black women in refashioning African oriented conceptions of care of children to a communal accountability for supporting Black children in America. The significance of Black female alliances is made evident as they function in roles as extended family members, neighbors, and fictive kin to cooperatively care for children (Collins, 2000; James, 1993; Walker & Snarey, 2004; Collins, 1994; Baker-Fletcher, 1997). The role of Black women in these set of arrangements, whether formal or informal, "not only serve to relieve some of the stress that can develop in the intimate daily relationships of mothers and daughters but they can also provide multiple role models for children" (James, 1993, p. 45). Therefore, othermothering can be viewed as a source of mitigation for biological mothers as well as guidance to children for future activity as othermothers. Baker-Fletcher (1997) speaks to the activity of othermothering as a lifelong birthing process and espoused that, "the most difficult part of birthing is the lifelong birthing process of raising a human being from childhood to adulthood for twenty and more years, allowing children to enjoy childhood but moving them toward age-appropriate responsibilities in attitude and action as they mature. True parenting, as elders in diverse communities often teach young parents, is a lifetime responsibility" (p. 178). As such, othermothering becomes a responsibility to cooperatively nurture and prepare the child into adulthood and parenthood. The responsibility for othermothering "may be for short- or –long-term periods and may exist both informally, such as within neighborhood child care arrangements, or formally, in the case of

public elementary-school classrooms" (Case, 1997, p. 26). Regardless of the time span or capacity in which Black women have served, othermothering has been central to the survival and flourishing of the Black family and works towards social change in the Black community.

Black female scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (2004) and Stanlie James (1993) depict community othermothers as women who feel accountable for their communities and act as catalysts for change through political activism. Community othermothers are described by James (1993) as

> commanding a powerful position of respect…the community othermother was/is able
> successfully to critique the behavior of individual members of the community and to
> provide directions on appropriate behavior(s). Based upon her knowledge and her
> respected position, a community othermother is also in a position to provide analyses
> and/or critiques of conditions or situations that may affect the well-being of her
> community. (p. 48)

As the needs of the community are understood to have a profound effect upon the child, the community othermother focuses on the welfare of the environment to address the interests of community members. Thus, as well respected and informed leaders of the community, community othermothers engage in activity that regards not only the mothering of children, but also nurtures and empowers community members towards political activism. Both Collins (2004) and James (1993) speak to the efforts of Ella Baker as an exemplar of a community othermother who worked for social change. As an assistant field secretary to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the 1940's, Ella Baker assisted and organized several membership drives throughout the South (Ransby, 2003). "Over the years, she had arrived at the conclusion that political participation was not mainly about high-powered leaders

like [Walter] White or [W.E.B] DuBois but rather about the ways in which ordinary people could transform themselves and their communities" (Ransby, 2003, p. 113). After leaving the NAACP in the early 1950's, Baker turned her political activism to her own community in Harlem, New York and as the first female president elected to the New York branch of NAACP, Baker led campaigns focused on school reform and child welfare policies (Ransby, 2003). As a community othermother, Baker also mentored people. According to Collins (2000), "Ella Baker…worked closely with students…[and] recount[ed] how she nurtured the empowerment of student civil rights workers" (p. 235). Thus, community othermothering encompasses a nurturing of the mind into a maturity that takes responsibility for the community and its members.

## Parent Involvement within Curriculum Studies Literature

Several studies have indicated that parents involved in their child's education demonstrate positive attitudes towards the teachers and school, parents' skills and leadership increase; students have fewer behavior problems, have higher grades and test scores, better attendance at school, and have higher graduation rates; school programs and climate are improved (Griffith, 1996, p. 33; Zellman & Waterman, 1998, p. 370; Epstein et al., 2002, p. 7). Although there are studies that lend to the benefits of parent involvement, it is important to note that parent participation is not the only indicator for improving the academic potential of students.

> Many studies of high-performing schools identify several key characteristics associated with improvement. These include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, as well as instruction and assessments aligned with those standards. They also include effective leadership, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, and focused professional development. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24)

Since parent involvement has been identified as one of the varying indicators that can assist schools in attaining high performance, researchers are continuously searching for ways to increase their participation in schools.

According to Diana Hiatt (1994), "the diligent labors of educational researchers' studies pointed out the positive influence parent involvement and parent education have upon student achievement in schools" (p. 35). These studies have indicated that "student achievement increases when parents, regardless of their socio-economic status or level of education, are involved in their children's education" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p.7). Accordingly, studies that have examined or evaluated the relationship between parent participation and student achievement have produced a great deal of interest for developing pragmatic responses to this concern. However, knowledge from these studies has not been realized within Curriculum Studies. In this section I will attempt to review the research within Curriculum Studies that address elements of parent involvement. Although the research on parent involvement in Curriculum Studies is sparse, there are a few scholars within the field who situate parents within the literature.

**Pinar:**

William Pinar et al. (2008) delineates parents' involvement in curriculum as understanding curriculum as racial text and understanding curriculum as theological text. Understanding curriculum as racial text explicates how race permeates schooling, with emphases on the Black experience in the formation of America's history, identity, political structure, and economy. According to Pinar et al. (2008), "all Americans can be understood as racialized beings; knowledge of who we have been, who we are, and who we will become is a story or text we construct. In this sense curriculum- our construction and reconstruction of this knowledge for

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conversation with the young- is racialized text" (p. 330). Therefore, our knowing is also constructed from the interconnectedness of Black and White identity. The canon that prescribes Black and White identity as independent variables regards knowledge as neutral and creates an alternative paradigm that represses self-awareness. Accordingly, "…the Eurocentric character of school curriculum functions not only to deny role models to non-European –American students; it denies self-understanding to white students as well" (Castenell in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 328). The institutional practices of curriculum are reflective of the larger society; thus, understanding curriculum as a racialized text broadens dialog in curriculum to its affect upon students' school experiences. This suggests that parents, as members of the larger society, can occupy space within curriculum discourse that may affect multiple ways of knowing and experiencing children's progress in school.

The research regarding the impact parent involvement has on student achievement is extensive. Pinar et al. (2008) presents the work of Concha Delgado-Gaitan as how, "another example of scholarship focused on institutional practices attends to the role of parents and other family members in children's success at school" (p. 333). Research from Delgado-Gaitan's work revealed that the integration of students' family and culture within curriculum contributed to the success of schools. Additionally, her findings supported that when prescriptions that repress self-awareness are challenged by the collaborative efforts of school, home, and community, non-white students are positively influenced (Pinar et al. 2008, pp. 333, 334). Delgado-Gaitan's findings also validated the importance of studies that focus on home and school collaborations in that as stakeholders of students' educational interests, curricular experiences can be enriched.

Understanding curriculum as theological text "…includes discussions of morality, ethics, values, hermeneutics, cosmology, and religious beliefs" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 606). In this sense,

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theology is used as a term to capture the multifaceted topics within curriculum. Although the separation between church and state is widely contested, Pinar et al. (2008) explicates the affect questions of theological focus have upon curricular interests. Specifically, pivotal cases from Supreme Court decisions have influenced outcomes of the curriculum taught.

Pinar et al. (2008) discussed several court decisions that highlight parents' protection of constitutional rights specific to religion and the role they believed curriculum had in denying that right to their children. Of particular interest concerning parents' involvement in curriculum are court cases involving parents' beliefs regarding theological concepts and the differing ideas and/or materials disseminated through textbooks. "Illustrative of this focus is the widely reported Tennessee textbook case [Mozert v. Hawkins County, 765 (1985)] which addressed the question of the proper balance between a school board's authority to prescribe a curriculum and the rights of individual parents to protect their children from books and ideas they consider religiously objectionable" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 617). In this court case, parents protested their children reading ideas and values in textbooks that conflicted with their religious beliefs. "Included in these ideas and values to which they objected were: a) the advocacy of humanistic moral values, b) an anti-Christian bias, c) promotion of one world government, d) false ideas of death, and e) feminist views favored over concepts of the traditional role of women" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 617). The outcome of this case was a court order by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit directing the students to return back to public schools with no change in their reading instruction. From their interpretation of the law, the court decided that although people were protected under the Constitution from being compelled to uphold beliefs that differed from their own, that the very same did not protect them from exposure to those beliefs.

**Jackson:**

Literature found within the text of Philip Jackson explicates parents' role in curriculum. In the work of Larry Cuban (1992), parents are described as a group internal to the organization of schools that have demanded changes to the intended and taught curriculum. Within this work, intended curriculum is delineated as "the subject matter, skills, and values that policy makers expect to be taught" (Cuban in Jackson, 1992, p. 222). Thus, the intended curriculum is content that frames theoretical perspectives of teaching and learning. Taught curriculum "…is what teachers do (lecture, ask questions, listen, organize classes into groups, etc.) and use (chalk, texts, worksheets, machines, etc.) to present content, ideas, skills, and attitudes" (Cuban in Jackson, 1992, p. 222). Therefore, the taught curriculum is the application of materials and activities developed that teachers perform to disseminate concepts for the intended learner. Decisions regarding intended and taught curriculum has affected parents' response to what they feel their children should learn.

Cuban's exploration into the social influence parents have upon intended and taught curriculum is made clear. "Sex education, subversive content taught in a government class, the concept of evolution, and library books viewed as obscene are instances when parental groups charge into school board meetings and demand changes in what is taught" (Cuban in Jackson, 1992, p. 231). Such displays of emotions typify how parents' beliefs regarding what could be learned from curriculum that violates their constitutional rights affects their response to what is taught in schools. Cuban (1992) further espouses that "less aroused but just as insistent groups of parents…ad hoc parent groups…parent teacher associations and lay groups have campaigned quietly but persistently for curricular changes and gotten them over time" (p. 231). Consequently, the intended and taught curriculum is politically influenced by the persistent

efforts of parent groups with similar interests. Cuban's work suggests that parents' aroused emotional displays and parent organizations' use of the political structure can change local, state, and federal decisions about curriculum.

**Schubert:**

William Schubert (1986) illustrates parents' involvement in curriculum as curriculum policy makers. Curriculum policy is explicated by Schubert (1986) as "…the policy of intended learning experiences or content (together with its purpose, organization, and evaluation) that a school system decides to provide for its students. Even when it is unwritten…curriculum is a school system's policy about the knowledge and experiences that students should have" (p. 142). In this sense, curriculum policies are the beliefs and plans set for curricular implementation.

Schubert (1986) espouses that parents "…contribute to curriculum policy in several ways. Parents help their children form educational outlooks or attitudes; from the parental relationship can spring a level of curiosity, a willingness to learn, a sense of discovery, a process for dealing with problems, and a facility with ideas" (p. 158). As illustrated by Schubert, parents contribute to curriculum policy by developing their children's viewpoint on schooling. It is further indicated that students' position on the educational process is derived from either observation or the direct instruction of their parents. "Thus, by the educational outlook that parents help to shape in their children, they set the limits on the kinds of curriculum policy that schools can implement" (Schubert, 1986, p. 158). It is implied, therefore, that schools' implementation of curriculum policy is linked to parents' impact on the outlook students have regarding its relevance in their lives. The intended learning experiences for students would be idealistic at best if students' beliefs regarding curriculum policy were not realized.

**Grumet:**

Madeleine Grumet (1988) addresses parent involvement as a process that comes about from the tensions occurring between parents and teachers. These tensions become evident as Grumet (1988) illustrates the estranged mother and the ambivalent teacher as battling over the child whereby:

> a mother may resent the teacher who leads her child away from her kitchen to an office, a factory, a world where she does not feel welcome. A mother may resent the teacher who wins her child's love or names her child's world. A teacher may project her ambivalence about her role in socialization onto the mother of her student, portraying her as clinging and regressive in order to rationalize her own and the school's intrusion…When we teach other women's children, we do not forget those affiliations [being some woman's child and being some child's mother], and we worry about them. (p. 178)

Thus, these battles over the rights to the custody of the child are contested and may culminate in parents' attacks on texts and courses of study. However, Grumet (1988) notes that if schools seek to protect children from the primitive sectarianism that may result from the fundamentalist attacks of some parents, "…then we must provide some process where the perspectives those parents hold are introduced, considered, and discussed in the curriculum" (p. 176). This developed process would require a level of trust between the parent and school to move towards the nurture and care children need to flourish. Thus, parents' presence in schools and the curriculum is a commitment to move beyond the possessive confinements of thinking about children as what Grumet (1988) termed 'my children' [parents] and 'their children [schools], to a mutual understanding that they are 'our children'.

**Nieto and Bode:**

Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode (2008) discuss parents' involvement as a way to transform the curriculum. "A transformative approach changes the canon, paradigms, and basic assumptions of the curriculum, thus letting students learn about issues, concepts, and problems from a variety of perspectives and points of view" (Banks, in Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 129). By using a transformative approach, curriculum is framed through the culture and experiences of the schools' population. Nieto and Bode (2008) highlighted the research of Judith Solsken, Jerri Willett, and Jo-Anne Wilson Keenan which "…focused on how parents' talents and skills could be used to promote student learning" (p. 130). Although parent visitations in classrooms are not a new concept, this research placed emphasis on dialogue between home and school to enrich curriculum. Their research project "opened the conversation to many aspects of the children's language and lives that had not previously had a place in the classroom, and they created many different opportunities for everyone to connect to one another and to the academic discourse of school" (Solsken, Willett, & Keenan in Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 130). Therefore, parents' talents and skills are used to transform curriculum to a more holistic approach to teaching and learning. By constructing an environment that recognizes the realities of the parents and families of the schools' population, curriculum is positioned for the exchange of ideas.

The literature from these scholars has addressed elements of parent involvement in the curriculum studies field; however, more is needed to expound upon parent involvement in curriculum scholarship. In particular, the intersectionality of parents' multiple social identities could contribute much to understanding the multifaceted ways parents are involved in their children's schooling. Such involvement underscores that there are ways of knowing that are not recognized in universalized conceptions of parent involvement. Universalized conceptions of

parent involvement that have been cited as assisting in the improvement of student performance include bake sales, back to school nights, volunteering in schools, attending school activities, chaperoning field trips, fund-raising, attendance at parent teacher conferences, participation in parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and influence over children's selection of courses (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Knowledge from such studies has been incorporated within educational reforms that construct epistemic orientations of parent involvement practices in schools. Because of the scarcity of research on alternative parent involvement standpoints, prescriptions delineate participation in schools and render any departures from what is considered the norm as unrecognizable. "Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor" (Freire, 1970/1997, p. 47). This imposition of prescriptions suggests an unconscious acceptance of a people who are inundated with dominant narrative.

The Curriculum Studies field is not immune to prescriptions which dictate practices that are recognized by school officials as parental involvement. "Despite the wide publicity parent involvement has gained among policymakers, educators, and education theorists, there has been little scrutiny with regards to the implications it has for socially vulnerable groups" (De Carvalho in Theodorou, 2007, p. 92). These vulnerable groups' intersectional social identities are not recognized within universalized parent involvement research, narrative and discourse.  As such, universalized constructs of parental involvement relegates these vulnerable groups' attempts to support their children's schooling to activities that support the function of schools and restricts their input on curriculum matters. By addressing the interconnecting identities that construct

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parental involvement within research, narrative and discourse as well as the multiple ways of knowing and experiencing children's progress in school could be exposed to curriculum scholars (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Anderson, & Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984/2007).

