Across the Divide: The Working Lives of African American Teachers in the Classroom

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ACROSS THE DIVIDE: THE WORKING LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Doctoral Program Faculty in Educational Leadership for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Whenever I think of this dissertation, the first word that always comes to mind is "collaboration." From the moment of the inception of this study through to the present moment, so many people have so graciously helped me at every stage of the journey to bring forward the story of these teachers. Indeed, when I think of this project, I have always tended to think in terms of words such as "we," "us," and "our" rather than "I," "me," and "mine." The story of these teachers is a deeply moving and human story, a story that has touched me deeply, both on a personal and professional level. Thus, I am especially grateful to be able to acknowledge and thank those persons who have given so much support, guidance, and assistance to me along the way as the story of these remarkable teachers has unfolded in the form of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge and thank the 10 extraordinary human beings who came forward to tell the story of their experience as African American persons and teachers. What was so extraordinary about them was not only their willingness to come forward and share their stories but also their ability to communicate those stories in such a clear, vivid, passionate, and effective manner. In short, they knew in their hearts that they had a truly compelling story to tell and they knew how to tell it. I’m just so very proud and happy that this dissertation provided a vehicle for that important and timely story to be told.

Listening to them talk about their lived experiences was like listening to a panel of experts talk about life and the art and practice of teaching. For indeed, these remarkable people were experts in both areas. I know how much I learned
from them. Through my in-person encounters with them during the actual interviews and during the subsequent months and years of meditating, considering, and writing about the words they had said to me, I’ve learned so much about life and teaching from them. My encounter with them has truly been, for me, a life-changing experience for the better. It is impossible to spend 28 hours with African American persons who are sharing their lives and their worlds with you on the deepest and most intimate of levels and not be changed by the experience. I know now that my life will never be the same either on a personal or professional level. I will never again view African American persons, or especially African American women, in quite the same way. I have been privileged to be allowed a glimpse into their world and, as a result, my world and how I view the world has grown and expanded and deepened.

I thank these teachers for allowing me to enter into their world with them, for at least an all-too-brief moment in time. While in their world, both in-person and through their words, I learned about resilience and hope in the face of ongoing societal racism found both inside and outside of the educational enterprise. I was again reminded by them of the role and importance of love in our lives and in our work as educators. Indeed, these teachers were unafraid and unashamed to love. They loved their work, their families, their communities, and their students. I learned about their belief in the ultimate triumph of hope and optimism and joy even amidst a lifetime of difficulty and struggle. For whatever reason, these 10 persons decided to trust me enough to allow me to enter into their world, and I am forever in their debt for having done so. Far
beyond the joy and pride and satisfaction of bringing their story forward and completing the dissertation, it is that sense of trust that I am most proud of in all of the dissertation experience. It is so deeply moving and meaningful to me that 10 African American persons, most of whom I had never met before the interview, each made a decision at some point during the interview that they could trust me with their story. I have done my utmost throughout the dissertation to be worthy of the honor of their trust. At all times, we have endeavored to tell their stories as closely as possible to how they themselves would tell the stories of their lives as African American persons and teachers.

Based on my experience with them, I believe that these teachers would not measure their success as educators in terms of financial accomplishment or career advancement. Rather, they would likely measure their professional success in the thousands of lives they have touched through their work as teachers. I believe that, in many ways, their view of the efficacy of their work can be summed up in a single question: “Did I make a difference?” As they toiled nobly and anonymously year after year, did they make a difference in the lives of their children and in the life of their communities? For indeed, they believed deeply that they had been called by God “to make a difference” in the lives of children. They had an innate sense that, through their work as teachers, they were involved in an enterprise and undertaking bigger and more important than themselves. They possessed a serenity and assuredness about their work as teachers and truly believed that they were exactly where they should be doing exactly what they should be doing in life. To be in the presence of such certainty
and confidence about one's life work is at once both endearing and uplifting. Based on my experience with them, there is little doubt in my mind that at least part of the effectiveness of these teachers in their work was grounded in that sense of confidence and serenity and assuredness in choosing their life paths. In their decision to dedicate their lives to children and to teaching, each one of them expressed the same sense of purpose and direction in their life's work described many years ago by Dag Hammarskjöld (1965).

I don't know Who--or What--put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone--or Something--and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender had a goal. From that moment, I have known what it means “not to look back,” and “to take no thought for the morrow.” (p. 205)

Indeed, these teachers have said Yes to “Someone or Something” (p. 205) in their lives as teachers and the lives of many thousands of children have been touched for the better as a result. Like so many of their students, far beyond the dissertation, they have also deeply touched my life. My life has been truly blessed for having encountered them, and they and their stories will remain with me for all of my days.

Our dissertation took place within the environment of the University of North Florida's doctoral program, and I wish to acknowledge and thank all those within that program who have been so helpful along the way. Indeed, the environment of UNF’s doctoral program is so totally supportive and nurturing for
all of the students privileged to be a part of it. The setting of that nurturing tone begins with the Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Kathe Kasten, continues with the director of the doctoral program, Dr. Joyce Jones, and is shared by all of the faculty members in the program. I always felt that if I was willing to do the work, the faculty in the doctoral program would go above and beyond the call of duty to help me. Beyond the impeccable credentials and inspirational instruction of the doctoral faculty, it was knowing that you could count on these experts in their fields to be there for you both as a professor and as a friend, that was so important to me and to so many others throughout their dissertations. I owe a profound debt of gratitude to all of the members of the doctoral faculty at UNF and it is here that I acknowledge that debt and thank each one of them for all they have done for me. Because of them and their work with me, I know that I have grown as a scholar, as a professional, and as a person.

I especially wish to acknowledge and thank three particular members of the doctoral faculty who were kind and gracious enough to serve as the members of my dissertation committee. I wish to thank Drs. Charles Galloway, Pritchy Smith, and David Fenner for all they did for me and my work during the dissertation process. I thank them for several reasons. First of all, they were extraordinarily patient with me and my work. As a result of the combination of my work schedule with Duval County Public Schools and the nature of the dissertation itself, it took a great deal of time to bring forward a finished work for review. During that long period of time, these gentlemen were consistently supportive, patient, and helpful, and I thank them so much for that. When the
work was ready for their review, it was a lengthy document by dissertation standards. Even though the timeline for approval was very tight and right in the middle of Spring Break, and the document was very lengthy, they not only went to the trouble and effort to read the work, they applied their considerable expertise to thoughtfully reviewing our work and offering suggestions to strengthen the study. In short, they truly went above and beyond the call of duty to read the work, to think about the work, and to help us bring additional layers of meaning and richness to the teachers' stories. It was through them that the years of private work began to become public. Indeed, through them, the stories of these teachers have begun to evolve from the private to the public arena. For that and so much more, these teachers and I are forever in their debt for all they have done for us.

Throughout my life, I have been truly blessed and happy to be a part of a wonderful family that has continued to grow and expand through the years. Whatever I am in life, I am because of my family. Quite simply, my family is my life, and their support and nurturing have been an irreplaceable part of this dissertation process as they have been throughout all of my life. I begin, of course, with my soul-mate, my wife Kay. This dissertation has been a small part of the joy that is our life together. Beyond the help and joy that she has given me on a daily basis, it was her belief in me and the unwavering encouragement that she has given me that have made such a difference in my life and in the process of writing this dissertation. A large part of the reason that I knew that I could complete this dissertation was because I knew that Kay believed that I could.
Quite simply, whatever I am or am able to do in life, is grounded in our life together, along with our children, Joseph and Kelly, who are the joys of my heart. She has always been there for me and she always will be. I thank her with all of my heart, as always, for that encouragement, and support, and patience, and I look forward to the joy and love of the rest of our lives together.

The roots of this dissertation begin, in many ways, with my Mother. During a time when it went against societal norms to do so, my Mother taught me to be accepting of persons of all races and ethnicities and to simply not accept the racial stereotypes and prejudice that were so prevalent at the time. In a way, she was teaching me as a child that the life experience of every other person in the world is just as valid and meaningful as my own. For me, that simple yet profound belief is the beginning point for combating the effects of White privilege within one’s self and is the beginning of becoming a citizen of the world. Perhaps without knowing it, she was teaching me that there was another path in life besides the socially-accepted path of racism and stereotypical thought. Any progress that I have made down that path can be traced directly back to what my Mother taught me at such a young age and modeled in her own behavior. Without that foundation laid for me by my Mother, my journey since would have been much more difficult and lengthy. Because of her, I didn’t have layers of racial misunderstandings to throw off before I could even begin the journey that I have made towards acceptance and understanding and communion with persons of color. For that teaching, and for a lifetime of devotion, and joy, and love, and wonderful memories, I thank my Mother.
I also thank all of the other members of my family for all they have meant to me in my life before, during, and after this dissertation. My father has been a wonderful father and role model for me and all of his children. No matter what the situation or distance, he has always been there for all of us. He and my stepmom are a joy to our lives. I see so much of him in me, and I am so proud to be his son. I am also blessed with so many wonderful brothers and sisters and their families, scattered throughout the country now, who have been so helpful and encouraging to me during my life and throughout this dissertation. I thank Kim, Bob, Ivy, Clint, Cathy, Judy, and Dave, and their families for all they have meant to me during this dissertation and our lives together.

I would especially like to thank and acknowledge my father and mother-in-law, Dr. Herbert and Betty Pearce. In every step of the journey throughout this dissertation, they have been so helpful, so supportive, and so encouraging. They have allowed me to become a part of their family, too, and I am so proud and happy to be a member of their family. They have helped me to believe in myself and to believe this dissertation could bring forward the story of these teachers. For that faith and confidence, I thank them, and I am forever in their debt for their support, and their encouragement, and their love.

Indeed, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Pearce's father, Dr. Rex Ray Pearce. Dr. Pearce was an inspirational scholar, person, and friend. It was my great privilege to know Dr. Pearce towards the end of his life. As was the case with so many of his students throughout his career, I found him to be enormously interesting to listen to and learn from, a person of the highest
standards of integrity and principles. He was that rarest of persons, a person who truly and consistently lived out what he believed in. During his time as a college professor, he was especially courageous in his social views at a time and in a place where such convictions could be professionally costly and personally hazardous. It was through my interaction and friendship with him that I first began to consider entering doctoral work. One of my fondest hopes is that he would have approved of this study and this work and found meaning and substance in the stories of these teachers. Knowing him as I did, I believe that he would have found these teachers' stories to be courageous, significant, and compelling in the context of the human experience.

I would certainly wish to thank and acknowledge Dr. Sharon Schurer for her tremendous help in editing our dissertation. It is most fair to say that my work prior to her editing was heartfelt and well-done, but “riddled” with various linguistic and stylistic anomalies. She was so very gracious and giving of her time in helping us tweak the work at just the right points in just the right way. Hers is an especially keen eye for the detail of language, and I appreciated her help so much. Thank you, Sharon, for being such a good friend and colleague. Your help was an important part of bringing the teachers' stories forward.

And, finally, I have deliberately waited until the end to thank and acknowledge Dr. Elinor Scheirer, my dissertation committee chairperson and mentor. Quite simply, had it not been for Ellie, I would not have finished this work and the story of these particular teachers would never have been told.

What Ellie has done for me during the course of this dissertation, she has done
for all of her students throughout her career at UNF. She has loved us and cared for us as students and as persons. Throughout the entirety of the dissertation process, Ellie has been my mentor, and my guide, and my friend and I am forever in her debt for what she has done to help me.

As she has done for so many of her other doctoral dissertation students, Ellie was a mentor, and guide, and friend for me on two levels. First, she has been so completely helpful to me in terms of the actual writing of the dissertation. When I was finished with the interviews of the teachers, I had 600 pages of transcript. The challenge of the dissertation was to bring forward systematic, structured, coherent meaning from such a large and expansive database. In and of itself, that represented a mammoth undertaking. In meeting after meeting over the course of years, Ellie worked with me and shared with me how to shape what the teachers had said into a structure of meaning. In meeting after meeting, Ellie painstakingly edited my work to sharpen its focus and meaning. I shall never forget and shall always be grateful for Ellie’s tireless dedication to our work during those years.

Secondly, again as she has done for so many other students over the years, Ellie has been such a help and a support on a personal level to me during the dissertation. There are so many examples of this during the dissertation process, but one particular incident comes quickly to mind. In February and March of 2004, the College of Education was undergoing an NCATE accreditation. This process was absolutely physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting for all of the faculty of the College of Education, including Ellie, who
had worked almost into exhaustion in preparation for the visit. We had scheduled one final editing session on the Sunday night before turning in the dissertation to the committee for review. This particular Sunday was the first day of the NCATE visit and a dinner was scheduled on campus for the visiting team and faculty. While attending the dinner, Ellie sent word to me through a graduate assistant that she would break away from the dinner and be back for the editing session at 8:00 pm. When I arrived, Ellie had been able to break away a little early, and I found her, sitting by herself, going over the last of my work. She had been there for over thirty minutes. I knew that she was absolutely exhausted. I knew that she was under tremendous pressure in terms of NCATE. And, yet, here she was, on a Sunday night, alone in Building 9, checking over my work. At that moment, I said to myself, as I’m sure so many of Ellie’s other students have said, “that is a person who cares about me and who cares about my work.”

What Ellie has done for me, and for so many of her students, has been to help bring out the best in us and in our work, to help us go beyond what we thought we could do. I know that I, and many others, are different people and different scholars for having known her. In short, she has given heart and soul in lovingly helping her students to lead more meaningful, richer lives. So, Ellie, on behalf of myself and ten other extraordinary teachers and human beings whose stories you did so much to bring forward... quite simply... with heart and soul... thank you.
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Across the Divide: The Working Lives of African American Teachers in the Classroom

This qualitative study examined how experienced African American teachers in predominantly African American schools perceived and conceptualized their worklives as classroom teachers, and, how they viewed their personal and professional identities in relationship to their lives as teachers. In-depth interviews of 10 experienced African American teachers provided the data for the study, analyzed through the interpretative use of appropriate literature screens. The teachers understood their experience of teacher worklife and their lives as human beings through three distinct dimensions of personal and professional identity: the self, including perceptions of race and gender; the interactive dimension within the educational environment; and transcendent notions of calling and personal spirituality within the global dimension.

This study underscored how deeply the notion of race is woven into the societal fabric of America. These teachers described an educational environment beset with the same ills as the larger society in terms of cross-racial interaction and relationships among teachers and between teachers and students. In the end, the teachers' collective voice is fundamentally optimistic and resilient, as they looked towards the future with a sense of hope born of a shared and deeply-rooted personal spirituality.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Speaking at an educational conference several years ago, Lisa Delpit, who was then Professor of Urban Educational Leadership at Georgia State University, expressed her views concerning one of the most “debilitating myths” with regard to the role African American teachers have historically played in our nation’s educational systems.

I spoke . . . about my own education in the segregated South and my very positive experiences with the Black teachers and the all-Black schools I attended. I ended my statement by saying that we needed to look at the past with new eyes in order to determine what we might learn to help address the apparently difficult educational issue of providing an excellent education for all African American children. A White progressive educator from New York, who by her own admission had never visited the South, stood up and angrily told me that I was romanticizing the past and doing irreparable harm to all the progress that had been made during the past few decades. After all, she continued, if segregated schools were so wonderful, then why did Black people fight so hard to integrate?

This statement, often repeated in one form or another, is emblematic of a debilitating myth embedded within the struggle for civil
rights that continues to haunt African Americans. Namely, that the reason Black people fought so hard for desegregation is that deep down they agreed with the larger society’s view that without access to White culture, White teachers, White schools, and White leadership, Black people could never adequately educate their children, nor hope to create a decent future for their race. (Delpit, 1997, p. ix)

Belief in this “myth” by the larger society, and at times by African Americans themselves, has been historically operationalized in the working lives of African American educators as having to practice their profession trapped somewhere in an educational netherworld (Fultz, 1995). The image of African American teachers has fluctuated between an unrealistic view of African American teachers as noble, self-sacrificing combinations of community leader, educator, and “moral agent” (p. 406) and the view of African American educators as persons who “lacked thorough intellectual training” (Perkins, 1989, p. 347) who were “morally degenerate and culturally backward” (p. 347).

In a very real sense, the experience of many African American teachers has been deeply affected by widespread adherence to this “myth,” itself embedded in the larger historical context of “society’s overarching racism” (Foster, 1997, p. xlix). Researchers agree that it is virtually impossible to understand the experiences of African American teachers outside of the African American experience in the United States (Foster, 1997; Fultz, 1995; McCullough-Garrett, 1994). Both historically and into the current era of education, the story of the contributions and struggles of African American
educators is inexorably intertwined with the political, economic, and social struggles of African American persons in American society (Perkins, 1989).

At various times throughout American history, African American teachers have found themselves and their work controlled by a "complicated system of Southern racial hierarchy" (Perkins, 1989, p. 344). Additionally, while fighting for integration of schools and faculties in both the North and South, they were dismissed in large numbers throughout the country following the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954 (Perkins, 1989). Today, African American educators find themselves referred to as a "drastically scarce resource" (Graham, 1987, p. 598), even as research in the field has consistently indicated and stressed the importance of diversity in the teaching force as schools become increasingly diverse in nature (Irvine, 1990).

Research in the field of the worklives of African American teachers often reveals how historical experience continues to affect their individual working lives today (Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1997). African American teachers often find themselves affected by the experience of "an underlying structure of Black culture" known as the notion of "two-ness" (DuBois, 1903, p. 3). Two-ness is defined as consistently "looking at one's self through the eyes of others" in the broader, largely White society, and "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dillard, 1995, p. 549). The experiences of many African American teachers are either entirely disregarded as being part of a unique experience or "amalgamated with those of White teachers" (Foster, 1997, p. xlix). Many African American teachers feel "invisible
as teachers of students of their own or other ethnic backgrounds” (Foster, 1997, p. xlix).

While informative and influential research exists regarding the topic of African American teacher worklife and personal and professional identity, the amount of research focused on the experience of African American teachers is limited in comparison to the volumes on teacher worklife in general (Foster, 1990, 1997; Fultz, 1995; Irvine, 1990; King, 1993). It is the goal of this study to add to the body of that research, to make the “invisible” working lives of African American teachers (Foster, 1997, p. xlix) more visible, and, particularly, to understand the working lives and personal and professional identities of African American teachers from the perspective of African American teachers themselves. With increased understanding of the experience of teaching from the perspective of the African American teacher, other educators might be better able both to support the work of African American teachers as they in turn work with students and, potentially, to recruit African American persons into the profession of teaching more effectively.

A large and ever expanding body of research literature pertains to “teacher worklife” (Johnson, 1990, p. 3). The importance of the study of teacher worklife is grounded in the belief that the fundamental function of the schools is to attend to the educational and developmental needs of students (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989). The study of the working lives of teachers, who are the persons who directly carry out the function of the schools, becomes vitally important because the degree to which teachers are motivated to carry out their
tasks is based in large measure on their experience of the "workaday world around them" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 3).

The concept of teacher worklife can be defined as the quality and nature of an individual teacher's experience of a "constellation of features" which shape the school as a workplace (Johnson, 1990, p. xviii). Broad agreement exists across the literature on the topic of teacher worklife (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) that seven of these features identified by Johnson (1990) are fundamental components of teachers' worklife. These features include:

1. The physical components of [teachers'] workplaces, considering whether they are safe, functional, comfortable...and well-equipped;
2. Organizational structures, including teaching loads, the demands and flexibility of the schedule, and the amount of discretion they are expected or allowed to exercise in their teaching;
3. A sociological perspective, considering their roles as teachers and their consequent relationship with colleagues, superiors, students, and parents;
4. Economic conditions, including job security, salaries, and access to the incentives and rewards that matter to them;
5. The political character of their schools...whether they can influence policy decisions;
6. [The response to] their schools' cultures, noting the presence or absence of positive norms, rich histories, and compelling traditions that engage students, peers, administrators, and parents in a shared set of
constructive purposes;
7. The psychological dimensions of work in schools, . . . whether the meaning of teaching is enhanced or diminished by their workplace, whether the personal and professional stresses of teaching are tolerable, and whether teaching provides sufficient opportunity for their own learning and growth. (p. xviii)

What is not commonly dealt with in much of the research literature on teacher worklife, at least not specifically, is the nature and quality of teacher worklife from the perspective of the African American teacher. Much of the literature even speaks directly to the dearth of research on African American teacher worklife (Foster, 1990; King, 1993). Therefore, the original purpose of this study was to elicit from a group of African American teachers their perceptions of teacher worklife as operationally defined above (Johnson, 1990), through the use of “in-depth interviews” (Mishler, 1986, p. 6).

However, the teachers themselves promoted an expansion of this original purpose to include a much wider-ranging discussion of their personal and professional identities. The research question thus evolved into a more holistic form: how do experienced African American classroom teachers in predominantly African American schools perceive and conceptualize their worklives as classroom teachers, and, ultimately, how do they view dimensions of their personal and professional identities in relationship to their lives as teachers? Chapter 3 describes this process of refining and expanding the research question in greater detail.
The study focused on the perceptions of African American teachers as a unique subset of the teaching force for several reasons. This group of teachers is indeed significant as our society and the schools which serve that society approach the 21st century. The student populations of schools are rapidly changing demographically and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Even though their numbers are declining, African American teachers can play a pivotal role in enhancing the educational experiences of both Black and White students. Finally, research indicates that very real differences may indeed exist in how African American and White teachers perceive the worklife of a teacher (Foster, 1990; Irvine, 1990). If schools are to support fully the work of teachers with their students, then educators must understand how both African American and White teachers experience their worklives.

Even to the casual observer, our schools are rapidly becoming increasingly diverse in nature (Day, 1996). Based on demographic trends indicated in the 1980 and 1990 censuses, Day (1996) predicted that while the percentage of the U.S. population that is White and non-Hispanic will continue to decrease through the year 2050, the percentage of the population comprised of persons of color will continue to increase dramatically. In the specific case of the African American population in the U.S., she predicted that by the middle of the 21st century the African American population would nearly double from its 1995 size to 61 million (p. 1).

Based on current demographic trends, Hodgkinson (1992) predicted that between the years 1990 and 2010 there will be a decrease of approximately 3.8...
million White students attending the nation’s schools, while there would be an increase of approximately 4.4 million Nonwhite students in the schools (p. 5). Further, he forecasted that there would be 12 states and the District of Columbia with “significant minority youth populations,” ranging from 40.1% to 93.2% of the total youth populations in those states (pp. 6-7).

At a time in educational history when the numbers of African American students and other students of color are rapidly and dramatically increasing in our schools, many researchers have noted that the number of African American teachers in our schools is rapidly declining (Graham, 1987; Hodgkinson, 1992; Smith, 1988). Indeed, minority teachers have never made up more than 12.5% of the national teaching force (Smith, 1988, p. 180). Graham (1987) noted that African American teachers comprise only about 7% of the teaching population, down from 8% during most of the 1970s and 1980s (p. 600).

The paucity of African American teachers in the teaching force is not likely to improve dramatically in the near future. Hodgkinson (1992) predicted that by the year 2010 the teaching populations of California, Florida, and Texas would be comprised of only 19%, 15%, and 22% Nonwhite teachers respectively (p. 9). These figures stand in contrast to the predicted populations of those states as comprised of a majority of minority students.

Against the backdrop of declining numbers of African American teachers and other teachers of color in the nation’s teaching force, research has consistently indicated and stressed the importance of diversity in the teaching force in schools that strive to be effective with populations of students who are
becoming increasingly diverse in nature (Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1990, 1997; Irvine, 1990, 1991). In addition to the need to match the diversity of the teaching force with the diversity of the students in the school population in terms of sheer numbers, other reasons exist supporting the desirability of employing teachers of different races. Chief among these is the notion that employing teachers of particular ethnic groups and races increases the rate of “cultural synchronization” between the students and faculty of schools who share similar backgrounds and life experiences (Irvine, 1990, p. 22). A higher degree of cultural synchronization “mediates the interaction of teacher and student” and can help to ensure that “communication is enhanced, . . . instruction is effective, . . . [and] positive teacher affect maximized” (p. xx). As Goodson (1988) posited, “teachers’ backgrounds, identities, and culture help to shape their view of teaching” and clearly affect their interaction with their students (cited in Foster, 1990, p. 124).

The presence of African American teachers is particularly important in the lives of African American students because their presence provides “cultural synchronization” (Irvine, 1990, p. 27) with their African American students. These students face significant problems in three areas as they come into contact with a teaching force that is largely White: nonverbal personae, the role of Black English in communication, and processes of knowing and learning. The presence of African American teachers is crucial in that they either provide cultural synchronization directly for their African American students or help to mentor their White colleagues to be more responsive to the needs of their African American students (1990).
The presence of African American teachers in the classroom aids African American students in yet another way. African American teachers can "understand and teach within the context of the African American experience" and provide "culturally meaningful pedagogy" in their practice of teaching for their African American students (King, 1993, pp. 475-476). While King (1993) emphasized that the mere presence of African American teachers is a form of role modeling for their students, Irvine (1991) argued that the importance of African American teachers goes far beyond merely being role models. In her view, African American teachers are both "cultural translators and intercessors for Black students;" they "are more likely to understand Black students’ personal style of presentation as well as their language" (p. 51). Irvine (1991) also noted that African American teachers can provide teaching approaches that honor the cultural differences of students with regard to views of authority and styles of instruction.

Research focused on the topic of the worklife of African American teachers indicates two primary benefits for White students when African American teachers are present during their educational experiences. Foster (1993) argued that White students benefit from experiences with African American teachers who exemplify classroom pedagogy based on “social equality, egalitarianism, and mutuality stemming from a group, rather than individual, ethos” (p. 386)—a style rooted in African American culture. Another benefit gained by White students in their contact with African American teachers is that White students can perceive African Americans in a range of
roles within the educational context which "counteract . . . negative racial stereotypes" (Irvine, 1991, p. 52). Without sufficient contact with African American teachers, White students can, even subconsciously, begin to think of "the academic enterprise in general as best suited for Whites" (Loehr, 1988, cited in Irvine, 1991, p. 52).

Research in the field of teacher worklife indicates that very real differences may exist between African American and White teachers in many of their perceptions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities, particularly in terms of how White teachers interact with African American students in comparison to how African American teachers interact with those students. Indeed, White, middle class teachers are all too often "strangers [to the] urban cultures" where the schools they work in are located and where the children they teach live (Gormley, McDermott, & Rothenberg, 1997, p. 4). Further, White teachers are often affected by "dysconscious racism" (p. 4), which is perpetuated by negative images in the mass media concerning African Americans (Gormley et al., 1997). Unfamiliarity on the part of White urban teachers with the life experiences of their African American students can lead to ineffective teaching practice and misinterpretation of the interaction occurring among the students in the classroom (Delpit, 1992).

Rang's survey of 925 White and 63 African American teachers (1996) revealed significant differences in the perceptions of teachers of their elementary students' social behavior based on both the race and gender of the teachers. On the Total Social Behavior Scale, African American female teachers tended to rate
females as a group higher than males and the African American males higher than White males. White female teachers rated their African American students as a group lower than their White students and African American male students significantly lower than their White male students. Teachers of both races tended to rate students who shared their own race more highly than students who did not share their same ethnic group.

Irvine (1990) posited that African American and White teachers differ significantly in their expectations for African American students. Her review of 36 research studies led to the conclusion that, while many White teachers are very effective in their teaching of African American students, these teachers exhibit more negative expectations for African American students than they do for White students. Further, her review noted the preponderance of research in the field of teacher expectations which indicates that these negative expectations of White teachers for African American students are not as likely to be shared by African American teachers.

Research evidence exists to support the notion that African American and White students themselves perceive teaching behaviors differently. A study involving 480 African American and White students revealed significant differences between the African American and White students in their perceptions of what constituted “warm . . . well-organized . . . and stimulating teacher behaviors” (Sizemore, 1981, p. 50). This finding of difference in perception among ethnic groups is particularly significant for both African American and White teachers who hope to employ effective cross-cultural
pedagogy in their classroom practice. Thus, an understanding of the perceptions of African American teachers regarding the challenges of teaching, both within and outside of their culture, can offer insight into the nature of effective cross-cultural and intra-cultural pedagogy.

In the end, what makes the working experiences of teachers of all races and ethnicities meaningful, important, and worthy of study is the work they do with students. Meeting the educational and developmental needs of students is the work of the school and, in that fundamental sense, teachers carry out the work of the school (Johnson, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989). Within the context of the important and significant work that teachers do, research and historical study have consistently emphasized the unique niche occupied by African American teachers in the continuum of the working experiences of American educators (Foster, 1997; Fultz, 1995; Irvine, 1990; Perkins, 1989). African American teachers do indeed possess a unique "voice... presence... [and] conversation" (McCullough-Garrett, 1994, p. 439) that have historically been largely ignored in the body of research focused on the area of teacher worklife (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1990). This study provides a medium through which that unique voice can be heard, listened to, and understood as a part of the ongoing effort to do all that we can for the students who depend on our teachers and our schools to make a lasting and meaningful difference in their lives.

This chapter presented a rationale for the study and a description of its purposes. Its focus upon the experience of teacher worklife from the perspective
of African American teachers set the foundation for the research question: How do experienced African American classroom teachers in predominantly African American schools perceive and conceptualize their worklives as classroom teachers, and, ultimately, how do they view dimensions of their personal and professional identities in relationship to their lives as teachers?

The subsequent chapters build and expand on that rationale and purpose. Chapter 2 reviews literature related both to the area of teacher worklife in general and then especially to African American teacher worklife. Chapter 3 presents the methodology associated with the present study which gave voice to African American teachers in exploring their experiences of teacher worklife and their personal and professional identities. Chapter 4 presents teachers' perspectives and insights regarding their working lives and their personal and professional identities through narratives and analyses in terms of the literature. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the overarching themes of the teachers' dialogues and conversations during their interviews and the implications of these themes for the practice of educational leadership.
CHAPTER 2
THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of the literature serving as a theoretical basis for this study appears in three sections. First, is a review of literature delineating several themes which describe teacher worklife in general. Following that review is a discussion of themes from the literature regarding the worklife of African American teachers. This review is then completed with a chronological history of African American teachers in order to document the unique characteristics of this group of teachers and to emphasize the importance of understanding the past when addressing current educational concerns.

As will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the focus of this study evolved from an investigation of teacher worklife from the perspective of African American teachers to include an expanded conversation regarding the personal and professional identities of the teachers in this study. However, a key assumption here is that an understanding of the personal and professional identities of teachers and, ultimately, of the personhood of these teachers begins through the lens of their experiences of teacher worklife. Indeed, their experience of teacher worklife, and the day-to-day journeys these teachers undertook in the art and practice of teaching, served as a contextual framework for the exploration of their personal and professional identities. For them, their
experience of teacher worklife, their personal and professional identities, and their experiences as human beings are seamlessly intertwined and inseparable. Thus, literature focused on the areas of teacher worklife, and the unique place of African American teachers within the broader domain of teacher worklife, serve as the theoretical basis for this study.

Teacher Worklife

It is virtually impossible to read the literature in the area of teacher worklife without being aware of the theme of the school as a separate and distinct culture. Such a theme is either expressed openly or is an understood premise of a given research study.