Although there is a plethora of research and narrative that universalizes parental involvement, curriculum scholars should explore how such is construed to be the prevailing knowledge claim in an effort to broaden their understanding of parental support of chidlren's schooling. The works of scholars such as Michel Foucault and Patricia Hill Collins challenge dominant knowledge claims and bring to the forefront that there are alternative ways of knowing. According to Foucault (1972) "…episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one of the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape – a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand" (p. 191). Foucault's description of episteme reveals a universalizing process by which the populace comes to know what is true. This process appears to be an inescapable prescription that normalizes, even within academia. Collins (2000) espoused that "epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail" (p. 271). This implies that truth is a relative construct that can be manipulated by groups in positions of power. To better understand constructions of truth, Collins (2000) noted that "epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why" (p. 270).

Foucault (1972) interprets the episteme as fluid and as such, is constructed from imperfect processes. To illustrate the fluidity of episteme Foucault (1972) explicates,

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…the episteme makes it possible to grasp the set of constraints and limitations which, at a given moment, are imposed on discourse: but this limitation is not the negative limitation that opposes knowledge (*connaissance*) to ignorance, reasoning to imagination, armed experience to fidelity to appearances, and fantasy to inferences and deductions; the episteme is not what may be known at a given period, due account taken of inadequate techniques, mental attitudes, or the limitations imposed by tradition; it is what, in the positivity of discursive practices, makes possible the existences of epistemological figures and sciences. (p. 192)

Hence, Foucault interprets episteme as a fluid process that cannot be understood within that instance because, within that point in time, it is constructed from concepts that are subjective. From Foucault's perspective, this fluid process of episteme makes it possible to understand the shortcomings of discourse which will in turn motivate scholars to explore other ways of knowing within that discourse. The episteme, as a fluid process for understanding parent involvement, makes it possible for curriculum scholars to interrogate static epistemologies. In this sense, the episteme inspires alternative ways of knowing so that disparate ideas of truth are investigated.

# CHAPTER 3

## COMPOSING MEMOIR: BIG MAMA

### Big Mama's House Shoes: A Curriculum for Educators

In my first year of employment as a school social worker I experienced my indoctrination into the contested terrain of schools and parenting. Only in this battle, there were no negotiations, no winners or losers; only casualties of war…a child. Laura was a third grade Black student who was referred to me because her grandmother needed assistance with identifying some resources that would assist with paying for her prescription. This grandmother had guardianship of Laura since birth, so to her, she was 'Big Mama', not grandmamma. Later that year I was asked to complete a social history on Laura to gather additional information that would assist with determining how the school could assist her with academic and behavior concerns. The school scheduled an eligibility meeting Laura's grandmother at 7:15am (before school started) to discuss the social history I completed, and the psychological conducted by the school psychologist. I should note that the eligibility meeting consists of an 'educational team', usually comprised of the school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, the child's teacher, and the Student Support Team (SST) chair (usually another teacher or an administrator). I have to remind myself how intimidating this must be to a parent; to be sitting across the table from so many 'experts' ready to provide the culmination of their years of experience and professional knowledge. As a parent, I can empathize; the sheer numbers alone is off-putting. The 'fight the system' or 'flight from the critical gaze of the experts' reaction impinges upon the psyche. I know this 'fight or flight' condition well; I've experienced it too many times myself as a parent sitting in on my own children's teacher conferences and witnessed it within my professional

practice in meetings for Individual Educational Plans (IEP), Response to Intervention (RTI), SST, and Risk Assessments.

A soft knock on the door interrupts our morning chit chat, "Um, excuse me…but the grandmother is here."

The counselor tells the secretary, "Okay, Ms. Johnson, tell her to come on back".

Ms. Johnson looks warily at the counselor and tells her, "You may want to come and see this for yourself."

After a few minutes, the counselor returns with an exasperated look and informs us "Ya'll are not going to believe this, but Laura's grandmother still has on her pajamas".

"WHAT???"…was the shared response of the committee.

I left the conference room so that I could intervene. I knew what was coming next, so the best offense now was defense. I needed to stop the onslaught of what we were taught in the School of Social Work as placing my middle class values on the families and students we work with. It was inevitable, this placement of values… the need to let the parent know that they've committed a faux pas. That their actions, their appearance, their words are a mishap that needs correction in this institution of knowledge dissemination. We, the experts use our knowledge and experience as a way of positioning ourselves; forming a boundary of either 'haves' or 'have nots' with our hegemonic status. We construct these boundaries to not only further perpetuate the expert-layperson relationship, but to demand compliance to this unspoken rule. And if all of this is disregarded, then it is our bounded duty to 'educate' the uninformed.

I was too late. I knew it was going to be bad…I just didn't know how bad. As I rounded the corner of the front office  I found Big Mama wearing house shoes, a scarf around her head, and (for lack of a better word) a house dress. The events that followed her arrival were not very

pretty. School personnel's nonverbal cues created an unwelcoming environment for Big Mama. They were whispering and openly gawking at her and the looks of scorn and disapproval were apparent. I guess Big Mama had enough and quickly stormed out of the school. I almost had to run to catch up with her (she was pretty fast for an elderly woman).

"Ms. Greene, please…wait!"

"I ain't got to put up with this!! I came here cause ya'll said I needed to be here to sign some papers to get my baby some help, and I get treated like I ain't supposed to be here!"

"I'm sorry Ms. Greene, how can we make it up to you?" Now she turned around to look at me full on in the middle of the parking lot.

"Make it up?"

"Yes ma'am, we all want what's best for your grandbaby, and we want to work with you to make sure that happens. I know you're upset now, but may I call you later on today to discuss how we can work together to help Laura?"

I'm getting that *'you must be out your mind'* look now, but she agrees (1st battle won). As I walked back towards the school building though, I saw that my colleagues were standing in the front door.

"Thanks for having my back." The sarcasm wasn't lost on them.

"Well…we saw you were handling it. What did she say she was gonna do?"

"She didn't, I'll call her back later to see what her plans are." All the while I'm thinking, (*what's she gonna do? Ya'll have just insulted her, and made her feel that she was unwelcomed here. Now, after all you've done, all of a sudden you want to see what*

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*'we' can do to help the child? Um, um, um. WE ARE PITIFUL, but we're the 'experts'*

*though).*

Of course when I called the grandmother back, she was still upset, and I think the main thing that

made her the angriest was that no one tried to find out why she was dressed the way she was.

Big Mama knew how she appeared and she explained to me, "I got off to a slow

start and I didn't want to be late for the meeting.  Now I made sho Laura was fed and

dressed fore I brought her on to school, but I wasn't gonna make that meeting on time if I

took the time to get myself ready."

I saw then that Big Mama brought with her a curriculum of parenting that embodied care

and nurturing which supported learning from home. This was illustrative of her preparation for

the meeting [personal documents brought for the meeting] and punctuality to the meeting; even

ensuring that Laura was ready for school was more important to her than those house shoes that

the 'experts' were so concerned about. Such dedication and display of love for a child reminds

me of something in Walker and Snarey's work (2004), "assuming a supposedly generic maternal

ideal and then reading the oppressive conditions under which Black mothers have had to labor as

excusing or explaining away a failure to achieve this maternal ideal obscures the creativity and

richness of the caring values characteristic of Black feminist traditions" (p. 34). And I can truly

say that in this instance, the school assumed a dominant ideology of a generic maternal ideal

which situated a Black woman's care for a child within a deficit paradigm. There was no

celebration of a grandmother raising a granddaughter, or a grandmother preparing and readying a

child for school; only a disappointment and chiding for presenting herself in a way that was

deemed unacceptable.

I have shared this story to depict a lived experience concealed within research that universalizes parental involvement; an experience that illustrates involvement in a child's schooling that is not a school-based activity that can be measured by the number of times it occurred. I hope that by providing a view into the interior life of a Black woman's support of a child's schooling that I offer a counter-narrative to hegemonic narrative and discourse which obscures the rich heritage and knowledge of Black culture. This view that I have provided is steeped within a long tradition of writing that Black women have produced to reexamine, reinterpret, and rearticulate experience; a tradition that was passed down from one generation to the next to create a literature that recasts history and informs knowing.

## Autobiography

Autobiography in curriculum and instruction remembers the individual's lived experiences in educational practice. Rather than fixating on measurable outcomes and performing the tasks and duties of the educational process, autobiography helps us to understand how our goals, dreams, and lived experiences drive our practice. Meta Harris (2005) espoused that, "the production of autobiography opens avenues for individuals to examine how the things their parents taught them, their formal education, and cultural and life experiences all impact who they are and how they perceive, react to, and interact with others" (pp.36, 37). Thus, the autobiographical method allows the researcher to comprehend phenomena as a participant rather than an observer. With the focus on research as participant, the researcher is free to reflect upon educational experiences to better understand their perceptions of the functions of schools, and to contemplate their role as educational professionals as well as the role of the student.

There are several methods of research that can be connected to autobiography. My study will focus more on a feminist autobiographical approach because I want to use my stories as a

communal dialectic for exposing dysconscious hegemonic constructions. I believe these

constructions influence consciousness and are the result of representations produced by social

structures' transmission of beliefs, ideas, and values. Using Black feminist thought as a

standpoint for writing about my inquiry, memoir and fiction will be employed as my method for

applying an autobiographical narrative approach to reflection and analysis. My writing of

memoir does not follow a linear chronological order of events; rather, the focus is on a sharing of

themes to explore ideologies and practices which either repress or dismiss diverse parent

participation in schools. Memoir will be my method for re-collecting history, memory, and a

bringing to consciousness the silenced stories of Black women. Re-collecting is an emotional

process for gathering what was once remembered, hidden, or silenced within an experience.

According to Toni Morrison (1992), "readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform

within a common language shareable imaginative worlds. And although upon that struggle the

positioning of the reader has justifiable claims, the author's presence- her or his intentions,

blindness, and sight- is part of the imaginative activity" (xii). Thus, a relationship of co-

interpretations is established between the writer and the reader. As the writer re-collects, she

discloses in her writing what she interprets from that which is suppressed and silent and the

reader gains insight from those secrete and hidden places.

   While fiction is used to protect myself and the people in my stories from the voyeuristic

spectator, it is not used to sensationalize or trivialize my study.  Fiction is used to "…elicit an

interpretation of the world by being itself a world like object for interpretation. It is a subtle

pedagogy" (Dillard, 1982, p. 155). Thus fiction is used in my writing to discover an

interpretative meaning of a lived truth. My stories are therefore fictionalized to move beyond the

limitations of hegemonic constructions of truth that restrict consciousness from understanding

multiple realities. It is my sincere hope that my method of writing will engage readers in the process that Morrison (1992) termed imaginative activity to reflect, analyze, and interpret together Black parental involvement. As the writer, I bring to the paper a truth in the experience that requires "a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to that site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (Morrison, 2008, p. 71). Guesswork because the interior lives of marginalized groups' emotional and psychological experiences are silenced in hegemonized narrative. Fiction exposes all that is silent to reconstruct a shared truth. As the reader, you reflect on that reconstructed site to find meaning from that experience.

Traditionally, educational inquiry has sought solutions to parental involvement concerns through pragmatic methods which focus on problem-centered approaches. For the purpose of this study, the pragmatic method is too restrictive for the inquiry necessary for fostering social justice and social understanding. According to Audrey Thompson (1996),

> at least two factors limit the political radicalism of problem-centered approaches to inquiry. One is that a problem-centered approach risks reading "difference" as "deficit." The other reason that problem-centered approaches to inquiry cannot be relied upon to yield a fully political analysis is that the very emphasis on pluralism and contextualism that is in many cases a strength of problem-centered inquiry tends to preclude structural and institutional analyses. (http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/96_docs/thompson.html)

Thus, a less confining method should be employed that will present a framework for conceptualizing the interconnections of social structures and social systems to understand groups' experiences as they intersect structural power.

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According to Glesne (2006), "qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions" (p. 4). By retelling my personal stories as parent and school social worker, autobiographical inquiry affords me the opportunity share my experiences as a Black woman to thereby "use the interrelationships between researcher and other to inform and change social knowledge" (Harris, in Phillion, et al, 2005, p. 39). I therefore engage in qualitative research that draws upon existentialism whereby critical analysis is crucial to understanding how we come to know through our lived experiences. My research is situated within qualitative methods because I am interested in attaining an understanding of the phenomenon of parent involvement through lived experiences. I want to use autobiographical inquiry because I find that my social identities as parent and school social worker are interconnected within my personal interactions with my children and my professional practice within schools. Thus, I use these lived experiences to interrogate prevalent western beliefs regarding parent participation.

As a Black woman, I am interested in conducting research that explores the storied experience of Black women who navigate the educational process. My identities as school social worker and mother situates me in a peculiar location in that those dual identities sometimes clash as well as work in harmony. Harris (2005) espoused that, "the writing of autobiography is a way of creating self and community…the social and the individual are symbiotically linked. The Black woman thus becomes a historian of her Black community" (p. 43). By using autobiographical narrative, I am freed to reposition my selves and as dialectician may re-collect experience as a shared truth. This re-collecting frees me to revisit parenting in schools from a removed perspective; personal and professional as one. As an autobiographical researcher, I

follow a tradition of Black women writers such as Angela Davis, Maya Angelou, June Jordan, and Alice Walker. These Black female writers have opened a space for women of color to contribute to the literature counter-narratives about women and their lives. Therefore, through my research, I attempt to provide counter-narratives to conceptions derived from universlized conceptions of parent involvement narrative and discourse. I hope to use autobiography to locate my experiences within narrative; using an intersectional analysis to identify how systems of discrimination create ideological conflicts between Black parents and schools.

## Black Women Writing About Their Lives

Black women have a long tradition of writing about their lives through a range of genres including narratives, autobiography, and memoirs. Using these forms of writing as a medium for reexamining, reinterpreting, and rearticulating experience, Black women have created a space for knowledge production which may add to autobiography as a form of inquiry within Curriculum Studies. The slave narratives of Black women; the autobiographies and works of early Black female scholars such as Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells; and the works, including autobiographies, essays, and memoirs, written by activists, poets, and contemporary writers such as Angela Davis, Maya Angelou, June Jordan, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison have situated the experiences of Black women among the landscape of United States' historical, political, and economic formations which, when exploring the significance to Curriculum Studies, could deepen understanding within the teaching and learning milieu of children of color. However, the contributions of Black women's experiences are not limited to domains within United States' formations, but can also be applied within the context of writing and the struggle to be heard in the literary world.

Although the works of Black female writers have been acknowledged for their contributions to literature within the past couple of decades, some have noted that in the not so distant past the literary works of Black women were not so well received; that in comparison to their male counterparts, Black women had difficulty with establishing themselves as writers (Collins, 1998, 2001; hooks, 1997; hooks, 1999; Walker, 1983; Morrison, 2008). During that age of patriarchic skepticism, women were not perceived as having the intellectual, experiential, analytical prose of what was once thought to be attributes of White and much, much later Black men (the later a byproduct of the Civil Rights Movement). This ideological stance may have existed because much of the creative process, writing style, and technique which were thought to be easily accessible to men were not attributes that were thought to be bestowed upon women. bell hooks (1997) espoused that the school of thought that supported male dominance in literature held the assumption that, "…females would fail to realize creative potential because their time would be consumed by caring for home, husband, and children" (xi). If we examine this school of thought regarding women and writing, we should question how women were able to produce any works under such circumstances and what the creativity to develop those works was derived from.

Specific to an oppressed race, gender, and class Alice Walker (1983) questioned "how was the creativity of the Black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years Black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a Black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist" (p. 234). One must wonder how Black female writers such as Ana Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida B. Wells were able to retain the creative process, despite the odds, and actually have their works published in such times. Certainly oppression due to their race, gender,

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and class should have been considered more of a hindrance to their creative process rather than caring for home, husband, and children. Nevertheless, the creative process that was believed to be a male dominated attribute managed to flourish; even through oppression. How? Walker (1983) offered a possibility when she stated, "…so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (p. 240). This way of knowing; this handing down of creativity, even when our mothers and their mothers before them were not able to realize their full artistic potential in the public sphere, could be an answer as to how the creative potential was preserved within the Black female writer. However, when describing the creativity necessary to produce the artistry with which her own mother grew her gardens, despite the nature and demands of her everyday work, Walker (1983) offers yet another possibility when she espoused "for her, so hindered and intruded upon in so many ways, being an artist has still been a daily part of her life. This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work Black women have done for a very long time" (p. 242). If we draw upon Walker's illuminations, we can construe that when patriarchic skepticism did not recognize the Black woman for her talents and gifts, her conviction and tenacity, her family, her community nurtured and supported that creative spark that was so easily dismissed by others. Thus, we can begin to understand how the struggle that Black female writers underwent to be heard in the literary world contributed just as much to the landscape of America's historical and economic formations as the actual experiences they wrote about.

Phillis Wheatley provides an example of how the creative spark can be passed from one generation to the next through her life and works, though she had no surviving children of her own. Although, Phillis Wheatley was the first Black American writer in the 1700's recognized

for the publication of her poems, she received much criticism for what was perceived as traitorous to her race within her works. Contemporary authors such as Alice Walker (1983) and June Jordan (2002) offered insight as to the conditions with which Wheatley, a slave girl learned and acclimated within Eurocentric patriarchic dominant schooling, must have lived under to produce the works that received much scorn from her peers while conversely creating space for future Black writers' publications. Jordan (2002) reminds us of the genius of Wheatley when she espoused, "repeatedly singing for liberty, singing against the tyrannical, repeatedly avid in her trusting support of the American Revolution (how could men want freedom enough to die for it but then want slavery enough to die for that?) repeatedly lifting witness to the righteous and the kindly factors of her days, this was no ordinary teenaged poet, male or female, Black or white" (p. 181). Jordan's depiction of a slave girl who at the age of seven was brought from her homeland of Africa and was able, as a teenager, to not only grasp the meaning of the American Revolution among a budding nation state, but was also able to capture the tenor and emotional climate of a culture not her own within her works. What an accomplishment within a short span of years as a subordinated youth living in an unknown land. Walker (1983) expounds even further on the overwhelming odds that such a poet must have had overcome to be able to hold on to the creative spark and still be heard as a slave girl in the 1700's. Accordingly Walker (1983) relates Virginia Woolf's contrary instincts to Wheatley's dilemma as poet and slave when she espoused, "because she did try to use her gift for poetry in a world that made her a slave, she was 'so thwarted and hindered by …contrary instincts, that she …lost her health…'" (p. 236). Perhaps the notion that this slave girl was educated within a Eurocentric patriarchic culture and published works in a tongue unknown to her African descent created a schism, a contested divide of what she remembered and experienced as a freed child to that of a slave girl indoctrinated to

Eurocentric, patriarchal dominant ideologies. Even as the separate but equal selves warred with each other, freed African, poet, slave girl, Wheatley managed to express her creative spark. Walker (1983) further aids our understanding of Wheatley's struggle to express her creative spark when she stated "we know now that you were not an idiot or a traitor; only a sickly little Black girl, snatched from your home and country and made a slave; a woman who still struggled to sing the song that was your gift, although in a land of barbarians who praised you for your bewildered tongue. It was not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, *the notion of song*" (p. 237). Arguably, this 'notion of song', this creative spark that Wheatley, a slave girl was able to keep alive for future generations of marginalized writers is a contribution to the literary world that we cannot afford to forget.

From Wheatley's spark, the autobiographies of Black female scholars such as Mary Church Terrell (1940/2005), Ida B. Wells (1970), and Anna Julia Cooper (1892/1988) succeeded her courageous example of writing despite the odds. While the three women were interested in effecting change over the oppression of Blacks; each chose a different course for contributing to efforts that sought to transform the condition of the injustices inflicted upon Black women. From my perspective, Anna Julia Cooper in particular was one of the first Black female writers to bring forth an analysis of the oppression of Blacks by teasing out how systems of discrimination affected subordinated groups in varying ways. Cooper's (1892/1988) assertion that "…our present record of eminent men, when placed beside the actual status of the race in America to-day, proves that no man can represent the race. Whatever the attainments of the individual may be, unless his home has moved on *pari passu*, he can never be regarded as identical with or representative of the whole" epitomized her standpoint on how the progression of the Black race should be measured (p. 30). With one of the first analysis of whose oppression

within a group embodies the effects of discrimination upon the collective, Cooper situates the subordination of Black women within the race and class issues that were leading the dialogue among key leaders in the Black community at that time. Cooper (1892/1988) espoused that "only the Black Woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*" (p. 31). Thus in one of the first written expressions of Black feminist thought, Cooper reasons that we should consider the location of oppression upon race and gender within a group and thereby argues that the condition of the Black race can only be improved by elevating the state of the Black woman through education. Therefore, Cooper's work should be considered avant-garde in that it brought a Black feminist critique to the dialogue of prominent Black male leaders of that time regarding the role of education in ending sexual and racial oppression of Black women. As an emerging feminist, I believe Cooper passed along the creative spark to contemporary Black female scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks by creating space within educational discourse for Black feminism.

Following in the footsteps of a long tradition of Black female writers, those known and unknown, I draw upon the creative spark handed down from generation to generation to shift our focus to the multifaceted forms of autobiography that can be considered within Curriculum Studies. Although we have gained much from scholars such as William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet regarding the benefits of using autobiography as inquiry within Curriculum Studies, much could be learned from using a Black feminist standpoint to expound upon autobiography within this field. Autobiography for the Black female writer has multiple literary forms because "not all the texts in the literary tradition of Black American women were written down" (Braxton, 1989, p. 5). If we consider a time when it was forbidden for Black Americans to learn

to read and write, we can begin to understand how texts survived when they could not be written. "Often in the most oppressive situations, it is the memories of mothers handed down through the daughters that keeps a community together. The mother tongue is not just the words or even the array of cultural symbols available to a people to resist its tormentors. The mother tongue is the oral tradition" (Kaplan in Braxton, 1989, p. 5). For many male and female uneducated Blacks, their experiences survived through what Braxton termed 'unwritten literature' as a means of passing down a history, a culture, familial mores and values to inform the next generation. Likewise, the written and unwritten within Black literature can be used as a means to inform those located outside the parentage of the tradition of Black American writers. Braxton (1989) espoused that

> …there are unwritten texts and subtexts that Black women bring to the reading or creation of written literature. This does not assert that those born outside the 'magic circle' of the Black and female 'world of love and ritual' are forever locked outside the text… The critic who is *not* a Black woman must simply work harder to see the Black woman at the center of her own (written) experience. From this understanding, and a close reading of important literary antecedents, the tradition unfolds and defines itself. (p. 6)

Thus, exploring the multiple approaches Black female writers have utilized in writing about their lives, including narratives, autobiography, and memoirs, to expound upon autobiography within Curriculum Studies does not alienate those outside of a race, class, or gender; rather, it is an opportunity to broaden the knowledge base of "whoever would first establish [the text] in its proper cultural context" (Braxton, 1989, p. 6). Situating text within its proper cultural context becomes important to those located outside of Black American literary forms for a few reasons;

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one of the most basic is to prevent commodfication of the text. Texts that have been

commodified can assume many forms ranging from voyeurism- because it is something new or

different it sparks a curious gaze within the spectator into the unknown, to sustaining the cultural

capital of dominant groups. Patricia Hill Collins (1998) best described the effects of a

commodified text when she espoused, "fostered by the increasing significance of mass media,

images, and culture in shaping our view of the political, Black women's texts can be used to give

the illusion of actual political, economic, and social change… This treatment of Black women's

texts enables members of privileged groups who cannot deal with *actual people* who are

constructed as different under hierarchical power relations to substitute the *idea* of difference for

conflict-ridden interpersonal contact" (p. 56). Situating texts within their proper cultural context

places those located outside Black American literary forms in a position to gain insight of groups

different from their own to make social change.

As I see it, autobiography within Curriculum Studies is an opportunity for educators to

reflect upon our lived experiences within practice, analyze those experiences, and interpret how

those experiences impacted upon us and the student so that we can better understand who we are

within the educational process and enhance teaching and learning experiences. The inclusion of

Black women's literary forms within autobiography as inquiry would widen the scope of

curriculum scholars' understanding of written and unwritten texts; provide understanding of how

the unwritten impacts the teacher and the student (who both bring their own set of subtexts that

informs their knowing); and creates an opportunity for multiple groups to contribute an array of

genres within Curriculum Studies. Accordingly, the positioning of Black female

autobiographical forms within Curriculum Studies would assist those outside of Black American

literary works in gaining access to the perceptions of schooling from oppressed groups within the

educational setting to make necessary change in practices that support marginalization of various groups.

## Theoretical Framework

*"We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders."*
*-Maya Angelou (1990)*

Ignorance…a pathology that has existed since the beginning of time. It has divided church, state, and family. Its condition atrophies the mind by tricking its host into believing that it is a superior organism because of its status, its gender, its ethnicity, its position in whatever group it identifies itself with. The host forgets that it does not exist in isolation from others who are different; that it is our differences that advance the human organism. Ignorance… a disorder that infects understanding. The disorder needs a remedy; a remedy that may not treat the host's conceptions of power and privilege, but may alter the effects of the host's constructions of dominance and entitlement wielded upon multiple groups. I find Critical Race Theory (CRT) to be the proper medication to arrest the pathology of ignorance. CRT, as a remedy to ignorance, may yield a prognosis of pluralism.

I am interested in using CRT as my theoretical framework because my epistemic orientation is situated within a critical analysis of constructions of identity which subordinate people of color. As I speak about my epistemic orientation, I am reminded of my first interview as a school social worker with one of the five largest metro Atlanta school systems. I had just graduated with my Masters in Social Work, so I was pretty nervous as I patiently waited for my name to be called.

While waiting, I tentatively reviewed in my mind a barrage of questions that the interviewer could possibly ask me. "Jacquelyn Anthony", I stand and shake the hand of the woman who has just called my name.

She introduces herself as Lois Johnson, a member of the interview panel, and asks me to follow her *(for my inquisition).* "Hello Ms. Anthony". An older gentleman addresses me. "Did you have any problems finding us?"

"No, I didn't, I was able to find you all quite easily".

"I'm glad to hear that. Well, I'm Dr. Rollins, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and I'll be serving as the interview chair".

I'm asked to take a seat and I'm introduced to the rest of the interview panel. "Tell me Ms. Anthony, what do you know about our school system?"

"Well, I know that it's one of the five largest school systems in metro Atlanta, you all have seven high schools, nine middle schools, and about twenty-three elementary schools, and the student demographics roughly consists of an even distribution of White and Black students, with a small percentage of Asian and Latino students".

A few nods from the panel members as Dr. Rollins states, "Well, that's a good start Ms. Anthony. Tell me, how would you handle a situation if you were conducting a home visit to a White parent's house and they're hostile towards you?"

*(Good God, that's how we're going to begin this interview?!! What difference would it make what color the parent was; if they're going to be hostile shouldn't I be able to respond within my practice to the best interest of the child? As a parent, would it be beneficial for me to know that race could have an impact on how school staff work with me… and more importantly… my child?).* I understand the question for what it is. They

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need to know that I'm not a trouble maker, that I can blend in and not upset the community or the balance of their work environment. So I resist the urge to question the logic behind the question because I *need* this job. I play it safe as I look back at the three White panel members and the one Black principal (who looks embarrassed).

"If a parent is hostile as I'm conducting the home visit I would try to put them at ease by letting them know that I'm there to assist them in addressing a concern regarding their child, and that the only reason I've come by their home is because the school had no other way of contacting them. I would then ask if they would rather have the discussion at the school…".

A warm smile spreads across Dr. Rollin's face as he nods in agreement while I'm responding to his question. His nonverbal cues tell me that I've passed the first test; I am one of the acceptable ones. However, my smile is deceiving, for I am a Black woman, a social worker, a parent. All of these mutually constructing identities, coupled with the body of experiences I bring to this environment, will disrupt this quiet peace that is held so dear to them. The real question is- what will they do when the phone calls complaining about 'that social worker' start coming in?

My potential dissertation research centers on exploring how the multiple realities of Blacks as a subordinated group are not recognized within universalized parent involvement conceptions. I believe that CRT is compatible as a theoretical framework for my research because as a form of inquiry it will unpack the ways in which the parent involvement phenomenon is constructed as "race-d". I use this term "race-d" to illustrate the multiple epistemological considerations of "other" in relationship to conceptual whiteness (Thomas, in Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 354; Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 9). Whether or not "other", as a race-d identity, is denoted as a historical condition, an ideological construct, or a category and/or

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classification, a critical race analysis may help to identify and deconstruct deeply rooted

conceptions hidden within the framework of American culture.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) explicate CRT to be "the radical legal

movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 144). The

enmeshment of race throughout social, institutional, political, and economic structures is a

substantiable framework for exercising advantages for a few [the dominant culture] and barriers

for many [marginalized groups]. Thus, the focus of race is central to the tenets of CRT.

Laurence Parker and Marvin Lynn (2002) attribute the works of critical race scholars as

espousing that

> racism should not be viewed as acts of individual prejudice that can simply be eradicated.
>
> Rather, it is an endemic part of American life, deeply ingrained through historical
>
> consciousness and ideological choices about race, which in turn has directly shaped the
>
> U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and
>
> privilege. (Harris, in Parker & Lynn, 2002 p. 9)

Thus, the promulgation of race within epistemological choices filters into the laws which govern

permissible practices that normalize and legitimate the oppression of marginalized groups. CRT

seeks to expose the various forms of institutional and structural racism which permeate

American culture to transform its hegemonic grip upon social consciousness. Therefore, as an

analytical tool, CRT identifies specific racial issues in the legal system and political processes so

that systemic racism may be understood. As a theory, CRT calls for movement towards social

justice.