Waller (1932) stressed the uniqueness of the school as a work place and culture. This culture of schools arises because schools include a population of young people and those who work with them, along with a political structure and networks of complex social relationships. Part of that culture, too, is the “dailiness of teaching” (Lieberman & Miller, 1984, p. 5). Upon entering their classrooms each day, teachers “enter a world that is unique and separated from the world of adults. They live in an exclusive and totally controlled environment” (Lieberman & Miller, 1984, p. 5).

One factor that makes the school setting unique, and certainly markedly different from most other organizations, is the emphasis teachers place on service to others. Kasten (1986) reminded us that service to others, particularly students, is a cornerstone of the teaching profession and is often cited by teachers as a primary factor in entering the profession. For many teachers, the
workplace transcends simply being a physical plant where the educational process takes place (Johnson, 1990).

Collaboration and collegiality among teachers in the work setting are often cited by researchers as prime motivators for teachers, both in terms of their levels of job satisfaction and in their levels of commitment to the profession. Firestone and Pennell (1993) identified collaboration and collegiality as two of the seven workplace conditions that can increase levels of teacher commitment. Strategies such as career ladders and mentoring, which stress collaboration with other teachers, are much stronger motivators for teachers than strategies such as merit pay which emphasize competition. Such collegiality can also be an important step in ongoing efforts to be more effective in working with students (Kasten, 1986).

Indeed, the degree to which collegiality is a supported notion within the social framework of the school can influence whether or not teachers seek help and assistance to improve practice (Rosenholtz, 1989). Several factors can influence the level of collegiality within a school setting. Having shared goals and a consistent pattern of substantial teacher involvement in school decision-making affects the levels of collaboration and collegiality among teachers in a school. A consistent pattern of team teaching and the demographic variables of the school can either increase or decrease the levels of collegiality within the school setting (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Further, the traditional organizational paradigm under which many schools still operate and the norms of privacy among teachers themselves are cited by
many researchers as primary reasons why collegiality among teachers is not usually encouraged in many schools (Johnson, 1990).

Teachers themselves note that greater autonomy and control over their workplace environment can be prime factors in improving their worklives. Rosenholtz (1989) cited task autonomy and discretion as a major factor in defining levels of teacher commitment. Task autonomy and discretion include teachers controlling to a great extent how they do their work and allowing them to make more of their decisions about their work. Johnson (1990) labeled the lack of teacher autonomy in the decision making processes of many schools as one aspect of the “personal price of teaching” (p. 45).

Firestone and Pennell (1993) identified teacher autonomy as another of the seven workplace conditions that contribute to teacher commitment to their profession. They distinguish between operational decisions in their own classrooms, over which teachers have historically had significant control, and strategic decisions, usually made by the principal or district officials and in which, historically, teachers have had virtually no input. Attending to teachers’ substantial and meaningful involvement in school governance can significantly contribute to efforts to redesign our schools (Kasten, 1986).

Another characteristic of teacher worklife is the loneliness and isolation of a classroom teacher (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Kasten, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989). Friesen, Prokop, & Sarros (1988) have found that this feeling of isolation among classroom teachers can lead to a feeling of depersonalization among burned-out teachers.
One of the primary causal factors of the isolation and sense of loneliness which so many classroom teachers feel is that teachers consistently adhere to norms of privacy concerning their work in the classroom (Johnson, 1990). Lieberman and Miller (1984) posited that this norm of privacy is one of the fundamental norms of teaching as it is currently practiced. Teachers tend to be extremely private about both the successes and failures they experience in the classroom. Rosenholtz (1989) identified this norm of teacher privacy as one of the chief roadblocks to the building of collegiality and cooperation among teachers in the school setting.

One characteristic of teacher worklife has received recognition from many of the stakeholders concerned with schooling—that is, from the general public, the legislatures, the school boards, educational researchers, and teachers themselves. All seem to agree that even though many persons purport to have firmly established one, there does not currently exist a clearly identified and reliable single “technical culture” of teaching (Kasten, 1986, p. 276). Unlike many professions and businesses, which do possess a single generally agreed upon technical culture, there exists no one single appropriate method of teaching in any given situation. This situation leads to an uncertainty on the part of many classroom teachers, which Lortie (1975) referred to as “endemic uncertainty” (p. 135). He pointed out that due to this teacher uncertainty, attributable to the lack of an identifiable and consistent technical culture, teachers must work for long periods of time during which they are unable to accurately gauge the effects of their work with students.
A survey of over 1,000 Tennessee elementary school teachers indicated that teachers do indeed experience a great deal of uncertainty about their work which arises from the absence of a generally agreed upon technical culture that is associated with teaching (Rosenholtz, 1989). Teachers are uncertain as to how to teach students in the most effective ways. Teachers' uncertainties about an effective technical culture can lead to self-defensiveness and rationalizations concerning their classroom practice. Kasten (1986) asserted, however, that such a culture is elusive. Rather than focusing so heavily on the establishment of a technical process of teaching, educators should instead focus on "an ever expanding repertoire of abilities and skills, . . . proficiency in a variety of models of teaching, and ability to reflect on pedagogical practice" (p. 280).

Another recurring theme in the research on teacher worklife is the existence of the dichotomy of teaching as a fundamentally interpersonal activity performed in the context of largely bureaucratic systems of education in our society (Bruckerhoff, 1991; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1995). One of the fundamental "realities of teaching " (Kasten, 1986, p. 273) is that even though the essence of teaching is one person helping another person in the process of education, a highly individualistic activity, this activity takes place in our society within the confines of a largely bureaucratic system.

The bureaucratic structure of many schools leads to difficulties in teacher worklife. A fundamental characteristic of schools is the requirement of student attendance. The resulting set of relationships between teachers and students has a major effect on teacher worklife (Kasten, 1986; Lortie, 1975). Classroom
pedagogy can also be deeply affected by the large numbers of students in classrooms usually present in the bureaucratic model of schooling (Kasten, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1984). Further, in the bureaucratic model of education, teachers’ views on educational policy and practice are largely ignored (Johnson, 1990).

Johnson (1990) offered several reasons as to why the bureaucratic model of schooling continues to be widely used in our society even though teaching is, in essence, such an interpersonal activity. School funding formulas continue to be based on class and school size and not primarily on the individual needs of students. Schools remain a central concern in a political process which increasingly demands accountability in terms of test scores and other statistical data. In addition, the authority for designing schools, curricula and physical facilities has traditionally rested with mostly male school administrators rather than with typically female teachers. These male administrators have been traditionally skeptical of alternative structuring of schools.

The literature in the field of teacher worklife has also addressed what rewards may motivate teachers (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1989). However, much of what works well as incentives seems to center around a cluster of rewards that are, in essence, “psychic rewards” (Lortie, 1975, p. 101). What motivates teachers to do their work and what motivates them to remain committed to their work are the rewards centered on the joy and fulfillment that teachers derive during the course of each day from working with their students (Lortie, 1975). Interaction with
coworkers is a psychic reward of teaching (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, cited in Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1989). Interestingly, this cluster of psychic rewards is in direct contrast to financial incentives such as merit pay.

These psychic rewards of teaching are distinguished by Lortie (1975) from the “extrinsic rewards” of teaching (p. 101), which include outward manifestations such as salary and benefits, and the “ancillary rewards” of teaching (p. 101), which are perceived rewards such as flexible scheduling and time off from school in the summer. A consistent theme throughout the literature on teacher worklife is that neither of these types of rewards is as motivating for teachers as the psychic rewards of teaching (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). Indeed, incentive policies for teachers such as career ladders and mentoring programs, which offer primarily psychic rewards for teachers, are far more influential than incentive programs such as merit pay in positively affecting the levels of commitment teachers feel for their profession (Firestone & Pennell, 1993).

Closely aligned with the psychic rewards of teaching are what Lortie described as five of the primary reasons for entering the teaching profession. One reason is the desire on the part of teachers to work with people, particularly young people. Teachers also seek the opportunity to render meaningful service to our society as a whole by their work with young people. Many teachers are attracted to teaching as a career because they can continue to enjoy the environment of school which they themselves enjoyed as students. Further, teaching does offer material benefits which are not noticeably deficient in
comparison to other professions, especially when hidden benefits such as retirement and health insurance are taken into account. Time compatibility is a fifth attractor to teaching because a certain flexibility to the working schedule of teachers does exist in comparison to other professions, particularly in the case of working parents.

African American Teacher Worklife

Literature focused on the worklife of African American teachers has consistently indicated the importance of the presence of African American teachers in schools, especially in terms of mentoring their White colleagues (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1990). African American teachers can be very effective in helping their White colleagues to be mindful of five important principles in working effectively with African American students (Birrell, 1995). A first principle stresses the need for teachers of all races and ethnicities to be aware that behavior in the classroom is symbolic as well as factual. Secondly, all teachers must recognize that the process of education may hold a different promise for students of color than for White, middle-class students. Importantly, too, White teachers must value the cultural identities of their African American students. The presence and influence of African American teachers can be helpful in reminding White teachers that life experiences outside of school as well as within school are deeply influential for all people in shaping their view and perception of the world around them. Finally, teachers must be keenly aware that the process of schooling in our society is still deeply rooted in and influenced by the beliefs and mores of the dominant, largely White, population in our society.
The working lives of African American teachers themselves can reflect the context of lingering racism in American society (Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1990; Fultz, 1995). For many African American teachers, it is impossible to separate the racism they have personally experienced in the past, or may very well still be experiencing, from the racism they experience in their professional lives (King, 1993).

Society’s racism has affected the working lives of African American teachers in several ways (Foster, 1990). Because teaching was one of the few employment opportunities available to educated African American persons as late as the 1950s, African American teachers, particularly males, are disproportionately assigned to stereotyped roles such as basketball coaching and remedial classes. Secondly, until recently, African American teachers were disproportionately assigned to predominantly or exclusively African American schools. Teacher unions demonstrated racism in the past when they opposed the hiring of African American teachers in order to preserve seniority privileges for their White members. Historically, racism operated when African American teachers were terminated in large numbers, particularly in the South, following the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954; desegregation efforts typically meant that African American students entered White schools with White teachers maintaining their positions. More recently, increased teacher testing at all levels of education has been an indicator of racism because such practices have denied employment to African American teachers (Anderson, 1989, cited in Foster, 1990).
Research evidence exists indicating that, while desegregation of schools has had many beneficial effects for society as a whole since 1954, harmful effects of desegregation are also evident for both African American students and African American teachers (Irvine, 1990). Desegregation efforts have affected the relationship between African American students and African American teachers (Foster, 1990). Foster argued that desegregation has altered the nature of the bond between African American students and African American teachers; African American teachers often find themselves in conflict between stressing the importance of academic achievement and maintaining their roles as mentors with African American students. A second detrimental effect is that desegregated schools have experienced more conflict than what occurred in segregated schools between African American teachers and administrators, between African teachers and other teachers, and particularly between White and African American parents (Foster, 1990). Furthermore, desegregated schools often “siphon off” (p. 129) the most competent African American teachers from African American schools in order to fill desegregation goals in predominantly White schools.

A case study of Centerville, North Carolina, following a desegregation order in the late 1960s uncovered several unexpected consequences (McCullough-Garrett, 1994). Most of Centerville’s African American teachers were demoted or dismissed when the desegregation order was put into effect. With the closing of the only totally African American school in Centerville, there was a loss of the sense of community and cohesion within the African American
community of Centerville. The “unique presence, pedagogy, caring, and conversation of the African American teacher” was nearly eliminated by the desegregation order (p. 439).

This loss of the sense of community as an effect of desegregation is echoed in other research work in the field of African American teacher worklife (Irvine, 1990). African American teachers who grew up in segregated communities tend to speak of the sense of connection they experienced among school, family, and church (Foster, 1993). These teachers tend to remember their teachers as acting very much like surrogate parents. Similarly, Dillard (1995) observed what she perceived as a lack of caring and nurturing of African American children in today’s environment by the African American community, at least due in part to the effects of desegregation.

African American Teachers:
An Historical Overview and Perspective

An historical overview and perspective on the history of African American teachers at this point in the review of related literature serves two purposes. First, such an overview can clearly delineate and define the experience of African American teachers as a unique subset of the teaching population. It is important to bring forward the notion that the history of African American teachers is characterized by struggle and difficulty to carry out their work in a society that could largely be described as either apathetic or, at times, openly hostile to the notion of quality education among persons of color (Perkins, 1989).

A second purpose of this historical perspective on African American
teachers is to reinforce the notion that to understand why events unfold as they do in the present, one must understand what has occurred in the past (Rippa, 1997). Therefore, to more fully understand, appreciate, and place properly into context the working lives of African American teachers today, it is absolutely necessary to understand the experience of African American teachers throughout American educational history (Foster, 1997; Fultz, 1995).

The single source for this overview is “The History of Blacks in Teaching: Growth and Decline Within the Profession” by Linda Perkins (1989), a chapter in American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work (Warren, 1989). Even though it is a single source, it is exceptionally strong for several reasons. It offers an extremely detailed chronology of African American teaching. Her work is seminal in that it has been cited in the work of other researchers 16 times between 1991 and 1997 in the Social Sciences Citation Index (1997). Partially due to the dearth of work focused on African American teachers in general which was acknowledged earlier (Irvine, 1990; Foster, 1990, 1997; Fultz, 1995; King, 1993), this is one of the few pieces of research which coherently traces the history of African American teachers from the beginning of African American teaching in the United States to the present time. Because this overview is based on a single source, all citations contained in the overview are linked to this source.

The history of African American teaching can be roughly divided into four major eras. The Antebellum Era of African American teaching existed from nearly the beginning of slavery in the South until the conclusion of the Civil War.
The Reconstruction and post-Civil-War years of African American teaching occurred from approximately 1865 through 1900. During the period of 1900 through 1950, there was tremendous growth in what was termed “the Black school system” (p. 350). The current period of African American teaching is generally characterized as beginning in 1954 with the Brown v. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court.

The history of the education of African American persons in the United States during the period before the end of the Civil War has been described as the Antebellum Era. This era of African American education was characterized by modest attempts at formally educating African American persons in the North and by open hostility from the White political structure of the South to any such attempts to educate African American students.

The work of African American teachers during this period was deeply affected by the prevailing political structure which refused to educate African American persons in the South. Many of the schools open to African Americans operated in a secretive manner as schools for African Americans in the South were formally banned by law. During the 1830s, more of these clandestine schools began appearing in cities such as Natchez and Savannah. Many of the predominantly African American teachers who taught in these schools did so at great risk to their personal safety.

During this period, schools for free African Americans were established in several Northern cities. Many of these schools were established for either religious or moral reasons. African Americans of this period became increasingly
critical of these schools, for both the pedagogy practiced and their fear that the schools were established to continue and propagate the subordinate roles of African Americans in society. During this period, the only university offering college level courses for African Americans was Oberlin College. Their graduates often entered into their careers in teaching with near “missionary zeal” (p. 346).

During the post-Civil-War and Reconstruction period, the major task of African American educators was to educate millions of former African American slaves systematically and effectively. A fundamental debate emerged regarding the purpose of educating African Americans. In both academic and governmental circles, this debate has continued throughout most of the history of African American education in the United States.

The debate about the education of African American persons centered around whether African Americans would be “educated to challenge or to accommodate their oppressive educational, economic, and social conditions” (p. 344). African American teachers historically found themselves caught in the middle during this ongoing debate; on the one side were large numbers of African American persons seeking social, economic, and political change through education, and on the other side, particularly in the South, were local school boards controlled largely by White persons who opposed such educational efforts.

During this period, African American teachers frequently took strong leadership roles in the continued struggle for quality and equitable educational
opportunities for African Americans. Due in large part to this ongoing leadership role, African American teachers have long exerted enormous influence and held positions of high status within their communities.

The American Missionary Association (AMA), sponsored by the Congregational Church and the Freedmen's Bureau, an agency of the federal government, were the largest providers of schools and educational opportunity for African Americans during this period. However, educated African Americans were routinely and systematically turned down by these agencies for teaching positions. The AMA routinely sent those African American teachers who were hired to the most undesirable teaching locations and schools. In 1895, of the 110 faculty members at the five AMA colleges for African Americans, only four were African American (p. 348). At the 17 AMA secondary schools of the time, only 12 of the 141 teachers were African American (p. 348).

The fortunes of African American teachers in the North and South began to diverge during the latter part of the 19th century. In the South, African American teachers began working in schools that were steadily, if slowly, improving in their delivery of educational services to African American students. By 1890, the number of African American teachers employed in the South had risen to 25,000 (p. 350). The major impetus for this increase lay mostly in the need for more teachers due to the tremendous growth in the numbers of African Americans in school. While shortly after the Civil War only approximately 100,000 African Americans were attending school, the number of African Americans attending some level of education had risen to nearly 1.5 million by
the end of the century (p. 350).

In the North during this period, African American teachers and other leaders began to focus on increasing integration within the schools. Whether or not a Northern city integrated its schools during this period was largely a function of how many African American persons resided in the city. A small number of African American students usually led to integration, especially if the school district were small, and a large number of African American students usually resulted in continued segregation, especially if neighborhoods were segregated.

A primary by-product of integration in a Northern school district would likely be the loss of teaching positions held by African American teachers in favor of employing White teachers. After New York City integrated its schools in 1873, no African American teacher was hired for a position for 22 years. In the 1880s, Boston had two African American teachers; and in the 1890s, Detroit had three African American teachers (p. 350). These numbers were typical of integrated Northern school districts of the period.

The period from approximately 1900 to 1950 featured the development of two separate, very distinct, and racially defined school systems, particularly in the South. One public school system typically serviced the White students of the community, and the other was a public school system for the African American students of the community. The worklife of African American teachers in the African American public school system was primarily characterized by “abbreviated school years, starvation salaries, inadequate curricula, and inferior buildings and equipment” (p. 350).
It was during this period that African American teachers began to mobilize to bring about improved working conditions. In 1907, the National Association of Teachers of Colored Schools (NATCS) was formed to monitor and promote the interests of African American teachers. During the period of 1884 through 1926, NATCS focused primarily on three concerns: industrial and vocational education, education as a vehicle for the moral uplifting of their students, and the “separate but equal” aspects of African American education (p. 352). NATCS also focused on issues such as the training of African American teachers, the academic progress made by African American schools, and poor teacher salaries among African American teachers.

During the 1920s and 1930s, militancy and protest increased among African Americans in general and African American teachers in particular concerning the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions for African American persons in the United States. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League grew rapidly in membership and became more outspoken in their work. During this period, the Black nationalist movement, headed by Marcus Garvey, began to grow. The number of African American owned businesses grew rapidly, and there was a tremendous increase in African American persons migrating from the South to the North. The number of African American college graduates between 1917 and 1927 increased rapidly from 2,132 to 13,580 (p. 359). One unforeseen result of this period of upward mobility for African Americans was a dramatic reduction in the numbers of African American persons
entering the teaching profession. With employment opportunities expanding during this period, many educated African Americans, particularly males, were simply unwilling to work for the low wages still paid to African American teachers. During this period, the African American teaching force began to stratify along gender lines. As early as the 1930 census, 45,672 African American women were teachers, compared with 8,767 African American men in the teaching profession (p. 359).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the NAACP began to bring lawsuits focused on the inequitable salaries paid to many African American teachers when compared to those paid to White teachers. By 1948, 27 out of 38 of these lawsuits had been settled in favor of the NAACP (p. 361). However, the reaction to these legal victories by many local school boards, still largely White, was to terminate many African American teachers, particularly those who were active in the NAACP. The pace of the termination of African American teachers continued and accelerated following the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954.

The period from 1954 to the present time has featured mixed results in the fortunes of African American teachers. On one hand, the working lives of African American teachers are far more equitably aligned with the working lives of their White counterparts. Beginning with the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision in 1954, a slow, painstaking, but inexorable march towards desegregation and equity in educational opportunity has occurred. Most schools and faculties are now integrated. African American and White teachers are paid the same amounts and receive the same benefits and protections from
inequitable treatment. African American teachers are free to move into educational administrative positions, though one must also acknowledge that debate continues over how equitable that pattern of movement is for African American teachers.

Since 1954, a variety of factors has contributed to a reduction in the numbers of African American teachers in the schools. For example, following the Brown decision, many states and particularly in the South, terminated African American teachers as part of the slow but ongoing campaign to integrate the schools. Moreover, African American teachers who were in any way politically active in the Civil Rights Movement were particularly susceptible to termination.

The advent of teacher competency testing has lowered the numbers of African Americans in the teaching force. As of 1989, 34 states required some form of teacher testing, with African American student teachers having a passing rate dramatically lower than that of White student teachers (p. 365).

Ironically, the Civil Rights and Women’s Movements have led to fewer African American individuals choosing to teach. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s and continuing through to the present time, young African Americans, both male and female, have enjoyed a far greater range of career opportunities available to them outside of the arena of teaching. For many young African Americans, being a teacher “conjures up memories of the self-sacrificing, religious, well-loved, and respected but poorly paid pillar of the Black community” (p. 363). Partly as a result of this dynamic, 91% of students applying for teacher education programs in the United States in 1987 were White, with only 4.3% of
the applicants being African American (p. 364).

While the work of Perkins (1989) and others have consistently indicated and placed into historical context the ongoing struggles and difficulties faced by African American teachers in their work as educators, it would be historically inaccurate to assume that substantive and effective learning communities have not thrived within the African American community throughout the entirety of the African American experience in America. Indeed, throughout all periods of the African American educational experience, African American teachers have been at the very center of effective, thriving, largely self-sufficient learning communities that served as one of the cornerstones of African American society. As Siddle Walker (1996) has asserted,

To remember segregated schools largely by recalling their poor resources presents a historically incomplete picture. Although Black schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped Black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from White school boards. (p. 3)

In a historical case study of one such African American learning community typical of many such African American learning communities throughout the segregated South, Siddle Walker (1996) described an environment characterized by a reverence for teaching and learning and pride in performance on the part of both teachers and students. Caswell County Training
School (CCTS) served as a foundational cornerstone of an intact, though segregated, African American community in tandem with the church, home and family. Although ill-equipped and under-funded as a result of the existing societal racism of the time, CCTS was indeed an oasis of learning, love, support, and discipline for African American students who would carry lessons learned there with them throughout their lives (1996). To be an African American teacher at CCTS, as was the case in so many other such African American learning communities throughout the segregated South was

to care that individual students learned course material, to be certain that students did not disengage from school work, and to be willing to look internally if problems arose. . . . Retrospectively, the phase most frequently used by [CCTS] teachers to describe their task is that it was their responsibility to be certain that every child “reached his or her highest potential.” (pp. 157-158)

Historical research in the area of teacher worklife has clearly documented the unique quality of the experience of African American teachers throughout the history of education in the United States. In many ways, these historical differences between the experiences of African American teachers and the experiences of other teachers continue to influence African American teachers today.

The dialogue, conversation, and narrative provided by the teachers during the study consistently reflected an awareness of themselves within historical context and a strong sense of inner linkage to the singularly unique historical
journey of both African Americans and of African American teachers in particular.

Thus, the following chapter details the methodology of this study designed to bring forward the teachers’ perceptions and thoughts with regard to their stories as African American teachers within the larger context of the historical story of African American teachers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This chapter discusses the methodology of a study of perception and conceptualization of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity among 10 experienced African American classroom teachers employed in one public school district during the 1997-1998 school year. The discussion includes the original research question and central focus of the study, data collection procedures, the self as research instrument, interview procedures, the evolution of the research question and focus of the study over the course of the interview process, and methodology of data analysis.

Research Questions and Focus of Study

At the outset of the study, the research focused primarily on how experienced African American classroom teachers in schools that are predominantly African American in student population perceive and conceptualize their lives as classroom teachers. Several questions for the study arose from this research focus. These questions included the following:

Is there a hidden work life particular to the experience of African American teachers?

How do African American teachers conceptualize and view their working lives as teachers, particularly in the nature and quality of their cross-gender and
cross-racial interactions with students, teachers, school administrators, and parents?

How do African American teachers conceptualize and view their intra-cultural interactions with other African American teachers and African American students, school administrators, and parents?

How do African American teachers perceive their worklives as different from those of White teachers in the classroom?

For the purposes of this study, hidden work life referred to those features of teacher worklife which exist within a particular school setting but are not normally discussed in the formally delineated communications occurring within the school (Rosenholtz, 1989). Lieberman and Miller (1984) have characterized these features of teacher worklife as existing outside of the “formal demands of the bureaucracy” (p. 48).

During the course of data collection, the research questions and central focus of the study evolved, largely at the direction of the research participants, from a focus principally on the perceptions and conceptualizations of teacher worklife to include exploration of other dimensions, later associated with personal and professional identity. The quality and nature of this evolutionary process are explored more fully later in this chapter.

Data Collection Procedures

The fundamental research question at the heart of this study centered on how experienced African American classroom teachers in a particular group of schools perceived and conceptualized their lives as classroom teachers, and,
ultimately, how they viewed dimensions of their personal and professional identities in relationship to their lives as teachers. Qualitative methodologies are often particularly appropriate in obtaining, interpreting, and making meaning of data associated with the perceptions and thinking processes of research participants in a given study (Kvale, 1992; McCracken, 1988). Indeed, Eisner (1991) has noted that exploring “the way in which the world is viewed and portrayed, and . . .the conceptual orientation used to see and make sense of what one has seen” (p. 230) lends itself to qualitative research methodologies. Thus, the most effective and appropriate method of gaining insight and understanding into the research questions posed by this study was the process of in-depth interviewing (Mishler, 1986, p. 6).

In-depth interviewing techniques are particularly effective in eliciting responses from research participants concerning their perceptions of environmental phenomena. Rubin and Rubin (1995) have posited that qualitative interviewing techniques enable researchers to “listen to people as they describe how they understand the worlds in which they live and work” (p. 3). Eisner (1991) identified interviewing as a “powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work” (p. 82). Marshall and Rossman (1995) asserted that interviewing techniques are highly effective in helping researchers to “understand the meanings people hold for their everyday activities” and to gain insight into how research participants structure their view of the world (p. 81). Further, Eichelberger (1989) identified in-depth interviewing techniques as particularly effective in illuminating research participants’ “personal
experience,” one of the three fundamental “ways of knowing” (p. 12) that people use to draw conclusions about their life experience, along with tradition, appeal to authority, and systematic research.

Through in-depth interviewing, the qualitative researcher enters the participants’ worlds and seeks to understand how they make meaning of their experiences. Donmoyer (1990) identified three particular strengths of such “vicarious experience” (p. 192). First, research environments become accessible to consumers that would not normally be easily available. Secondly, consumers are able to view through the researcher’s eyes the particular details of a given research environment that might otherwise go unnoticed. Finally, consumers are less likely to become defensive with regard to the data collected and the theory constructed about a particular research environment through the use of case study and other forms of qualitative research because they tend to feel comfortable in selecting data from the rich detail offered which is most applicable to their particular environment.

In addition, Kvale (1992) noted the utility of qualitative research methodologies in emphasizing “local knowledge” (p. 17). From this contextualized knowledge, broader lessons are constructed based on a psychological process of generalization using schema theory (Donmoyer, 1990).

Following the designation of in-depth interviewing as the most appropriate and effective research tool in gathering data regarding the research questions, during the 1997-1998 school year, I invited experienced African American teachers to participate in the interview process. The desired profile for potential
research participants included being an African American teacher with a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience and being employed at a school in the feeder pattern associated with a predominately African American high school in a large urban school district in northeast Florida.

The high school feeder pattern is a group of 11 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school within the Duval County (Florida) School District. The concept of a feeder pattern is based on the notion of all students within it eventually attending one particular high school. The implied continuity of student experience offered a cohesive character to these schools.

The feeder pattern selected operated around the African American high school with the longest history in the district. Further, each of the schools in the group had a predominantly African American student population, with a few White students who were attending magnet school programs within the high school. It was hoped that limiting the study to this group of schools and teachers would help provide coherence (Eisner, 1991) to the data elicited from the teachers during the interviews. It was also logical to assume that experienced African American teachers working in this feeder pattern share, at least to some degree, commonalities of experience. Furthermore, schools in this feeder pattern have been encouraged by the Duval County School Board to cooperate in terms of curriculum, general goals and objectives, and funding (Dr. Bibi Golfin-Greer, personal communication, February, 1998).

The narrowing of the number of possible interviewees by years of experience in teaching was a conscious research decision. First, when teachers
have taught five years or more, they are more likely to have moved through the
“novice” and “advanced beginner” stages of teaching to at least the “competent
teacher” stage of their teaching career (Berliner, 1988, pp. 2-4). Competent
teachers are characterized by the ability to make conscious choices about their
teaching careers and classroom pedagogy and to feel a sense of responsibility
for their actions both in the classroom and in their careers. Teachers at this
stage have moved beyond the mode of survival in the classroom and have the
ability to reflect on their experiences in teaching. That type of reflection was a
key source of data in this study. In addition to this fundamental assumption of
reflective capacity, it would also be logical to assume that many of the African
American teachers who have taught 5 years or longer have teaching experience
in several school settings; such breadth of experience was indeed characteristic
of the teachers who actually participated in the interview process and offered a
more meaningful perspective on teacher worklife.

In the initial phase of the study, a letter was sent to each principal in the
high school feeder pattern in the Duval County (Florida) School District. This
letter explained the nature and purposes of the study and requested permission
to send each of the African American teachers in the school, who fit the research
profile, a letter inviting their participation in the study. Each principal was asked
to return to the researcher a response form indicating whether or not he or she
gave approval for contacting the teachers at the school. Of the 14 principals in
the feeder pattern, 11 responded to the letter. Ten principals gave permission to
contact the African American teachers at the school. The remaining principal
indicated that he had a concern about contacting the teachers at his school. After discussion by telephone, he granted permission.

Upon receiving permission from the principals, each African American teacher in the schools in the feeder pattern who fit the desired profile was sent a letter inviting him or her each to participate in the interview process (see Appendix A). The letter explained the nature and purposes of the research study. In addition, each teacher's packet also included an interview response form (see Appendix B) and a self-addressed envelope for use in returning the response form to the researcher in order to indicate the teacher's interest in participating in the interview process.

Out of 151 African American teachers in the feeder pattern who fit the desired profile, 12 teachers returned the interview response form and indicated an interest in participating in the interview process. However, one teacher moved to Atlanta, Georgia, before arrangements could be finalized to conduct the interview. Two teachers, even after several telephone conversations, subsequently indicated that they would prefer not to participate in the interview process. A fourth teacher, while expressing interest in being interviewed, decided not to participate in the interview process due to the precarious health situation of a family member. Therefore, 8 of the 12 teachers who had returned interview response forms were contacted to establish mutually convenient dates, times, and locations for the interviews to take place. Two additional teachers decided to participate by contacting the researcher, one by telephone and one by personal contact. Therefore, a total of 10 African American teachers agreed
to be interviewed for the purposes of this study. A demographic summary of the 10 research participants appears below. This information represents their status at the time of their decisions to participate in the interview process in May of 1998.