According to Roy Brooks and Mary Jo Newborn (1994), Richard Delgado described

CRT as legal scholarship that is characterized by an insistence on "naming our own reality"; the

belief that knowledge and ideas are powerful; a readiness to question basic premises of moderate/incremental civil rights law; the borrowing of insights from social sciences on race and racism; critical examination of the myths and stories powerful groups use to justify racial subordination; a more contextualized treatment of doctrine; criticism of liberal legalism; and an interest in structural determinism- the ways in which legal tools and thought-structures can impede law reform (p. 788). Delgado's descriptions of CRT scholarship position constructions of race as central to our understanding of lived experiences. These race-d experiences can be better understood using Delgado and Stefancic's explication of themes within CRT. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) the four themes within CRT are interest convergence, "thesis pioneered by Derrick Bell that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so", revisionist interpretation of history, "view of history or an event that challenges the accepted one", critique of liberalism, focus of critical race scholars on liberalism specific to "color blindness and neutral principles of constitutional law", and structural determinism, "concept that a mode of thought or widely shared practice determines significant social outcomes, usually without our conscious knowledge" (pp. 25, 149, 155, 156). These themes are considered to be the principal characteristics of CRT thought which contribute to the research and advocacy of critical race scholars.

Derrick Bell's analysis of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision hypothesized that the Supreme Court's decision was due to an image conscious government desperate to improve its relations among third world countries rather than moral qualms over the oppression of Blacks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 18, 19). Thus, advances in the civil rights movement were allowed because the dominant group would benefit as well. Bell (1995) espoused that "interest convergence provides the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated

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only when it converges with the interests of whites. ..the remedies, if granted, will secure,

advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important  by middle- and upper-class

whites" (p. 22). Bell's theory denotes that economic considerations as well as an image

conscious government were the underpinnings of support from Whites for *Brown vs. Board of*

*Education*. Although he felt there were some Whites who "sought an end to desegregation on

moral grounds", the decision in Brown was of value to Whites, "not simply those concerned

about the immorality of racial inequality, but also those Whites in policymaking positions able to

see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow the abandonment

of segregation" (Bell, 1995, pp. 22, 23). Thus, the equality of the Black race was inextricably

tied to Whites' interests being served.

A revisionist history disputes the dominant culture's view of history while giving a voice

to those who were silenced for many years. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) described revisionist

history as one of the processes for naming your reality. According to Ladson-Billings (1999),

"there are three reasons for naming one's own reality in legal discourse, (1) much of reality is

socially constructed, (2) stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-

preservation, and (3) the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome

ethnocentrism and the dysconscious conviction of viewing the world one way" (p. 15). Thus, the

retelling of a history constructed by dominant paradigms is a powerful mechanism for redressing

constructions of discrimination.

Critical race theorists critique liberalism because it is believed that it uses tenets of color-

blindness and neutrality that attribute to the continued subordination of people of color. "Color-

blind, or formal, conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is

the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination, such

as mortgage redlining or the refusal to hire a Black Ph.D. rather than a white high school dropout" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Consequently, it is the clandestine instances of discrimination which cause critical race scholars to examine the neutral principles of constitutional law.

We can begin to understand social outcomes utilizing structural determinism to critically examine the structures that support discrimination. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) write, "…consider the situation of Black women wishing to sue for job discrimination directed against them as Black women. Attorneys searching for precedent will find a large body of case and statutory law under the headings 'race discrimination' and 'sex discrimination'. No category combines the two types of discrimination. Because of the structure…Black women have filed under one category or the other, or sometimes both (p. 218)." Thus, the systems utilized by lawyers are structured so that the law and the cases researched are neutralizing. Consequently, this prohibits people who are discriminated against in multiple ways (because of their mutually constructing identities) from attaining full access to the law.

**Traditions**

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) attribute the origins of CRT to several traditions, including civil rights, critical legal studies, and radical feminism (p. 4, 5). From these traditions, CRT borrowed concepts and methodologies that were incorporated within its tenets. Elements of civil rights advocacy and thought, critical legal studies, and radical feminism will be explored to address their impact upon the development of CRT.

Civil Rights:

Many activist and legal scholars who were not pleased with the slow progress of the civil rights movement and who were concerned about the gains lost in eradicating inequalities

between Blacks and Whites, "noted the limitations of achieving justice using dominant conceptions of race, racism, and social equality" (Tate, 1997, p. 206). The tenets of civil rights thought which focused on color-blindness and neutrality were believed to be counterproductive to the reformations sought for equality between the races. For critical race scholars, a color-blind and neutral view of the law "…allows us to ignore the racial constructions of Whiteness and reinforces its privileged and oppressive position" (Taylor, 1999, p. 184). The historical construction of privilege as a conduit for the oppression of people of color brought about calls for change that eventually gave rise to civil rights.

Brooks and Newborn (1994) described civil rights policies as a historical process that can be traced to court decisions that have constructed our understanding of constitutional law. These decisions influenced policies and practices which initiated as separate-and-unequal (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*), progressed to separate-but-equal (*Plessy v. Ferguson*), and were eventually replaced with formal equal opportunity or FEO (*Brown v. Board of Education*) (Brooks & Newborn 1994, pp. 792-795). The separate-and-unequal and separate-but-equal policies were motivated by the prevailing thought that Blacks were inferior to Whites; however, economic and non-economic factors proved such ideologies to be costly and embarrassing. Brooks and Newborn (1994) espoused that NAACP lawyers were able to provide documentation that illustrated racial inequalities in salaries, expenditures, and working conditions between Blacks and Whites which eventually won equalized-funding cases that "…made the separate-but-equal policy an expensive proposition for segregationists. In addition, the morality of the separate-but-equal policy was called into question by the need for African American labor at home to help with the war effort and by the worldwide embarrassment that resulted when American citizens discriminated against African dignitaries who were in our country to attend United Nations functions" (pp. 794, 795).

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Thus, civil rights was birthed because of economic and image conscious choices that were derived by cases won through NAACP and the criticisms of the global community.

Although civil rights brought about FEO, "critical race scholars find themselves questioning the philosophical underpinnings of civil rights discourse during a period of ideological attack from the right by neoconservatives seeking to eliminate past civil rights gains" (Tate, 1997, p. 204). The emergence of assaults on civil rights by rightist are made evident in their use of color-blind and neutrality discourse to protect their interests.  Edward Taylor (1999) espoused that "by relying on merit criteria, or standards, the dominant group can justify its exclusion of Blacks to positions of power, believing in its own neutrality (p. 184). Accordingly, "conservatives used this rhetoric of color blindness against affirmative action programs to argue that all race-conscious considerations in education were inconsistent with race-neutrality" (Roithmayr in Parker et al., 1999, p. 2).Therefore, while civil rights was meant to end segregation, critical race scholars believe that it attributes to the segregation evident in today's society (i.e., schools). Ladson-Billings and Tate espoused "instead of providing more and better educational opportunities, school desegregation has meant white flight along with a loss of African-American teaching and administrative positions" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55, 56).Thus, the unanticipated consequence of the landmark Brown decision did little to change the homogeny of schools whereby Whites continue to benefit from better resourced educational opportunities and Blacks remain deprived.

Critical Legal Studies:

Critical Legal Studies (CLS) fully emerged in the late 1970's as scholars began to realize that the law reflected the interests of the dominant group. Tate (1997) espouses that "scholars within the CLS movement have attempted to analyze legal ideology and discourse as a

mechanism that functions to re-create and legitimate social structures in the United States" (p. 207). As a theoretical framework, CLS critiques how constitutional law constructs hierarchies of class disparities. Crenshaw et al. (1995), denotes three ideological differences that split legal scholars of color from the CLS organization, "CLS's underdeveloped critique of racial power in institutions (even within Critical Legal Studies), failure of CLS in the critique of rights specific to the lived experiences of people of color, and a lack in addressing how the law reflects and produces racial power" (xxiii, xxiv). The inability of CLS to centralize race and power within its critique of law, led to the collaboration of lawyers, legal scholars, and activists to develop CRT. Hence, CRT intended to raise consciousness of the affects of race within American culture.

Radical Feminism:

*When I offered the word "Womanism" many years ago, it was to give us a tool to use, as feminist women of color, in times like these. These are the moments we can see clearly, and must honor devotedly, our singular path as women of color in the United States. We are not white women and this truth has been ground into us for centuries, often in brutal ways.*
*- [Alice Walker](#) (2008)*

The radical feminism that Delgado and Stefanic (2001) speak of differs from feminism derived from The Women's Liberation Movement. Whereas feminism emerged as a response to discriminatory practices based on sexism, Black feminist thought emerged from a location that speaks to all systems of discrimination. Few Black feminist, if any at all, have organized around the tenets of The Women's Liberation Movement because it was widely viewed as a movement for privileged White women who wanted the same access to the workplace as their male counterparts. Toni Morrison (2008) quoted Ida Lewis (former editor-in-chief of Essence), who was asked why more Black women were not involved in Women's Lib, as saying that "The Women's Liberation Movement is basically a family quarrel between White women and White men. And on general principles, it's not good to get involved in family disputes" (p. 21). The

Black woman's standoffish position could be due to an observance of White women who have historically benefited from racist practices. Thus, Black women who were interested in addressing oppression that crossed all social boundaries developed other means for focusing on the issues women face. Womanism and Black feminism are the resultant products of Black women's standpoint about what it means to be a woman of color in the United States of America.

Alice Walker (1983) is credited for introducing the term Womanist and provided several definitions, "a Black feminist or feminist of color. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one. Also, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (xi). By Walker's accounts, the womanist takes charge, and is a serious, responsible being who has a comprehensive understanding of the world they live in.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, (2000), Black feminist works provides scholarship with two contributions regarding knowledge for empowerment, "first, Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations. By embracing a paradigm of intersecting oppression of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation as well as Black women's individual and collective agency within them, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relation of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics that underlie what counts as knowledge" (pp. 291, 292). Based on the contributions of Black Feminist Thought, I find that it enriches CRT in that it provides an opportunity to shift epistemological considerations regarding power and knowledge to redress hegemonized narrative, discourse, and practice.

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One of the ways Black Feminist Thought redresses hegemonization is through what Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) termed "the use of voice". An exemplar of the use of voice is CRT scholars response to current civil rights doctrine as noted by Ladson-Billings (1999), "the use of voice or 'naming your reality' is a way that CRT links form and substance in scholarship. CRT scholars use parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine" (Ladson-Billings in Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 15). Although these forms of telling are silenced within universalized ideologies, their significance to CRT reach beyond legal doctrine. Stories, counterstories, fiction, and revisionist history are powerful forms of telling that reposition marginalized groups' lived experiences within hegemonized narrative that universalizes experience within dominant Eurocentric paradigms. Such repositioning provides accounts from perspectives from which we can reconstruct a more holistic account of truth. These accounts are oppositional to the hegemonic constructions of their oppressor and can, "catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism" (Ladson-Billings in Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 16). Thus, silenced narratives create a space for the interrogation of mainstream narrative, discourse, and practice.

**History**

Critical Race Theory arose from the contributions of several people during the mid 70's. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) attribute CRT's initial beginnings to the works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who drew the attention of other well known legal scholars and activist such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, Neil Gotanda, Robert Williams, and Richard Delgado (pp. 5, 6). CRT grew from these early contributors' critique of critical legal scholarship which was thought to typically address the

interpretations of constitutional law on hierarchies of class. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Keffrelyn Brown (2008) espoused that "Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from legal scholarship when scholars of color began to challenge the ways that liberal legal scholarship failed to interrogate and/or challenge the relationship between race, racism, and power" (p. 154). Additionally, legal scholars and activists who were dissatisfied with the progress of reforms established through civil rights and who questioned race neutral discourse of constitutional law, sought to develop theories and strategies that would remove barriers for people of color. Their work towards CRT required that they act on changing the relationship between law and racial power. According to William Tate (1997), the work of Derrick Bell espoused that "the role of the civil-rights lawyer was not simply to deliver an interpretation of the legal rules, but to fashion arguments that might change existing laws" (p. 205). Therefore, CRT is a participatory theory that seeks to transform the principles of power and oppression which permeate institutional and social cultural practices.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory is of significance because it provides a framework for understanding how subordinated groups' lived experiences shape perceptions of what 'is'. According to Ladson-Billings (1999), "the use of voice or 'naming your reality' is a way that CRT links form and substance in scholarship" (p. 15). When subordinated groups name their reality, it provides viewpoints which reconstruct a more holistic account of what 'is'. Such accounts are oppositional to Eurocentric epistemological constructions and can, "catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 16). Accordingly, naming ideological constructions which oppress and subordinate marginal groups provides a means for rearticulating what 'is'. bell hooks (1994) espoused that, "coming to voice is not just the act of telling one's experience. It is using that telling strategically- to come to

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voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects" (p. 148). Thus, the use of 'voice'

can be powerful to the oppressed to not just speak of lived experiences, but to use lived

experience(s) to deconstruct ideologies of oppression while also protesting against

epistemological standards that do not recognize difference.

Although CRT can be used as a tool for examining race as a permeation of American

culture while reciprocally providing subordinated groups an avenue in naming reality, as a form

of inquiry in and of itself, it does not account for mutually constructing identities which are

oppressed in multiple ways. Through the discourse of neutrality, the social identities of race,

class, and gender that help construct difference are made invisible. Cooper ( 2006) espoused "in

America, race is situated within the institutions with a White patriarchal epistemology; whereby

(1) people must be categorized according to qualities such as gender, race, sex orientation, and so

on; (2) the types within each category must be hierachized, and (3) society must be structured

based on those hierarchies" (p. 871). Analysis of race, gender, and class is required because these

social categories are interconnected with parent participation in the educational process. I believe

that as a researcher, if I try to treat these categories as separate but equal systems of

discrimination, that the phenomenon of parent participation would not be encapsulated

holistically.

> *Because we are not just one thing, but a compilation of many facets that make up a whole person, it is next to impossible to talk about women as if we are a homogenous group. I talk a lot about women here, and I am a feminist who believes that women get a raw deal and deserve equality, but I also acknowledge that women are a variegated group and include all sorts of different identities, and if women are to be equal in society, we must also eliminate racism, classism, able-ism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination.*
> *-Audre Lorde (1984/2007, pp. 114-123).*

Audre Lorde (1984/2007) best described how various social identities cannot be treated as mutually exclusive to systems of discrimination. An intersectional analysis reconciles the absence of race, gender, and class within the Critical Race Theory framework. "CRT as a theoretical construct incorporates the concept of intersectionality" (Stoval in Watkins, 2005, p. 205). Using intersectionality as a tool for analysis, people of color may explore meaningful experiences as multifaceted including gendered, raced, classed, aged, etc. The theory of intersectionality originated from the writings of Black women to reconceptualize the social positions of women of color. Although Audre Lorde has written about race, class, and gender issues in several of her works, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill-Collins are credited for developing this theory as a form of analysis; situating women of color within the discourse of feminism and antiracism. Crenshaw first used the concept of intersectionality in a paper that focused on male violence against women. She espoused,

> …the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses either of feminism or of antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (Crenshaw et al. 1995, 358)

Her groundbreaking work enriched understandings of the interconnections between race, class, and gender and highlighted that these social identities were not mutually exclusive to systems of discrimination.

Patricia Hill Collins (1998) defines intersectionality as "a form of analysis claiming that systems of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" (p. 278). Although these systems mutually construct

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social organizations, they do not construct equally defined social practices and/or interactions with social groups. Systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and age replicate hierarchal power relations which support some groups' dominance over others. Thus, these systems create power relations which impact the lived experiences of groups. To "treat race, class, and gender as if their intersection produces equivalent results for all oppressed groups obscures differences in how race, and gender are hierarchically organized, as well as the differential effects of intersecting systems of power on diverse groups of people" (Collins, 1998, p. 211). An intersectional analysis complicates the interconnections of race, class and gender to bring to consciousness that there are multiple phenomena which impact groups' experiences.

From my perspective, intersectionality may be used as an analytical tool to understand the intersections of social/cultural hierarchies which mutually construct identities that oppress because the implications for practice reach beyond the experiences of Black women. Using an intersectional analysis addresses the interconnections of gender, race, and class which construct the multiple identities of groups and therefore provides other ways of perceiving Black parenting. Intersectionality would provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted patterns of relationships formed between the home, school and community to redress universalizations of traditional parental involvement discourse. Thus, an intersectional analysis would further expound upon the sparse research on the stories of difference in parental school involvement. Additionally, intersectionality is integral to this study because, "a structural analysis studies the intersections of race, class, and gender within institutions and within individual's experiences in those institutions (Andersen & Collins, 2004, pp. 96, 97). Thus, utilizing this framework will allow me to analyze the participation of Black parents in schools and will situate our experiences within the social structural realm of schools. An intersectional analysis provides an alternative

way for thinking about unjust power relations in what Evelyn Nakano Glen espoused as the three realms of society (e.g., representational, social interaction, and social structural). According to Glen (2004),

> the representational realm includes the symbols, language, and images that convey racial meanings in society; social interaction refers to the norms and behaviors observable in human relationships, the social structural realm involves the institutional sites where power and resources are distributed in society. (Glen in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p.79)

Thus, an intersectional analysis complicates social phenomena which are interconnected to group formations and creates a space for inclusivity in the construction of knowledge.

## Connection of Critical Race Theory to Dissertation

One of the most well cited contentions between Black parents and schools is racism. Gail Thompson (2003) indicated in her study that, "problems pertaining to racism have been negatively linked to children's schooling experiences… [If the racism was perpetuated by] adults on campus, the racism usually manifested itself through low expectations, negative perceptions of African American students, preconceived notions, and unfair disciplinary practices" (p. 156). Racism experienced by students at this level becomes institutionalized and has consequences that are far reaching. Institutionalized racism situate educators in a position of power over parents; creating a social-cultural consciousness of a privileged paradigm permeating schools. Hence, an epistemological standard for value and norm construction categorizes Black parents' involvement as invisible.

Because CRT tenets are "rooted in analysis of legal decisions…a critical-race praxis [enables] lawyers to address color-on-color racial conflict in addition to White racism" (Stovall in Watkins, 2005, pp. 204, 206). Although there is a need for analysis of legal ideologies and

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discourse which reproduce racist agendas, CRT is a framework that can provide critical analysis of race beyond legal scholarship. In the story I presented of Big Mama earlier in this chapter, the demographics of most of the school personnel, students and their parents indicated a majority Black population. Although race was homogeneous, discrimination was still perpetuated in this environment. Olivos (2006) noted that "…racial discrimination against people of color is not always exclusively committed by Whites. On the contrary, it is often just as easily perpetuated by nonwhite school personnel who accept the dominant form of thinking as the norm and view the nonwhite parents through a deficit lens" (pp. 50-51). Although the school's personnel was similar in the racial make-up of the parents and students in that school, the personnel's internalization of homogenized ideals led to unconscious acts of discrimination that prohibited the success of Black parental involvement in their children's schooling.

Homogenized cultural, political, and economic agendas which have operated as sites for the stratification of people of color have created a contentious relationship between the Black parent and schools. Big Mama's story underscores the significance of using CRT as a, "powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience" in education (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 21). A critical race analysis is significant to this study in that historically, Black parents have experienced difficulty educating their children in America's public schools (Watkins, 2001; Anderson, 1988; Lightfoot, 1978; Slaughter, & Kuehne, 1991; Takaki, 1993; Woodson, 1933/2009; Du Bois, 1903/2008). Seemingly, interactions between schools and Black parents as a marginalized group are problematic because of systemic disparities in the education of their children.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) notes that CRT addresses instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation as areas where inequities exist in education (p. 21). Several scholars

explored curriculum as another area where inequities existed in education (Ladson-Billings 1999; Woodson, 1933/2009; Harris in Shujaa, 1994; Watkins, 2001; Tate, 1997). The significance of CRT to the curriculum scholar is that it provides a paradigm for examining raced narratives and texts that perpetuate barriers to school success for children of color. Using a critical race analysis to examine ways people of color are restricted to, "the rigor of the curriculum and access to what is deemed enriched curriculum via courses and classes for the gifted…[and] the way the curriculum presumes a homogenized [race-neutral] perspective that…misequates  the middle passage with Ellis Island" is crucial to redressing inequities in curriculum (Ladson-Billings in Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999, p. 22). Thus CRT is an opportunity for parents, policy makers, educational researchers and practitioners to engage in transformative work to enhance teaching and learning experiences.

A critical race analysis creates space for change in the educational process. William Tate (1997) highlighted this point when he indicated that "the change process requires a theoretical lens capable of examining classroom-level and more macrolevel aspects of the educational system and society" (p. 227). CRT would expose universalized and hegemonized narratives that silence Black parents' engagement in their children's schooling. By illuminating that there are multiple ways for understanding care and participation, parenting discourse in schools is broadened. This is where I see parental involvement intersecting curriculum theorizing and where I believe we as educational professionals can begin interrogating universalized parent involvement conceptions.

### Re-Collecting Stories

Autobiographical re-collection relies upon, "the words of acquaintances of the writer, any written documentation about the life of the writer, spoken communications, video and

photographic data, fictive literary devices, and even other writing genres such as memoirs, diaries, journals, poetry, and novels based on the life of the person being documented (Harris, 2005, p. 41). Therefore, the re-collection of stories used for this study will be multiple. Using my personal experiences as parent and school social worker within this study will require me to revisit my thoughts and actions within these locations.

The stories in this study were constructed from emails, correspondence, and emailed newspaper articles. These e-mails and correspondences were used to re-collect and recreate the stories of myself and the parents I have assisted in various schools. Audio taped recorded interviews with colleagues of my personal experiences as parent and social worker also assisted in the re-collection of memories and histories. Upon review of these recorded interviews, I was able to capture my interactions with teachers (as parent) and parents (as social worker) holistically. I reviewed these recordings to detail the multiplicity of parental involvement as a storied experience. My hope is that these stories will depict the multiple realities of the personal and professional to illuminate a deeper understanding of involvement in schools.

## Challenges of the Study

This study will explore parent involvement in schools using memoir as a form of autobiography as my research methodology. My study is therefore limited in that if it is not properly written, emphasis on just my experiences as opposed to the experiences of multiple parents of Black children could be interpreted as solipsistic or self-therapeutic. Robert Bullough and Stefinee Pinnegar (2001) espoused that, "self study research does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in" (p. 15). Although I am using autobiography as a form of self-assessment, I am not using this assessment to analyze myself; rather, I am analyzing and interpreting research that will create a space for dialogue between

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educational practitioners and the communities they serve. Do I believe that I will benefit from this study? Yes, because I believe this study will improve my practice as a school social worker. However, I also hope that this study will be used as a heuristic device for educators to begin to think beyond what traditional parental discourse has presented so that they may attain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted patterns of relationships formed between the home, school and community as a means of enhancing teaching and learning experiences.

## Significance of the Study

A precursory review of current parent involvement studies reveals that the role of the involved parent positively impacts their child's progress in school. Studies that support universalized conceptions of parental involvement outline school-based activities which do not account for cross-racial, cross-cultural, cross-economic groups' efforts to support student learning. This study is significant in that it does not focus on a problem-centered approach as a solution to increase academic achievement; rather, it explores the experience of a Black woman and the care of Black children as a means for enhancing our epistemological orientations for enriching their teaching and learning experiences. As Black parental involvement is sought as one of the approaches to improving their children's achievement, this study problematizes the intersectionality of Black parents' social identities to examine ways they are already involved in their children's schooling. This study also explores othermothering as a communal approach for developing dialogical relationships that sustains a community of knowledge.

Although this study explores parental involvement from a Black female perspective to examine ways of improving the teaching and learning experiences of Black children, the implications for practice for educational researchers, policy makers, and school officials are numerous. The Black race as social identity is meant to be used as a vantage point for

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understanding that there are other ways of knowing. Therefore, using this study is heuristically beneficial to parents and education professionals because it can be a paradigm for illuminating counter-stories of other groups in parent involvement research, narrative, and discourse. Revealing the multiple ways of supporting children's schooling within parental involvement frameworks should assist researchers with policy analysis, policy-making, and development of educational programming that reach beyond Black parents' support of their children's schooling.

# CHAPTER 4

## BARRIERS TO BLACK PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: MY MEMOIR

It's May 1st and the 2010-11 school year is quickly coming to an end. For most school personnel it's a mad rush to bring closure to all the activities planned throughout the year that supported student learning. As a school social worker, I'm not immune to the madness. Part of what I do to conclude the year includes updating my notes taken on students and families I've assisted and closing-out referrals that schools gave me this school year (all of which is retrieved by the state department for their data collection), assessing programs and resources developed by our department to determine areas for future growth for next school year, completing social histories that are; incredulously, still being referred during this month, and assessing students who need follow-up for next school year for attendance, behavioral, and academic concerns. And all the while this end-of-the year frenzy is occurring my first-born daughter, Andrea, is struggling to maintain the credits needed to be promoted to the eighth grade; math and science in particular are the banes of her existence. Oh she's not struggling from any deficiency in her ability to academically succeed in either of these subjects. No, no, no…her struggles come from a more ethereal place; unattainable to all human interventions aside from herself. In this nebulous place, only Andrea can make the choices that will mitigate her struggles. All I can do is provide her with the support needed to help her to see why she is struggling and empower her to make the necessary changes; after all, I won't live forever so she's going to have to learn how to self correct and work through issues that keep her from achieving her goal(s) one day.

It is exactly my mortality and my youngest child's struggle that has led me to one immutable fact. I've come to the conclusion that Andrea is trying to kill me…not down and outright murder mind you. Her kind of killing cuts straight to the heart; makes you lose sleep at

night worrying over her future; makes you lose your appetite because the joy you used to take savoring that jerk chicken and yellow rice meal is lost upon the countless hours spent ensuring that she adheres to good study habits and understands the importance of completing school work at her best effort; makes you lose hold of your reality because your life is so consumed with her reality as the hours turn into days and the days turn into months and the months become an entire school year of follow-up e-mails with teachers, conferences at school, and monitoring at home because you have to inspect what you expect. Oh no, her kind of killing isn't pre-meditated or precipitated, but it's the kind of slow death that's derived from prolonged deficiency of sleep, inconsistent and/or unhealthy eating habits, and a shift in your mental state; the kind of slow death that eventually erodes your peace and shaves years from your life. To hear my father tell it,

"It ain't Andrea honey, it's you. You 49 years old. How long you think you supposed to look like you 30?"

Maybe I am being a little dramatic about my child's unintentional contribution to my early demise, because I've certainly worked with parents who are dealing with a lot worse with their children... I guess I should count my blessings. So I continue to chip away at Andrea's ethereal place knowing that one day my small sacrifice will make a difference in her life.

Resigning myself to one of the many functions of motherhood, I continue to support Andrea as her father and I assist her along her journey of self-sufficiency. Our last act at the end of the school year…help the poor child prepare for her math and science final exams. Her dad had just e-mailed both teachers last night when I received his call.

"Jacque, I want you to look at the e-mails I just forwarded to you."

"What's wrong with you?  What happened"? I could tell he was agitated by the rate of his breathing and the tone of his voice.

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"You'll see what's up when you read them. It just don't make no sense."

"Okay, hold on, don't hang up. It's going to take a minute for me to open them from this slow computer".

"Oh, don't worry. I'm not going anywhere. I want to hear your reaction when you see how they responded".

When I opened the e-mails at work this is what I found:

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**From:** Phillip Anthony [mailto:panthony@comcast.com]
**Sent:** Monday, May 16, 2011 10:47 PM
**To:** 052 - Stone, K.
**Subject:** Final Exam

Ms. Stone,
What will your Final Exam Cover?

Phillip Anthony

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**From:** kstone@clayton.k12.ga.us
**To:** panthony@comcast.com
**CC:** kstone@clayton.k12.ga.us
**Date:** Tue, 17 May 2011 08:53:32 -0400
**Subject:** RE: Final Exam

The exam is a cumulative exam covering most 7$^{th}$ grade mathematics standards.

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The other e-mail from her science teacher stated:

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**From:** Phillip Anthony [mailto:planthony@comcast.com]
**Sent:** Monday, May 16, 2011 10:45 PM
**To:** 052 - Roberts, M.
**Subject:** Final Exam

Ms. Roberts,

What will your Final Exam cover?

Phillip Anthony

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**From:** mroberts@clayton.k12.ga.us [mailto:mroberts@clayton.k12.ga.us]
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 17, 2011 8:37 AM
**To:** planthony@comcast.com
**Subject:** RE: Final Exam

The Final Exam will cover material from both semesters.

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**"ARE YOU KIDDING ME?! WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THIS? WE SHOULDN'T OF HAD TO ASK IN THE FIRST PLACE?! SOME TYPE OF INFORMATION SHOULD HAVE BEEN SENT HOME LETTING AT LEAST THE STUDENT KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO BE COVERED ON THE FINAL!"**

"Uh, Jacque…are you outdoors?

"Huh…oh was I yelling?"

"Yeah, you were kind of loud".

His laughter at my response helped me to regain my composure because it was all I could do to not fire-off a sharp reply to these teachers. I mean I can somewhat understand Andrea's foolishness; she's an impetuous, headstrong, free-spirited, twelve year old adolescent who's still trying to figure out her place in this world. But for an adult who's supposed to be the expert in their field, to produce such a contrived response to a parent's inquiry is unconscionable. In this situation, I could have easily become discouraged, combative, confused, or any number responses which could have affected my involvement in my child's schooling.

I re-collect this specific time in my life because it bears to mind how such influences can create challenges to parents' successful involvement in their children's schooling. Although

several areas have been identified as problematic to Black parental involvement, the reoccurring

themes addressed in research are bureaucratic social structures and school personnel's

hegemonic status (Smith, & Chunn, 1991; Lightfoot, 1978; Fine, 1993; Thompson, 2003;

Watkins, 2009).  I will present my storied experiences with the Southern Association of Colleges

and Schools (SACS) and a teacher as exemplars to underscore how bureaucratic social structures

and school personnel's hegemonic status may be barriers to parental involvement.