Table 1

Demographic Status of Participants at Time of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Number of Years of Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Self as Research Instrument

I embarked upon the interview process fully aware that, as a participant in a qualitative interview environment, the self that I was bringing into that environment was a significant contributor to the research process. Indeed, the self is “the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it” (Eisner, 1991, p. 34). Further, the use of the self is one of the six major features which Eisner cited as characterizing the qualitative study. Aspects of the researcher’s self remained a constant throughout the research process as the dynamics of the interview process in large measure “reflect[ed] the researcher’s own personality” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 13).
Two research objectives remained central for me throughout the research study. First, with absolute fidelity, the study provided a forum for hearing and listening to the voices of a group of African American teachers as they described their perceptions, conceptualizations, and experiences of teacher worklife and, as the study evolved, dimensions of their personal and professional identities. This process empowered the research participant to “speak in one’s own voice, and to tell one’s own story” (Mishler, 1986, p. 119). Secondly, through the descriptive, analytical, and interpretative usage of literature screens, the study brought meaning to the data provided by the participants.

These types of research objectives imply seeking depths of understanding that flow from relationships formed during the course of the interview. Rubin and Rubin (1995) noted that the creation of a relationship during effective and meaningful qualitative interviewing is quite commonly deeply felt. I was confident before the interview process began that, even though the research participants were African American and predominantly female and I was White and male, I could help build, in collaboration with the participants, that type of relationship during the interviews. This confidence was born from a lifetime experience of authentic comfort level and, on a deepest of levels, a sense of connection with African Americans and other persons of color.

The level of comfort and sense of connection with African Americans which I brought to the interview process have been developed and nurtured in the context of a pattern of consistent and meaningful interaction with African Americans and other persons of color as a natural course of events throughout
As a child, I grew up in racially diverse neighborhoods, while playing and interacting with African American children on a nearly daily basis. Following high school, I served in the Army and lived with many African Americans and persons of color. As a young teacher at an inner city elementary school for nine years, I worked alongside African American teachers at a school created as part of the desegregation of the Duval County, Florida, Public School System. During the course of my career and personal life since that time, I have maintained close relationships, both personal and professional, with African Americans and other persons of color.

The benefits provided by this component of my life experience were twofold in terms of the success and effectiveness of the interview process. First, my history of familiarity, sensitivity, and awareness of others, including African Americans, served as a comprehensive guide for my path of interaction with the research participants during the interviews. My previous life experiences served to inform me, at many critical points in the interviews, of the direction of questioning and response most appropriate to pursue, or not pursue, with this particular group of persons. Secondly, the alignment of my behavior, sensitivity, understanding, and mindset with those of the participants, created as a by-product of my personal experience, helped to facilitate an atmosphere of trust, rapport, and depth of questioning and response during the interviews. As a result, this interview environment characterized by trust and rapport became fundamental in creating “conversational partnerships” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 93) as part of a joint effort to achieve depth in understanding of the participants’
perceptions regarding teacher worklife and personal and professional identity.

I undertook the interview process knowing full well that it would be essential that I cross boundaries of race, gender, and culture. Research in the field of cross-racial and cross-cultural research consistently indicates that the researcher about to undergo such a process must adequately reflect upon his or her motivations, goals, biases, cultural perspectives, and limitations in undertaking such research (Atkinson, 1993; Helms, 1993; Iwamasa & Mio, 1993; Lahnston, 1973; Parham, 1993; Sue, 1993).

Two factors seem fundamental to the ability of a White researcher to cross racial, cultural, or gender boundaries. First, the researcher must possess a full, deep, and rich understanding of his or her self as a “racial/cultural being” (Sue, 1993, p. 245). It is essential that White researchers understand the degree to which their world view is influenced and shaped by their racial and cultural experience of life and the extent to which that experience shapes the structure of the research process and their relationship with the research participants (Parham, 1993). Secondly, the researcher must have acquired a knowledge base about the culture and life experience of the research participants that is as full, deep, and rich as possible. As previously stated, my life experience and history of interaction with African American persons was facilitative in both areas.

Components of my life experience, combined with a high degree of willingness on the part of the research participants to explore in a deeply-felt and meaningful manner dimensions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity, enabled the interview environment to become a fertile ground for
significant and, at many points, evocative collaborative dialogue. However, during the course of the interview process and analysis of data, I endeavored to attain a quality of work contained within the autonomy stage of Helms' Stages of White Identity (1993). At this level, the White researcher “recognizes inherent cultural assumptions of one's work,” but “does not impose them on non-group members” (p. 243). Operating at this level was both natural and helpful to me during the interview and data analysis processes both in accepting statements made by the participants that were in alignment with my life experience and, particularly, in accepting without judgement data provided by the participants that ran contrary to my professional and personal experience.

For example, during the course of the interviews, several participants described their perception of the process of turnover of White teachers in inner-city, predominantly African American schools. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, the participants’ perception of the process was that young, inexperienced White teachers were assigned to inner-city schools, gathered teaching experience at the expense of the African American children in those schools, and stayed only as long as was necessary to achieve transfer to suburban, predominantly White schools. Furthermore, according to the participants, this process could often be tinged, at least to some degree, with racist attitudes on the part of both the White teachers themselves and school system, which initially placed the White teachers in the predominantly African American schools in lieu of available African American teachers and then allowed the transfers.
For the first nine years of my teaching career, I taught at an inner-city elementary school in Jacksonville. During that time and afterward, I have been very much aware of my attitudes, perceptions, and level of dedication with regard to the students with whom I have worked. As I listened to the participants describe their perceptions and experiences in this area, I felt that, to a large degree, the participants were not describing my personal experience. On one level, this scenario could have been used to describe my own early career. However, I chose not to identify personally with this scenario, because I possessed an internal certainty as to my mindset, attitudes, and beliefs during those early years in my teaching career. In addition, in my role as a researcher, it was critical that, to the extent possible, I place aside my perception of my experience of teaching in an inner-city school in order to hear as clearly as possible the participants' perceptions of this phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A fundamental objective for me as the researcher in this study was to hear, listen to, and give encouragement and acceptance to the participants' experience of teacher worklife and professional and personal identity. I recognized that, whatever my experience of life and work has been, in the end I am a White person living in American society. That fact, in and of itself, implied a cultural viewpoint and frame of reference that, at least on some level, acted as one of the filters embedded within the self during the research experience. While recognizing and taking into account the existence of that cultural viewpoint, I endeavored at all times during the research study to limit the filtering effect of that viewpoint upon the interview and data analysis processes and not to impose
my perceptions and experiences of teacher worklife upon the research participants.

An important component in limiting the filtering effect of my cultural viewpoint was the level of intensity which I experienced in listening to the participants during the actual interviews. As a researcher, I was dedicated to capturing and understanding as completely, fully, and accurately as possible the participants’ experience of teacher worklife, and, as the study evolved, a sense of their personal and professional identities. This intensive listening and total focus upon each person led to each interview being a highly distinctive and vivid experience, focused entirely and wholly in the moment. This level of focus and intensity left little available time during the interviews for reflection on self or one’s attitudes or beliefs. Indeed, my ultimate objective as the researcher in this study was, to the extent possible, to enable the voice of the research participants to come through the research process as fully, clearly, and authentically as possible.

One of the benefits for the researcher in undertaking qualitative research across boundaries of race, culture, or gender is the opportunity for personal and professional growth. The act of listening to the research participants discuss their perceptions concerning White teachers working in predominantly African American schools caused me to reflect upon my own personal experience and motivations in that environment. While it was certainly true that I had taught and experienced a very high personal level of dedication in an inner-city school for nine years,
ultimately, I did indeed leave by transfer request. At the time of the transfer, I was comfortable within myself in the knowledge that my leaving had nothing to do with race or the location of the school. However, after listening to the participants’ perceptions of this phenomenon, I wondered what were the true perceptions of my African American colleagues at the time of my leaving. Was I so absolutely sure that my leaving had nothing to do with race or with the location of the school? This was the case in several areas of focus and conversation during the interview process, particularly in areas of race, culture, and gender. The willingness of the participants to share their perceptions and experience of life enabled me more fully to extend my “intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 1).

Thus, the research process became, in many ways, a collaborative dialogue through which the participants allowed me, both as a researcher and human being, to enter into a part of their world and life experience and to learn more about myself in the process.

An example of this process of engagement with others occurred during one of the interviews when a participant began discussing her initial motivation as a young girl in becoming a teacher. I began each of the interviews with a question framed in such a manner as to enable the participants to discuss their careers and working lives in general terms. It was in responding to this question that the participant allowed a glimpse into an important moment in her life.

The participant related that, as a fourth grader, she dreaded spelling class. As each child took a turn standing in front of the class and spelling words, the
teacher would implement corporal punishment for each letter that a child misspelled. The sense of dread and anxiety that the participant felt was exacerbated by a feeling of isolation on her part within the school environment due to her physical appearance.

I was fair with light eyes and blonde hair. And, when you’re in a segregated school, you’re ridiculed by your own, you know?

Even though she had studied conscientiously and knew her words, the sense of anxiety created within her led to misspellings and public physical punishment on many occasions in the form of swats by the teacher. This experience initiated a resolve within the participant as a little girl to become a teacher and to become the kind of teacher that “children would not fear. . . . No child around me would hate school and fear coming to school.”

As I listened to the participant relate this moment in her life, I was transported across boundaries of time, race, culture, gender and community to find myself in that moment with a 4th grade girl and experiencing that moment alongside the participant. Mooney (1975) has identified this opportunity for personal growth as a primary benefit of the research process. If undertaken with an appropriate mindset and approach of openness, the research process can become a journey during which the researcher, in collaboration with the research participants, constructs layers of understanding, empathy, meaning, and sense of connectedness and self-realization that benefit both the researcher and educational community at large (Mooney, 1975).
Interview Procedures

Prior to the beginning of the interviews, Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures were initiated. IRB approval for the study was obtained during the Spring semester. The design of the study included sample interview questions and a description of possible methods for data analysis. The 10 in-depth interviews which provided the data for this study took place between July 3, 1998, and January 12, 2000. The actual length of the interviews varied from 2 hours to 3 hours and 45 minutes. The only persons present at the interviews, with the exception of one interview at the participant’s home, were the researcher and the research participant. Four of the interviews took place at the middle school, where I was employed during the window of time in which most of the interviews took place. One interview per site took place at each of the following locations: the local state university, the high school in the feeder pattern, and two of the elementary schools in the feeder pattern. An additional interview took place at the research participant’s home. Another interview was begun at the middle school and completed on a subsequent day at the community education district office. Seven of the interviews were completed in one session. Two of the interviews were completed over the span of two sessions each, and one interview required three sessions to complete.

At the beginning of each interview, the research participant read and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C), which outlined the purposes of the interview, detailed the interview and transcription processes, and provided information regarding rights as a research participant during the interview.
process. Each participant granted permission to the researcher to take notes during the interview. Each interview was recorded by an audio tape recorder visible during the interview. Following the interview process, all 10 interviews were transcribed on a verbatim basis to form the database for the study.

Evolution of the Research Question and the Focus of the Study

As alluded to earlier in this chapter, an evolution of the research question and focus of the study occurred over the course of data collection through the interviews. While keeping intact the initial investigation of perception and conceptualization of teacher worklife, a wider ranging discussion occurred with the research participants, which led to an exploration of various dimensions of personal and professional identity.

It is indeed appropriate during the qualitative research process that the research question and focus of the study might evolve and develop, particularly if this expansion is a by-product of a collaborative partnership between interviewer and participants (Smaling, 1996). During the course of the interview process, the research participant should be empowered to "influence the (re)formulation and the interpretation of the interview questions" and to "choose his or her own individual answers and clarify their contextual meaning" (p. 25). The ebb and flow of questions, responses, and focus of the research study are thus "shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents" (Mishler, 1986, p. 52). During the course of the interviews, participants consistently employed questions as springboards for discussion into a variety of topics related to teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. This pattern of response, which
frequently added meaning and context to the topic at hand, was welcomed and nurtured by the researcher during the interviews.

Meaningful qualitative interviewing is also characterized by “flexibility” and an “iterative” quality in the context of on-going and continuous re-design of the research questions during the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 43). Flexibility in questioning and identification of the central focus of the study are critical as emerging themes, which may or may not have been identified at the outset of the study, are uncovered during collaborative exploration between interviewer and participants. During each stage of the interview process, an iterative process of gathering and analyzing data and subsequent refinement of questioning techniques takes place until the research questions align closely with themes and areas of focus deemed important by the research participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Three major factors served to influence and facilitate this evolution of the research question and focus of the study during the course of the interview process. First, as African Americans with substantial life experience and as highly experienced teachers, the participants came to the interview setting equipped with a particular knowledge base and set of beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences that could serve easily to expand the conversation beyond a focused discussion of teacher worklife. Secondly, each of the interviews was nurtured in an environment of “participatory consciousness” which helped to facilitate the evolution of the dialogue from a discussion of teacher worklife towards a richer exploration of dimensions of personal and professional
identity on the part of the participants (Heshusius, 1994, p. 16). Lastly, as the 10 interviews progressed, a "recursive" quality was incorporated into the questioning and dialogue with the research participants (Doll, 1993, p. 289). A conscious research decision was made to "loop back" in later interviews to areas identified by the participants in earlier interviews as significant in an effort to expand the meaning and understanding of those areas of personal and professional identity (p. 289).

At the time of the interviews, 9 of the 10 participants were between the ages of 45 to 65 and had lived in the southern part of the United States most, if not all, of their lives. As such, these teachers were members of a generation of African Americans who have experienced a cycle of evolution in American society ranging from institutionalized segregation, to an era of desegregation of schools and communities, to a period of collective reflection among African Americans as to the legacy and impact of societal desegregation upon African American communities, schools, teachers, and children (Foster, 1997). These experiences continued to remain of major significance in the collective experience of the members of this generation. Thus, in the interviews with the participants, questions related, or at times, unrelated to issues of race and desegregation with regards to teacher worklife often tended only to serve as beginning points for more in-depth exploration of personal and professional identity.

For example, a question concerning merit pay elicited a wide-ranging response on the part of one participant to include a variety of issues centered
around equity and racial and cultural norms. In her response, the participant did essentially state that she felt it was difficult, if not impossible, to equitably make decisions on merit pay for teachers when so many divergent teaching styles can be successful in the classroom. However, during the course of her answer to the question, unprompted by me, the participant touched upon issues related to norms of disciplining children within the African American community as compared to the White community and her relationship with her own children. This pattern of response, in which participants explored a variety of dimensions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity during responses to specific questions, remained a constant during the interview process.

As the researcher in this study, I consciously and specifically nurtured this expansion of thought, meaning, and areas of exploration embedded within the participants’ extended responses to specific questioning. I conducted each interview with a definite set of questions regarding conceptualization and perception of teacher worklife and, in the later interviews, questions related to personal and professional identity. Somewhere during the course of each interview, those questions were indeed asked and responses given. But, essentially, as the researcher, I was interested in talking about what the participants wanted to talk about and explore. I already knew my world as a teacher and as an educator. I was interested in learning about their worlds as a teachers, educators, and human beings, from their perspective. The propensity on the part of the participants to expand their responses into explorations of a variety of dimensions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity
added significantly to a far richer and deeper understanding of their life experience, both professionally and personally, than originally anticipated at the outset of the study.

This cohort of participants was a very experienced group of educators, averaging 24 years of experience, with several members having 30 years or more in education. In light of that breadth of experience, the participants consistently demonstrated an ability and predisposition to discuss aspects of teacher worklife beyond the day-to-day tasks of teaching. Berliner (1988) has noted that this reflective capacity is a hallmark of experienced and expert teachers. For instance, one participant, reflecting on her role as a teacher during an extended response, stated that,

Not only was I a teacher, I tried to be a teacher, a parent, a pal...a counselor, whatever. Whatever made it work, that’s what I did...trying to keep that family-like atmosphere.

The desire and ability of the participants to explore dimensions of teacher worklife outside of the day-to-day routines of teaching were demonstrated consistently in the responses offered during the interviews. These enhanced responses frequently offered insight into the mindset, thought processes, and worldview of the participants.

As previously stated earlier in this chapter, I endeavored during each interview to help foster an atmosphere in which each participant felt comfortable in not only in exploring the seven domains of teacher worklife as outlined in the review of literature but also in exploring other areas of interest to the participants.
Such a climate empowered interview participants to help set questioning agendas and to identify areas of exploration, a process which commonly enhances the understanding of the interviewee's world and life experience (Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The interviews consistently followed a three-stage pattern. During the first stage, the participants and I would typically spend at least some time in ice-breaking activity. It is important to note that, with one exception, the participants had never met me in person, and the interview followed what was usually a fairly brief telephone call designed to set up the interview time, date, and place. This first phase was a time devoted to the building of trust and rapport between participant and interviewer. I would typically begin the interview by asking the participant a question designed to give the person time to discuss in general terms his or her career and, basically, whatever the person wanted to discuss concerning that career. This type of questioning often seemed to ease the participant gently into the interview environment. Through what was normally the extended discourse of the opening question and response, participants frequently revealed meaningful insights into their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities.

During the second stage of the interview, the level of trust and rapport between participants and interviewer was solidified to the extent that the participants would typically begin to initiate feedback checks in order to ensure that I was understanding their perceptions and experiences as they understood their meaning. Phrases such as "Do you know what I mean?" and "Do you see
what I’m saying?” would typically punctuate conversation between the participants and the interviewer in order to check congruence of understanding and meaning.

While it is important to note that the duration of the first two stages varied with each interview, the third stage of the interview commonly began to occur fairly early during the interview. During this third stage, a state of “participatory consciousness” existed between interviewer and participant, characterized by a “deeper level of kinship” (Heshusius, 1994, p. 16) around the interview topics. By way of verbal and non-verbal cues, body language, selection of topics to be explored, and the level and depth of emotion and passion attached to those topics, the participants gave me permission to enter into their world to experience dimensions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity as they experienced them. In each of the interviews, this moment became almost a visible moment of trust, a moment in which the teachers made a conscious internal decision that they could trust me, both as a researcher and as a human being, and that they could trust the interview process to portray accurately deeply-felt and very personal aspects of their teaching worklife and personal and professional identities. As Eisner has suggested, “It is surprising how much people are willing to say to those whom they believe are really willing to listen” (1991, p. 183). At this point, the participants and I crossed the boundaries of self and the distance between ourselves implied by those boundaries (1994) and began to explore areas of personal and professional identity in addition to areas of teacher worklife.
It was at this point in each interview that the focus of the interview evolved and was transformed to include both the original study of teacher worklife and a collaborative dialogue focused upon dimensions of personal and professional identity. Having left our selves (Heshusius, 1994), both the participants and I became interested in discussing dimensions of personal and professional identity that were of importance to the participants.

It was quite commonplace during this phase of each interview for the participant and I to explore dimensions of personal and professional identity linked to deep levels of emotion on the part of the participant. For instance, one participant became quite emotional when discussing her sense of bonding and relationship with African American students and children.

Oh, yeah. I love my kids. I get teary, just thinking about. . .I think that’s why I still work. I know that’s why I still work.

Even though I was a White male researcher and the participants were African American and largely female in all but one case, this stage of each interview was facilitated and enhanced by many points of connection between us. We may have very well experienced them differently, but we had all shared long time membership in two distinctive cultures, the American South and the Duval County Public School system. We had both known societal segregation, discrimination, and the ongoing issues of race in the South, albeit from very different perspectives and quality of experience. We had both experienced the peculiarities, nuances, and distinct organizational culture of Duval County Public
Schools as experienced teachers and, as a result, I saw myself in many of their responses.

Partly as a result of the connections that I experienced with each of the participants, humor and laughter was a common occurrence throughout all of the interviews. We laughed frequently and often with great gusto.

For instance, one of the participants related an unusual twist to the story of her experience with a young man in the school’s Media Center.

So, I said, “Young man, did you just curse?” He said, “I’m eighteen. I ought to be able to curse.” [laughter] I said, “Young man, as old as I am, do you hear me cursing you?” He said, “No. But I’ll bet you wanna.” [laughter]

Throughout the interview process, I asked questions of the participants during each interview which were directly linked to the seven areas of teacher worklife as identified in the review of literature and the initial focus of this study. However, as the interview process progressed, I also began increasingly to structure questions based on topics and areas of personal and professional identity that seemed of interest to the participants. Doll (1993) described this process of cycling back to previous data to help inform and restructure future research as the process of “recursion” (p. 289).

As an example of this approach, in each of the early interviews and without prompting, the participants consistently communicated the experience of a sense of spirituality and calling in their work as a teacher. As indicated in the
following excerpt, the participants discussed this phenomenon without any sense of self-consciousness or solicitation on my part.

That was when the light bulb came on, then I knew I was doing what I was here to do. . . .that teaching was God's calling on my life. . .

After several interviews during which a spiritual aspect to teaching was identified as being important to the participants' experience of teacher worklife and in their personal and professional identity, I began in later interviews to broach the topic more directly at appropriate times during the interview process.

**Kris:** Let me ask you about something that I've already heard you refer to a couple of times. The spiritual aspect of your life.

**Terri:** Oh, my, yes.

**Kris:** Can you talk about the role that plays in your personal life, and how that spills over into your teaching?

**Terri:** Very much so. . . .I don't think I would be who I am if I did not have God in me.

It is important to note that questions related to the seven areas of teacher worklife that served as the initial focus of this study remained intact throughout the course of the interview process. However, the deliberate choice of cycling back to earlier conversations and interviews in a recursive manner (Doll, 1993) to identify and include in later interviews areas of focus and dialogue that seemed of importance to the participants helped to foster a sense of empowerment with regard to the participants' perspective during the interview process (Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).
Methodology of Data Analysis

As described previously throughout this chapter, the data provided by the participants evolved during the course of this study to include an exploration of dimensions of personal and professional identity. In a very real sense, dialogue regarding the seven areas of teacher worklife, as delineated in the review of literature for this study, became a conduit for an expanded conversation focused upon the personal and professional identities of the research participants. Thus, the analysis of data conducted for this study simultaneously focused upon analyses of data offered by the participants concerning teacher worklife as an embedded construct within the larger framework of an exploration of dimensions of personal and professional identity.

Data offered by the research participants seemed to cluster logically into three distinct dimensions of personal and professional identity. First, the dimension of self included dialogue focused primarily upon race and gender as critical factors within the life experience of the participants. Secondly, the interactive dimension associated with the personal and professional identity of the participants included the quality and nature of the participants' interaction with students and other adults within the school community, the African American community and American society at large, and educational systems and organizations. Lastly, the global dimension of the participants' personal and professional identity embraced transcendent notions of the spiritual dimensions of their teaching and life experience.

The data provided by the research participants regarding these
dimensions of personal and professional identity were analyzed through the
descriptive, analytical, and interpretative usage of relevant and appropriate
literature screens. A concentrated effort was made, through linkage and
connection of data to relevant and appropriate educational research literature, to
bring forward meaning from the collaborative dialogue between researcher and
participants in this study.

The analysis of data through the use of literature screens was a three-step
process. First, in the analysis of each topic, I searched the transcripts to identity
what the teachers themselves had said regarding the topic at hand. What
exactly had the teachers said, how did they say it, what did they appear to mean
when they said it? I was aided in this process by my work with the data prior to
the formal analysis of the data. I had personally transcribed each interview
verbatim. Then, I read each interview over again word-for-word three times.
Finally, on the fourth reading of each interview, I constructed a data outline for
each interview. The outline consisted of notes from each page of the transcript
detailing the topics as named by the participants, along with initial analytic
comments. The processes of transcription and outlining the data enabled me to
hear the voices again, to again hear the subtle nuances of meaning attached to
the data by the teachers, and, in the end, to know and understand the data in
their fullest context. The second step in the process of analysis was to identify
meaningful and relevant educational research literature germane to the topic
being analyzed. The final step involved linking the words of the teachers to the
research literature in a manner that both amplified and brought layers of meaning
to what the teachers said about each topic. In the end, the primary intention of
the analysis of data was to tell the teachers' stories, in ways commensurate with
how they themselves would tell the story of their lived experience as teachers
and as African American persons.

Indeed, the intense level of psychic connection that I had experienced with
the teachers, born and nurtured within the state of participatory consciousness
(Heshusius, 1994) between myself and the teachers during the interviews,
remained intact within me during the process of the analysis of data. As I wrote, I
would literally envision the group of teachers circled around me in our den, where
I did most of the actual writing of this dissertation. I felt myself guided by them in
terms of choices of topics, overall direction, tone, and even the wording.
Whenever I found myself in times of uncertainty, I would ask myself questions
such as: Which topics would the teachers themselves choose to explore? In
which direction would the teachers go? How would the teachers themselves
explain what I am trying to explain and analyze? What wording would the
teachers use?

One specific example among many examples of this process came as I
struggled to characterize and entitle the section of the analysis that dealt with the
teachers' relationships with White teaching colleagues. I finally asked myself,
“How would the teachers themselves characterize that relationship? If they were
here with me now, and sitting around the computer with me, what would they
write? What words would they use?” As I remained in that state and focused
upon the psychic connection that I continued to have with the teachers, the
words came to me. I entitled the section “The Uneasy Alliance: The Relationship with White Teaching Colleagues.” Those are exactly the words that I believe the teachers themselves would use, as uncomfortable as they are to hear, in describing their relationships with many of their White teaching colleagues. Those words continued to give me a framework and guidepost to work within as I wrote that particular section of the analysis.

Thus, the following chapter in this study is, as much as possible, the teachers speaking of their experience of teacher worklife and of their personal and professional identities through me to the reader. Knowing the teachers as I do, I believe that they would likely give their approval for such an endeavor, explaining that on at least some level, I have been and continue to be “one in the spirit” with them. And, who am I to argue the point?
CHAPTER 4
THE ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents an analysis of data gathered to answer the research question of how experienced African American classroom teachers in schools that are predominately African American in student population perceived and conceptualized their work lives as classroom teachers. The research strategy undertaken to investigate this research question was to conduct in-depth interviews of 10 experienced African American classroom teachers employed in one public school district during the 1997-1998 school year. Chapter 3 described how data collection processes led to an evolution of the original research design. The analysis of data developed beyond the focus on teacher worklife to an examination of teachers' perceptions and conceptualizations of worklife as an embedded construct within a wider context of personal and professional identity. Those dimensions, derived from what the teachers themselves said during the course of the interview process, included the dimension of self, the interactive dimension, and the global dimension of their personal and professional identities.

The interview process was built on a foundation of collaboration, partnership, and a shared empowerment between researcher and participants in the shaping of dialogue, conversation, questioning, and choice of subject matter (Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The primary goal during the interview
process was to elicit the participants' understanding of their experiences of teacher worklife and the various dimensions of personal and professional identity (Cortazzi, 1993). In alignment with that research perspective, this chapter continues in a spirit of collaboration and partnership in the analysis of the data provided by the participants.

In the collaborative spirit of the “conversational partnerships” formed during the interviews between myself and the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 93), the central questions of this chapter then become: “What would the data gathered during the interviews mean to the participants, as filtered through appropriate and relevant screens of research literature?” “What meaning would the teachers themselves attach to the data, if they were writing this chapter?” This analysis adheres as closely as possible to that perspective and viewpoint. In a sense, as far as possible, the analysis represents the teachers' perspectives through their eyes, as well as through the eyes of the researcher. Thus, the analysis is grounded in the empathic understanding between researcher and participants that characterized the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

**Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of the Data**

Figure 1 visually and holistically captures components of the analysis of the interview data. As a model, it represents how the participants constructed their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities. The model organizes the analysis into three dimensions: the dimension of self, the interactive dimension, and the global dimension of teachers' personal and
professional identities. Vignettes, stories, direct conversation, and dialogue with the researcher during the course of the interview process provided the database for the analysis.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Data
Based upon the cumulative effect of the quality, nature, and depth of my interaction with the participants during the interview process, I believe that the participants would assert that the journey towards finding meaning in the research data begins with the dimension of self. I would contend, based upon the data revealed by the participants during the interviews, that to understand these teachers' experiences of teacher worklife and dimensions of personal and professional identities begins with an understanding of who each person is as a unique and singular self, particularly and specifically in the areas of race and gender. Additionally, researchers such as Nobles (1991) stressed the importance of understanding the dimension of self as a fundamental initial component in undertaking research involving African American persons.

Data revealed by the participants appeared to support the notion of the dimension of self as the point of origin in both the teachers' construction of personal and professional identity and in understanding the meaning of data associated with that personal and professional identity. The teachers also offered data regarding their perceptions of the interactive and global dimensions of their personal and professional identities. As indicated in Figure 1, data provided by the teachers indicated that they perceived themselves as moving in an unobstructed manner between the dimension of self, the interactive dimension, and the global dimensions of personal and professional identity in their daily work as teachers. This chapter thus moves towards substantiating this assertion in greater detail.
As defined by the participants, the interactive dimension of their personal and professional identities was focused upon their interaction and relationships with students, with fellow teachers and staff members at their schools, with both African American and White communities, and with educational systems and organizations. Discussion by the teachers regarding the global dimension of their personal and professional identities included their experience of a sense of mission, of calling, and of commitment to their teaching. Additional aspects of the global dimension expressed by the teachers included the role of caring and love in their experiences of teaching, and a sense of spirituality in their personal identities that was reflected in their experiences of teacher worklife.

The following exchange with Carolyn clearly illustrates the three dimensions of personal and professional identity. Carolyn \(^1\) herself begins the discussion within the dimension of self. Indeed, throughout the interviews the teachers consistently framed their responses beginning with the dimension of the self and then linked the dialogue with the interactive or global dimensions. In her response, Carolyn also typified how the teachers navigate seamlessly between the three dimensions in their worklives and the internal construction of personal and professional identity. For purposes of clarity, the various dimensions of personal and professional identity have been labeled.

\(^1\) Each participant in this study is assigned a pseudonym in alignment with the conditions of confidentiality as outlined in the agreement entered into between researcher and participant at the beginning of the interview process (see Appendix C)
Kris: Carolyn, as a teacher, what kind of incentives have motivated you? Have financial incentives been important to you as a teacher?

Carolyn: [laughter] Not! [laughter] There were really none. I was just always the child that had the dolls and the teddy bears and I would be there teaching to them. And, I just knew that I wanted to be a teacher. I just always wanted to work in the classroom. Again, I thought I was going to save the world. [dimension of self] But, once I realized that there were some kids that just weren’t going to let me save the world, [laughter] I also came to the notion that, "I’m just going to help every child to be the best that they can be." [interactive dimension] And, that, in and of itself, was the reward. [dimension of self] That was when I saw that light bulb come on, then I knew I was doing what I was supposed to be in education doing, that teaching was God’s calling on my life, to be a teacher. [global dimension] ..I don’t think that I was the brightest person. I don’t think that I had the most to offer, or the most talent, or whatever [dimension of self], it’s just that I was always able to get people to see the good in themselves, and to tap into what made them feel good about themselves. [interactive dimension]

Thus, the analysis of data begins with a discussion of the dimension of the self, as revealed by the participants during the interviews. It then radiates outward towards discussion and analysis of the interactive and global dimensions of personal and professional identity.
The experience of African Americans in the United States has historically been linked to the notion of race. Assumptions and beliefs held by many persons within the dominant White culture based upon race have led to the institution of slavery, rejection of African Americans by American society following the Civil War, and the subsequent aftermath of historical discrimination and segregation towards African Americans (Eyerman, 2001). These experiences, built inexorably on the foundation of one’s race, have deeply affected the collective and individual selves of African Americans. Thus, in large measure, the notion of one’s race and its consequences in American society serve as guidepost and cornerstone in the search for identity and a sense of self, within both the collective and the individual experience of African Americans (Allen, 2001; Berry & Blassingame, 1982, cited in Boamah-Wiafe, 1990; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001).