## Parent Involvement and the Hidden Curriculum

*The result of the curriculum production process looks like any other modern staple. It is a bundle*
*of planned meanings, a package of values, a commodity whose "balanced appeal "makes it*
*marketable to a sufficiently large number to justify the cost of production. Consumer-pupils are*
*taught to make their desires conform to marketable values. Thus they are made to feel guilty if*
*they do not behave according to the predictions of consumer research by getting the grades and*
*certificates that will place them in the job category they have been led to expect.*
*-Ivan Illich (1970, p. 41)*

There are some scholars who believe that the function of schools is to program students

into the values and ideals of the nation-state of which they have been graded or certificated for

service within identified roles. Ivan Illich's criticism of schooling mirrored that belief.

Accordingly, Illich (1970) espoused that "in school we are taught that valuable learning is the

result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally,

that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates" (p. 39). Once

students have been conditioned to accept prescriptions of the curriculum production process,

they grow into adulthood acclimated to a range of institutionalized processes that require them to

place value on what can be documented and measured. If we apply this reasoning to the structure

of social institutions, we can apply the tenets of Illich's curriculum production process to

organizations such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which is

constructed to be intimately involved with the documenting and measuring of whether or not

educational institutions are credentialed, qualified, authenticated to instruct students. Social

structures such as SACS operate within the bureaucratic context to inspect, supervise, and

discipline organizations, their work forces, and their clientele to ensure compliance (Collins,

2000). As a bureaucratic social structure, SACS, has become "important in controlling

populations, especially across race, gender, and other markers of difference…[operating as sites

to create] quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations" (Collins, 2000, p. 299). Thus

parents and their children as the clientele of the school organization are placed under the same

surveillance that controls whether or not they have received legitimate education. Adults

schooled as children to value authentication through credentialing place much value on

organizations such as SACS's stamp of approval because their endorsement legitimates them as

accredited. This value placement trickles down to the student as well because accreditation

becomes of particular importance for high school and college students who require the diplomas

and degrees for acceptance into programs or occupations that necessitate credentialing. Of course

these students are expected to obtain the grades and advance to the next level above their present

level to even receive consideration for their diploma or degree; however, if their educational

institution is not accredited, then their progression in the educational process would have been a

waste of their time and energy as it relates to the programs and occupations that value

credentialing.

As a social worker employed within the educational setting, I understand the purpose of

organizations, including SACS, which are responsible for accrediting educational institutions

because I have been thoroughly schooled in the credentialing process. My indoctrination in the

credentialing process can be evidenced by receipt of a diploma and degrees from public

schooling, undergraduate, and masters level programs respectively; all of which are accredited.

As a parent; however, I question organizations such as SACS's location in the educational

process. Illich's (1970) depiction of the curriculum production process places credentialing in

perspective with the recent loss of accreditation of the school system my children attend. I've

read several articles posted in the Atlanta Journal Constitution which conveyed the struggles that

Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) had with maintaining accreditation with SACS;

however, after reading this article, I felt it captured the devastation of most parents and students

when accreditation was finally pulled:

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**From:** Prescott Elementary School - Phillips, L. S.
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 02, 2008 7:48 AM
**To:** Student Services - Anthony, Jacque
**Subject:** Clayton County chaos devastates students

**Clayton County chaos devastates students**

By Megan Matteucci, Gayle White

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Sunday, August 31, 2008

Genetta Reeves has spent the past three days turning her Jonesboro High School class ring over and over in her hand.

For the 17-year-old, the trinket is as important as a wedding band —- it symbolizes years of hard work and a promise for the future.

"Valedictorian at Jonesboro has been my goal since the third grade," said Reeves, who is ranked first in her senior class. "My mom told me it means you're the smartest and work the hardest in your class and that's what I've worked for."

On Friday, Reeves wondered whether she would still wear it at her new school —- wherever that is.

Her parents began calling private schools on Thursday —- the day Clayton County schools lost accreditation.

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I had to stop reading at this point because as a parent with a ninth grade student, it did feel like a funeral. Like something devastating just occurred and only the living were left to morn its loss. Everyone that we, the parents of Clayton County, turned to for help couldn't or wouldn't offer any assistance. The flood of letters and phone calls pleading to the Governor's office, the State Department of Education, and SACS for guidance; nothing brought the results that would change our children's fate. We all had so many questions, but no answers. What did the children do to deserve this? How in the world could it have gotten this far? Why was this allowed to get this far out of hand? Who is responsible for allowing this to get this far out of hand? Then rage…I couldn't believe this was happening at the dawn of the 21st century! As if all we were experiencing was orchestrated to create an opportunity to implement a policy long awaited, prove a point, make an example of us so that all school systems could witness the unfolding of what could occur if guidelines, rules, decorum are not followed. STAY IN LINE OR ELSE…

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Many parents are hoping the appeal is successful.

With about three-fourths of the system's students falling below the federal poverty level, many lack money for tuition at private or out-of-district schools.

Still, Atlanta Public Schools received more than 200 phone calls to its central office and individual schools have also been contacted, spokesman Joe Manguno said. The system allows students from other districts to pay tuition of $10,440 a year to attend Atlanta schools.

Fayette County schools answered about 50 phone calls Thursday and Fulton has received about 50 a day since accreditation was revoked, district spokesmen said.

Henry County does not admit students from outside the county, spokeswoman Connie Rutherford said.

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Lord Jesus, we're trapped! With watchful eyes on CCPS, all other school systems shun our students who have been stigmatized for their ill-defined deeds. They have done nothing wrong, yet they pay with their futures…

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…The teen hopes to be accepted to Howard University's pre-med program and go on to be an anesthesiologist. She worries prestigious schools won't like her "worthless diploma."

But officials at Howard, Duke, Auburn and Emory universities offered hope to Clayton County students at week's end, saying applicants would be considered on an individual basis, and not rejected solely for an unaccredited diploma.

"It's the student, not the school," said David Jarmul, a spokesman for Duke. Darrin Rankin, vice president for Enrollment Services and Student Affairs at Clark Atlanta University, said currently enrolled students with Clayton County diplomas won't be affected. "Future determination of how applicants will be handled will be decided by senior administration at a later date," he said.

Staff writer Laura Diamond contributed to this article.

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Yes, a lot of parents (including me) were worried about some of the same issues that the parents and students in this article expressed; graduating with a worthless diploma, acceptance or non-acceptance into colleges applied to across the nation, and possible enrollment in either an accredited private school or nearby public school system to circumvent attendance in a non-accredited school system. However, there were also concerns of what accreditation loss and student flight meant for the state of our children's education including loss of federal and state per pupil funding to support the operational/fiscal budget of the school system. Additionally, the loss of accreditation affected how the school system and Clayton County in general was viewed by spectators who witnessed our shame unfold within the media. The negative publicity did not help our property values, which were lowered and eventually affected the local tax base that supports the daily activities of our schools. And suddenly students from Clayton County were stereotyped as pariah to be shunned from neighboring school systems who anticipated the influx of the unseemly scheming to enroll in their credible establishments. Needless to say, the loss of accreditation had a rippling effect across many levels with which the residents of Clayton County are still experiencing. One could ask how one simple act could cause such a disruption to our lives. By removing the credentialing that legitimates schools' value and worth in the educational realm, SACS managed with one sweeping hand to add to the damage that they had cited the school board caused by disrupting students' access within the curriculum production process; certification for advancement to the next expected level. What did schools and the credentialing organizations teach us? What lesson was learned by the school board, students and parents, and residents of the county? Although teaching and learning is a major area of focus for students, parents, educational practitioners and researchers, one must question the clandestine function of

schools and the organizations that legitimate them. An inquiry into what is hidden should be

explored.

*In the name of motherhood and fatherhood and education and good manners, we threaten and suffocate and bind and ensnare and bribe and trick children into wholesale emulation of our ways. Indeed, originality is recognized as disobedience, pathology, incorrigible character and/or unlawful conduct to be prosecuted by the state…At best, new behavior by the new people among us, the children, is perceived as something to patronize or to tolerate, knowing the systematic force of our adult demand for slavelike mimicry will likely overcome rebellious inclination, soon enough.*
*-June Jordan (2002, p. 277)*

According to Jordan (2002), we, the adults, expect children to emulate our ways and it is

that expectation that we rely upon to keep them compliant and conformed to our will. June

Jordan's articulation of the systematic force that prescribes the actions of children is much like

how Michael Apple (1995) regarded schools' role in prescribing students' functions through a

hidden curriculum. Whereas Jordan (2002) spoke to the concealed efforts to mold children into

an adult's image, Apple (1995) addressed schools' clandestine purpose in molding students to

the economic structures of the larger society. Considering the role of adults with both Jordan and

Apple, the adults have a hidden agenda for the child and work covertly to ensure that their efforts

yield the result they set-out to achieve; all the while the expectation is that the child submits to

conformity.

Apple (1995) explicated the role of schools when he noted that "…as a state apparatus,

schools perform important roles in assisting in the creation of the conditions necessary for capital

accumulation (they sort, select, and certify a hierarchically organized student body) and

legitimation (they maintain an inaccurate meritocratic ideology and, therefore, legitimate the

ideological forms necessary for the recreation of inequality)" (p. 13). This sorting process

dismisses the disparities created by historical socio-cultural, political, and economic systems and

blames children's lack of progress in schools as issues within the child or family (Apple, 1995).

Issues of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, etc., become invisible and are not depicted as

barriers to education; rather, education is touted as the 'liberator' from these ills. It is the

invisible which becomes the hidden curriculum; the hidden curriculum of 'sameness'.

This hidden curriculum of 'sameness' is of value to the dominant culture because it shifts

the focus from disparities in the larger society and blames the student/family who fails because

of 'difference'. Attempts to review valid issues from the perspective of the parents and families

of the student who fails are not addressed; rather, rhetoric is produced to demonstrate that

something is being done. This process is not overtly prescribed; rather, it is hidden within the

curriculum of schools to inculcate bodies for the hierarchal labor market. Michel Foucault

(1975/1995) espoused that whoever has access to discipline and punish the body into objects of

knowledge could therefore examine, normalize and homogenize the 'deviant' (pp. 28, 184). The

deviant's reality and the dominant's perceptions therefore become one in the same, thus situating

the dominant in a position of power to prescribe reality and classify marginalized groups' lived

experience(s) as deviant. Accordingly, Apple (1995) explicates that the hidden curriculum of

schools is to act as sorting devices to target those students who do not meet the expectations

required by the privileged in attaining a particular knowledge; eventually to be classified as

deviant and reassigned according to what is deemed appropriate for the division of labor

demanded by our economy (pp. 39-40).  Schools then are an apparatus, and as such, operate as a

reflection of the larger society; whereby government employees are seen as 'experts'. The hidden

curriculum promotes the discourse of 'sameness' that constructs a 'cookie cutter' approach

which is suggestive of an assembly line focus on production and outcomes in schooling. What is

manifested within a 'cookie cutter' approach are "modes of thought or widely shared practices"

(Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001, p. 155, 156) that overtly and/or clandestinely affect social outcomes.

If we consider the function of the hidden curriculum in relationship to credentialing and schools, we can begin to see how our acceptance of institutions roles in our lives indoctrinates us to be schooled. We can begin to understand then how our docile bodies as students were trained to eventually become the adults to believe that knowledge has to be measured and documented by a credible and reliable entity to legitimate one's value and worth within the larger society. We can begin to see that "once people have the idea schooled into them that values can be produced and measured, they tend to accept all kinds of rankings" (Illich, 1970, p. 40). This acceptance of rankings may explain how a bureaucratic organization's removal of accreditation could have the effect that it had on the parents and students who valued the credentialing of their learning. How that parent or student must have felt when SACS told them that the grades and the advancements to the next level were not worthy of their standards because the grown-ups forgot what was schooled into them.

## By Whose Standards?

Reflecting about SACS removal of accreditation compels me to tell out from the phenomenon of parent involvement an issue within educational realm that may be considered as a barrier to Black parents' involvement in schools; school personnel's hegemonic status. Exploring schools' hierarchal ordering of parent groups is of importance to understanding how power relations are established in schools. Some texts suggest that social categories such as race, gender, or class which are associated with family's identity are categories that schools use to relegate these families participation as problematic (Watkins, 2009; Olivos, 2006). Edward Olivos (2006) offers several possibilities for how a family's social identity contributes to

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schools' perception of parent involvement; one of which offers a structural analysis of class as a category of social identity. According to Olivos (2006),

> the power of the school to legitimize certain displays of social, cultural, and economic capital is therefore reflected in the interpersonal relationships between school personnel and bicultural parents…All too often low-income parents have their questions about school-related matters or complaints about personnel 'neutralized by the teachers' [and administrators] superior status…School personnel exercise what Shannon refers to as 'hegemonic status', which is a 'dominant and silencing status [that] is sustained by society accepting the status quo. (p. 37)

If we consider Olivos's structural analysis of class, we can begin to see how knowledge restricted to a few may be utilized to set up barriers of open communication between schools and marginalized parent groups. Accordingly, as participation in school-based activities has been identified by universalized parent involvement discourse, we can begin to understand how schools' acceptance of what is considered to be the norm may relegate parents who are economically disadvantaged participation as marginal since school-based activities may not be practical to their work schedules.

Considering schools' hierarchal ordering of parent groups may be of significance in understanding how power is established among school personnel; however, it does not address school personnel's hegemonic status when social categories such as race, gender and class are similar to their parent population. Edward Olivos (2006) and Paulo Freire (1993) address such situations as they explicate how the internalization of a dominant group's ideals perpetuates the marginalization of like groups. Specific to race, Olivos (2006) noted that "…racial discrimination against people of color is not always exclusively committed by Whites. On the

contrary, it is often just as easily perpetuated by nonwhite school personnel who accept the dominant form of thinking as the norm and view the nonwhite parents through a deficit lens" (pp. 50-51). It is exactly school personnel's acceptance of the norm that affects their behavior towards parents who share like social categories. Freire (1993) noted that when marginalized groups have been conditioned to accept the ideals of a dominant group, their behaviors become prescribed. These prescribed behaviors unknowingly set the tone for the school's climate, day-to-day practices, and language used to either invite or discourage parental involvement in their children's schooling.

As I re-collect my own experiences with school personnel's hegemonic status, I return back to my son's freshman year in biology. Although he had completed half the year with a lot of his bad habits dissipated, I was still having difficulty following-up on his progress in his biology class. Pop quizzes that were not related to materials discussed in class, inconsistent verbal communication of class expectations from week to week, and confusing written feedback on class work/homework were still the main issues that troubled me with this class. With this type of testing, communication, and follow-up with students, I understood how Charlie began to adopt some of the bad habits that had plagued him during his first semester of high school. Back in August of Charlie's 9th grade year, when I asked him what he planned to do differently in this class to improve his grades, his response was a defeatist,

"I dunno mom. I guess I could try to keep my work more organized and review my notes". "What about asking your teacher for help if you have questions"?

"I told you mom, you don't say nothing in that class. You just get your work out". "So what if you don't understand something, you're just going to sit there and say nothing"?

"Mom it's not like I'm gonna get help that I can understand from her anyway. She

sort of talks in-and-out".

I couldn't argue with that. When I was finally able to speak with Ms. Johnson, I found it difficult

to understand the technical jargon she used to explain to me state standards and teacher

expectations for that class. More than once I had to ask her to repeat something or provide more

detail about what she was saying. As an adult trying to dialog with someone who used their

expertise as a barrier, I found the conversation to be taxing, so I definitely couldn't see a student

going through that to gain understanding. They would more than likely do just what my son had

tried to do; give up all hope and take on the attitude of just 'going with the flow'.

I remembered my conversation with this teacher for another reason as well because it

brought to my attention the question of the use of standards and teacher expectations. With this

particular class, although parents were provided a generic syllabus to sign and return to the

teacher at the beginning of the school year, it only outlined expectations for classroom behavior

and percentages that homework, class work, test/quizzes, etc., would count towards the final

grade. This syllabus reflected how standards are used to school the docile body into acceptance

of measurements and documentation of percentages that lend to the grades to legitimate a

student's competence within that class; however, it did not reflect how those very standards were

to be used to aid students in accomplishing their personal best. Specifically, there were no set

standards clearly communicated that would help students to understand how the curriculum

related to the teacher's goal(s), nor were there any clearly communicated standards to help guide

each student's personal  performance in that class. Mike Rose (2009) called for an alternative

discussion about standards and asked what I feel are some crucial questions that should guide our

thoughts about standards. A few of the questions that I thought were important are, "How good

are we at explaining our standards to students? How can we re-conceive standards so that they function not just as final measures of competence but also as guides to improving performance? How reflective are we about the attitudes and assumptions that underlie our standards? How open are we to considering the provisional nature of these standards and modifying them?" (Rose, 2009, pp. 103-105). By asking ourselves these kinds of questions, as educators we re-examine one of many areas within educational practice, such as standards, to assist us with goal setting, developing, and communicating curriculum and instruction with the very people we continue to rely upon as an approach to assist with improving student achievement: parents. If we really want to engage parents more with the schooling of their children, then we need to begin to examine all areas of educational practice, including standards, to determine how these issues impact upon the day-to-day practices of how school personnel treat their students and parents; how bureaucratic language disconnects students and parents from schooling; and how the overall school climate sets the tone for collaborations between students and parents.

# CHAPTER 5

## REFLECTIONS: LOOKING BACK- LOOKING FORWARD

In this chapter I present a summary of eight findings that emerge from my study: (1) Knowledge about school functions, curricular, and educational standards is of value to Black parents who seek to gain access to expertise to assist their children's school success. (2) The intersectionality of Black parents' varying social identities such as race, gender, class, power, etc., influence their perceptions of schools and ways they interact with their children's schools. (3) Black women's autobiographical narrative counters official narrative that universalizes and hegemonizes Black parental involvement in their children's mainstream schooling. (4) Autobiography provides opportunities for Black parents, practitioners, and policy makers to be wide awake to all that are suppressed and silent, to understand who they were and how they became who they are in the life of Black children, and to interrogate goals, dreams, and beliefs that affect Black children's success in schools and life. (5) School personnel's hegemonic status and bureaucratic social structures perpetuate barriers and adversities that prohibit the success of Black parental involvement in their children's schooling. (6) Engaging the home, school, and community in dialogue creates space for honoring Black culture, heritage, and knowledge to expand epistemologies regarding Black parental involvement. (7) Othermothering provides a communal approach for educators, community members, and parents to enable Black children's thriving in schools and life. (8) There is a need for Black orientations to parental involvement in schools to redress universalization, hegemonization, and silencing of Black parents' engagement in their children's schooling; to dismantle those individual, structural, and political agendas and practices that are pervasive and negatively affect Black children's success in schools and life; and to construct a dialogical relationship between the home, school and community that honors

multiple ways of knowing about Black communal parental involvement that inspires all Black children to reach their highest potential (Walker, 1996) in the school, society, and life.

This dissertation explores parental involvement from a Black female perspective to offer a communal approach for all who are involved in facilitating Black children's thriving in schools and in life. Although I chose an autobiographical narrative approach as a means of reflection, analysis, and interpretation of my experiences as a parent and social worker, my use of memoir also interrogates research that universalizes parental involvement in schools and provides counter-narratives to hegemonic beliefs regarding Black parent's involvement in their children's schooling. I couple my memoir with the use of fiction to highlight a lived experience that is silenced within research and policy; revealing what Toni Morrison (2008) best described as an interior life. One may re-collect and remember to provide details of events that occurred, but "…if I'm trying to fill in the blanks…- to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard- then the approach that's most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image" (Morrison, 2008, p. 72). This excavating of someone's lived experience requires what Morrison (1992) noted as imaginative activity in capturing their truth, their reality, their lived experience.  Fiction in this sense draws attention to that which was left unwritten so that the reader could fully grasp the truths of those who are silenced. Whereas "memoirs and recollections won't give me access to the unwritten interior life of these people" (Morrison, 2008, p. 71), fiction becomes the instrument to imagine a site which may have otherwise gone unexplored.  Therefore, this study's usage of memoir and fiction helps to expose what has been missing within official narrative that universalizes parental involvement; a view into the interior lives of Black parents who support their children's schooling.

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The Black race is a focus within my study because as a parent of Black children who practices in a school system that serves predominately Black children and youth, I am concerned with growing debates surrounding achievement gaps between Black children when compared to other races. Oftentimes one of the solutions elicited to address this concern is to increase the involvement of Black parents. This pragmatic approach assumes that Black parents are not already involved in their children's schooling. By using Critical Race Theory to view this phenomenon, I am presented with what Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) termed a revisionist history of Black parents' involvement in securing schooling for their children during slavery and segregation. A revisionist interpretation also created space for me to explore present-day accounts of Black parents' involvement in their children's education. These suppressed accounts allowed me to interrogate hegemonic ideals which did not examine the socio-political and economic factors which have systemically affected Black students' rate of achievement; rather, their focus was to place Black children's lower rate of achievement as an issue that their parent could alleviate. A revisionist history also provided me with a lineage of Afro-centric mothering that supports parenting beyond the classroom, beyond the school building, and beyond the traditional K-12 age limits of public schooling (James, 1993; Collins, 1994; Baker-Fletcher, 1997; Walker & Snarey, 2004; Case, 1997). This communal approach to parenting depicted a range of activities Black parents perform to support their children's education not captured in research, policy, or practice that universalizes parents' involvement in schools.

Black Feminist Thought created an opportunity for me to critically analyze and interpret how silenced accounts shaped the present-day experiences of Black parents and students. Using what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) termed intersectional paradigms, I was able to reflect upon the mutually constructing identities of myself and other Black parents to locate specific areas of

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oppression. I used this paradigm as my approach for analysis because it "remind[s] us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (Morrison, 2008 p. 21). Through this intersectional lens, I was free to examine how race, gender, and class as identities divide and unite Black parental involvement within systems of discrimination. With this paradigm lived experience is no longer universalized to mainstream accounts of parent's involvement in schools; parental involvement is now presented to reflect multiple experiences with children's schooling.

In this study I have found that knowledge about school functions, curricular, and educational standards is of value to Black parents who seek to gain access to expertise to assist their children's school success (**Finding 1**). Accordingly, knowledge specific to educational policies and procedures, state codes, and how to access such is an exclusive commodity to some groups because "knowledge can serve as a regulator. It creates boundaries for discourse and understanding. Knowledge can either open up our world or close it down" (Watkins, 2005, p. 115). I have shared my stories as a parent and school social worker within the multiple locations of the parent involvement phenomenon in hopes of examining differences in knowledges to gain new meaning from those experiences (Chapters 1 and 4). Re-collecting my experiences allowed me to reflect upon my two selves as parent and social worker; as a result, I gained insight into a realm of consciousness that would not have otherwise been realized. As a Black woman parenting three children of my own, trying to navigate the bureaucracy of schools is frustrating, but as a social worker who works with parents and observing them traipse through the very same is heart-wrenching. I found that what made my experiences different from theirs is access; the ability to access to information which provided me with knowledge that may not have been available to the layperson. With that knowledge I could ask the right questions, assess

information provided to me with discernment, and aptly respond to my children's needs in school. Now this knowledge did not shield me from some of the same negative incidents that uninformed parents experienced, but it did offer me some solace in that I knew how to approach and follow-up on specific concerns regarding my children's schooling.

While re-collecting my experiences with parent involvement and comparing those experiences to research another finding emerged; the intersectionality of Black parents' varying social identities, such as race, gender, class, power, etc., influence their perceptions of schools and ways they interact with their children's schools (**Finding 2**). This gathering of experiences enabled me to "take noncompetitive notice of other women" and become "[sensitive] to the plight of others…to traverse the lines that separate [us] - class, race, religion, nationality" (Morrison, 2008, p. 136). In my noncompetitive noticing of the similar and dissimilar encounters with schools experienced by Ja'netta Clark's mother in comparison to mine, I found that although our shared race placed our children at the same risk of becoming a part of the percentages listed with the U.S. Department of Education (2010), our class differences separated us from the school's response(s) to our presence in their building. As an economically disadvantaged Black woman who has learned to survive off meager resources since her childhood, Ms. Clark's experiences with her child's schooling is entrenched within her own negative experiences as a student in the South who entered the school setting just as schools were being integrated (Chapter 1). Schooled in a hostile environment, her quick temper and smart mouth quickly earned her a placement in an alternative educational placement in school. These experiences helped to formulate Ms. Clark's perception of teachers and the role of schools in her child's education. Conversely, by the time I entered the school setting integration had been in effect for seven years. Most of my teachers and classmates looked like me and I was afforded a

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more nurturing environment for learning. Being more mild mannered as a child, I was not labeled and placed in an alternative educational placement in school. I therefore developed a more positive outlook on schooling. Whereas Ms. Clark could not take off work to address concerns regarding her child, I could either coordinate with my children's father to attend to issues surrounding their education or schedule meetings during my lunch break. Whereas Ms. Clark's concept(s) of supporting her child's education resulted in cursing and accusing staff of wrongdoing, my ideas led me to a less confrontational route. Thus, Ms. Clark's participation in school was seen by school personnel and staff as threatening and needing to be limited to certain activities, whereas my participation was welcomed and unbridled.

Re-collecting and reflecting upon my experiences also revealed another aspect of this study; Black women's autobiographical narrative counters official narrative that universalizes and hegemonizes Black parental involvement in their children's mainstream schooling (**Finding 3**). When addressing the contribution of autobiography to her literary works, Morrison (2008) observed that, "in this country the print origins of Black literature (as distinguished from the oral origins) were slave narratives. These book-length narratives (autobiographies, recollections, memoirs), of which well over a hundred were published, are familiar texts to historians and students of Black history" (p. 65). This is an important observation in that it indicates how the heritage of Black literature arose out from the endeavors of slaves who attempted to expose the atrocities of slavery. In this sense, autobiography for the contemporary Black writer continues in the vein of exposing, revealing, or even publicizing the Black experience within the various genres of literature. As I reflect upon autobiography's birthing of Black literature in America, I hope that this autobiographical study revealed the multifaceted ways Black parents are involved in their children's schooling; ways that are invisible to policy and research that universalizes and

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hegemonizes Black parental involvement in their children's schooling. Exploring ways that Black women are involved in their children's schooling adds to the dialogue of universalized parent involvement ideals and challenges the notion that involvement is restricted to activities which support students' learning in schools.

Black women's autobiographical narrative also helps us to consider "the individual in relation to those others with whom she shares emotional, philosophical, and spiritual affinities, as well as political realities" (Braxton, 1989, p. 9). From this viewpoint, the reader may now gain access to and meaning from a knowing that Morrison (2008) termed as discredited knowledge. This knowledge may be discredited by dominant ways of knowing because it acknowledges what "could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things…And some of those things were discredited knowledge that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they *knew* was discredited" (Morrison, 2008, p. 61). Much can be learned from a knowing rooted in Black women's lived experiences; a knowing that may be discredited, but still "fosters both…empowerment and social justice" (Collins, 2000, p. 289).

I also discovered that autobiography provides opportunities for Black parents, practitioners, and policy makers to examine all that are suppressed and silent, to understand who they were and how they became who they are in the life of Black children, and to interrogate goals, dreams, and beliefs that affect Black children's success in schools and life (**Finding 4**). From my perspective, this insight is necessary to begin to think critically about ourselves in relationship to others outside of our knowing. Reflecting on my own experiences as parent and social worker, I found autobiography to be particularly instructive in my self-examination to bring about what Audre Lorde (1984/2007) regarded as revolutionary change that seeks out "that

piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships" (p. 123).   As I reflect upon the thinking behind my practices I interrogate those hegemonic beliefs which situate me in the position of a well intended actor ( Apple, 1995) within dominant groups' hidden agenda(s). When we begin to contemplate our emotional, philosophical, spiritual, and political realities and how these realities affect our interactions, practices, and responses to others outside of our knowing, then we can begin to make progress to a revolutionary change that enhances our endeavors. This process of critical self-examination can be especially challenging to educational practitioners and policy makers who are bound to pragmatic methods which focus on extrinsic solutions to identified problems. However, to those who are willing to examine the intrinsic workings of their actions within the educational process, the genre of autobiography is a vehicle that should be considered as a means for reflecting upon their lived experiences, analyzing those experiences, and interpreting experiences that will create intrinsic solutions to identified problems (Chapter 3).

I used an intersectional paradigm as my model for understanding the impact that educational professionals and bureaucratic social structures have upon Black parents' involvement because as Collins (2000) noted, it "…[untangles] the relationships between knowledge and empowerment [by shedding] new light on how domination is organized" (p. 246). As I reflected on what Collins (2000) termed as the matrix of domination and Black parents, I found that school personnel's hegemonic status and bureaucratic social structures perpetuate barriers and adversities that prohibit the success of Black parental involvement in their children's schooling (**Finding 5**). Of particular concern are two domains of power which I felt addressed these areas; the disciplinary domain of power and the interpersonal domain of power.

Bureaucratic social structures impact the day-to-day functions of schools and are situated in a position to discipline and control school personnel as well as students and parents as consumers of schooling (Chapter 4). These bureaucracies are responsible for regulating the activities of organizations/personnel and conforming clientele to the standards of the organization. The function of this domain normalizes and disciplines by relying on "bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance…Bureaucracy, in turn, has become important in controlling populations, especially across race, gender, and other markers of difference" (Collins, 2000, p. 299). Actions are therefore influenced by ensuring that the manners in which organizations are governed are adhered to. Thus, this domain exerts its power through routine reviews and/or on-site visitations (surveillance), and sanctions (discipline) placed upon those who fail to conform.

School personnel possess the ability to either enhance or damage the relationship between the school and home (Chapter 4). It is for this reason that dynamics such as whether or not the school environment is welcoming or the language used when speaking to parents can produce domains of power that stratify parent groups. The function of the interpersonal domain is to normalize the "day-to-day practices of how people treat one another (e.g. micro-level of social organization). Such practices are systematic, recurrent, and so familiar that they often go unnoticed" (Collins, 2000, pp. 305-306).  This domain of power influences everyday lived experience and helps to shape the individual consciousness that arises as a result of these experiences. Thus within this domain, behaviors are prescribed and individuals who internalize these prescriptions can assume ideals within systems of oppression which they would otherwise consciously oppose (Freire, 1993).