Interview data from the African American teachers who served as participants in this study were consistently reflective of the preeminence of one’s race in the formation of the self. During a response to a question focused upon her image of herself as an African American person and as a teacher, Laverne remarked,

This is a White world. . . . So, with that thought in mind, even though we say that we erase all that, you cannot erase who you are. You cannot
erase your life experiences.

With other participants, Laverne identified a major component in her life experience—a perpetual awareness of the importance of one’s race in the construction of one’s identity. Similarly, as part of her response in assessing her self-image as an African American, Ethel asserted,

I'm not trying to be Caucasian. Because, I know that I never could be. All I've got to do is look in the mirror. When I was born, I was African American. I'm going to be African American until I die. . . . I'm not one of these African Americans who say, “Lord, when I come back, I want to be Caucasian.”

In her response, Ethel alluded to two components within the African American dimension of self. First, she again emphasized the preeminent, persistent, and lifelong awareness within African Americans regarding the notion of one’s race. Second, in her remarks about not being an African American who wants to come back as a Caucasian, she appeared to tap into the problematic nature of the relationship between African Americans and the larger American culture (Allen, 2001; DuBois, 1903). In her remarks, Ethel clearly affirmed her belief that there are African Americans who, if it were possible, would desire to experience life in American society and culture as a White person. A logical question flowing from Ethel’s assertion, assuming that she is correct and that there are African Americans who would wish to experience life as a White person, is why? Why would an African American wish to experience life as a White person in American society?
Literature in the area of the African American self-concept indicates that African Americans tend to have relatively high levels of self-esteem, at least as high as White Americans (Porter & Washington, 1989, cited in Allen, 2001). Thus, it would seem unlikely that any belief in African American self-hatred formed a basis for Ethel's remark, especially since she referenced no such belief. It is more likely that Ethel is referring to a generalized belief among African Americans as to the privilege and status afforded White persons in American society (Allen, 2001). The privileges and status afforded to White persons linked to the notion of race are so ingrained and embedded within individual White Americans and American society at large as to be routinely "invisible" to White persons, to the extent that many White persons "do not consciously think about the profound effect that being White has on their everyday lives" (Martin et. al, 1999, cited in Allen, 2001, p. 51). "Whiteness" (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 17) has been identified as "an unmarked category against which difference is constructed; Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 23).

Thus, to acknowledge the documented presence within American society of White privilege and status, as Ethel has asserted, life as a White person may very well seem a road more easily and profitably traveled to at least some African Americans. The number of African Americans who would privately declare that "when I come back, I want to be Caucasian " is strictly a matter of conjecture. However, Ethel's assertion is indeed reflective of the historically conflicted nature
of the relationship between African Americans and the dominant White culture, particularly as evidenced in the construction of the individual and collective African American self (Allen, 2001; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001).

Reflecting on the ways in which her experience as an African American had affected her experience as a teacher, Lorraine seemed to emphasize, again, the importance of her race within the construct of self.

It affected me in a positive way...in that...I never forgot what color I was, my race, I never forgot that.

While reinforcing the notion of the importance of race in the lives of African Americans, Lorraine also pointed out that race played a positive role in her experience of teaching. Along with Lorraine, other teachers commented on the positive role of race in the life and teaching experience of African Americans. For instance, later in her interview, Lorraine described the role that race played in bonding with her students, particularly her African American students. She described,

Kids who don't want to go home. You know, after rehearsal, they're [African American students] still there. As long as I was there, they were there. [African American] parents perfectly satisfied, because they knew that they were with [me].

While the teachers consistently commented on the positive aspects of bonding with their African American students on the basis of race, the notion of race was only one source of linkage between these teachers and their students. The teachers often described their bonding with African American students
based on the notion of race as only one component of an overall sense of relationship and bonding that they experienced with their students based on the totality of their life experience. For example, in the following discussion Carolyn touched on the holistic nature of the bonding between herself and her African American students.

See, I was raised in a housing project...and I could tell where these kids were coming from... I knew about the situation of being poor and not having some of the things that the other children had. But, a lot of our [African American] kids, they look to you to understand... One of the little guys at my school was invited by one of the ladies at my church, and, he was just so excited to see me. And, he came up, and he's like, "Oh, Mrs. [Carolyn]." So, at school now, he comes up and he hugs me. [He says], "I'll see you at church Sunday." And, so, he feels good about that, knowing that he can touch me in another place outside of school.

In this discussion, Carolyn clearly identified race as one source of bonding between herself and her African American students. However, the sense of bonding also encompassed socioeconomic status and its impact on one's life experience and an allusion to the role and importance of the church in African American society. Additionally, Carolyn's comments reflected a sense of connection to the entirety of the African American community, a sense of connection in which race is foundationally important, but not the only component in the connection. The notion of a holistic bonding between African American
teachers and their students, encompassing race and a variety of components, was commonly expressed by the teachers during the interviews.

Statements such as these are indicative and reflective of the notion of one’s race as an overwhelmingly preeminent construct within the life experience of African Americans. For African Americans, race is an aspect of their inner and outer lives that serves both as cornerstone and primary filter of the experience of life (Allen, 2001; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001).

The experience of African Americans is a singularly unique experience within American society and culture. The literature in the field points to a depiction of the African American experience as one born in institutionalized captivity and slavery, followed by historically institutionalized and informally sanctioned racism and discrimination which continues into the present day. As a result, the development of the notion of race within both the collective and individual self of African Americans has tracked differently from other groups within American society, including the White population (Allen, 2001; Eyerman, 2001). Thus, the understanding of the self of African Americans in general, and in this particular group of African American teachers, must logically begin with an examination of the notion of race in the formation of the African American self.

The Role of Collective Memory

Research related to the role of race in the formation of self within African American persons indicates the existence and importance of a “collective memory” within African Americans (Eyerman, 2001, p. 2). Collective memory is linked to racial identity and is based on “recollections of a shared past” with
respect to the historical experience of African Americans in American society and
culture (p.5). The collective memory of the African American experience is
present within the collective and individual self of African Americans. It is
generated by both conscious and subconscious remembrance of and reaction to,
three distinct periods of the African American experience (Allen, 2001; Boamah-
Wiafe, 1990; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001) as described below.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between various components of collective
memory as experienced within the collective and individual African American self.
The construct of collective memory is seen as beginning with the experience of
slavery for African Americans. Hope among African Americans following the Civil
War for a full and complete incorporation into American society and culture was
dashed by widespread rejection of African Americans by the dominant White
culture following the Civil War. The journey for African Americans since the Civil
War has largely consisted of reaction and adjustment to that cultural rejection
Figure 2: The Construction of Collective Memory Within the Collective and Individual African American Self

In order to frame the analysis of data carefully with regard to collective memory, this discussion first examines the origins of the construct itself. Thus, the next sections describe how the literature depicts its development.

*The experience of slavery.* During a period lasting over 300 years, millions of African persons were captured and led into lifetimes of enforced slavery in the southern United States. The advent and perpetuation of that experience produced a “cultural trauma” within the collective and individual
African American self, leading to a “dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric” (Eyerman, 2001, p. 2). Even though an African American person living today may not have personally experienced the institution of slavery, he or she is influenced on the deepest of levels through the “collective memory” of that experience among African Americans (p. 2). Through the collective memory and remembrance of the slave experience, African Americans, in many ways, define themselves as a “race member” (Angelou, 1976, cited in Eyerman, 2001, p. 3).

Raised expectations and rejection by American society: The Civil War period. The cultural trauma within African American society and culture associated with the practice of slavery accelerated and became more acutely permanent following the Civil War and Reconstruction. Many African Americans of that time believed that Emancipation and the end of the Civil War would bring an end to the “caste system” engendered by slavery and would greatly reduce, if not eliminate, race as a basis for individual and collective identity (Eyerman, 2001, p. 24). However, as a result of both formal re-segregation of society in the form of statutory authorization and informal re-segregation via the widespread practice of racism and discrimination, African Americans were largely rejected by American society following reconstruction. This rejection led to the beginning of a rethinking among African Americans vis-a-vis their individual and collective relationship to American society and to the role of race within the individual and collective African American identity (Allen, 2001; Eyerman, 2001).
The journey since the Civil War: African American identity in American society. Following the rejection of African Americans by large segments of the American population following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the African American journey since that time has been characterized by the struggle to define a relationship with the majority American culture. Additionally, African Americans have struggled to define the role of race within the individual and collective African American consciousness. In many ways, the problematic nature of those relationships within individual African Americans and African American culture at large continues to the present day (Berry & Blassingame, 1982; Eyerman, 2001).

An uncertainty exists within African Americans as to their individual and collective relationship to American society, and this uncertainty deeply affects the formation of sense of self and identity within the context of that society. DuBois (1903) classically characterized this uncertainty of the self based on race as a sense of “two-ness.” (p. 3)

This double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others...One ever feels his two-ness--an American, a Negro... Two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3)

In fact, Laverne described this very experience of managing two differing, internalized views of one’s self as an African American through both the White and the Black lens.
Even though people say that they’re not prejudiced, and I love everybody, there’s always a prejudice down there. . . . But, I have always been just who I am and let people know that I am open and receptive. . . . and everybody will get the same treatment. Still knowing deep inside that they’re [White people] still probably scrutinizing. . . . But, I still feel like, yes, I’m under the microscope. Yes, I’m being watched. Yes. . . . They [White people] want to see if I make mistakes, how human am I, how sensitive am I, how tough am I. . . . I feel like I’m being scrutinized.

Thus, as in the experience of many African Americans, in order to construct a sense of the self and identity, Laverne and the other teachers involved in this study have had to answer for themselves questions such as: Who am I? Am I African or am I American? Am I neither, or both? What is my place in American society? What is my place in African American society? (Allen, 2001; Berry & Blassingame, 1982; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001).

Collective Memory and the Dimension of the Self

The phenomenon of collective memory among African Americans (Eyerman, 2001), linked to racial identity, appears to be alive and well within the self and the identity of the teachers who served as research participants in this study. As a function of that collective memory, the notion of one’s race serves as background and subtext for virtually every aspect of one’s personal and professional life, as a primary filter for life experiences, and as a cornerstone of one’s personal and professional identity. Thus, the notion of conscious and subconscious collective memory among African Americans, linked to racial
identity and shaped by historical experience (Allen, 2001; Boamah-Wiafe, 1990; DuBois, 1903; Eyerman, 2001), serves as an appropriate and relevant literature screen for discussion of the dimension of self evident within the interview data.

Figure 3 depicts the notion of a uniquely African American collective memory within the self, made manifest in a variety of domains during the interviews. First, the teachers consistently referenced an awareness of one’s self as an African American in historical context, both in the context of responding to questions directly related to matters of race and in apparently unrelated discussions. Secondly, several participants spoke of a connection with their roots, particularly in terms of their personal educational experiences and their community life as children growing up in segregated communities. Third, a good many responses by the participants came in the form of stories and advice, which they hoped to pass on as a legacy to younger African Americans. Fourth, many participants expressed a deep sense of kinship with their African American students and with the African American community at large. Lastly, virtually every teacher delineated linkages between a sense of personal spirituality and their worklife, a sense of spirituality which grounded their personal and professional identity.
Figure 3: Manifestations of Collective Memory As Revealed in Data Shared by Participants

Collective Memory
Of
African American Teachers

- Historical Context
- Roots
- Spirituality
- Kinship
- Stories

[As Mediator]
The sense of personal spirituality expressed by the teachers was remarkable both in its consistency of appearance in the data and in the routine manner in which the teachers incorporated it into their personal and professional lives. They described a spirituality, which flowed effortlessly among all of the dimensions of personal and professional identity and the various domains of an African American collective memory expressed by the participants. Thus, this spirituality operated as the background context for these interactions. In a sense, a personal spirituality served as a mediator for the teachers as they navigated between the various dimensions of personal and professional identity and manifestations of African American collective memory. For example, in a response by Carolyn concerning one of her former principals, the almost routine manner in which this spirituality flows among the three dimensions of personal and professional identity was shown quite clearly.

He was just the kind of person. . . . Irate parents could come in, complaining about those lockers, and they'd leave out of his office with a lollipop in their mouth or something. . . . I don't know what kind of magic he put on them while they were there, but they would always leave out totally different [interactive dimension]. . . . As I watched him, he really modeled what I thought an administrator ought to be [dimension of the self]. . . . There was just no doubt in my mind that middle school would have been his calling [global dimension]. . . . Just the kind of man that you just knew God put him there to do what he did for those kids and us [global dimension].
A sense of spirituality served to unify the differing dimensions of personal and professional identity included in this response. In this excerpt, Carolyn begins in the interactive dimension of personal and professional identity by describing the principal’s skill at working with concerned parents. Even though the parents would come into the office “irate,” the parents would always “leave out totally different.” As Carolyn began to speak of the principal’s personal characteristics in the context of effective modeling for herself and others, she entered into the dimension of the self. Later in her remarks, as she spoke in a transcendent manner of middle school as this principal’s “calling,” she entered into the global dimension of personal and professional identity. In her own thinking, as Carolyn stated that the principal was at the school due to “God” specifically placing him there, Carolyn was explaining the principal’s skills at interacting with parents, his personal characteristics, and his presence in that particular middle school as part of a transcendent master plan for the children and staff at the school. A sense of personal spirituality had served both as a mediator for Carolyn among the various dimensions of personal and professional identity and as an indispensable tool in Carolyn’s construction of an understanding of her world and worklife.

Carolyn and the other teachers who participated in this study are members of a particular generation of African Americans. They grew up during the segregation of the 1950s, came of age in the context of significant cultural and societal change in the 1960s, and raised families and lived out the majority of their worklives during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. As such, along with the
other members of their generation, they have been exposed to and shaped by particular historical events and the related social and cultural environment in which they lived. Each generation of African Americans, including their generation, must reshape its own representation, vision, and perception of collective memory. The construction of African American collective memory is a fluid and ever-evolving process. The nature, scope, and focus of collective memory can evolve both over the course of many generations and within a generation itself, depending on the confluence of historical, societal, and cultural trends (Eyerman, 2001). Thus, the following analysis does not presume to examine all existing interpretations and manifestations of collective memory, either on the part of the teachers or their generation of African Americans. The analysis merely examines those domains expressed by the participants during the interview process.

Collective Memory: The Awareness of One’s self in Historical Context

A consistent and recurring notion expressed by the teachers throughout the interview process focused upon their awareness of themselves in the context of the singularly unique experience of African Americans in American society and culture (Allen, 2001; Eyerman, 2001). More specifically, they communicated a sense of having plied their craft as teachers and lived their lives as African Americans within the context of a society in which racism has existed and continues to exist as an historically embedded and influential component of American societal fabric (Hilliard, 1995, cited in Allen, 2001).
For instance, Laverne spoke directly to her sense of a fundamental racism among many White persons regarding encounters with African Americans. In her view, racial attitudes and assumptions on the part of many White persons seemed linked to a lack of experience and interaction with African Americans.

There are some White students who may be surprised that there is a Black person who has some reasonable semblance of intelligence. Remember, a lot of times when you see somebody Black coming, a flag goes up. “Oh, my God, this is a violent person.”... But, sometimes you [White people] have a perception, especially if you haven’t been around them a lot, you just believe one thing, and that’s it. I mean, so many rumors have been passed during the years, and [White people] just believe that.

Similarly, Lorraine recalled an experience that occurred shortly after her assignment to a local middle school in Jacksonville. She connected this experience to an ongoing residue of racism and oppression in the playing of the song “Dixie” at a school pep rally.

**Lorraine:** We were the few and the far in-between, the Black teachers, you know that. We were put into that area because we were the answer to their idea of integration. And, I had a teacher say something to me because I wouldn’t stand up when they played “Dixie.”

**Kris:** Now was that the school song or something, or was it just being played?

**Lorraine:** They played it at the assemblies. You were supposed to
stand up. I said, “Oh, no, no, no.” I said, “Well, I’m not going to.”

Then, it got to my ears that I was a militant, a troublemaker, or whatever.

Two important ideas are broached by Lorraine in this excerpt. First, as she spoke of African American teachers being “their [White policymakers] idea of integration,” she alluded to a resentment on the part of African American teachers as to their role as instruments in the effort to desegregate the schools. The resentment of this role, and a decidedly conflicted view towards the desegregation of schools in general, was consistently expressed by the teachers in the interviews. Second, in being branded as a “militant, a troublemaker” for her refusal to stand during the playing of “Dixie,” Lorraine expressed her perception of a general lack of appreciation on the part of White culture for the experience of collective memory among African Americans (Eyerman, 2001). For many African Americans, the playing of “Dixie” is linked through collective memory to a society that enslaved and brutalized generations of African Americans (Eyerman, 2001). In Lorraine’s view, the lack of appreciation on behalf of White administrators and teachers for that experience of collective memory was reflective of an ongoing culture of residual racism.

One effect of African American collective memory and its relationship to an awareness of one’s self in historical context is to have experienced and witnessed degradation of one’s parents at the hands of White persons (Eyerman, 2001). The teachers in this study, most of whom came of age in the 1950s and 1960s in the South, experienced such events. Carolyn recalled an incident as a
young girl when her family attempted to eat at a Florida restaurant in the early 1960s. And, my Dad went to this restaurant, and the man told him that they didn’t serve “Niggers.” It was because of the look on my Dad’s face that I knew it must have been a real bad thing, what he said. And, now that I’m an adult, I figure my Father must have really been embarrassed and not known how to have that said in front of us. And, I remember my Mom saying, “Well, just get back in the car. Don’t say anything.” But...I just remember thinking, and I never even talked to my parents about it, but, I just remember thinking how that must have hurt him to have that said to him in front of us.

The impression from Carolyn was her recollection of the racism associated with the barring of her family from the restaurant. However, it was the look on her Father’s face and the experience of both of her parents having to endure blatant and overt racism in front of her and her siblings that left the deepest impression on her. For Carolyn, this experience may very well have been linked through African American collective memory to a time when children of slaves witnessed the “daily degradation of their parents at the hands of slaveholders” (Eyerman, 2001, p. 2).

One function of the African American collective memory is to tie together past and present experience leading to a focus on the notion of race within the collective and individual identity of African Americans (Eyerman, 2001).
her responses, Ethel discussed the persistence of race and of racism in her experience as an African American person and teacher.

I've seen discrimination, now. I've lived with discrimination, and that is why I have a problem with [African American] kids who refuse to see their learning role, because I know about discrimination, you see? And, growing up in the '50s and '60s, you see, I know about discrimination. And, I've seen it. . . . What I'm saying to you is that you're going to have discrimination. . . . Discrimination is alive and is growing. . . . I've seen discrimination here at [our school], because I know that some of our Caucasian students can get away with some of the things that African American students can't, with a Caucasian teacher, you know?

During the course of this response, Ethel explicitly stated that societal racism and racial discrimination have been ever present in her life experience. However, as did several other teachers during the interviews, she alluded to a partial sense of disconnection between herself and some African American students. This sense of partial disconnection centered upon African American students' lack of interest in internalizing a full and robust sense of the African American collective memory. Her comment as to "[African American] kids who refuse to see their learning role" expressed her belief that a greater sense of the African American collective memory among this generation of African American students would lead to greater commitment on their part to educational endeavors. Ethel, and many of the other teachers, grew up in a time when African Americans were denied equity and access in virtually all areas and
arenas of the American educational enterprise. At times during the interviews, they appeared mystified by an apparent lack of interest in education on the part of some African American students. The teachers expressed concern at various points in the interviews that present-day African American students do not see how education can help to overcome the negative consequences of race. However, this partial sense of disconnection expressed by Ethel and the other teachers could be at least somewhat generational in nature, as each generation of African Americans reshapes a vision and experience of the African American collective memory unique unto itself (Eyerman, 2001).

One of the participants, Terri, was a member of a historically prominent African American family in Jacksonville who have been noted for their contribution to the education of African Americans and the development of African American culture in the city. Her remembrance of her grandfather and early childhood in Jacksonville in the 1920s and 1930s harkened back to facets of the African American experience of that time, particularly in the areas of racial identity, segregation, and White resistance to the education of African Americans.

Grandaddy...was a contractor, and a very fair [complexioned] man. You could not tell that he was Black. So, he was able to get a lot of work that would not have gone to a Black contractor. And, he was able to do a lot for educating Black children during his time. In fact, he had the first school bus in Jacksonville, because the Black kids would have to come so far to this little one-room school. And, he would transport them by wagon...
And, a lot of the kids would get hurt. [White] people would throw rocks at them. They'd do all kinds of things to keep them from getting an education at that time. . . . And, when you grow up with a history of fighting to get the Black children, our children, educated, it becomes a part of you.

Later in her interview, Terri linked her childhood memories of the importance of education for African Americans, in spite of White resistance, with her own experience as she pursued an education degree later in her life.

When I went to UNF. . . I had instructors sitting in there and telling us that if you went to a Black institution, or if you had gone to a Black high school. . . you were surely going to fail. . . . Now, here you’ve got an older person who was out of high school many, many moons ago. [laughter] So, where is that putting me? . . . I mean, it was like that determination. “You told me I was going to fail. You gave me a double-whammy. I went to a Black institution, and I’ve been out of high school a long time. And, you told me, automatically, I’m going to fail your class. Buddy, I’m going to show you that I’m not.” But, see, that’s because it had been instilled in me all throughout my life.

As Terri spoke during this part of her interview and recalled these experiences, the lines of linkage and connection with the African American collective memory became clearly visible. As Terri recalled the experiences of her childhood in her family’s struggle to aid in the education of African American children and in her own experiences later in life, one could clearly sense the
"recollections of a shared past" within Terri and other African Americans as to the historical resistance by the majority White society to the education of African Americans (Eyerman, 2001, p. 5). For Terri, rocks thrown at school buses, one‐room schools, and a professor’s disdain for historically African American colleges and universities are all components of the African American collective memory with regards to the educational opportunities historically afforded African American persons in American society (Eyerman, 2001).

Similarly, Carolyn described the skepticism among her White teaching colleagues regarding the educational experiences provided by historically African American colleges and universities.

Even in the field of teachers themselves, you’ve been told that you’ve got to work harder because you’re African American, and that you’re going to be inferior. . . . I went to Florida A & M, it’s like “Oh, the other school in Tallahassee.” You know, its perceived [by White teachers] that it has to be an inferior school, because it’s the Black school, and because the other school is Florida State, and everybody knows Florida State. And, so I found African American people that were afraid to say that they had gone to an African American school. . . . So, after I got my Master’s from Nova, or did classes at JU or UNF, that was almost seen as, “Oh, now you’re more accepted [by White teachers], because you’ve been to White schools now, and you’ve been successful there, too, so, now you’re OK.” . . . And, I’ve heard comments from my Caucasian colleagues about, “Well, why didn’t you go to Florida State?” . . . It had nothing to do with
evading the White schools, it was just that I chose to go to that school.

In this excerpt, Carolyn clearly linked the attitude of some of her White teaching colleagues towards African American colleges and universities to a larger, more encompassing racism existing within a segment of the White teaching population. Without exception, each of the teachers in this study alluded, in one form or another, to their perception of fundamentally racist attitudes on the part of a significant number of White teachers. For Carolyn and the other teachers in this study, a wall between the society at large and the school does not exist. The racism embedded within the fabric of American society (Hilliard, 1995, cited in Allen, 2001) finds its way into the school setting in a variety of manifestations, including racism on the part of at least some White teachers. Osler (1997) found that the racism that teachers of color experienced in their youth, both structurally and individually, reflected a "similar and continuing pattern in their professional lives" (p. 189). The notion of racism among White teachers, as experienced by the teachers in this study, will be further examined later in this chapter as part of the interactive dimension of the teachers' personal and professional identity.

Many of the teachers in this study attended segregated African American elementary, middle, and high schools during the 1950s and 1960s and went on to begin their teaching careers in segregated schools. As such, they often described a separate, but very unequal, educational experience from their White contemporaries, beginning with physical facilities and equipment. As Gloria described,
Going back to when I was in school, we always had the old desks with knife markings all over them. I didn’t see a new desk until I got to Miami Northwestern, where I finished high school. The books were always written in. You never got new books. And, we had to cover those. Take them home and cover them. When I started teaching [in a segregated school], we didn’t get supplies. We didn’t get crayons. At one point, we used ... and I remember this so vividly. ... we used the newsprint. We would cut the newsprint to the size of 8½ X 11 and run it through the ditto thing, which you cranked. And, that was in 1964. ... In the inner city, we would turn paper over and use both sides. We didn’t have hardly any paper.

The teachers also expressed an awareness, both as children in segregated schools and as adult educators, of a historical inequality in terms of materials and physical facilities between predominately White and African American schools. As James recalled from his childhood, “We always heard that. You always heard that the schools on the other side of town were a lot better. ... They may get ... more things, and I noticed the difference.” As a child, Ethel also remembered that “they [White schools] were getting more than we were getting. ... And, we were ever aware of that.” As an adult educator, Carolyn described her deeply-held belief as to the inequities between predominately White and predominately African American schools.
A lot of things are done in some schools across town that aren’t being done in many of our [African American] schools. . . . There are discrepancies. . . . Across the board, there’s something happening, where there’s some really bright people that know these budgets very well, and know how to hide money or whatever, and it hurts across the board.

Beliefs, thoughts, and feelings such as these expressed by James, Ethel, and Carolyn are in keeping with the notion that, historically, the education of African American children and the work of African American teachers have occurred in a society largely apathetic about, or at times openly hostile to, the quality education of persons of color (Perkins, 1989). While a great number of African Americans, such as the teachers in this study, continue to work and hope for a truly equitable education for children of color, many African American children continue to experience a “substandard and alienating” education (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 143). Indeed, for many African American students, school is not an experience that promotes overcoming their handicaps and sense of stigmatization, but a place where those experiences are perpetuated and confirmed. . . . Overcrowded classrooms, crumbling buildings, sometimes even an absence of textbooks . . . convey to students what society thinks of them and their prospects. (Wachtel, 1999, p. 271)

During the course of the interviews, many of the teachers recounted a related arc of personal experience regarding integration and desegregation. As previously described, their stories would normally begin with their personal
educational experiences within the context of a segregated, inequitable environment for African American and White children. Then, as young teachers in the late 1960s and 1970s, they experienced the beginnings of the desegregation of the schools in the South and the transfer of African American and White teachers among schools as remedies for staff segregation. And, finally, at this point in their careers, they were left pondering the effects of desegregation on themselves and on their students. Gloria’s experience was a typical one for many of the teachers.

When I came up, I walked four miles past the [White] school, right behind my house, to go to my school, cold, sleet, rain, whatever. And, when I got to my school, you know, it was not up to par with what they [the White students] had. When I started teaching, it was still segregated. And, we always said, even when they started integration, they pulled our best teachers, our best Black teachers, and sent them to the White schools. And, it was like some kind of badge of honor, to be chosen to go. . . . You were the cream of the crop. But, when integration, full integration, came about, we found out that they [White teachers] didn’t know as much as we [African American teachers] did. Simply because they didn’t have to dig down. We had to dig. We had to improvise. We had to do whatever we could to teach the kids. . . . It was just a difference. And, that’s caused a whole lot of problems in educating the Black child.

Gloria’s comments are reflective of an ongoing and historical debate within the African American community with regard to the effectiveness and wisdom of
the desegregation of schools as contrasted to separate schooling for African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Her reference to “a whole lot of problems in educating the Black child” conjures up the record of performance for African American students in integrated settings, which is decidedly mixed. While there has been marginal improvement in standardized test scores for African American students since desegregation, data indicate that the academic performance of African American students in integrated environments tends consistently to lag behind the performance of White students.

Additionally, Gloria’s concerns with regard to the effectiveness of White teachers in working with African American students were shared by several other teachers. Indeed, in order to be successful and effective with African American students, White teachers must be willing and able to become fully engaged, skilled, and immersed in the practice of “culturally relevant” teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 42). Gloria referred to this method of teaching as “dig[ging] down... to do whatever we could to teach the kids.” Many of the other teachers in the study shared Gloria’s skepticism as to the internal motivation of many White teachers to engage fully with African American students. As she said, “When integration, full integration, came about, we found out that they [White teachers] didn’t know as much as we [African American teachers] did.”

In the end, for these teachers, the phenomena of race, racism, and the uncertainty of their relationship with the dominant White culture in American society formed the background music for their lives. At times, the music played loudly for them, as when Gloria described her perception of a “plantation
mentality” among many of her White teaching colleagues. At other times, the music played more softly, as when Laverne remarked in an almost off-handed and oblique way that her African American students would still have looked at her “as a person who always had the upper hand anyway,” if she had been born White. But, the music of race is always there, ever present in their lives and in their experiences.

Collective Memory: Roots and the Connection with Family and Community

Many of the teachers who participated in this study grew up as children in segregated African American communities, with 7 of the 10 teachers having lived in segregated African American communities in Jacksonville. In addition, many of the teachers, as adults, continued to live in the African American community, with several teachers living within the area served by the school at which they taught at the time of the interview. As described by the teachers themselves, this commonality of experience influenced their teaching in two distinct areas. First, the teachers seemed to use their experience as children in relating to the children, especially the African American children, whom they taught. In many ways, they saw themselves and their experiences as children reflected in the young African American children they taught, who often lived the same neighborhoods they had lived in as children. Secondly, the teachers seemed to use their own experiences growing up in framing their relationships as teachers with African American parents and with the African American community. Many of the teachers could and did trace a deeply-felt sense of connection and roots
between their childhood experiences and their work as teachers now serving parents in the same African American communities in which they grew up.

For the teachers in this study, the often fond and nostalgic remembrance and memories of their early family lives, and of the communities which nurtured them as children held a special sense of intimacy and meaning. The participants shaped and constructed this domain of African American collective memory into three major areas of discussion. First, many of them recalled their early family life and the African American communities in which they lived as children. Secondly, the teachers spoke of the role played by various African American mentors in their lives during their childhood experience. Lastly, they detailed their perceptions of a breakdown in the cohesion of the African American family and community and factors underlying that breakdown.

Throughout history, the African American family has held a singular place of importance, relevance, and meaning in African American society and culture as a whole and in the lives of individual African Americans (Thompson, 2001). The African American family has been a particularly resilient and influential institution throughout the experience and trauma of slavery, the era of statutory and de jure segregation, and the evolution and diversification of the African American family during the latter part of the 20th century.

During the course of the interviews, many of the teachers recalled a very structured, stable, and loving family life as children. Typical of this type of response was Laverne’s description of her home and family life as a child.
I grew up in a very structured, loving environment. My father was a minister, so you know how preachers' kids grow up. And, my Mother never worked. So, you know, when you hear people talk about how when the babysitter was here, we had a chance to cut up? We never had that opportunity, because my Mother was always home. [laughter] And, we knew when my Father came home, it was time for dinner. So, when the call came, I had three siblings, we ran to the table, we had assigned seats at the table. When dinner was over, we knew automatically what to do. “May I be excused, please?” We got up from the table, and we were like little soldiers. We knew what our chores were to do for that night. And, I thought that everybody grew up like that. I mean, the family vacation, just something like the Brady Bunch, the stuff you see on TV, is how I grew up.

Laverne’s description of her family life in an African American family living in a segregated African American community runs contrary to widely-held beliefs in American society as to the structure and stability of African American families (Thompson, 2001). Indeed, stereotypes exist regarding African American families that assume a level of familial dysfunction as a result of the trauma of slavery and the subsequent difficulties experienced by African Americans since that time (Thompson, 2001). On the contrary, during this excerpt, Terri spoke movingly of her experience of family life as a child and of the continuing importance of the family in her life experience.

When I grew up, family was the centerpoint. . . . My sister and I laugh now, we thought we were wealthy. [laughter] We didn’t see how hard [our
Mother] was working to provide for us what we had. But, she was always there for us. We were never home alone. . . . We would go out to the Little Theater in San Marco, and I was laughing and telling my children how, as a child, I was taken there. . . . I was exposed to concerts and plays, and those kinds of things. . . . You don’t let the family down. You are who you are and we love you for who you are, mistakes and all. . . . You love, you have unconditional love.

Comments such as Terri’s are reflective of a texture and depth to African American families, both the families experienced by these teachers as children and their own current families, that indeed run contrary to the aforementioned stereotypical conceptualizations of African American families (Thompson, 2001). During her discussion of family life, Terri also alluded to the importance of the extended family in African American culture and society.

And, whenever there are problems, the family is there. And, extensions of the family. . . . [My sister-in-law’s] children and my children are cousins. And, there’s no greater love than what these cousins have for each other. 

. . . I have a nephew who’s made every mistake there is to make in the book. And, when I talk to him, he says, “Auntie, I don’t let anybody talk to me the way you do.” [laughter] And, I say, “Boy, I used to change your diapers. And, I will talk to you any way I want to. And, if you get too grown, you’ll find yourself on the floor.”

The emphasis placed by Terri and other teachers on the importance of the extended family life is reflective of values traceable back to the West African
cultures from which many slaves were captured and brought to America (Thompson, 2001). These cultures placed a priority on the role and importance of the extended family both in the overall stability and function of individual families and in the rearing of children.

The teachers in this study consistently described their experience of a stable and loving family life with a strong, supportive, and nurturing African American community. For example, Carolyn recalled her neighborhood and community:

Everybody in my community was your Momma. [laughter] In my community, we were looked after, by your parents, by the neighborhood. Parents fed you. Parents looked out for you, they chastised you. And, when I say they looked out for you, I mean they could spank you. But, it was just accepted that you had that many "parents" in your neighborhood. . . . I’m talking right around the block, in the project. Miss Ida, or Miss Geraldine, or anybody on that street, could correct you, and you’d better not have anything to say about it. . . . It was a community. . . . At nights, we did our homework. Everyone was expected to do well in school. Everyone attended church. Everyone was in the Scouts or whatever. There were just certain things that were always expected.

In this excerpt, Carolyn described a healthy, functional, and close-knit community, even though the socioeconomic level of the community was likely at a low level, as evidenced by the location being “in the project.” For example, there was a collective and deeply-felt concern for the children of the community,
in that “everybody in my community was your Momma.” A community-wide network of informal sanctioning and disciplining of children existed in the fact that “anybody on that street, could correct you.” The fact that “everyone was expected to do well in school” was reflective of a shared community norm which valued the importance of education.

Of the 10 teachers who participated in this study, nine of them grew up as children in segregated African American communities. Due to the segregative practices in place during the time frame of these teachers’ childhoods, there were literally no other living situations for African Americans. However, as Gloria described, these neighborhoods and communities were intact, socio-economically diverse, supportive, and self-sufficient.

At one time...you couldn’t go to live anywhere you wanted to live. So, you could have a millionaire living right next door to someone who didn’t have anything. Because, even though this person was a millionaire, he couldn’t buy where he wanted to buy, because of his color. So, therefore, in the [African American] community, you had everything you needed. You had your stores. You had your shops. You had your restaurants. You had whatever you needed, because you couldn’t go to another hotel and live. If you came to town, there was one right here in the [African American] community.

Intact, self-sufficient, nurturing, and supportive African American communities such as the ones that Carolyn, Gloria and other teachers detailed during their interviews have been described by West (1993) as one of the
"powerful buffers" that "equip Black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness" (p. 15). Indeed, as a group, the participants in this study uniformly remember their families and their childhood communities, while segregated, as a nurturing, supportive, stable, and orderly world in which to grow up.

For many of the teachers, one aspect of the nurturing and support that they experienced in their community was to come into contact with African American teachers who served as mentors during their childhood and early years in teaching. Lorraine, who from an early age exhibited an unusually gifted singing voice, recalled her experience with an African American teacher who was also her mentor.

The choral director...brought out what I had. She took it from there, and... I competed for the title of Miss Stanton, and won.... I also won the Most Talented in the Senior Class...Most Popular...and, then I was also the President of the Glee Club. Great things began to happen.... To make it easier on my parents, due to their limited education and income...whatever financial shortcomings there were, she was willing to help, she and her husband, were a lot of help, to my parents and to other children's parents. And, I truly believe, that had it not been for her, I would not have received that scholarship...that I did get to go to Bethune-Cookman.... We lived on [her] every word, even when she had interns to come in, the way she guided them, you know? And, it was then that I decided that I
wanted to be like her. Thus, when I finished school, I began my teaching career down in Suwannee County.

Similarly, Pauline recalled that the origin of her decision to undertake a career in teaching was as a result of the mentorship and influence of one of her elementary school teachers. As she explained,

What made me want to teach initially was my sixth grade teacher. . . . She retired either last year or the year before. . . . The way she always took such an interest in you. She would visit with you at home. She just cared so much about you. If you didn’t understand, then she’d go over it and over it again until you did. And, through her, I just developed a love for learning and a love for teaching.

Both Lorraine’s choral director and Pauline’s sixth grade teacher were members of a nurturing, supportive African American community that Lorraine and Pauline and many of the other teachers remembered so clearly and valued so highly from their childhood experience. These mentors were part of a community-wide collective network of support and nurturing for African American children that extended from the home, to the school, to the corner grocery stores and shops, to the church, and to community social events. As Pauline remarked, “I did feel a sense of community [during childhood]. I knew everybody in our community. Everybody knew me.” As children, the teachers in this study experienced consistent and meaningful contact and guidance from African American adults, mentors, and teachers on an ongoing basis in their homes, at school, at church and throughout the community. Remembering this web of
support and nurturing, and the African American adult community members who comprised that web, Pauline said,

Other people did not mind chastising you. You may not have been their child, but there's that old African proverb that, somebody said they don't believe in, but I do [laughter]: "It takes a village to raise a child." And, I think it does.

Pauline and the other teachers in this study experienced that "village" as children growing up in African American communities. It is the experience and memory of that "village" that they remember and recall so vividly and warmly. In many ways, the nurturing, the support, and the African American adults who populated that village shaped and molded them into the people and teachers they later became as adults.

However, without exception, all teachers in this study also followed up their discussion of their childhood experience of African American family and community life with a contrasting discussion of their perception of a serious breakdown and dysfunctionality within many African American communities today. Their concern regarding these phenomena is authentic, abiding, and deeply felt.

The fate of African American children living today in these communities is of particular concern to the teachers in this study. They expressed a belief that the warm, nurturing, and supportive world that they experienced as children is not, by and large, the world that African American children experience today. As Laverne described,
These [African American] kids have a lot of stress in their life. And, are we compassionate? Do we try to understand? Now, grant you, not to the point where we spoil them. . . happy medium here. But, they have a lot of different stressors, they have a lot of different challenges, drugs are just rampant. I mean, drugs were quiet when I was young. If you had a baby out of wedlock, oh my God. Now, the kids come to school. . . . One little girl, we had to send home, because she was pregnant with triplets. . . . So, you know, it's like a different world. . . . They [African American communities] are in bad shape. . . . broken homes, drugs, all kinds of stuff.

According to several of the teachers, one manifestation of dysfunctionality within many African American families and communities is a lack of emphasis placed on the value of learning and education. For example, as Ethel remarked, We just don't tend to have as much community and parental support as we had when I was growing up, you see? With that support, hey, a kid is kind of scared to go wrong. They tend to think that they, you know, have to get up in the morning, go to school. I've never seen so many kids who don't want to go into the classroom to learn. I've never seen so many African American kids who didn't want to go in the classroom, you see? They'll do anything to get out of going into the classroom.

Gloria also placed the current lack of interest in education and in learning in historical context.

I love learning. And, I think everybody should have that. I think about the time in slavery, when it was a crime to teach a Black person to read. And,
now we have [African American] kids around here who won’t read, who won’t pick up a book, who have no sense of history, have no sense of who they are, no sense of where they came from, no sense of where they’re going. And, you learn that through reading. And, I just think it’s sad.

The teachers’ sense of despair was perhaps more acute because many of them continued to live in predominantly African American communities. For example, for most of her life, Bernadine had lived and worked within a two-mile radius of where she was born and grew up; she still lived in that same community. Because of this unique sense of place, her extensive narrative provided much insight into the metamorphosis that her neighborhood and community had experienced over the course of her lifetime.

I grew up about five minutes from where we are [during the interview]. . .

I went to school in this community. I went to elementary school, Old College Park [elementary], they’ve torn the building down, now. It’s right next to Edward Waters [College]. I used to walk out my Mother’s back door right to school. Then, I went to James Weldon Johnson. . .and, then. . .to Stanton. . .and Edward Waters [College] for three years.

Bernadine went on to describe, as had many of the other teachers, a nurturing, supportive, intact, and self-contained African American community based on the stability of family life.

They were beautiful years. I was telling another teacher today, we always taught routine in our family, because we knew when dinner was going to be. It wasn’t like, “You might eat at 6:00, you might eat
at 3:00, you might not eat at all.” [laughter] There were 12 children, and
every one of us finished high school, and eight finished college, three with
Master’s degrees. My Mother did basically day’s work, my Daddy worked
for the Railway Express. . . . That’s the family I came out of. I mean, all of
us who went to college, one gave support and helped the other. . . . When
we were coming up, you didn’t defy the teacher. You didn’t disrespect.
The whole community, we say it takes a whole village to raise a child; well,
during that time, it took the whole village. Because, if you acted up in
the community, after one parent or another parent got hold of you, then,
you were also going to get the same treatment when you got home.
Later in her detailed narrative, Bernadine turned her focus to the
transformation of her African American community over the course of her lifetime.
Things have changed tremendously. And, whether others would take note
or not, they have changed for the worse. . . . There’s a great
disappointment in the discipline and control of Black students. . . . When
we were coming up, it just wasn’t like this. . . . The care for property . . .
In the community, where we used to be concerned about the way it
looked, there’s not as much care in the general outward appearance. . . . I
guess it’s because a lot of the individuals that lived around here during my
time, they died out, they didn’t have anyone of responsibility maybe to
leave things to. . . . All of my brothers finished school. They had little
neighborhood jobs at the grocery store, things of this sort. And, their
friends were basically like that. They either went into the military, or they
got a decent job. They knew they were to work. But, now, you pass the corner, you’ve got 7 or 8 boys hanging up on the corner. You know, young teenagers, they’re not in school, and, some of them past school age, and they won’t work. They don’t contribute anything. And, that’s a concern. . . . These are things that I sit and think about, and I’m real concerned about, because I know, basically, as a race of people, there’s a whole lot to contribute and give. . . . And, so, these are my concerns.

Thus, unanimous agreement existed among the teachers as to the evolution of many African American communities towards a more unstable and dysfunctional state, especially as compared to how they remembered their childhood communities. The teachers also provided three basic explanations for the transformation. First, several teachers noted the harmful, if unintentional, effects of public assistance to African American families in the breakdown of African American communities. As Carolyn explained,

I think the welfare system has had a lot to do with that. They even brag about that. They just sit at home and collect checks or whatever. So many times, they take advantage, and the people over the program don’t really monitor them as they should. A mindset of “you owe me” sets in. Many times, they’ll work maybe part-time at babysitting, or something like that. The expectation is that they won’t be successful, and they usually aren’t. But, there are no real expectations of their behavior by the people over the program. And, I’ve tried in my teaching . . . to try to change the
mind-set of the children, and help the children to understand that you
don't ever want to have to wait on someone to give you something.
That education is your way out.

Secondly, several of the teachers spoke of the high rate of mobility in
African American communities as linked to a general instability within the social
fabric of the community. Pauline explained a connection between the
educational experience and community stability, at least in her experience.

A lot of them [African American parents] are mobile. . . . What do
you call them? . . . They're in transit. I mean, it seems kind of hard to get
a grasp on a feeling of community when you're not sure whether you're
going to be there more than two months. . . . It's difficult for parents to get
a grip on it, and to feel a part, if they're not in an area for at least a year. . .
.to get to know the Principal and the school activities, and to participate,
and to know the teachers.

However, a third and primary rationale for instability and dysfunctionality
within many African American communities today is a creeping, steady drift
towards materialism and consumerism. While recognizing that this African
American focus on materialism existed within the context of a larger and wider-
ranging American societal consumerism, the teachers nonetheless cited this
sense of materialism as the root cause of the problems they saw in many African
American communities. West (1993) has noted that this sense of materialism,
fostered by "corporate market institutions" (p. 16), has had an enormously
detrimental effect upon the fabric of African American family and community life.
Like all Americans, African Americans are influenced greatly by the images of comfort, convenience, machismo, femininity, violence, and sexual stimulation that bombard consumers. These seductive images contribute to the predominance of the market-inspired way of life over all others and thereby edge out non-market values--love, care, service to others--handed down by preceding generations. (p. 17)

The teachers in this study certainly sensed a connection between the high level of materialism and consumerism embedded within the African American community today and a lack of cohesion and community structure. For instance, Terry noted a link between the level of materialism within the African American community, the amount of time and energy required to achieve that level of material comfort, and a subsequent lack of appropriate supervision and nurturance of African American children.

Our Black world has become very materialistic. And, even though they are not in the ghetto, per se, but they're in a nicer neighborhood, it's not stopping the children from becoming problem children. Because the parents are not there. Momma and Daddy are so busy paying for this house, and buying computers, and buying these fancy bikes and all this kind of stuff, that they are not giving the nurturing that those children need. You have so many people who are so busy, so busy making a living. . . . They are two and three-car families, but the kids...they're into trouble. And, it's because our African American values have changed.
In some of her remarks on the subject, Gloria compared and contrasted the material expectations of her youth in an African American community with children growing up today in African American communities, especially in light of today’s increased access to technology and information.

First of all, when I was coming up, we barely had a radio. And, when we got the radio show, a lot of static would be coming on, and we went to the movies once on Saturdays. Now, these [African American] kids get on the internet and go all the way around the world. I mean, it’s different. Technology has changed everything. The children, they are demanding more. We didn’t demand anything when we were coming up. . . . They think they should have new cars. . . . I do know that the values are so different. You know, we were so thankful. I was the first one in my immediate family to finish college. And, that was a big deal.

Individually and collectively, the participants clearly felt that the intact, stable, and nurturing African American communities that they remembered from their childhoods have changed and evolved dramatically. The dialogue during the interview process clearly indicated that they perceived African American communities of today as far less stable, far less intact, and far less nurturing to children than the communities of their childhoods. As Gloria remarked, “I don’t think we have the same neighborhoods. . . . They’re all dying out.”

The teachers consistently pointed to their desire for a return to the values, traditions, structures, and community interactions commonplace in their childhood African American communities. They expressed their belief that, by
returning to many of these values and community structures, what they viewed as a damaged family and community life could eventually be repaired and restored.

The participants particularly hoped that members of African American communities would expand their scope of personal responsibility, caring, concern, and commitment beyond their individual lives and needs. Indeed, they believed that African Americans need to participate in a collective, community-wide sharing of responsibility to enhance the well-being of the children and of other adults. In essence, the teachers believed that African Americans today need to become more like the members of the African American communities that these teachers remember, to accept the notion that one’s own priorities and concerns in life are inevitably linked to the common good and to the future of the “village,” and to act in alignment with that belief as members of the community.

West (1993) identified an important ingredient for the reformation of African American communities so that they might once again become the nurturing and stable worlds remembered by the teachers in this study. He described a “politics of conversion...a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle” (p. 18). At the heart of the politics of conversion, according to West, is “an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of the politics of conversion” (1993, p. 19).

Terri related a story about a student named Teddy. This account eloquently demonstrates how the life stories of teachers, the communities where
they teach, and the experiences of children in school are inextricably linked.

Here is a story of love and concern for others and the transmitting of that sense of love and concern for others to younger generations of African Americans. It clearly communicates what these teachers saw as being commonplace elements within the communities of their childhoods.

This was a Kindergartner. At five, he had such an animosity towards life. And, it took me a good six weeks, I know, to get Teddy to say, “thank you.” He was being reared by a Grandmama. . . . Didn't know where Momma was. . . . Daddy was in jail. . . . There was one day, and I know we were well into the school year, he’d brought this book up and laid up against me. Well, for Teddy to touch you, that was something. And, I said, “Teddy, do you want me to read that to you?” And, he grunted and nodded his head. . . . And, when I finished, he said, “Thank you.” And, the biggest grin came on his face. And, I just hugged him. . . . But, just, love. . . . I had come from work one day, and this young man pulls into my neighbor’s parking space, and jumps out of his car and yells, “Miss Terri!” And, I turned and looked at him, and I recognized him. . . . And, I said, “Teddy, you still remember me?!” “Oh, yes, Miss Terri, yes.” He said, “You taught me how to love.” . . . And, he told me that he was now a father. And, that, because of me, I taught him how to love. He didn’t say I taught him how to read. He didn’t say I taught him his alphabet. . . . You see, a teacher teaches more than just academic skills. . . . You teach a child how to love. . . . But, to have one come up and say, “You taught me
how to love.” Oh! That’s the greatest tribute I can say for my 30 years in the school system.

*Collective Memory: The Role and Importance of Story and Legacy*

The art of storytelling has traditionally held an important and valued place within the cultural structure of African societies. The notion of story and the life lessons illustrated through stories remained deeply ingrained within African Americans throughout the experience of the Middle Passage and subsequent disbursement among thousands of plantations and farms throughout the South during slavery (Gates, 1989). Indeed, the role of storytelling remained a constant in helping African Americans interpret “the nature of our world to ourselves...in our own voices and on our own terms” throughout the experience of slavery and the subsequent evolution of a truly African American culture (p. 17). The notion of story as a useful, effective, and meaningful means of communication within African American society and culture has remained to this day.

For the teachers in this study and for other African Americans, the use of story as a tool of communication is simultaneously both a meaningful and commonplace experience. As Gates (1989) described the place of story in African American society and culture,

the stories that we tell ourselves and our children function to order our world, serving to create both a foundation upon which each of us constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each event that confronts us every day. (p. 17)
In many ways, the interview sessions with the teachers became the story of their working lives as teachers and the sense of personal and professional meaning that flowed from those life experiences. As they touched upon and discussed specific elements of their life experiences, they often did so in the form of stories. Stories related to race, gender, interaction with students and the community, the perils and promises of desegregation and integration, and many other topics became short stories told within the larger story of their working lives as teachers and of their personal and professional identities.

Moreover, the teachers in this study engaged in purposeful storytelling. In the tradition of African and African American storytelling (Gates, 1989), their stories were told to convey meaning and specific information about their life experiences. The teachers used the stories of their personal experience for two purposes. First, they used them as vehicles to convey perceived truths regarding a variety of topics associated with teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. The teachers’ stories added layers of meaning and contextualization to the topic of discussion beyond straightforward conversation and dialogue. Secondly, their stories helped foster a record and a legacy of their experience in teaching for themselves, for the interviewer, and particularly for African Americans, both older and younger, who may come into contact with the stories of their experience. Indeed, several stories told by the teachers included references to the importance of a legacy handed down to future generations of African Americans as an important component of their teaching experience.
Through stories, the teachers frequently explored and shared their views on issues of importance to them in their experiences of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. For example, a primary and recurring issue discussed by the teachers throughout the interviews was their experience of a fundamental, ongoing racism embedded within the structure of American society both outside and inside of schools. Through a story, Laverne recalled her earliest awareness of this phenomenon.

My elementary school was predominantly Black, and my junior high and senior high were predominantly Jewish. . . . In fact, I can remember when I was in school and they had the Jewish holidays, there were like three kids in the class, and they still wouldn't close the school [laughter]. . . . I knew they [White students] had better schools. . . . They had been exposed to more. That was my first taste of, "Oh, there's a difference in the school system." Because, we supposedly had gone through the same stuff, and I know all these parents didn't do all this. . . . I'll never forget Susan in my chemistry class, Susan Rice. She got a good report card. I got a couple of dollars, she got a new car. You know! [laughter]. . . . I felt like I was always playing catch-up.

Embedded within Laverne's story, amid the discussion of Jewish holidays and her friend Susan, lies a distinct awareness on her part of disparities in educational opportunity based on race. Laverne's method of compensation for that disparity was revealed in her comment, "I felt like I was always playing catch-
up.” As she progressed with her story, the theme of having to play “catch-up” continued.

I’m always competitive. Oh, listen, if they [White persons] can do it. . . . Hey, look, you’re not leaving me in the dust. . . . Even during my first year [of college], when I went to community college, I had three White roommates, and the first semester, they all made the Dean’s list. So, I had to make the Dean’s list. . . . They [Whites] helped your drive, because if you had that competitive spirit, and you saw that someone else could do it, it’s like, “They’re no smarter than I am; I can do it, too.” So, they [White persons] helped motivate me.

Carolyn told a story that depicted how her different lives, as a teacher, as a citizen, as a human being, and as an African American woman were deeply interrelated on many levels. For Carolyn, the connecting tissue that joined all of those lives into one mosaic was the notion of a fundamental and embedded racism within American society towards African American persons. In recalling her experience on a jury, Carolyn focused upon her perceptions of racism and stereotyping among White jury members.

I sat on a Federal court case as a jury member, where myself and another Black man were the only two Black people on the jury. And, these people were ready to convict this guy, simply because he was Black, I know. And, the judge was very emphatic about saying that we needed to make sure that all of the evidence pointed to this guy. They had evidence on all of the other people. They caught them selling drugs. They caught them
on videotape. They caught them on audiotape. . . . But, this [African American] guy . . . was never caught on tape doing anything. He was never even seen talking to people. He would not allow any drugs on his person. The only thing they found on his person was $700 cash. And, they [White jurors] were ready to convict him because of the amount of money that was found on him. I said, “Ya’ll. At any given time, I can cash a paycheck and have that amount of money on me. Are you saying that I could be a drug dealer?” [The other juror said,] “But you know he’s the leader” . . . . But, the facts don’t support that. . . . And, I spoke up in that setting, and people had to admit that it was true that there was no way we could convict this guy just because he had cash on him.

In the telling of this story, Carolyn touched upon several of her own perceptions regarding race in our society. First, she is keenly aware of race as a social dynamic as revealed in the fact that she was immediately aware that only two of the jurors, “myself and another Black man” were African American persons in a predominantly White setting. Additionally, she believed that the White persons on the jury, at least in her perception, are willing to engage in racial profiling and stereotyping. To Carolyn, the White jurors easily and quickly come to the conclusion that if an African American male has $700 dollars in his possession, drug distribution could be a likely source of that income. Lastly, Carolyn felt an obligation to resist what she perceived as a rush to judgement on the part of White jurors by speaking up “in that setting.” For Carolyn, the unspoken adjectives in that phrase are “in that [predominantly White] setting.” In
telling this story, as was nearly always the case as the teachers related stories during the interviews, Carolyn was not simply narrating a story in a random, undirected manner. Within the layers of this particular story, Carolyn expressed her views on race in our society, on racial stereotyping and profiling, and the importance to her of resisting such racism and stereotyping.

For many of the teachers, examples of expressions of the fundamental racism embedded within the fabric of American society (Hilliard, 1995, cited in Allen, 2001) were the racial attitudes of many White teachers towards African Americans. A pronounced sense of racism on the part of White teaching colleagues was consistently expressed and detailed during the interviews. Carolyn’s experience as a young teacher in leading a middle school team of teachers was a typical one.

There was a much more experienced White female teacher on our team. But, I had been chosen as the team leader. And, I could tell she had a problem with my age as well as my being African American. She never said it. But, there was always a test. There was always scrutiny in everything I did. And, I’m the kind of person, and I think you know me well enough to know, that I love working with people. It seemed to me that she had gotten to a place in a meeting one day where she was just so negative, until I finally said, “You know, I’ve had it up to here with you. I’ve sought to give you things to do. I’ve sought to even ask your experience in how you would do certain things, and you’ve done nothing but be negative. And, the bottom line is, I’m not putting up with it anymore. Now,
if you have a problem with me, then maybe you need to ask the principal to move you to another team or whatever, but, I've just had it. I'm up to here, and I'm not going to deal with it anymore”... It was sort of like, I just had to let her know, "Don't give me a hard time... I don't need any more aggravation or whatever. And, I just need for you to understand, and I don't want to try to know it all. We need to do this together, as a group.”

When Carolyn stated that her White teammate had a problem with “my being African American,” she clearly expressed her feeling that her White colleague harbored racist attitudes towards African Americans and African American teachers. She also demonstrated how she dealt with these attitudes. Osler (1997) has identified 6 strategies employed by Black educators in responding to the racism they encounter in schools. In the story of confronting her White teaching colleague, Carolyn was engaged in the “challenging” strategy, as she “challenge[d] and test[ed] the existing paradigm” of her colleague’s views on the competency of African American teachers based on race (p. 193).

During the interviews, many of the teachers noted this fundamental racism towards African American teachers and students on the part of White teachers. However, just as quickly, the teachers often took note of and discussed White colleagues who, in their view, were extraordinary in relating to African American students and teachers. For instance, Terri told the story of her relationship with three of her White colleagues.

We were very fortunate on the Kindergarten wing. There were
three Whites and two Blacks. And, the three Whites who were
on the wing, they refused to leave [transfer]. They really got the "bug."
They knew what it was. And, we'd sit in meetings, and we'd talk. We'd all
meet together. We'd talk about the kids, and what we could do. And,
there were times when they could have left and gone to schools nearer to
their homes, and they refused to go, because they felt they were needed
at [our school]. Now, that's a dedicated teacher. I had one very dear
friend. We became as thick as thieves. [laughter] And, it was so funny.
She was there when I got there [at her current school]. And, she said that
her husband had asked her what I was. And, she said, "Bob, I don't
know!" [laughter] She came into my classroom one day, and she said,
"Terri, what in the hell are you?" [laughter] So, I said, "Well, just call me
Heinz 57, you know?" [laughter] But, it got to a point where her husband
asked her to leave [our school] because of the baby. She cried. She did
not want to leave. She was just that dedicated to [our school] and to the
[African American] children. And, all of the other ladies in the
Kindergarten pod were just that way. They are so dedicated to the kids,
helping them to build that foundation, seeing them benefit.

Two ideas were clearly expressed during Terri's story. First, she admired
and respected the dedication and depth of feeling on the part of her White
colleagues towards African American children as evident in the statements, "She
was just that dedicated to [our school] and to the [African American] children" and
that "all of the other ladies in the Kindergarten pod were just that way."
Secondly, it was clear that the friendship and bonding between Terri and one of her White colleagues had reached a level of depth where racial barriers are transcended. This depth of bonding and comfort level were evidenced in the fact that Terri and her White colleague were able to speak of race in a humorous and uninhibited manner in the exchange, “Terri...what in the hell are you? Well, just call me Heinz 57, you know?” Osler (1997) identified the level of comfort, trust, and bonding between Black and White educators detailed by Terri as “transforming...the paradigms” of race and racial divides (p. 193). In effect, Terri and her White teaching colleague engaged in and built “an interdependent vision of human experience” (p. 193).

Through the use of story, the teachers explored and brought meaning to a range of experiences throughout their lives. For instance, many of the teachers attended historically African American universities and colleges. In their view, this experience played a key role in the evolution of their working lives and in the construction of their personal and professional identities. For instance, in her story of attending Bethune-Cookman College as an undergraduate, Lorraine brought forward several components related to that experience.

It never dawned on me to go to a school that might be predominantly White, or anything like that. . . . After my talent [singing] was discovered, the uniqueness of it, was discovered, everything was cut and dried, you know? Hey, this is where she’s going, this is what she’s going to do, and, of course, my parents, along with other children’s parents, you know, you didn’t question decisions. You simply followed suit. So, I never thought
about another school, even though I had an aunt that went through Florida A & M. . . . The fact that it was a church-related school, Bethune-Cookman is a Methodist-owned school, my parents were very religious and strict. The fact that this school was owned by the church, I think, was the nail in the coffin, the rag on the bush, or whatever. . . . I would have chosen a Black school. . . . basically [because] of the closeness. . . . I don't know, I tend to think that in a predominantly Black school there is more of a family atmosphere. . . . a little more family-like caring. And, at Bethune-Cookman, I wasn't sorry one day that I went there. I enjoyed it. . . .

My freshman year was a trying year simply because, you know, what they do to freshmen. . . . We had to wear that stupid little cap, we had to wear. . . . a beanie. . . . And, that little beanie, that had to go on our heads, and they told us that we had to braid our hair. OK, my feelings were, you're not my Mother, and you're not my Father, you're not going to tell me what to do. So, rather than have my hair braided, I walked up the street, Second Avenue, and I found a barber shop. I told them to cut it, cut it off, cut it so short that it can't be braided. . . . So, from then on, I was known as "The Mean Freshman from Jacksonville, Florida, with the Man's Voice."

Through the telling of her story, Lorraine alluded to three components of the experience of attending a historically African American university that were commonly identified by other teachers during the interviews. In describing each component of that experience, Lorraine connected the tradition of African
Americans attending historically African American colleges and universities with the notion of a desired legacy within that experience for younger African Americans. First, Lorraine acknowledged the influence of her family and of the family’s sense of tradition in attending historically African American universities: “Everything was cut and dried, you know? Hey, this is where she’s going, this is what she’s going to do, and of course, my parents, along with other children’s parents, you know, you didn’t question decisions. You simply followed suit.” Secondly, once at Bethune-Cookman, Lorraine found a sense of community and support that continues to the present day. As several of the other teachers remembered of their university experience, Lorraine stated that she “tend[ed] to think that in a predominantly Black school there is more of a family atmosphere...a little more family-like caring.” Thirdly, Lorraine clearly linked the notion and importance of church and religion with her choice of a university education. As Lorraine said, “The fact that it was a church-related school, Bethune-Cookman is a Methodist-owned school, my parents were very religious and strict. The fact that this school was owned by the church, I think, was the nail in the coffin, the rag on the bush, or whatever.”

In the retelling of the “beanie” story, Lorraine offered a slice-of-life and glimpse into her life as a freshman at Bethune-Cookman, while at the same time revealing a part of her personal identity in her refusal to submit to the wearing of the beanie cap. This pattern of traveling her own separate path in her teaching and life experience and remaining true to her own perceived sense of right and
wrong was evident throughout her interview. As she described herself later in the interview,

I was a loner. Even though I was popular. I basically stayed to myself; if you said something to me, fine. If you didn’t, fine. I didn’t initiate conversation or whatever. If somebody wanted to talk with me, or if they saw me walking somewhere, if they said something, otherwise I didn’t. I stayed to myself. I’m still a loner.