This study highlighted that engaging the home, school, and community in dialogue creates space for honoring Black culture, heritage, and knowledge to expand epistemologies regarding Black parental involvement (**Finding 6**). As a school social worker, I have had the opportunity to work with varying outside agencies, community members, and of course parents and school personnel; all of which have collaborated in some form to support students' progress in school. What I have found to be most beneficial in these collaborations are the opportunities to communicate our thoughts and share ideas which may further that goal. Such dialogue creates a communal approach to supporting students' education and validates that there are multifaceted approaches in which schooling can be sustained.  This is not an easy process because "their presence [in schools] would interrupt the march to the common culture without necessarily shifting the whole parade to another destination. The struggle for local control persisted in conflating schooling and the legitimation of a particular identity, wresting control of the school away from the bureaucracy so that it could be shaped to the needs of dominant neighborhood ethnic groups" (Grumet, 1988, p. 174). This process includes a parental aspect that while disrupting the common culture of established norms, produces a community of knowledge that enriches student learning. This communal approach to parental involvement reveals that respecting others experiences informs knowing and is open to a dialogical relationship between schools, parents, students, and community to examine how various experiences may enhance teaching and learning. We need dialogical relations from multiple groups to widen the depth of Western epistemological orientations to parent involvement in schools. Developing relationships through dialogue requires an imaginative openness to multiple realities. I believe this imaginative openness is what Maxine Greene (1995) addressed as "…the noticing, the active insertion of one's perception into the lived world" (p.74).  Our ability to perceive multiple

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realities is an imaginative creative process that releases ideas for multiple forms of expression. Expression of ideas creates a space for dialogue that is open to multiple possibilities. Hence, knowledge is obtained through dialogical relations that facilitate co-investigations to challenges presented by the world (Freire, 1993, pp. 79, 80).

Such respect for shared knowledge would expand narrow epistemologies regarding parent involvement to explore the multiple possibilities of involvement that moves beyond an individual parent or community focus. Shifting our focus from just the parent or the community alone widens our gaze from conversely generic ideals of participation in improving student achievement to specific ideals of involvement, such as othermothering, that includes a holistic approach to participation whereby multiple locations are responsible for supporting student learning (Chapter 2). Othermothering provides a communal approach for educators, community members, and parents to enable Black children's thriving in schools and life (**Finding 7**). By using this Afrocentric standpoint on mothering to widen the scope of how we define involvement in schools, dialogue may be opened regarding the use of multiple groups' experiences with parenting. However, if we fail to appreciate diverse knowledges within multiple locations, opportunities for using a dialogical relationship to contribute to the educational process could be impaired. I think Rose (2009) best addressed this concern when he said, "If we don't appreciate, if we in some way constrict the full range of everyday cognition, then we will develop limited educational programs and fail to make fresh and meaningful instructional connections among disparate kinds of skill and knowledge. If we think that whole categories of people – identified by class, by occupation – are not that bright, then we reinforce social separations and cripple our ability to talk across our current cultural divides" (p. 86). Accordingly, narrow epistemological

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orientations regarding knowledge have convoluted debates about curriculum, the educational

process, and what it means to prepare children to become life-long learners.

Debates regarding education have been guilt-ridden with liberties and presumptions about

education and expertise. There are those of us within the educational arena who have been guilty

of using our expertise to intimidate and/or create barriers for those outside of our practice as well

as there being socially vulnerable groups who have been equally culpable of deferring

educational matters to professional educators either because of cultural beliefs and/or well

ingrained ideals regarding the authority of schools (Apple, 1995; Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1993).

By shifting our focus, we are required to move beyond perceived notions of knowledge and

expertise in which "debates about education are often treated as technical concerns of

professional educators" (Collins, 2009, p. 11). This type of shift requires us to dialogue as equals

with the very people who have a stake in student learning; parents, communities, and schools.

Part of the challenge of fostering and maintaining such dialogue is recognizing multiple factors,

including historical socio-political systems that have disenfranchised marginalized groups from

schooling, stereotyping of subordinated groups and the communities they live, and assumptions

regarding parenting that exclude diverse groups' participation in schools. Since dominant groups

have the ability to prescribe reality, their fixed perceptions of normalcy could lead to the sorting

of difference into hierarchies to then later classify multiple groups' parenting as marginal.

Therefore, ideological contradictions should be struggled over because we need a process for

understanding multiple realities in parent participation. The struggle [whether we like it or not]

creates dialogue and opens a space for understanding.  Such dialogue would redress educational

policies and programs which have either obscured histories whereby whole groups were denied

access to and funding for schooling or restricts students' personal performance to achievement

measures which categorizes their failure in not achieving at the level of their counterparts as pathology in which the parent or the individual school needs to fix. I am suggesting that by using dialogical relations, we can attain the ability to perceive multiple realities from diverse viewpoints to perceive difference as the norm. Our task as educators then becomes to recognize fixed realities so that we can begin to challenge what is perceived to be the norm in order to recognize the lived experiences of multiple groups. Thus, using a dialogical relationship as a possible site for respecting multiple ways of knowing creates a location for developing a holistic approach to participation in schools.

I therefore tell my stories out from the phenomenon of a universalized epistemology of parent involvement in hopes that the reader's gaze will look away for a moment towards a pluralistic view of multiple groups' experiences as parents within schools. Turning our gaze away from the universal allows us to broaden our view to more cooperative approaches to parenting within schools such as othermothering. I have found that there is a need for Black orientations to parental involvement in schools to redress universalization, hegemonization, and silencing of Black parents' engagement in their children's schooling; to dismantle those individual, structural, and political agendas and practices that are pervasive and negatively affect Black children's success in schools and life; and to construct a dialogical relationship between the home, school and community that honors multiple ways of knowing about Black communal parental involvement that inspires all Black children to reach their highest potential (Walker, 1996) in the school, society, and life (**Finding 8**). By nurturing the minds and overall well being of the children in their care, educators can begin to transform the teaching and learning experiences at the school to address the growth and development of the whole child. Studies from researchers such as Karen Case (1997) and Annette Henry (2006) have brought to light

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Black educators' othermothering of students and have addressed the implications for practice. Considering such studies, it is my hope that we can begin to perceive these othermothering experiences beyond the school environment to ameliorate home, school, community relationships. Since othermothering encompasses an epistemological orientation that recognizes that the biological and environmental are interconnected, it becomes important to nurture and care for people as well as the spaces they inhabit. Thus, debating the achievement of a student as if she were separated from the social, political, and economic trajectories of her environment upon her physical, emotional and mental self is objectionable. Rather, a more reasonable approach would be for schools, communities, and families to enter a dialogical relationship that would foster the othermothering of the child's interconnected selves…biological and environmental as one.

**EPILOGUE**

As I prepare for the defense of my dissertation in November, I vacillate between allowing my children to spend the day with me at Georgia Southern University or sending them on to school. Part of the appeal of letting them spend the day with me would be the witnessing of a culmination of years of cultivating a standpoint, a curriculum, a writing of experience. I am constantly thinking and acting upon ways to keep my children involved in activities that I feel will enrich their mental, emotional, and physical selves. In my quest to support my children's schooling beyond the K-12 public schools, I've introduced them to a wealth of scholarship to expand their critical thinking. Scholars such as W.E.B Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells, although long gone from this plane of existence, have contributed much to the critical analysis of hegemonic standpoints that silence marginalized groups' lived experiences. By exposing my children to this scholarship, I hoped that they would begin to understand how to interrogate those goals, dreams, and beliefs that affect their success in school and in life; that they would begin to critically examine the economic, political, and social-cultural structures that shape the world they live in; and that by interrogation and examination they could begin the hard work that requires action to make a change. Although we have spent what feels like a millennium dialoguing about critical analysis, nothing takes the place of a first-hand witnessed account of what we've spent years dialoguing about. Dilemma…

Part of the deterrent of letting my children spend the day with me as I defend my dissertation is that their sheer proximity would be a distraction. The issue with their proximity is that the defense requires dialogue. That is not a problem in and of itself, but in our family dialogue is an engaging process that can be quite chaotic. We are loud, we are rude and cut each other off when responding to each other or making a point, and we can be inappropriate when we

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laugh at each other when the point we are making seems outlandish. For an outsider looking in, the process of my family's dialoguing may be quite disconcerting. As I have not taught my children to rein in that chaotic energy when dialoguing, what we do at home, we do in public. What would end-up happening during my defense is me exerting energy trying to ensure that they maintain some type of decorum, and I don't want to spend energy on that eventful day doing that. Dilemma…

So in my effort to expose my children to enriching activities, I have created a quagmire; an interesting dilemma that I don't mind being in. My children have been involved throughout my scholarship in the Curriculum Studies program and helped me to create a curriculum based on our lived experience. This study is just as much theirs as it is mine. I hope when they are old enough to fully appreciate this qualitative study that they gain something from it; I hope that one day they will be able to matriculate through a program that stretches, disrupts, and develops them as this program has done to me and for me. If the biggest dilemma I'll face as I support them through their life journey is choosing whether or not they'll witness my culminating moment, then I'll gladly face that challenge any day.

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**ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION**

## Part A — Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

SEC. 1111 | SEC. 1112 | SEC. 1113 | SEC. 1114 | SEC. 1115 | SEC. 1116

SEC. 1117 | SEC. 1118 | SEC. 1119 | SEC. 1120 | SEC. 1120A

# Subpart 1 — Basic Program Requirements

**SEC. 1118. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.**

(a) LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY POLICY-

(1) IN GENERAL- A local educational agency may receive funds under this part only if such agency implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs assisted under this part consistent with this section. Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children.

(2) WRITTEN POLICY- Each local educational agency that receives funds under this part shall develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy. The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's plan developed under section 1112, establish the agency's expectations for parent involvement, and describe how the agency will —

(A) involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112, and the process of school review and improvement under section 1116;

(B) provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;

(C) build the schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement as described in subsection (e);

(D) coordinate and integrate parental involvement strategies under this part with parental involvement strategies under other programs, such as the Head Start program, Reading First program, Early Reading First program, Even Start program, Parents as Teachers program, and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, and State-run preschool programs;

(E) conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, including identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement, and to revise, if necessary, the parental involvement policies described in this section; and

(F) involve parents in the activities of the schools served under this part.

(3) RESERVATION-

(A) IN GENERAL- Each local educational agency shall reserve not less than 1 percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part to carry out this section, including promoting family literacy and parenting skills, except that this paragraph shall not apply if 1 percent of such agency's allocation under subpart 2 of this part for the fiscal year for which the determination is made is $5,000 or less.

(B) PARENTAL INPUT- Parents of children receiving services under this part shall be involved in the decisions regarding how funds reserved under subparagraph (A) are allotted for parental involvement activities.

(C) DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS- Not less than 95 percent of the funds reserved under subparagraph (A) shall be distributed to schools served under this part.

(b) SCHOOL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY-

(1) IN GENERAL- Each school served under this part shall jointly develop with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parental involvement policy, agreed on by such parents, that shall describe the means for carrying out the requirements of subsections (c) through (f). Parents shall be notified of the policy in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, provided in a language the parents can understand. Such policy shall be made available to the local community and updated periodically to meet the changing needs of parents and the school.

(2) SPECIAL RULE- If the school has a parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such school may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

(3) AMENDMENT- If the local educational agency involved has a school district-level parental involvement policy that applies to all parents, such agency may amend that policy, if necessary, to meet the requirements of this subsection.

(4) PARENTAL COMMENTS- If the plan under section 1112 is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, the local educational agency shall submit any parent comments with such plan when such local educational agency submits the plan to the State.

(c) POLICY INVOLVEMENT- Each school served under this part shall —

(1) convene an annual meeting, at a convenient time, to which all parents of participating children shall be invited and encouraged to attend, to inform parents of their school's participation under this part and to explain the requirements of this part, and the right of the parents to be involved;

(2) offer a flexible number of meetings, such as meetings in the morning or evening, and may provide, with funds provided under this part, transportation, child care, or home visits, as such services relate to parental involvement;

(3) involve parents, in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of programs under this part, including the planning, review, and improvement of the school parental involvement policy and the joint development of the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2), except that if a school has in place a process for involving parents in the joint planning and design of the school's programs, the school may use that process, if such process includes an adequate representation of parents of participating children;

(4) provide parents of participating children —

(A) timely information about programs under this part;

(B) a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet; and

(C) if requested by parents, opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children, and respond to any such suggestions as soon as practicably possible; and

(5) if the schoolwide program plan under section 1114(b)(2) is not satisfactory to the parents of participating children, submit any parent comments on the plan when the school makes the plan available to the local educational agency.

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(d) SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HIGH STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT- As a component of the school-level parental involvement policy developed under subsection (b), each school served under this part shall jointly develop with parents for all children served under this part a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards. Such compact shall —

(1) describe the school's responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the children served under this part to meet the State's student academic achievement standards, and the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in their child's classroom; and participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and positive use of extracurricular time; and

(2) address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum —

(A) parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, at least annually, during which the compact shall be discussed as the compact relates to the individual child's achievement;

(B) frequent reports to parents on their children's progress; and

(C) reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class, and observation of classroom activities.

(e) BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INVOLVEMENT- To ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement, each school and local educational agency assisted under this part —

(1) shall provide assistance to parents of children served by the school or local educational agency, as appropriate, in understanding such topics as the State's academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, State and local academic assessments, the requirements of this part, and how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children;

(2) shall provide materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their children's achievement, such as literacy training and using technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement;

(3) shall educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of parents, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school;

(4) shall, to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs and activities with Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, the Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, the Parents as Teachers Program, and public preschool and other programs, and conduct other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support parents in more fully participating in the education of their children;

(5) shall ensure that information related to school and parent programs, meetings, and other activities is sent to the parents of participating children in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parents can understand;

(6) may involve parents in the development of training for teachers, principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of such training;

(7) may provide necessary literacy training from funds received under this part if the local educational agency has exhausted all other reasonably available sources of funding for such training;

(8) may pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions;

(9) may train parents to enhance the involvement of other parents;

(10) may arrange school meetings at a variety of times, or conduct in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation;

(11) may adopt and implement model approaches to improving parental involvement;

(12) may establish a districtwide parent advisory council to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in programs supported under this section;

(13) may develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities; and

(14) shall provide such other reasonable support for parental involvement activities under this section as parents may request.

(f) ACCESSIBILITY– In carrying out the parental involvement requirements of this part, local educational agencies and schools, to the extent practicable, shall provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children, including providing information and school reports required under section 1111 in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language such parents understand.

(g) INFORMATION FROM PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS- In a State where a parental information and resource center is established to provide training, information, and support to parents and individuals who work with local parents, local educational agencies, and schools receiving assistance under this part, each local educational agency or school that receives assistance under this part and is located in the State shall assist parents and parental organizations by informing such parents and organizations of the existence and purpose of such centers.

(h) REVIEW- The State educational agency shall review the local educational agency's parental involvement policies and practices to determine if the policies and practices meet the requirements of this section.