In addition to telling personal stories that revealed their perceptions of racism within American society and the experience of attending historically African American institutions, the teachers explored other topics of interest to them through story. For instance, many of their stories were, on some level, related to the impact of gender upon their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. Of the 10 teachers who participated in this study, 9 were women. During the course of the interviews, the female teachers consistently shared stories regarding a teaching style that was holistic in nature with regards to the care and education of students. In their view, this holistic orientation was closely linked to gender. In the telling of a story about a field trip, Alicia touched upon her belief that female educators tend to be more attentive than male educators to the developmental and nurturing needs of children and students.

I remember, we went on a field trip, and we had a female principal at that time, and the bus company was supposed to take us by McDonalds. And
they didn’t, they brought us back to school, and the cafeteria had closed. And, so, the Principal was upset, because the kids were hungry. . . . She was upset, bringing those hungry kids back here. So, she got a School Board truck and went down the street to this eating place and had all the kids to write down what they wanted to order. And, we got the food down there. Now, a male, I don’t know whether . . . you know? And, then, she called the bus company. We lost that bus company that day. They never drove us again. Because . . . she just didn’t like the fact that we brought these kids back hungry. And, I don’t think a male would have taken the time to take all those kids’ orders and, you know, it’s just stuff like that. And, who didn’t have money, she, some kind of way, they got the money from somewhere. And, they ate Maryland’s Fried Chicken all the way up to school. [laughter] So, this is what I’m saying. It’s like the mother comes out in them [African American female educators].

Alicia’s description connected the attentive detail paid to the non-academic needs of the students on this field trip by the principal and other teachers to gender and motherhood. As she herself stated, “It’s like the mother comes out in them,” in referring to the teaching style of African American female educators. Like Alicia, many of the teachers affirmed gender as a primary causal factor in their holistic orientation towards the education of children. Further, Alicia’s story underscores mothering and attention to the developmental and affective needs of children, important components in the fabric of African American culture and society, tracing back to the cultures of Western Africa,
through the period of slavery, and through to present times (Rodgers-Rose, 1980).

As previously stated, the teachers used storytelling for two primary purposes. First, they employed storytelling as a vehicle to convey their perceptions and experiences with regard to a number of topics of interest to them in their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. Secondly, a central purpose behind the storytelling of the teachers was to record their experiences as a legacy for themselves and their work in the larger African American context for future generations. Many of their stories offered insights into the teachers' efforts to foster a specifically African American legacy for their African American students. Other stories described the legacy of their teaching experience which was not specifically African American.

In the following story, Ethel discussed the importance of passing on a particularly African American history and legacy to her students.

I'll give you an example of something, and I guess it might be considered bragging. . . . I'm not bragging. A group of kids got together and did a video, under my supervision, two years ago. These same kids started working with me when they were in 10th grade. . . . So, in their 10th grade year, they did a video, and we submitted it to the county. . . . They won. . . . first place. They went to State. . . . Those kids won first place in the county, first place in the State, and we were off to Maryland. . . . and represented the State of Florida. . . . When we got to
Maryland, we found out we could have gotten us a Tuskegee Airman to interview. We didn’t know that.

The student video project referenced by Ethel focused upon various aspects of the African American historical experience. As part of her students more fully understanding that experience, Ethel clearly stressed the potential importance to her students in meeting with a Tuskegee Airman. As was the case with many of the teachers, Ethel expressed the importance of transmitting a sense of African American history and tradition to her students as an important component of the legacy of her work as a teacher. For Ethel, the opportunity for her students to meet and interview a Tuskegee Airman represented a chance for her students to establish a living connection with a part of their African American history and heritage. As she continued with her story, Ethel drew additional lines of connection between African American traditions, history, and her students and her role in nurturing an increased awareness of their heritage within her African American students as part of her legacy as a teacher.

Our [predominantly African American high school] has a tradition rooted in togetherness. . . . We have so many students whose parents have graduated from here. . . . I’ve seen young people from [our school] go on to be lawyers, doctors, and policeman, and some teachers, ministers, you see? . . . So, [our school] has a tradition rooted in greatness, you know? We’ve got this tradition rooted in greatness. And, so we just have to continue the greatness of this school.
In both parts of her story, Ethel was clearly stressing the importance of her students being aware of African American history. Additionally, Ethel worked at the only historically African American high school in Jacksonville. Her comment “[our school] has a tradition rooted in greatness” and her desire to “continue the greatness of this school” for future African American students indicate both a need to continue that legacy for future generations and her awareness of her role and responsibility in that effort.

In addition to the specific stories told by the teachers regarding their own lives, the teachers also collectively told a larger story, one which characterized the experience of many African Americans over time. Throughout the interviews, the teachers so consistently, forcefully, and eloquently spoke of the importance and value of education in the African American experience, that their descriptions of education for African Americans became, in effect, a story unto itself. For the teachers, educational opportunity for African Americans became a redemptive story of the role that education has played and continues to play in the progress and, ultimately, the societal salvation of African Americans. The teachers were keenly interested in ensuring that African American students have both a sense of the history of the struggle for educational opportunity for African Americans and an internalized notion of the role and importance of education in their future lives.

Characterizing the story of the struggle for educational opportunities for African Americans as “redemptive” and leading to societal “salvation” is in alignment with the emphasis placed on spirituality by the teachers themselves.
For these teachers, a sense of spirituality was an important component woven into the fabric of both their personal and professional identities and their interaction with their students. In this excerpt, James explained how spirituality is a natural part of his experience of teaching and interaction with his students.

My Mother was a praying woman. She read the Bible, and she would always instill in us those things that are God-like. . . . So, the spiritual part evolved in me because of the rearing I had. And, quite naturally, if that's a part of me, it becomes a part of my role as an educator. . . . And, I would answer questions [from the students] sometimes, too. . . . [such as] “Do you believe in God?” And, quite naturally, the majority of those hands. . . . would go up. So, all of the kids would say that they believed in God. Right? And, I would say, [to the students] “I believe in God.” And, I would let them know. I didn’t hide that. I believe in God. . . . But, I did not try to impact somebody, because you could have a Jehovah’s Witness, or a Jewish kid, or something like that. . . . And, I deal with spirituality in the way that I teach, because even though I’m doing a social science, we teach people, for the most part, how civilization evolved, [and] that’s a big part of World History. . . . And, we study religions, different religions . . . Islam, Buddhism. . . . Hopefully, through that study, they can see their own spirituality, and they can understand mine.

In the following story, Terri spoke of her personal experience in the struggle for educational opportunities for African Americans, the redemptive
value of education to African Americans, and the importance of sustaining that legacy for future generations of African Americans. Earlier in this chapter, Terri’s account reflected her awareness of herself within a historical context. Here an expanded version of her history demonstrates both her passion regarding educational opportunity for African Americans and her deeply-felt sense of responsibility to transmit an awareness of that history to her own children and to her African American students.

Grandaddy. . . . was able to do a lot for educating Black children during his time. In fact, he had the first school bus in Jacksonville, because the Black kids would have to come so far to this little one-room school. And, he would transport them by wagon. . . . A lot of the kids would get hurt. [White] people would throw rocks at them. . . . I remember, even after Grandaddy died, we were over in an area where San Jose Elementary is now. . . . That was our land. And, Grandmother used to have [African American] kids from Greenland [Road] and Bayard and so forth that could not get to high school [from their home]. They would stay at our house all through the week and then go home on the weekend to work in the fields. But, our home was like a. . . well, I can’t say “hotel,” because we didn’t charge any money [laughter]. But, it was like a “live-in school.” And, she would help the young people if they were having problems in their work. . . . And, year-round, just constantly, you can’t help but feel the need. . . . The striving to make sure you built that foundation that Grandaddy believed you really needed, and
that the way that Blacks could elevate themselves was through education.

. . . That you worked with your hands, but you educated the mind. . . .

Grandmother was very influential in getting many Black teachers jobs,
when they didn't want to be fair to Black teachers. . . . She was a fighter.
.a very calm, low-key [person]. . . . I used to tell my children the same
thing. And, my children tell me that they hear my words when they open
their mouths. So, this is why. . . the dedication, the hard work, and being
from a family that education was the key to everything.

In her story, Terri traces the involvement of her family in helping to
educate African American students during a time of White resistance to the
notion of educational opportunity for African Americans. Dorsey (2001)
characterized this time and a significant portion of American history as a time
when education was “withheld from African Americans as a means to keep them
under control” (p. 93). In Terri’s view, the hard-won progress in providing access
to educational opportunity reinforces its value as a tool for social progress for
African Americans. As she stated, “the way that Blacks could elevate
themselves was through education. . . . That you worked with your hands, but
you educated the mind.” Later in the story, Terri speaks of learning the
redemptive story of education from her Grandmother and then passing that
legacy on to her children, who “hear my words when they open their mouths.”

Several of the teachers spoke movingly and eloquently of their desire to
instill an awareness of and appreciation for the redemptive story of education for
African Americans within their African American students as part of their legacy.

As Carolyn described her efforts in this area,

And, I've tried in my teaching, because I've worked in a lot of low-income areas, to try to change the mind-set of [African American] children, and help the children to understand that you don't ever want to have to wait on someone to give you something. That education is your way out. And, that your key to the future, and having things that you want in life and feeling good about yourself, and knowing that you're capable of achieving any goal, is that you really want to be able to say, "I can own a home. I can buy cars, or I can feel good about giving back, because someone invested their time in me. And, they helped me to see that education was the great out, and that I could go on and be successful.

Carolyn's comments show her desire to pass on to her African American students the redemptive story of education not only as a value unto itself, but also as a tool for social mobility and entrée into American society (Dorsey, 2001). When Carolyn says to her African American students that "education is your way out," it is implied that education for African Americans is a way out of the lower socioeconomic struggle into the relative prosperity of the American middle class. Additionally, her comment that her students "can feel good about giving back, because someone invested their time in me" indicates her hope that a legacy of the redemptive story of education for African Americans will pass from her, to her students, to future generations of African Americans.
Similarly, Gloria described her own process in understanding anew the importance of education in the lives of African American children and her role in leaving a legacy of educational excellence for those children.

I think, as an African American woman, I have contributed something to the children who came my way. I taught them, the ones I had, I didn’t waste their time. . . . I felt like there was something they needed to know, and I was there, not to get a paycheck, but to teach. And, that first year, I was embarrassed to get my check, and there was a Black principal. And, he would stand behind the desk, and he would hand us the checks. And, I made $500 a month. That’s what I made starting out. It was like $5,000 a year. And, I was embarrassed; I almost didn’t want that check because I wasn’t teaching the children anything. They didn’t learn that first year. But, when I went to this other school, I call it the “teaching school,” and I learned how to teach. And, then I realized how much our [African American] boys and girls needed. . . . I got that from that school, too. . . . the necessity of teaching. I mean, it was more than just a job. It was a calling. This was instilled in me. You have to move these children. You have to bring them up. It was like going back to like a Booker T.

Gloria’s comment that she viewed her teaching, particularly in the case of African American students, as “a calling,” is indicative of an awareness of her place in a process that is longer-lasting and more meaningful than her own experience, a process that transcends her individual career. The struggle for
African Americans to obtain full and uninhibited access to educational opportunities in American society has been a long and arduous one. In many ways, that struggle continues to this day (Dorsey, 2001). Through dialogue and conversation, Gloria and the other teachers revealed a deep awareness of this struggle and of the redemptive story of the importance and value of education for African Americans in American society. Just as importantly to them, they revealed that they hope to pass on the history of the struggle and the redemptive story of educational opportunity to their students as part of their legacy as teachers.

Many of the teachers' stories focused upon issues related to the notions of race and racism and the importance of transmitting a specifically African American legacy to their African American students. However, other stories described aspects of the teachers' personal journeys that were unrelated to the notions of race and legacy. For instance, many of the teachers in this study recalled that their initial desire to enter the field of education came as a result of their youthful interactions with teachers, primarily but not exclusively, African American teachers. An area of concern for many of the teachers was a continuation of the legacy and tradition of African American teachers inspiring young people, primarily but not exclusively African American, to enter the field of teaching. Pauline told a story of one such student, whom she inspired to enter the profession.

I'll tell you about one. Her name was Kim. She was a child I had taught at King's Trail. Her Daddy may have been a chiropractor, or something.
She looked for me, and she found me here [at my current school] last year. And, she said that I had made such an impression on her, that she had gone into teaching. And it was really courageous of her to go into teaching and to get her education, because she had a disability. She was just about finished with her education.

These accounts provide an additional dimension to the data analysis.

Much of the data gathered during the interviews with the teachers came in the form of straightforward dialogue, conversation, and sharing. However, the teachers also, at moments of their discretion, chose to talk about parts of their life experiences through the vehicle of storytelling. For them, storytelling as an aspect of African American collective memory seemed an appropriate path to travel at times in relating and revealing certain parts of their life stories. Indeed, storytelling has remained through time as an indispensable component of African American culture. In describing the importance and value of storytelling for African Americans, Gates (1989) asserted,

> The values that we cherish and wish to preserve, the behavior that we wish to censure, the fears and dread that we can barely confess in ordinary language, the aspirations and goals that we most clearly prize—all of these things are encoded in the stories that each culture invents and preserves for the next generation, stories that, in effect, we live by and through. (p. 17)

Indeed, these teachers have told their stories with eloquence.
Collective Memory: The Power of Kinship

An enduring and powerful sense of kinship has historically existed within and among individual African Americans and collectively throughout the larger African American culture during the entirety of their experience in America (Eyerman, 2001; Wachtel, 1999). For African Americans, this sense of kinship was born and nurtured as a result of two components in their collective history. First, the collective memory of a shared past including slavery, cultural rejection following the Civil War, and a problematic relationship with the majority American society since that time has created a kinship within African Americans with other persons of their race and culture who themselves are inexorably tied to that same shared past (Eyerman, 2001). As James remarked at one point during his interview,

You know, we have racism. We have prejudice. We have those things. And, that’s based on our [African American] historical nature, you know? How African Americans were brought here, and the things they experienced. . . . That “we” experienced, I shouldn’t say “they.” I’m a part of it, my ancestry. The things that “we” experienced.

A second factor which has nurtured the presence of a sense of individual and collective kinship within African Americans has been the singularly unique historical and cultural path African Americans have experienced during their history in America (Eyerman, 2001). Indeed, the genesis for the presence of African Americans in this country, namely slavery, and the difficult journey since
for African Americans in American society, marks the African American experience as a totally unique one in American society, culture, and historical experience. DuBois described African Americans as members of a "vast historic race of separate origin from the rest of America" (1903, cited in Eyerman, 2001, p. 63). In emphasizing the unique cultural and societal experience of African Americans, Barton (2001, cited in Eyerman, 2001) asserted,

As a social construct and concept, race has had a profound influence on the spatial development of the American landscape, creating separate, though sometimes parallel, overlapping or even superimposed cultural landscapes for Black and White Americans.

(p. 9)

Thus, a powerful and abiding sense of kinship among African Americans has been nurtured throughout African American history as the result of the collective memory of a shared past linked to racial identity and the unique quality of the cultural story of the African American experience. Indeed, the kinship felt among African Americans reflects a "solidarity, identification, and a sense of shared fate [that] are pivotally important features of the African American experience" (Wachtel, 1999, p. 172).

The teachers in this study touched upon the notion of a sense of kinship with other African Americans throughout the interviews. For instance, Carolyn recalled her initial arrival in Utah, a predominantly White state, and a resulting loss of contact and kinship with other African American persons.
Initially, when I arrived in Utah, because we [she and her African American family] were so totally in the minority [laughter], I found myself going up to total strangers in the grocery store, if they were African American, and they would look at me very strangely, because I would introduce myself, or whatever, and [I was] thinking that I just had to be in touch with someone Black.

While humorous, Carolyn’s description of “having to be in touch with someone Black” clearly spoke to the depth of Carolyn’s sense of kinship with other African Americans as an important component in her life experience. In another interview, Ethel eloquently described her perception of African Americans as a people and the inclusion of the notion of kinship in that experience.

I love being African American. I’m not one of the African Americans who say, “Lord, when I come back, I want to be Caucasian.”... I love the... kinship, [the] spirit. We’ve [African Americans] got plenty of spirit. [laughter] We’re a spirited people, you see. And, we’re a deeply loving people. We’re a forgiving people. We’re a forgiving people. We are. ... I love that about us. ... I love the fact that we’re a spirited people. I love our history. Anytime you can persevere, when your past has not been the very best, and you persevere, you keep on looking up. ... We’re a people who keep looking up. We keep hoping. We keep dreaming. See, we’re a people who can dream, you see? We’re dreamers. So, I love that about
African Americans. And, we've learned to do with so little, you see? And, that’s what makes me feel good about being African American. And, if I had it to do all over again, I’d want to be African American.

In her comments, Ethel specifically alluded to the "kinship" that she feels with other African Americans. This kinship, according to Ethel, was nurtured throughout a history of perseverance on the part of African Americans. Ethel’s comments regarding African Americans persevering as a people throughout a “past that has not been the very best” and “having learned to do with so little” and being a “deeply loving” and “forgiving people” sprang from the collective memory within Ethel of a shared past and unique historical path with other African American persons. Thus, Ethel felt a strong sense of kinship with other members of the same cultural group whose lives are inexorably linked to that same shared past and experience.

The teachers described their sense of kinship with other African Americans in two ways. First, and most frequently, they expressed the sense of kinship and bonding that they felt with their African American students. Secondly, they detailed a sense of kinship through their students and their schools outwards towards a more encompassing kinship with the larger African American community.

For example, Gloria described a kinship enhanced by a shared commonality of experience between herself and her African American students.

I've been there. I've been snubbed. I've felt hurt and pain.

In the broader spectrum, I came up in a segregated society.
I can feel what the African American children are going through. . . . I can feel sympathy and empathy, much empathy. And, plus, growing up poor. . . . not only just being African American, but growing up poor and wanting things.

In this excerpt, Gloria described her sense of connection and kinship with African American students in the totality of the shared African American experience. She described not only the "hurt and pain" of being "snubbed" by the dominant White society, but also the socioeconomic difficulties faced by African American children in terms of "growing up poor and wanting things."

Continuing the theme of kinship based upon a totality of shared experience, Carolyn spoke of her sense of connection and bonding with her African American students. See, I was raised in a housing project. . . . And, I could tell where these [African American] kids were coming from. I could tell the kind of home life, although our home life was nothing like their setting, because we still had that community feeling. Some of our kids here, there's so much domestic violence. . . . They hear gunshots at night. See, I didn't have to deal with any of that. But, I knew about the situation of being poor and not having some of the same things that other children had. But, a lot of our [African American] kids, it's almost like they look to you to understand. . . . It's like, they know that I understand what they have to deal with.
However, as Carolyn continued in her comments, she just as quickly described her insistence on her African American students maintaining a high standard of motivation and achievement in their work in school.

Then, my expectations are that you [my African American students] still will come here [to school] and perform. . . . They [African American students] know that you’re not going to put up with their stuff. . . . I [have] said very adamantly to African American children, “You can’t afford not to be educated. You can’t afford not to [be educated], because there’s no room for you. You have a strike against you. You’re already African American. . . . Out there in the real world, you’re going to have to really work hard. And, you’re going to have to prove yourself. So, you need to start right now, preparing yourself. Because, that’s what’s going to happen.”

Carolyn’s comments to her African American students are indicative of an underlying tension for African Americans in the area of kinship and sense of connection with other African Americans. Specifically, African Americans must internally negotiate between “solidarity” and kinship with other African Americans based upon the collective memory of a shared past linked to racial identity and a unique cultural history and the need to find their own successful individual place within the larger American society (Wachtel, 1999, p. 174). Indeed, as did many of the other teachers, Carolyn described a deep and abiding sense of kinship, bonding, and connection with her African American students. When Carolyn stated, “they know that I understand what they have to deal with,” she spoke of a
kinship with her African American students both in terms of racial identity and shared life experience. However, she also acknowledged that she insisted that her African American students must be able to function effectively in a predominantly White society as adults “out there in the real world.” By implication, Carolyn was saying that her students have to be prepared, for their own benefit, to succeed in “the real [White] world.” Additionally, in her view, this “real world” of predominantly White American society was resistant to the notion of her African American students succeeding and finding their place in the larger American society as reflected in the comment, “You have a strike against you. You’re already African American.” Indeed, the notion of balancing a sense of kinship and connection with other African Americans and successful individual integration into the larger American society remained an ongoing source of tension within the teachers in this study and for other African Americans (Wachtel, 1999).

The teachers consistently linked their sense of kinship and bonding with their African American students with positive ramifications for their experience and practice of teaching. For example, Laverne described her kinship with her African American students as facilitating entrée for her into a more effective, holistic relationship with her students.

Not only do you teach the material from the book, you have a bonding with the [African American] students, which gives you a little more credence when you let them know that no, you just did not awaken one day, and here you are, a polished, you know,
an articulate person. . . . That you’ve had growing pains, you’ve made decisions, sometimes good choices, sometimes not real good choices. And, when you tell them that, sometimes they can relate to you better. Instead of you just being an authority figure in front of them, let them know that, hey, if you cut me, I will bleed. . . . So, I let them know those kind of things. And, you’re also a counselor. Because, they [African American students] come to you. Once you have built this confidence in them, or this trust, it is important. They will come to you as a counselor.

In this excerpt, Laverne described three important components in her practice of teaching. First, she spoke of “bonding” with her African American students. Secondly, this bonding was facilitated through the expression of her humanity, and particularly of her African American humanity, with her students, as exemplified in such statements as “you’ve had growing pains” and “if you cut me, I will bleed.” Thirdly, her vulnerability helped lead to a connection characterized by “confidence . . . or trust” with her students. Thus, Laverne was able to enter into a relationship of counseling with her students, outside the normal parameters of strictly instructional duties.

Another example of establishing deep relationships with students was evident in Ethel’s description of how her sense of kinship and bonding with African American students enhanced her insight into the management of student behavior and the disciplining of African American students in the classroom environment.
A lot of them [African American teachers] bring a kinship. And, when I say a kinship, that means that nine times out of ten, they've grown up in an African American neighborhood. They've grown up in an African American family, you see? . . . There's a minority [of African American] teachers that might have grown up in a mixed neighborhood, but, for the majority, they have a kinship. They have a kinship towards our [African American] students. It makes it interesting. . . . And, they [African American teachers] know about discipline, see?

As Ethel responded to a probing question about the nature of disciplining students, she explained:


As did many of the other teachers, Ethel felt that a commonality of life experience between herself and her African American students, linked to racial identity, fostered a sense of kinship and bonding with her African American students. Many of the teachers, like Ethel, had grown up as children in segregated African American communities. As Ethel herself said, she had “grown up in an African American neighborhood” and had “grown up in an African
American family.” As a result, she felt that this shared life experience helped her to understand her African American students on the deepest of levels. One practical benefit for classroom work of this depth of understanding was revealed in Ethel’s frank discussion of the “games” that she felt African American students played with White teachers in terms of discipline and classroom management. A second practical benefit for the classroom from this sense of kinship and shared life experience with African American students became evident as Ethel described the depth of love and caring that African American teachers bring to their day-to-day interactions with African American students, particularly in contrast to some White teachers. In a sense, Ethel invited her White teaching colleagues to experience a sense of kinship and bonding with African American students by calling to mind their sense of kinship with their own children.

You see, we live with African American kids. We’re in the community, a lot of us, and we know those [African American] communities.... I’m trying to remember who said that you never know what it’s like until you walk in another man’s shoes. You learn a lot about African Americans, but the most important thing, I think, is just working with kids, understanding kids. You know, I could tell Caucasian teachers that if you just treat our [African American] students like they were your kids, you see? You know about what you’re willing to take from your kids. You thought enough about it to go into the vocation of teaching. And, so, you know about what you’re going to stand from your kids. Treat them [African American kids] like they were
your kids. You want your kids to come into the classroom and learn. You want the best for your kids. You should want the best for the kids here at [our] school.

During the interviews, the teachers primarily expressed a sense of kinship and bonding with other African American persons in terms of their interaction with African American students. However, at times the teachers also spoke of a broader sense of kinship and bonding through their students out towards the larger African American community.

For instance, during an extended narrative, Ethel constructed a sense of community, linkage, and kinship that included herself, her African American students, and the surrounding African American community that encompassed Ethel’s school, the only predominantly African American high school from its inception in the district.

I would say that [our school] has a tradition deeply rooted in togetherness. And the reason I say that, about the tradition, is because we have so many students whose parents have graduated from here. . . . [Our school] has some of things that make it so rich. You have a rich tradition of football pride. We won the state championship in football. . . . I’ve been here long enough to see us win “Brain Brawl” competition. . . . So, it’s not unusual for us to have kids who excel. . . . We’ve got this tradition rooted in greatness. And, so, we just have to continue the greatness of this school. The principals play a vital part, a vital part. Of course the first principal was second to none, Dr. Robinson. . . . You go to [our school],
because you have that “kinship.” You have that “Viking” tradition of
greatness, you see, from the community. [Our school] is still the original,
it’s the only original Black school, African American school. So, you have
that tradition, you see? The [African American] community recognizes
that. . . . This is why [African American students] come to [our school].
And, I’m pretty sure that a lot of them had the opportunity to go elsewhere
because they are a minority, you see? . . . But, they chose to come to a
predominantly Black high school to experience, I would imagine, the
closeness, the bonding, the togetherness, you see? . . . Do you know,
when I go to the grocery store now, and I see the [African American] kids,
do you know I get more hugs, and I get more parents talking to me, do you
see what I’m saying? So, African American teachers, involved in the
community, or within the community, offer pride to our kids. It’s pride.
When they see you in a different area in the community. See, that’s pride.
They know that their teacher is a part of their community, a part of their
being, a part of their way of being, you see what I’m saying? . . .
It’s community interaction.
In her narrative, Ethel described three levels of kinship and bonding within
the African American community. First, she detailed the sense of legacy and
tradition within the school itself in terms of a “tradition deeply rooted in
togetherness. . . .[and] greatness.” Secondly, she began to branch out into the
larger African American community in describing how that sense of kinship and
tradition within the school setting still attracted African American students from
the community who may very well have had “the opportunity to go elsewhere.”
Lastly, as her narrative progressed and expanded, she spoke of herself and other African American teachers bonding with African American students and other adults in the context of the larger African American community. Indeed, phrases such as “a part of their being, a part of their way of being” characterized a relationship between Ethel and her African American students that flourished on a far deeper level than the traditional teacher and student relationship. Indeed, the “solidarity, identification, and sense of shared fate” described by Ethel in this narrative and by other teachers throughout the interviews are “pivotaly important features of the African American experience” (Wachtel, 1999, p. 172).

During one excerpt in his interview, James placed his sense of kinship and bonding with African American students in the context of a larger sense of connection with the African American community at large.

I feel that children would want to attach themselves to somebody they know, and they may feel more comfortable with. . . . I think that there’s a difference, because that’s the culture. African American culture is unique. And, that’s even the nature of the people, because if I pass an African American on the road, I will probably speak to them a lot more readily than I would a White person, because a lot of times, White people don’t speak. . . . But, Blacks will speak to one another. And, I see an [African American] guy across the street, he’ll look at me, and we have a little head nod, you know? He’ll say, “What’s up?” He may not even say
anything, he'll just nod his head. . . . So, I feel that African American students would feel very, very comfortable with an African American teacher, because they would feel a sensitivity, they have a sensitivity, that they would feel that this person understands me and has my experience, that background. It would happen in that fashion.

For James, the words “this person understands me and has my experience, that background” could be used to describe both his relationship with African American students and with other African Americans he encounters in the larger context of the African American community, such as the “guy across the street” who “nod[s] his head” towards James in a recognition of kinship and connection. The depth of kinship and bonding are the same in both circumstances.

However, as the teachers themselves pointed out, their unique sense of kinship and bonding with African American students and other African Americans did not in any way preclude deeply-felt connections between themselves and White students. As James explained,

I once had a White boy, a 6th grader. I used to have to run him out of the office sometimes, because he would come by to take his medicine. But, he just liked being under me. He'd come get that medicine, and I'd say, “Ronnie, you've got to get back to class,” because he'd just want to sit and talk and have that exchange. . . . But, that was an affection that this kid developed for me. . . . He just had to talk to me every day. . . . And, that kid, if I wasn't in that office, it was like, “I came by your office.” You know,
if I wasn’t there when he came by. But, that particular child, he just took
an affection for me. . . . He wanted me to come to his baseball games,
and it was kind of like, I became his role model. But, I wasn’t White. I was
an African American.

Throughout the entirety of the interviews, the teachers consistently used
words such as “we,” “us,” and “our” when they spoke of themselves and other
African Americans. Words such as these, often spoken with great feeling, were
reflective of a sense of kinship and connection felt on the deepest of levels within
these teachers towards other African American persons. This sense of kinship,
bonding, and connection is an integral component of the African American
experience and of the collective memory of that experience among African
Americans. In describing that sense of kinship and connection, Wachtel (1999)
asserted,

Hardships and doubts that are difficult to bear individually become
more manageable when they are undergone as a shared experience.
Strengthened not only by privation but by positive traditions of mutual aid
and support that some have suggested can be traced all the way back to
Africa, the psychic ties of African Americans to their group, the sense of
racial and cultural affinity and of shared fate, are often extremely powerful.
(p. 172)

Indeed, this sense of brother and sisterhood, of kinship, and a "shared
fate" between themselves and all other African Americans continued to be alive
and well within these teachers and to be a fundamental component of their personal and professional identities (p. 172).

Collective Memory: Personal Spirituality as Mediator and Life Guide

Without exception, the teachers in this study consistently discussed the role of personal spirituality in both their professional and personal lives. As Laverne remarked, "I believe in being a spiritual person. . . . I am in church most Sunday mornings." Laverne's assertion was typical of the teachers' experiences in two ways. First, the teachers did indeed describe themselves as being deeply spiritual people with firmly held sets of belief in transcendent notions of God and existence beyond the physical plane of life. Secondly, for them, a primary expression of this sense of spirituality came in the form of regular attendance and involvement in mainline African American denominational churches.

The teachers' expressions of belief in spirituality and practice of religious expression through the vehicle of the African American church were entirely consistent with the historic African American experience and the African American collective memory of that experience in this area of life (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Stewart, 1999). Indeed, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the African American church as a central foundation in the individual lives of many African Americans and in a wider context "as the cultural womb of the Black community" (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 8). For many African Americans, such as these teachers, this deeply-felt and abiding sense of spirituality was grounded in the collective memory of slavery and its aftermath, when the spiritual dimension of life was all that African Americans could truly call
their own and the only place where freedom existed in any form (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). As James remarked at one point during his interview, African Americans, at one point, that’s all they had, was the spiritual side of life. That’s all they had. Because, the older generation [of African Americans], they knew the hardships, especially those who lived during the Great Depression and all that. So, quite naturally, the spiritual part of African Americans has always been there, even when they were coming across on the ship, in chains. . . . Spiritualism is very much a part [of the African American experience]. Even those [African Americans] who may not display it very much, publicly, at some point, with the connection they’ve had, they’ve had it, and it’s been extended. You know, they may not practice spirituality. But, it’s always been a part of me. I was raised in a Christian home. I can remember the times when my Mother, there were five of us, she was a single parent. . . . My Father died before I was born. . . . I can remember the times when she would get us all around the bed. We all had to kneel. And, we all prayed. She prayed. We prayed. That was part of my upbringing. We went to church. We went to Sunday school.

In this excerpt, James described an ongoing and historically persistent sense of cultural African American spirituality as he stated that “the spiritual part of African Americans has always been there, even when they were coming across on the ship, in chains.” For James, the sense of spirituality that has historically permeated African American culture as a whole is alive and well
within him as “it’s always been a part of me.” Further, the narrative of James and the other teachers revealed a sense of personal spirituality inexorably linked to the faith of their ancestors, who nurtured and developed a cultural sense of African American spirituality in the context of the experience of slavery, the aftermath of slavery, and the collective memory of that experience (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). This linkage occurred because,

African Americans have a unique spiritual way of being, a spirituality personality, which is part of their reality and identity. . . . Black Americans are a spiritual people of soul. Their cultural ethos is replete with manifestations of the divine presence. Whether it is Black football players bowing their heads in prayer. . .or jazz musicians giving thanks to God before playing a set, there is affirmation and acknowledgment of God's all-pervasive presence, power, and grace in every aspect of Black life. (Stewart, 1999, p. 4)

The teachers described the impact and influence of spirituality in four areas of their experience in teaching and in their personal and professional identities. First, the teachers discussed the role of spirituality in their decision to enter the profession of teaching, often describing this decision as a mystical “calling” to teach. Secondly, the teachers described the influence of their personal sense of spirituality in their practice of teaching and interaction with students, parents, and colleagues. Both of these roles played by spirituality in the lives of the teachers will be discussed later in this chapter in the analysis of the global dimension of their personal and professional identities. Here, the third
and fourth areas of the influence of spirituality in the teachers’ lives will be examined, that is, the linkage of spirituality to African American collective memory and the manifestation of that spirituality in church participation.

For the teachers in this study, a personal sense of spirituality served as the fundamental guiding force in their experience of life. For them, their personal sense of spirituality served to help them internally navigate between and among the components of their African American collective memory, the varying dimensions of personal and professional identity, and in all matters of life. For example, in this narrative, Terri described a faith so deeply ingrained and real within her being as to be almost routine in nature.

I don’t think I would be who I am if I did not have God in me. . . . My Grandmother used to tell me, “If you’re a real Christian, you never have to say it. Your life shows it. . . . You don’t have to say it, you don’t have to do anything. It shows. One time, when I was ill, and I went to work, we had a new Reading teacher at our school. And, she said, “Terri, why are you here? You were just in the hospital.” And, I said, “By the grace of God.” . . . And, a lot of times, I’d keep the lid on things around the school, because they’d come in and blow off steam to me, and Momma Terri would say, “Now, you know you’re wrong. [laughter] Now, have you talked to God about that? Do you think He’d be proud of you saying that?”

In this narrative, Terri described a spiritual relationship with God that was deeply ingrained within her total experience of life. So deeply ingrained within her that, for Terri, talking with God was as real as talking with neighbors or a
friend. As she continued her narrative, Terri described a recent set of illnesses in the context of her faith in, and relationship with, God.

There are certain things I'll do, because I want to do, not because somebody says I need to do it. I do it just because God tells me to do it. Like in the last couple of years, God has kind of said, "OK, you stop now." But, as I told my minister, for a long time, I couldn’t figure out, "why [am I ill]?

And, at a certain point, I questioned God, why? What is it that I’ve done, that I'm being punished for? And, I was in the hospital one time, and this technician, this was when I had been through quite a bit, and she said, "You’re a Christian, aren’t you?" And, I said, "Is it that obvious?" [laughter] By that time, I had eight different operations on my stomach, and one of the nurses that would come three times a day to change my bandage. . . . And, it was so cute. . . . She was very polite, and very attentive and everything. And, then, after a while, when she got to know me and become more comfortable with me, I guess, she asked me, "Terri, are you afraid of dying?" And, I said, "No." And, without even thinking, I said, "It’s because I’ve got God in my life." . . . She sat down on the floor, like she had been struck by lightning. She sat down, and she said, "Tell me about God." . . . And, then, one of my co-workers told me, she said, "Terri, you don’t realize what a beacon you are to people. You have been through so much, and you have a smile on your face, your attitude. We all just marvel at how positive you are. And, you’re always saying, "By the grace of God." And, I realized then why I had been in so
much pain, and why there was so much I had to go through. . . . That light that God wanted to shine wouldn’t have been able to shine. If I hadn’t suffered through all that illness that I went through, then, if you don’t go through the turmoil, how can your light shine? If you don’t go through the pain and the hardship, how can God let His will and His work be seen? So, [that’s] when I said, “OK, God, now I’ve got the message. Now I know what it’s all about.” [laughter] My children, they’re all Christians, and, I know, I know that losing me would be something that would really hurt them. But, they also know that I would be going home to God.

Terri’s narrative illustrated the preeminence of spirituality and her relationship with her God in Terri’s internal life and self. For Terri, that notion of spirituality and relationship with God served, as with other African Americans and for these teachers in particular, as a filter within herself to bring “life, form, and meaning to physical realities” (Stewart, 1999, p. 5). As Terri herself said, she questioned why she was so seriously ill. However, she later explained her illness as part of God’s plan for her life, in order to facilitate God’s “will and His work” being seen by others through her experience of illness. For Terri, the meaning for her in her illness was for others, such as the nurse and the technician in the hospital and her colleagues at school, to see “that light that God wanted to shine.” Additionally, later in the narrative, Terry spoke of her death as “going home to God.” Statements such as these by Terri and other teachers indicated deeply-held beliefs on their part in a God and in the spiritual nature of themselves
and their relationship with God that bring meaning for them to both significant and routine experiences in life. Indeed, for many African Americans and for these teachers, their sense of spirituality "undergirds, shapes, and informs" (Stewart, 1990, p. 4) the "meaning in existence" (Richards, 1989, cited in Stewart, 1990, p. 5).

The belief in spirituality expressed by these teachers and other African Americans finds a primary physical and concrete manifestation in the African American church. Indeed, primarily as a function of the experience of slavery and the collective memory associated with that experience, the church has served throughout history as a nexus and intersection of the various foundational components of African American culture. As James himself said, the church was "all they [African Americans] had" during a significant portion of their history. The home, family life, social norms, education, and the enduring struggle for African Americans for freedom, acceptance, and a place within American society have all traditionally and historically met at the doors of the African American church (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Stewart, 1999). The influence of and connection with the African American church is deeply felt throughout virtually all aspects of African American culture and society. For many African Americans and for these teachers, participation in the African American church "empowers them to navigate culturally and spiritually through the storms of the Black experience" (Stewart, 1999, p. 103).

Again, without exception, each of the teachers spoke of their involvement and participation in the activities of an African American church. They described
the influence of their churches upon both their personal lives and the African American community as a whole.

For example, Terri spoke of the role of her church in obtaining her first assignment as a Kindergarten teacher.

I had three different Principals who I understand were, and it sounds very vain to say it, but who were fighting over me, because of what the Kindergarten supervisor had said about me. And, one just happened to be the wife of my minister, and when she found out that I was going to be available, she went to the School Board first. And, she had been given the wrong phone number, so she could never reach me. She [the Principal] said, “I don’t know why I didn’t think of looking in the church roster.”... So, I went in, and she said, “You’ve got a job.” [laughter] And, so, it was as simple as that.

While it seemed certain that Terri would have found employment as a Kindergarten teacher in any event, her narrative is also reflective of Terri’s sense of connection to her church and, specifically, with her minister. As Terri herself said, there was no interview associated with the position. As a result of her familiarity with her minister and his wife, the principal of Terri’s school, she was hired, and it was “as simple as that.” Terri’s sense of connection with her minister is indicative of the important role of African American ministers in terms of moral authority and leadership within the African American community and culture. Indeed,
No one has been more influential in shaping Black consciousness, Black religious belief, and the social and political life of Black people than the Black minister. He or she is the symbol of freedom, vitality, and power. (Stewart, 1990, p. 113)

Bernadine’s story of coming to work as a teacher in a district alternative school underscored the role of the African American church as an arbiter in the establishment of African American societal norms (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). In this case, the influence of the church extended even to the matter of appropriate clothing.

So, I went to [this alternative school]. . . . I interviewed there, and [the Principal] said, “Well, to work here. . . .” and, I was about 90 pounds smaller, she said, “You know, to work here, you’re going to have to wear pants.” And, I wasn’t a pants person. [laughter] She said, “You know, sometimes I have to get on the floor to restrain students." [laughter] And, you know, she just went on and on. And, I’m sitting here saying, “I’m not going to let any of this discourage me.” I’m saying this in the back of my head. [laughter] So, I said, “No, if I have to wear pants, I don’t mind wearing pants.” I think she might have thought that it was because of my religion, knowing I was Pentecostal. I think she thought this was the reason. But, see, we wear pants. So, that wasn’t my reason. I just always thought that anybody over size 6 shouldn’t wear pants. [laughter] So, anyway, I told her, “Yes, if I needed to wear pants, I would.” Because, I did have some, I just didn’t like wearing them out.
Although humorous, Bernadine’s narrative also points to the important role that the church plays in helping to establish societal norms within the African American community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). In the context of her story she stated, “... knowing I was Pentecostal. I think she thought this was the reason. But, see, we wear pants.” By implication, she acknowledged a public aspect of her religious affiliation. Further, she was saying that the wearing of pants by women, in her view, was approved by her church. Otherwise, again by implication, it seemed logical to assume that if her church had not approved of her wearing pants, Bernadine, as a firm believer in her church and its authority, would not have been willing to wear pants to work.

Later in her interview, Bernadine spoke extensively of her church and its continued influence throughout her African American community.

I guess I’m real fortunate to be at a church where the pastor really accentuates growth. And, how can I put it? Growth, as well as spiritual maturity, the holistic, the whole individual approach. And, that’s where I’ve gained so much information, from leadership skills, in communications skills, you name it, everything you could possibly think of is covered at the church I attend. As a matter of fact, we do a workshop every year. Last year, it was on the family. . . . And, my church is a very big advocate of this. All of our young people aspire towards something. . . . And, these kids really aspire to achieve. They come to church regularly, most of them two or three times a week, stay late at night. But, they’re honors students
in all the schools. . . . We accentuate education and all of these kinds of things. And, you see it coming from the members, because we have people who thought they couldn’t do certain things, could never be off of welfare, off of it, have bought their own homes, no more HUD. . . . So, it’s just exciting to me. . . . There’s so much that I know can happen with Black people, if you get the right people to inspire them. That’s the key. With the kids and all. . . . they’ve got so much potential, so much they could do, but, they’ve got to be inspired. And, once they can get inspired, you don’t know which direction they’ll take off into. And, I’ve experienced that. So, I get just as excited in going to church as I do in coming to work, because the potential is equally as great.

Bernadine’s narrative described an institution that is both a religious entity and a center for community activity and socio-cultural interaction. In her own thinking, Bernadine linked the inspirational environment for African American persons present in the church with societal improvement and change, as evidenced by the development of African American “honors students in all the schools” and the support of “people who thought they couldn’t do certain things, could never be off of welfare, off of it, have bought their own homes.” As Bernadine stated, one of the keys for success for African Americans is to find “the right people to inspire them,” especially in the environment of an African American church that “accentuates growth, as well as spiritual maturity.” As in the case of Bernadine’s church, the African American church has historically and traditionally accepted a multi-layered role and responsibility within African
American society. The church has served as an institution of spirituality, as a foundational support of many of the pillars of African American society and culture, and as a leading player in the ongoing struggle of African Americans for a place in American society (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

For these teachers and for many African Americans, the notion of personal belief and spirituality is at the very center of their personal identity. Their faith and belief and sense of spirituality influence every aspect of their personal and professional lives. Through collective memory, these teachers’ sense of spirituality is inexorably connected to ancestors for whom belief in an unseen and invisible spiritual dimension of the life experience was literally the only shred of their lives over which they had any control. Indeed for them and for many African Americans,

African American spirituality...is...unique in that this soul force spirit is the ultimate reference point for Black existence. This spirit permeates Black life and instills in African American people a will to survive; a desire to confront and surmount all threats to their being and existence while concurrently creating idioms of life and culture which provide them with adaptive mechanisms that reinforce their sanity, affirm their wholeness, and establish their spiritual and ontological location in American society. (Stewart, 1999, p. 3)
The Dimension of Self: Part II

The Role of Gender

At the beginning of Chapter 4, a sequence for the analysis of data was identified and put forward for the reader. The analysis of data follows three dimensions of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities as identified by the teachers themselves: the dimension of self, the interactive dimension, and the global dimension.

Within the dimension of the self, the areas of race and gender were identified by the teachers as fundamental to an understanding of their working lives as teachers and their personal and professional identities. Thus far in the analysis of data, the notions of race and racial identity have been explored through the construct of conscious and subconscious African American collective memory. As identified by the teachers themselves, their construct of African American collective memory consisted of five manifestations; the awareness of one’s self in historical context, roots and the connection with family and community, the role and importance of story and legacy, the power of kinship, and personal spirituality as mediator and life guide.

In order to complete the analysis of the dimension of the self, an exploration of the impact of gender upon the working lives and personal and professional identities of the teachers is appropriate at this point. Upon the completion of the analysis of the notion of gender, the remaining two sections of
the analysis of data will investigate the interactive and global dimensions of the teachers' worklife and personal and professional identities.

*Gender as a Defining Variable in the Life Experience and Art and Practice of Teaching*

With one exception, the African American teachers who chose to participate in this research study were women. As such, their life experience, their world view, and their conceptualization of the meaning and priorities of life are inexorably linked to and influenced by the long historic line of both their African and African American female ancestors (Rodgers-Rose, 1980; Scott, 1991). Historically, African American women have suffered a duality of oppression, repression, and discrimination at the hands of the majority American White population in terms of both their race and their gender (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; Townes, 1995). In many ways, African American women have had to negotiate their life journeys between two distinct worlds, the worlds of being an African American and of being a woman (Scott, 1991).

As a legacy of both their pre-slavery role within West African society and culture and their particular and unique experience within the wider context of the ongoing African American story in America, African American women have developed a strong sense of self, purpose, and independence. In describing African American women, Rodgers-Rose (1980) has asserted that, the Black woman has emerged out of a history of oppression. She survived the long middle passage from Africa to America, bringing
with her many of the diverse characteristics of her African mothers—not only did she bring with her the ability to raise strong sons and daughters, but she also brought with her a sense of independence...and a commitment to the survival of her race. (p. 9-10)

The strength, sense of independence, and indomitable will not only to survive but to thrive under any set of circumstances, so characteristic of African American women throughout the centuries, certainly found a home within the teachers who participated in this study. Indeed, the teachers described the influence of gender in their personal lives and in their practice of teaching in three areas. First, they described their gender as a delimiting factor in their choice of life profession and work. Secondly, they detailed the strong influence of their gender, linked to the notion of African American motherhood, in providing them with a holistic orientation in their relationships with their students. And, lastly, the teachers outlined a sense of ongoing kinship and bonding with other African American women, both informally within the family structure and via the vehicle of more formally structured organizations, such as African American sororities.

Thus, the next three sections of the analysis of data will be organized around these three topics. The first section will detail how the teachers described gender as a delimiting factor, as they made decisions as young women regarding a choice of profession. The second section will investigate the linkage between the teachers’ holistic orientation to the practice of teaching and their internal construct of motherhood, specifically African American motherhood.
Finally, the third section will examine the sense of kinship and bonding the teachers feel between themselves and other African American women.

**Gender as a Delimiting Factor in Choice of Profession**

As a group, the teachers in this study grew up during the 1950s, came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, and began their career in teaching either during the 1960s or early to mid-1970s. Thus, they chose to enter the profession of teaching during a time when African American women faced a restricted range of career paths and choices due to both race and gender (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; Scott, 1991). Indeed, many of the teachers described a very narrow range of career choices available to them as young women. This issue was most clearly and directly stated by Gloria, as she explained,

> When I went into teaching, I had no choice, because of segregation. When I finished high school, I couldn’t even be a cashier at Food Fair and Pantry Pride. They were all White girls. The only thing I could do, I could go to college and be a teacher, or a nurse. . . . Or I could go be a receptionist in a doctor’s office, or I could do maid’s work or work in a cafeteria. My options were so limited. There was no para-professional, or in-between kind of thing. You [as an African American woman] had to be either a professional or a domestic, or a laborer type thing. . . . My options were very narrow.

Gloria’s description of a very narrow range of career choices and options was consistent with a larger, historic pattern of “limited employment opportunities” for African American women linked to societal discrimination based
upon race and gender (Scott, 1991, p. 147). Indeed, throughout much of American history, African American women desiring professional careers have been relegated to “lower status jobs...occupations such as nursing and teaching” (Berry, 1982, p. xvi).

The teachers’ descriptions of a restricted choice of careers and professional options based upon the notions of race and gender did not, in their view, mean that they might not have entered the profession of teaching anyway. Indeed, many of the teachers described a profound urge and desire to enter the teaching profession from a very early age; they often characterized the decision to enter into and continue in the profession of teaching as a “calling” and “mission.” As Carolyn said,

I was just always the child that had the dolls and teddy bears and I would be there teaching to them. And, I just knew I wanted to be a teacher. I just always wanted to work in the classroom... And, I just kind of felt that that’s what I was supposed to be in education doing, that teaching was God’s calling on my life, to be a teacher.

Thus, for these teachers, the decision to become a teacher was not equated solely with a lack of career options for young African American women. Indeed, their choice of entry into the teaching profession was many times a deeply felt and long held desire, a “calling,” on their parts, a decision made independent of the societal and cultural environment for African Americans at the time. However, the teachers were also aware of the increasing range of career and professional opportunities for African Americans within American society.
over the past 40 years (Hull & Smith, 1982; Scott, 1991). As Gloria said, “it’s opened up quite a bit [for young African Americans]. . . . These [African American] kids have opportunities, you know?” In the end, for these teachers, the decision to enter the teaching profession was a deeply felt and fulfilling one, a decision, according to the teachers themselves, that would very likely have been made under nearly any circumstances.

**Gender and the Construction of a Holistic Relationship Between Teacher and Student**

During the course of the interviews, the teachers consistently expressed their view of the practice of teaching as a holistically-oriented enterprise, an art and practice dedicated to addressing not only the academic, but also the personal, social, and developmental needs of children. In their own thinking, the source of their holistic orientation in their relationships with their students was found in the connections among their gender, their role and experience as a mother, and the subsequent influence of this internal construct of female and mother upon their interactions with their students. As Laverne explained,

> When you realize that there are young people who are expecting you to be on-task all of the time, then it helps you to stay focused. . . . It’s like a mother who cannot get sick, she has children who need her. Mothers do not have a sick day. Mothers cannot stay in bed. So, I’m this mother who cannot have a sick day, who cannot stay in bed, who has to stay focused, who has to continue to set goals, who has to continue to be an example. And, it helps you to do what you are
supposed to do. Because the path of least resistance is to have the pity party, to be lazy, and to do nothing. But, when you know that there are young people whom you can influence, and I'm in a position where I can influence them, then it says, "I must do this." So, it helps me to stay focused.

It is clear that, in Laverne's thinking, the boundaries surrounding the roles of teacher and mother, for her, are permeable. As she herself said, as a teacher, "I'm this mother who cannot have a sick day, who cannot stay in bed, who has to stay focused, who has to continue to set goals, who has to continue to be an example." The use of the word "mother" was a conscious choice on her part of a descriptor for her, for her work as a teacher, and for her responsibility to her students. For Laverne, her responsibility to her students is both a professional responsibility and a maternal responsibility.

In the following excerpt, Lorraine also fused the role of mother and teacher in her description of interactions with both students and parents.

Mostly, the parents left everything up to me. I guess because I was the motherly type. Whatever I needed, you know, as far as the group [of parents] was concerned or whatever, they'd get together and make sure that, you know, it was done or whatever. . . . I've even had some parents to call and tell me something, but they didn't want the kids to know that they did it. I had some parents who were actually scared of their own children. They'd turn it over to me.
In describing herself as "the motherly type," Lorraine implied a deep sense of relationship with and responsibility towards her students, one that extended beyond the strict parameters of imparting academic knowledge. Additionally, while expressing a degree of concern over the abdication of parental responsibilities by certain parents, Lorraine also expressed an implied acceptance of these parental responsibilities on her part in alignment with her role as a "motherly" teacher.

Gloria also detailed her view of an expanded role for herself as an educator based on her simultaneous roles as mother and teacher.

They [the students] call me "Grandma" at school. [They'll say to me,]
"Can I be your grandson? Can I be your granddaughter?" [I'll say,]
"Yeah." [And, the students will say,] "OK, Grandma." And, they'll come up. . .like one came up and put his arms around my shoulders. . . .
But, then I would stop in the hall, they'll see me coming down the hall, and, they'll just hug me. And, I'll give them a hug back. . . . You've got to have a feel for it. . . . And, you've got to know when you can fuss. I can. . . .oooh, I can fuss. [laughter]

For Gloria, being called "Grandma" at school, hugging students, and "fussing" with her students were an extension of her natural "grandmotherly" behavior towards those who were in fact her own grandchildren and those, like her students at school, whom she viewed in a distinctly maternal manner.

The emphasis placed on the notion of motherhood and its connection with the practice of teaching by those teachers echoed the singular importance
attached to motherhood and child rearing throughout history by West African, and later African American, women (McCray, 1980; Rodgers-Rose, 1980). An unusually strong bond has historically existed between African American women and their children that is "deeply rooted in our African heritage and philosophical orientation, which places a special value on children because they represent the continuity of life" (Hale, 1980, p. 80). In West African culture, child rearing and attending to the entire array of children's needs were collectively considered to be the single most important function of the culture as an entity and for women in particular; and the role of motherhood was seen as directly linked to the survival of the culture and society (Rodgers-Rose, 1980). Indeed, the mothers in West African cultures inhabited a privileged place in society and culture, as the "survival of children was paramount in the culture" (Rodgers-Rose, 1980, p. 17).

As such, West African women were frequently "instrumental in the economic marketplace" and "controlled certain industries" (p. 16).

The relationship between mother and child was frequently more intense and deeply-held than the marriage relationship in West African culture. In pre-slavery West African culture, marriages were frequently polygamous. Women generally followed a three-year cycle in terms in experiencing the roles of wife and mother. As a woman became pregnant, she left her husband's home to return to her father's home, not to return until the baby was born and weaned. This frequently entailed up to a three-year separation between husband and wife, during which time the relationship between child and mother deepened along
with a deepening sense of self-sufficiency and independence on the part of African women (Rodgers-Rose, 1980).

Understandably, the framework and structure under which child care practiced by African American women have evolved and changed through the period of slavery to the present time. However, the depth of the bonding between African American women and children has remained consistent and constant since the pre-slavery period in West Africa. The holistic focus on children’s cognitive, social, and developmental needs embedded in African American culture (Rodgers-Rose, 1980; Hale, 1980) has found its way into the personal and professional identities of these teachers and, subsequently, into their practices of teaching. The teachers’ beliefs in their views of themselves as both mothers and teachers found practical and concrete expressions in a continuum of caring about the entire range of their students’ needs, both academic and developmental.

For example, in describing her vision of an “old-fashioned” teacher, Terri touched upon several facets of an expanded relationship with her students that extended beyond the strict imparting of information.

I think an old-fashioned teacher is the type of teacher for whom the child is number one, and the curriculum is secondary. And, I feel that this is very important, but, I also feel that having a nurturing, loving relationship will get that child faster to the point in the curriculum where you [as a teacher] want them. I think that [the] child is number one. If each grade-level teacher believed in the well-being of that child, . . . maybe by the time the
child got into 5th or 6th grade, they would be where the academic level is saying they should be. But, you cannot cram something down a child's throat, when they don't feel good about themselves. When they don't feel good about the environment. The old-fashioned teacher used to care about the whole child, not just the academic skills. And, I think that the most important criterion in teaching now [are] teaching the academic skills. Don't care about the little person you're trying to teach it to.

In this excerpt, Terri drew a correlation between students achieving academic progress and the "nurturing, loving relationship" that was built between herself and her students. For Terri, academic instruction was a sequence of events that occurred within the context of a holistic, nurturing relationship between teacher and student, in which the teacher "care[s] about the whole child, not just the academic skills." Additionally, as Terri spoke of teachers attending to the "well-being of that child," by implication she was referring to the entire gamut of children's developmental needs, to include academic, social, and developmental needs.

Later in her interview, Terri continued to explore the notion of fusing the roles of female, mother, and teacher in reaching her students and attending to the entire continuum of their academic and developmental needs. In the following narrative, Terri described these complex relationships.

Yes, you're going to get, excuse the expression, this little snot-nosed, unclean [child]. And, honestly, when I first started working [as a teacher], those were the children that I wanted to nurture. The ones who were the
troublemakers, the ones who were not very clean, who you knew were not having a very good homelife. Those were the ones that I nurtured, until I started seeing some of the nicer children, from some of the “better” homes, cutting up. And, when I asked what was wrong, and why had this “new” person come into the classroom, and they told me I wasn’t paying any attention to them. [They said,] “You don’t love me.” They didn’t say, “You’re not paying attention to me.” They’d say, “You don’t love me. You love Joe better than you do me.” And, my eyes were opened, that you can’t do this, because this child is from a good family, and you think they’re getting all of the nurturing and all of the love and everything, and you can kind of look over that child. You can’t. When they’re in that classroom, they need just as much of you as that one who’s not getting it at home. You have to reach each individual child. . . . What I can do is see that child, and see that person I’m working with, and see where they come from. “What can I do as Terri to be able to reach that person? . . . What do I need to understand that person? . . . There’s so many ways, and, yes, you have to be able to individualize teaching.

In this one narrative alone, Terri used the words “nurture” and “love” seven times to describe her interaction with her students. The deliberate choice of words such as “nurture” and “love” implied the type of relationship between Terri and her students that included components of both a teacher-student and a mother-child relationship. It was clear during Terri’s narrative that she felt completely comfortable in both relationships, as a teacher and as a teacher-
mother. As she said, “the ones who were the troublemakers... were the ones that I nurtured,” along with children “from some of the ‘better’ homes” who “need just as much of you as that one who’s not getting it at home.” Additionally, as Terri commented on the importance of reaching “each individual child,” she implied that reaching “each individual child” meant addressing the entire array of their academic, social, and developmental needs, supported through the effort on her part to “see that child, and see that person I’m working with... to understand that person.” Indeed, African American women such as Terri and the women teachers in this study have traditionally and historically “been ascribed roles in the Black community as nurturers and protectors” (Scott, 1991, p. 154). Thus, Terri’s emphasis upon the nurturing of children and the attention to the needs of children as whole, intact, developing young people was consistent with the traditional pattern of maternal behavior within African American culture and society throughout history (Hale, 1980; Rodgers-Rose, 1980).

Many of the teachers expressed their belief that the need among students for their type of holistically-oriented, maternal approach to teaching was particularly acute within the framework of today’s society. Indeed, the teachers seemed to sense their involvement in their students’ lives, both academically and developmentally, as being a needed supplement to the nurturing and guidance received at home. Laverne, Carolyn, and Bernadine each described differing versions of this same theme in detailing relationships with students that both included and expanded the formalized boundaries of teacher and student interaction. As Laverne carefully explained in the following narrative,
There is a lot that goes on in that classroom beside what’s in that book. Now, face it, if that’s all that we were really doing, you could give a kid a book, send him home, come back in a week, and I’ll test you. So, there must be more that we’re doing than that book stuff, OK?... There are some teachers who will go by the book, this is it, your exam is here, read these chapters, we’ll review these chapters tomorrow, and that’s it. You have to do more. You have to be creative, you have to get those juices flowing, you have to help them discover who this person is inside. Because, a lot of times, they don’t know. So, you have to offer them different things. Let them know how many choices they have. Talk about the different choices [in life]. Talk about opportunities. They don’t hear this stuff [at home]. We just assume, like me, that, you know, everybody sat down at the table when Daddy came home for dinner.... Everybody doesn’t do that. So, we can’t assume these basic, these foundational things, these critical things, they are receiving. They’re not. But, we have to be willing to do that. We have to be willing to do more than just have them read the chapters. They need more than that. They’re [the students] crying for help.

In her narrative, Laverne addressed two components of her holistic approach in her work with students. First, she described the need for teachers to work with students beyond the strictly academic, to do all that they can to assist students to develop and grow as individuals, “to discover who this person is inside.” Secondly, she stated very directly that many of her students may not be
receiving this needed guidance in the home setting. As Laverne said, "We can't assume these basic, these foundational things, these critical things, they are receiving. They're not." In Laverne's view, teachers must "be willing" to engage students in guidance and discussion concerning "the choices...and opportunities" of life, especially in light of a diminished degree of this type of guidance and discussion in the home setting for many students.

Carolyn likewise emphasized the theme of the value of a holistically-oriented, maternal style of teaching as a supplement to the guidance received at home.

You know, it makes you feel good when you know that they [students] really did know that it was coming from here [points to heart]. . . . I spent a lot of personal time. I would bring kids to my house, and we did a lot of things together. I did a lot of tutoring that I've never been paid for, because I believed in kids, and I believed in our future. . . . I remember running into a former parent of mine. . . . and she said, "You know, you taught my daughter when she was in the 8th grade. And, I remember telling my husband during that time, after Open House night, 'This person [Carolyn] is going to be a good role model. Not only is she going to teach her about math, she's [Carolyn] going to teach her something about life.' " And, I remember thinking, "Gosh, I really didn't know how parents were reacting to me." You know, they were always quiet or whatever. But, I really didn't know whether or not they realized I was also trying to teach life skills in addition to math. I had hoped that
was being conveyed, and, it was good to hear a parent say that. But, to
hear someone say that, it meant a lot to me.

In this narrative, Carolyn established two points with regard to her holistic
teaching and interaction with students. First, she was willing to interact
with students in an expanded manner beyond the strict role of instructor through
commitment of personal time during which she tutored them and even brought
them to her own home. Secondly, she stated that she was purposefully “trying to
teach life skills in addition to Math.” For Carolyn, the desire to teach students
about both mathematics and life was no accident, but a deliberate act, intended
to supplement the guidance and direction received in the home. It was
interesting to note that, at least in one case, parents were aware of Carolyn’s
holistic approach to teaching and were accepting of Carolyn’s efforts in this area.

Finally, Bernadine spoke movingly of her interaction with one particular
student, and of her efforts to provide guidance, direction, and support for the
child as additions to what the home provided. The following lengthy account
reflects her close involvement with a student in a quasi-parental role.

There are a lot of touchy situations. Just before you came in, I had
one. I didn’t know what was going on. I heard this parent, and really,
I was frightened at the time, because it sounded like something terrible
was going on. But, it was a parent who had a speech problem, and
she really couldn’t talk. She used sign language. And, I guess, she
couldn’t hear, and her voice was accelerating. . . . And then the child
was embarrassed, because of their mother, because of the appearance and the loud talking. . . . And, I walked outside with it, [the conference] and I’m so glad. . . . I spent 15 minutes conferencing out there [with the student], and I learned so much in that time. . . . But, then today, I got involved in so much more than that. There’s just so much help that’s needed. And, see, this is good, because I get involved in that kind of thing. A lot of counselors, they would just kind of deal with the attendance [of the student] and that’s it. But, now, see what I would do in this case, with this child, I’ve already spoken to [my clerk]. I’ve told her, “Well, we’re going to have to put something in place for him to eat. He gets here [to school] late. He doesn’t eat. He promised me that he’d be here in the morning in time for breakfast.” I’ve already given him a job for after-school, because he wasn’t looking for anything for Christmas, because they [the family] couldn’t afford that. And, so, I talked with him later, and I said, “When school’s out, could you clean windows or something like that?” So, he’s going to do that for me. What I’m planning to do is, after he helps me, then I’ll take him shopping to spend the money the way he wants to for Christmas . . . . Every now and then, every year, there’s one [student] that hits me a little different from the others, that something tells me, “It’s time to give a little something more than just here at school.”

For Bernadine, the roles of teacher, counselor, and mother merged within the context of her interaction with this student. Her approach to this student was completely holistic in nature, ranging from a concern about his breakfast in the
morning, to working odd jobs, to how he would experience the Christmas season.
Bernadine clearly felt a need to interact with this student in these areas as a
supplement and an addition to the home experience. Additionally, it was logical
to assume that Bernadine's comment that, "every year, there's one [student] that
hits me a little different from the others" is an understatement. Based on the
passion and conviction with which Bernadine told this story, it seemed far more
likely that many children every year are the beneficiaries of Bernadine's
compassion, empathy, and dedication to the entire range of children's academic,
social, and developmental needs.

During the course of the interviews, the teachers categorically stated that
their deep sense of caring grounded in an internal construct of mother and
teacher was directed towards all of their students, African American and White,
male and female. However, they did indicate a special and unique depth of
caring and concern with regards to their African American students, presumably
as a result of their sense of the needs of African American students and of a pre­
existing sense of kinship and bonding with those students as fellow African
American persons. For example, as Laverne explained,

I feel the need for Black students greater than for White students,
because they seem to have more life-threatening challenges than
the Whites. . . . And, it looks like the Black students have a
greater need. So, I guess I'm more drawn to them, because
they appear to have a greater need, or a different type of need. . . .
Both of them [Black and White students] still need this nurturing.
But, it looks like the Blacks need it more.

In her response, Laverne again specifically used the word “nurturing” in describing at least part of her interaction with her students. In a similar vein, Pauline also combined the notions of teaching and nurturing, as she described her deliberate decision, late in her career, to return to an inner-city, predominantly African American school to teach.

I didn’t grow up in an integrated neighborhood. I knew that there were White people in the world. [laughter] My parents didn’t talk negatively or positively [about race]. It just wasn’t talked about. . . . I mean, every now and then you may have heard something, but I have no real conscious memory of it. And, so, I grew up feeling good about myself. And, I knew that the [African American] teachers I had loved me, cared about me, they respected me and the rest of us. And, I just could see, over the years, I just have not always felt that young Black children, after having been bussed many miles from home, sometimes I just didn’t get the feeling that they were cared about. And, I decided that I wanted to do a little bit of nurturing as well as teaching. Somebody had to do it for me, and I appreciated it.

In her narrative, Pauline linked the legacy of teaching and nurturing that she received as an African American child from African American teachers with the same type of teaching and nurturing that she hoped to provide for her current African American students. Within the context of her narrative, Pauline implied that she felt a sense of duty and obligation to provide that teaching and nurturing.
for her African American students, at least partly as a result of the lack of nurturing that they currently received at school. As Pauline herself stated, “I just didn’t get the feeling that they were cared about.” For Pauline, as in the case of so many of the teachers, the notions of teaching and nurturing were parallel constructs in their view of their work as teachers.

However, as previously noted, the teachers’ special emphasis upon the needs and nurturing of African American students by no means precluded the same type and depth of nurturing, guidance, and care for White students. As Lorraine explained,

Yes, there were some White kids that were absolutely precious to me. I can call their names off the top of my head right now. I even have some that call me, who called me, “Momma.” And, when I left, and we would go to these county festivals, and I saw them. And, they [the White students] would say something about “Momma.” And, then the [African American] kids in my [group] would be talking about, “Miss Lorraine, those kids are calling you “Momma.” [laughter] And, then I would say, “Listen. I raised them just like I raised you all.” [laughter]

Indeed, Lorraine and the other female teachers in this study demonstrate that “the lesson of the Black mother is in each of us” (Jones, 1985, p. 10). For these teachers, “the lesson of the Black mother” became a reality in their working lives as expressed in the notion of teaching as a fusion of instructor, mother, nurturer, counselor, and life guide for the students they taught.
As African American women, the teachers in this study shared a deep sense of kinship and bonding, both individually and collectively, with other African American women. Indeed, a shared commonality of experience has existed among African American women from the pre-slavery period in West Africa, during the middle passage and the slavery period in America, and through to the present day (Hull & Smith, 1982).

A primary, shared commonality of experience which has contributed to the sense of kinship and bonding between African American women has been the experience of systematic discrimination, oppression, and repression based not only on race, but also on gender as well (Scott, 1991). In describing the historical journey of African American women in our society, Rodgers-Rose (1980) has asserted that,

"Her existence has been characterized by three hundred—no, nearly four hundred—years of struggle, a struggle to exist, to be her own person, not only for herself, but for her family. . . . The knowledge of the history of Black women tells us that they continue to live in an oppressive society. (pp. 9,10)

Besides the struggle against oppression at large, African American women have faced discrimination in employment outside the home. Black women have worked for over three hundred years in this country. Discriminated against both as Black and as female, they
are the most disadvantaged race-sex group. For three centuries, they have been consistently undereducated, underemployed, and underpaid. (Scott, 1991, p. 19)

Indeed, for much of their history in America, African American women have lived their lives in a “society, which through racial, sexual, and class oppression, systematically denies our existence” (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xviii).

However, the sense of kinship and bonding among African American women is only partially explained by the shared experience of historic, systematic discrimination and oppression within American society. It is the surviving of that oppression, the living of full and rich lives as individual persons, as sisters, daughters, and mothers that has completed and sustained the creation of kinship and bonding among African American women (Rodgers-Rose, 1980; Scott, 1991). “Black women have always bonded together in support of each other, however uneasy, and in the face of whatever other allegiances militated against that bonding” (Lorde, 1979, cited in Barnes, p. 100). However, African American women have not only survived, they have also thrived together within a society largely hostile to their dreams and aspirations during much of American history.

What our multilayered oppression does not understand are the ways in which we have created and maintained our own intellectual traditions as Black women, without either the recognition or the support of White male society. (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xviii)

The teachers expressed this ongoing sense of kinship and bonding in two ways, one internal to their lives and one external. First, they described the
kinship and bonding within their internal family lives, with their mothers and
grandmothers. Secondly, several teachers detailed an external sense of kinship
and bonding with other African American women in the form of participation in
African American sororities.

In an extended narrative, Terri described aspects of her relationship with
her grandmother, the impact of that relationship upon her as a person, and her
grandmother's subsequent influence on her later interaction with her own
children.

When I was a little girl, I would always try my grandmother. I didn't
know it at the time; you would think that anybody would be able to
go to their grandma and talk about sex. . . . And, I would hear dirty
jokes in school, and I would tell them, and she'd say, "Oh, I'm too
young to hear that." [laughter] But, it was never a no-no, a dirty
little something you didn't discuss. And, I tried to bring the kids up
the same way. There was nothing my children couldn't tell me. One of
my daughters, when she was at [her 6th grade school], and they had to
write an essay about Mother's Day. . . . And, her essay said, "There's
nothing that I can't tell my Momma. My Mom is my best friend. I
can go to her." Even though, they would come, and some of the things
that they would want to discuss, I would go, "Whoa!" And, I would
say, "This is hypothetical, isn't it? [laughter] But, we were able to
talk. My kids used to say that they would rather I'd go on and whip them.
[laughter] They'd say, "Momma, please just go on and whip me."
[laughter] But, I remember my grandmother doing that. She would discuss with me and tell me. . . .

As Terri continued her narrative, she continued to detail the generational linkages between herself, her grandmother, and in her relationship with her own children.

I never heard my grandmother raise her voice, never. Never in all my 15 years of knowing her. . . . Now, I won’t say I never saw her angry. We are members of [a large, African American church]. And, she was a deaconess. She was always sitting at the front of the church. And, I would usually sit in the back. And, how she would know it was me back there making the noise, I don’t know. [laughter] But, she would turn around and look, and she had the deepest blue-green eyes. She would turn around, and those eyes would look like daggers. And, it would be like, “You’d better shape up, or you’re going to get it, kid.” And, she would always tell you before she whipped you, she would tell you why she was whipping you, how much it hurt her, but, because she loved you, you were not going to get by with it. And, I used to tell my children the same thing. [laughter] And, my children tell me that they hear my words when they open their mouths [to their children]. And, I say, “Yeah, I do know what you’re talking about.” Because, I used to say, “I would never do this kind of thing to my children. I’d just go on and beat them. But, I’d have to lecture them before and after.” [laughter]
In her narrative, Terri repeatedly recalled a sense of bonding with her grandmother, even though she was alive only until Terri was 15 years old. Many years later, the detail of her memory of being with her grandmother in church, and the “deepest blue-green eyes” of her grandmother acting as “daggers,” spoke to the impact her grandmother had upon her. Additionally, at several points in her narrative, Terri linked her grandmother’s child-rearing practices with her own, using phrases several times such as, “I remember my grandmother doing that” and “I tried to bring the kids up the same way.” A key moment in the narrative came as Terri said, “I used to tell my children the same thing. . . . And, my children tell me that they hear my words when they open their mouths [to their children].” For Terri, the legacy of her bonding with her grandmother had indeed come full circle. Lessons in child-rearing that she learned from her grandmother have passed from her grandmother, to her, and now to her own children.

Additionally, these same lessons in, and approach to, child-rearing became a valued component in Terri’s interactions with her students in the school environment. In the following description of a particular student at her school, Terri expressed points of connection in her own thinking between the child-rearing practices that she employed with her own children, passed down to her from her grandmother, and child-rearing practices at school.

We had a little boy at our school who was a holy terror. The principal was afraid of him. And, he was something else. And, the guidance counselor asked him where he thought he would be when he was 14 years old. And,
he said, “Dead or in jail.” Now, this was his outlook on life at 14 [years old]. If there had been somebody he could look up to, and could jack him up, and say, “No, you’re not, because I’m going to beat your socks off.” . . . I’m a true believer in “spare the rod and spoil the child.” That you sit up here, and you can talk, and, as I would tell my own children, we would talk, and talk, and talk. . . . [laughter] And, when those words have not reached you, I would do something to remind you that I’m not going to put up with it. [laughter] And, I have to admit, when I was little, the only thing that kept me from doing something was that I was scared that I would get my behind whipped. . . . But, I would rather spank somebody’s bottom, because he’s done wrong, than to go on and let them think they’re going to get away with it in life. And, then, that child is lost.

Bernadine also recalled the supportive bonding between her mother and herself, and her other brothers and sisters. This relationship influenced her decision to enter teaching.

I’m from a large family, seven brothers and four sisters; there’s 12 of us. . . . My mother finished 2nd grade. She could read better than the average teacher. . . . handwriting, beautiful spelling. . . . My mother said she always wanted to teach. . . . So, all of us went to school. It was kind of a reinforcement to do it. You’ve got to learn. My mother stressed, “You don’t want to have to work hard like I’m working. I don’t want you to work like this.”. . . She did day’s work. . . . So, the thing
that really motivated me to go to school was my mother, really... Every one of us finished high school... and eight of us finished college, four of us got Master’s degrees, one with a doctorate... Strange enough... I was always, for some reason wanting to stay around to help my mother, to be there, to keep house and all. I don’t know why... When she died, we were going through some papers and some records... She got a special recognition, to come to the college and be recognized as “Mother of the Year.” And, I was looking at that, and I said, “This is an honor. We really need to frame this kind of thing.” And, they were saying at that time in the letter, that they had recognized her for... her enthusiasm for wanting to see her children educated, and the sacrifices and what have you. So, this is the kind of family background I came from that motivated me.

In her narrative, Bernadine described a sense of bonding and kinship with her mother that is still alive and well within her, even though her mother is gone. The special sense of bonding with her mother deeply influenced her, especially in terms of her motivation to obtain an education. For Terri, Bernadine, and many of the other teachers, the memory of their sense of bonding and kinship with their mothers and grandmothers is similar to the relationship Angelita Reyes (1996) described.

Because of her belief in the olden kinship that had sustained her people, she always told us the importance of sticking together as a family. There were the sibling squabbles among the five of us, each vying for her special
attention, even when we became adults! But, she wanted us to be close to each other, and to find for ourselves another "center" among us after she was gone. "When I am gone, my spirit will be with all of you at the same time." (p. 27)

The teachers also described the sense of kinship and bonding they experienced with other African American women, in African American sororities. Through the work of the sororities, they contributed to the well-being of the African American community. For example, Carolyn stated that she was, . . . proud of my sorority, because it's one of the few entities that does, indeed, reach back. We have scholarships for African American kids. . . . It used to be only females. But, now, we've included Black males, because we see the number of Black males who aren't going to college. Last year, when our [school's] Saturday School sessions were in, they [the sorority] donated monies. We were one of their projects. . . . In my sorority, it's just a beautiful group of women, that are in all professions, but, the majority of them are teachers. . . . I cling to that group, because we do support each other. It's a sisterhood of women that understands some of the common problems that we have when we face our different worlds, when we go out into our worlds. . . . especially some of them in business. They hit that [glass] ceiling, and they can't break through that ceiling. And, that's kind of in education, too. . . . A lot of African American women don't see themselves as superintendents, and, it's not because they don't think they're capable.
They just realize and accept that there’s going to be a limitation in terms of how far they can go, simply because they’re a woman and simply because they’re Black.

For Carolyn, her continued participation in her sorority served two distinct purposes. First, she experienced a sense of kinship and “sisterhood” with other African American women. Additionally, her sorority conscientiously “reach[ed] back” into the African American community through service projects such as providing scholarships to African American students.

Gloria described both her perception of a difference in roles between White and African American fraternities and sororities and, like Carolyn, reiterated the importance of African American sororities “reaching back” into the African American community.

Well, for White people, when you’re in a sorority, that’s like during college time. And, when you graduate, well, that’s it. But, with the African American [women], we have graduate chapters. And, we go on. And, we meet, and we still do for the [African American] community. We still do for the children. We still contribute to sickle-cell. We still have sales. We are more or less like service clubs. . . . I’m a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha. It’s the first and only sorority for Negro women. . . . Being a member of a sorority, as a Black woman, is important.

Thus, for Carolyn, Gloria, and several of the other teachers, ongoing participation in an African American sorority furnished a venue to strengthen a
“sisterhood” of kinship and bonding with other African American women. And, just as importantly, the sorority offered an opportunity to “reach back” into the African American community with much-needed help in many areas of community need. For many of the teachers, their work in the sorority fulfilled a need within them at this point in their lives to give back to the community and society from which they came. Lawrence Lightfoot (1994) profiled six middle-class African American professionals similarly.

There is a strong impulse to find meaningful ways to give forward. No longer so driven by ambition, they have become more interested in the quality of their commitments. Their lives are less focused on what they will acquire and more shaped by what they will leave behind. They have developed an impressive body of work, refined skills, discernment, and self-confidence. They have learned what they do best and how to use their gifts wisely and productively. . . . for all of us, giving forward means journeying home.

In the end, the professional and personal lives and identities of these teachers are characterized and marked by the notion of kinship—kinship with African American children and the African American community, kinship with other African American women, and kinship with the long, historic line of their foremothers throughout history.

Black American women, we are born into a mystic sisterhood, and we live our lives within a magic circle, a realm of shared language reference, and
allusion within the veil of our blackness and our femaleness. (Braxton, 1989, p. 17).
The Interactive Dimension

The teachers themselves defined the interactive dimension of their personal and professional identities as lived experience in the work settings. This dimension encompassed interactions within three distinct spheres of experience—their interaction with students and the community, their interaction with colleagues and others in the school setting, and their interaction with educational systems and organizations. Figure 1 on page 6 places this “interactive dimension” as a separate domain within teachers’ personal and professional identities. However, the three domains of that conceptual framework are not fully independent. Indeed, to separate the domains would be artificial.

The interactive dimension relates as well to the dimension of the self, the first domain explored in this chapter. Thus, any analysis of the interactive dimension must recall previous discussion. For example, this chapter has already explored the experiences of these teachers in terms of their interaction with their students, both African American and White, and their interaction with their African American communities as part of the discussion of the dimension of the self. In that section, the teachers’ notion of self was intertwined with a depth of feeling, kinship, and connection among these teachers and their students, primarily but not exclusively African American students, and their African American communities. Thus, even though these experiences were “interactive”
in nature, the quality and nature of these interactions also fell logically and sequentially within the dimension of the self as the self was being actualized.

Additionally, the nature of the interaction between the teachers and their African American students and their African American communities helped to comprise specific components of the teachers’ construction of African American collective memory, one aspect of the dimension of the self. The earlier discussion of how the teaching self emerged in relationship with African American students and with African American communities is also highly relevant to the interactive dimension of the teachers’ identities.

Therefore, the range of interactions relevant to this study is broad, spanning connections with one’s self, with students, and with the community. To avoid redundancy, this discussion focuses only on the interactions of teachers with their colleagues and within the educational organization, certainly two milieux in which interactions are central.

What follows also continues the pattern of selecting and emphasizing topics proportionate to the attention placed upon those topics by the teachers themselves during the interviews. In other words, the analysis of data has quite naturally focused on the topics which teachers found important to discuss during the interviews. Importance was evident not only by the length of time the teachers devoted to a topic but also by the depth of emotion and interest they have brought to the discussion. For example, the teachers emphasized two areas. First, they spent a significant amount of interview time discussing their perceptions of their White teaching colleagues, both in terms of their own
relationships with White teachers and in terms of the interactions between White teachers and African American students. Secondly, the teachers detailed their view of themselves as buffers and bridge-builders between a largely White teaching force and African American students, parents, and the African American community at large.

The teachers emphasized two related topics within the interactive dimension which influenced their personal and professional identities. First, the teachers detailed their perceptions of both the positive and negative effects of school integration and desegregation upon themselves, upon African American students, and upon the African American community. Secondly, as one aspect of this discussion, they described their perceptions regarding the employment of White teachers in predominantly African American schools, the voluntary decision of these White teachers to transfer to predominantly White suburban schools within a few years, and the subsequent effects of this process upon themselves, upon African American students, and upon the African American community at large.

The Uneasy Alliance: The Relationship with White Teaching Colleagues

Each of the teachers in this study worked in a public elementary, middle, or high school within the feeder pattern of a large, predominantly African American high school in Duval County, Florida. The faculties of this set of schools were fully integrated and in most cases were predominantly White. These teachers had worked closely alongside White teaching colleagues throughout their careers. During the course of the interviews, the teachers did
indeed describe productive and meaningful collaborations and friendships with White teaching colleagues throughout their teaching experiences up through the present time. However, much more consistently, the teachers described, often with great passion and conviction, their perception of a pattern of racism among many of their White teaching colleagues towards both themselves and towards African American students. In their view, this racism led to a diminishing of the potential collaboration between themselves and their White colleagues in a joint effort towards the betterment of the educational experience for all children, both for White students and African American children. Additionally, the teachers felt that the specter of internal racism within many of their White colleagues led to a lack of overall effectiveness in working with and teaching African American students.

Thus, this section in the analysis of data will first detail the teachers’ thoughts and opinions regarding their own relationships with White teaching colleagues. Secondly, this section will examine the teachers’ perceptions of White teachers’ interactions with African American students. Both discussions will focus specifically upon interactions with White teaching colleagues based on the teachers’ perception of an internal racism linked to White privilege on the part of many White teachers.

The teachers described two types of racism which they had experienced emanating from their White colleagues over the years. First, they detailed open, overt instances and experiences of racism emanating from their White colleagues. Secondly, and much more prevalently, they described many White
teachers as possessed with a type of racism that was, in their view, largely unconscious and unintentional, thus, perhaps, internal. This type of racism, of which many White persons are frequently unaware, is the racism linked to the ongoing notion of White privilege and its effects upon both White persons and people of color in our society (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000).

In terms of open, overt experiences of racism with respect to their White colleagues, Lorraine related a disturbingly stark example of racism in her interaction with one White teaching colleague.

Once, a teacher [at the middle school] said something [to another colleague that] she had a problem with my being the department chairperson. She said that she didn’t like being told by a nigger what to do. . . . And, it just made me smile. Oh, well, unless she leaves, she’s stuck with me. And, you know, I really didn’t pay any attention to her. Hell, I was loving what I was doing. I had a dynamite choir, hey, I didn’t even see her. . . . Other than the fact that she was catching hell in that classroom. She never should have been a teacher. And, that’s what the problem was. My success. Her failure. Of course, I didn’t slap her, but go ahead. [laughter] Oh, yeah, you can pick it up in a couple of minutes, basically speaking. . . . It’s still very prominent. Racism is still very prominent. . . . It is s-l-o-w-i-1-y improving. . . . And, it’s just enough to slow it down, as it has, you know, always.
Three important components were embedded within Lorraine’s encounter with her White teaching colleague. First is the White teacher’s problematic relationship with the idea of a Black person having position and power within the department; the presumption is that someone White should hold the position, based upon the notion of White privilege (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; McIntyre, 1997). As Lorraine said, the teacher “didn’t like being told by a nigger what to do.” Secondly, Lorraine recounted her resistance and resilience with regard to the teacher’s attitudes of racism. As she said, “it just made me smile. Oh, well, unless she leaves, she’s stuck with me. And, you know, I really didn’t pay any attention to her. Hell, I was loving what I was doing.” Lastly, Lorraine acknowledged the ongoing presence of racism within the school environment, in her belief that “racism is still very prominent. . . . It is s-l-o-w-l-y improving.”

Similarly, Gloria recounted an experience in working with a White teaching colleague at one of her former schools in Miami.

The White teachers don’t really . . . they don’t embrace you as an equal.

And, I had to get used to that when I first [started teaching]. . . . This was the general attitude. And, I got into it with one of the [White] teachers one time. You know, it’s like they’ll [White teachers] tell you what to do. And, I told her, “No, I’m a teacher. This is my group. I’m a teacher, just like you are.” You know, we really got into it. Which is a lot for me. . . . Anyway, I went to the principal. We both went to the Principal. And, she [the White teacher] said, “I’ve bent over to accommodate you.” And, I said, “You don’t have to accommodate me. I’m a teacher just like you are. We’re in
this together."... I'll never forget her name. You can take it off the tape, but I'll just have to say it. ... [She said the name.] She was a little, short nervous thing. And, I had been taught differently, you know.

Again, as in the previous example of Lorraine's encounter with a White colleague, the White teachers in Gloria's account related to Gloria within the context of an assumed, inherent position of superiority based on race. As Gloria herself said, "they don't really embrace you as an equal." Specifically, the White teacher's comment of "I've bent over to accommodate you" assumes in a paternalistic, condescending manner which communicates that, because of Gloria's racial identity, White teachers working with African American teachers must automatically make adjustments based on a perceived lack of ability on the part of African American teachers. In many ways, the White teacher in this narrative assumed the "innate superiority" embedded within the notion of White privilege in her professional relationship with Gloria (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001, p. 163).

At times, the teachers' descriptions of examples of overt racism expressed by White teaching colleagues could be quite graphic and specific. In a somewhat extended narrative, Carolyn described two specific examples of such behavior.

The gentleman that I told you [about earlier in the interview] that I worked with as well as other [White teachers] ... did not like Black kids. He called them names like "you dad-burned flea ant" was one that I remember. And, he just created such a hostile [environment].... There was no relationship between him and the [African American] kids.... They didn't
respect him, he didn’t respect them. And, it was quite obvious. . . At that time... my principal had allowed me to go in and work in the dean’s office. . . And, when I would handle referrals, the [same] Caucasian teacher would go to the union and say that it was obvious that I had no respect for him, or that I would not handle his referrals the way he thought was necessary. He never just came out and said, “Because she’s Black, she doesn’t see things the way she should. . . . [And] I had [White] teachers that would just cut me off or whatever, and, that was OK, because I came to know that still does not diminish what I bring to the table.

As in the previous narrative provided by Gloria, Carolyn recalled encountering overtly racial attitudes with her White teaching colleague who referred to African American students as “dad-burned flea ants” and resisted Carolyn’s efforts during her time working in the dean’s office. Additionally, she described White teaching colleagues who thought of her contributions as irrelevant and who “would just cut [her] off.” As Carolyn continued in her narrative, she described an unsettling episode involving White teaching colleagues at a professional development in-service meeting.

The person who was over Affirmative Action at the time... [an] African American woman. She was really heavy-chested. Anyway, she came to [our school] one day to do a workshop. And, the [White] people in the workshop... were passing around a note, where they were actually taking bets on her bra size. And, I thought, it was already rude not to be paying attention and listen. But, how could you be that
disrespectful to do something like that? And, then they’re all looking at each other, and it’s like a joke or something. And, first of all, I’m offended, because she’s a Black woman. And, then, second of all, I’m offended, because she’s not being treated as a professional. And, they [the White teachers] thought it was OK. They passed the note to me as well. And, so that kind of thing has always bothered me. The jokes or whatever. But, I’ve come to know that there are times when you can walk out, or, you can let people know how you really don’t appreciate that, or whatever. . . . I’ve picked and chosen those battles.

Thus, embedded within the teachers’ narratives are indeed stories and examples of overt racism expressed towards these particular African American teachers by White colleagues. However, as previously stated, the teachers much more frequently and consistently discussed and described their perceptions of a much more subtle and insidious element of racism present within many of their White colleagues. It is the form of racism associated with and springing from the notion of White privilege (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976).

Fundamentally, White privilege refers to the constellation of effects upon individuals of all ethnic origins and our society as a whole as a result of the historical and ongoing domination of our culture by the White majority population (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; McIntyre, 1997). The notion of White privilege has a dual effect in that it affects deeply both the lives of White and non-White persons in our society. The majority of White people live
their lives in an insulated, and often unknowing, world of economic and social privilege and advantage within our society. African Americans and other persons of color construct lives in reaction to and with awareness of the fact that they live in a society still largely dominated by the White population (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; McIntyre, 1997).

Research suggests that the fundamental racism associated with White privilege, so pervasive within the fabric of American life and society, finds its way into the world view, mindset, and teaching practices of many of the White teachers from that society who work with African American and other children of color within our nation’s classrooms (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Hale, 2001; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000). The subtle and often unconscious form of racism associated with White privilege has been referred to as a “hidden racism” within our classrooms and school systems (Hale, 2001, p. xx). In fact, many White teachers enter into and practice the profession of teaching largely unaware of the notion that their Whiteness affects every component of their personal self, their teaching self, and their interaction with others, including other teachers and students (McIntyre, 1997). As McIntyre has described, shortly after entering into the teaching profession,

I realized that I was insulated in, and by, my own skin color. Everyone I knew and had grown up with was White like me. Everyone I played with as a child was White like me. Everyone that I had become friends with later into my adolescence was White like me. Every teacher I had in school was White like me. Every babysitter, store owner, relative,
neighbor, and family friend that I came into contact was White like me. And, like others before me, I never thought about it. No one ever asked about my Whiteness. Being White was an invisible, yet powerful force that was as much a part of my makeup as my gender, my ethnicity, my religion, and my social class. I just never saw it. (1997, p. 1)

It is this more subtle form of racism undergirding the notion of White privilege that characterized much of the teachers’ narratives describing their contact with and experiences of racism among their White teaching colleagues. Although it did occur, experiences of overt racism directed towards them by White colleagues were relatively rare compared to the ongoing, persistent quality of a hidden, subtle, often unknowing racism present within many of the White colleagues of these teachers.

The subtle nature of racism among many White teachers described by the African American teachers in this study was expressed by Carolyn in her recollection of teaching in one predominantly White, suburban school.

Initially, I don’t think they [the White teachers] saw me as a very serious person, because I came in telling them about this middle school concept that I had just left and all of these great things that we did, and no one listened. And, then the second year, I was asked to be the team leader. It was like, “Oh, maybe Carolyn had something here.” But, I was always talked down to, or offered things to do that were not things that were considered, you know, working with curriculum or anything. It was always, if you want to work with a dance, or coaching, or whatever. And, not
saying that there’s anything wrong with those things, it was just that I had to seek and ask to be included in things that were considered to be more academically-oriented. So, it was always just a feeling that I had. No one ever said it, it was unspoken, but it was just considered that you [as an African American teacher] weren’t quite the person to do certain things, until they would come and see you in the classroom, then you got the respect. . . . They sort of resented the fact that I came in with a very professional look, that I was in my room, that I was doing what I was supposed to do. . . . And, so I was looked at as being this “Miss Goody Two Shoes,” and who does she think she is? She’s just some little Black teacher. How dare she come in here and say anything? Because, I didn’t dare say anything. It was obvious that my practices were different.

At no point in her narrative, did Carolyn describe a racial slur or overt, racially-motivated action against her by her White teaching colleagues. However, as Carolyn herself said, the racism embedded within many of the White teachers towards her was “unspoken,” and “it was always just a feeling that I had.” The refusal by the White teachers to take her seriously, the reluctance to entrust her with serious curricular decisions, Carolyn’s being “always talked down to,” and the resentment towards a “little Black teacher” because of her desire to dress professionally all spoke to outward manifestations of underlying racial attitudes towards Carolyn on the part of her White teaching colleagues. In the end, Carolyn encountered an invisible form of racism
associated with White privilege of which White persons often are not fully
cognizant (McIntyre, 1997). As Berlak & Moyenda (2001) have suggested,

So many White people have no concept that there are people in the world
who function with an entirely different set of values, needs, and self­
concepts. . . . They [don't] realize that we [African Americans] had our
own reality that differed greatly from their own. (p. 163)

In an extended narrative, Terri provided insight into the relationship
between White and African American teachers at her school. This one narrative
encapsulates many of the teachers' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions
regarding their relationships with their White teaching colleagues.

I can see us getting back to where we were back in the 1940s, race­
wise. I don't believe Blacks are going to be willing to be pushed back. It's
going to be, and as a friend of mine was saying, "It's going to be some
fighting. It's going to be some dangerous fighting, because Blacks are not
going to take a back seat anymore." And, it was for a long time, there was
just so much racial tension. But, it was pushed aside. It's not going to be
pushed aside anymore. . . . I could tell from my [school's] staff, [White]
people don't respect Blacks, our [White] co-workers. And, it's like, you're
sitting in a faculty meeting, and you've got these young bucks, who feel
they know all of the answers, and they've got all of the solutions, and all of
this technology, and all of this other kind of carrying on. And, if a Black
person contradicted the statement of one of them, it was like, "You [are]
stupid." Now that wasn't said. But, you got the feeling. . . . I remember
walking into a meeting, and the meeting hadn't started yet, and there were six of my [White] co-workers sitting in the library. And, they were chattering away when I walked in. So, I said, “Good afternoon.” Now, I know who I am. And, I would hold my credentials up to any one of theirs. . . culturally, everything. I know where I came from, and I know what I've done in life. So, I would hold my credentials up to theirs any day of the week. I have never done anything for them to disrespect me. So, when I walked in and said, “Good afternoon,” and not a word was spoken, Terri stood there and said, “OK. I'll try it again.” [laughter] “Good afternoon.” And, then [the White teachers] said, “Good afternoon. Good afternoon.” But, it was like “nothing” walked in. “Nothing” walked in. And, I'm going, “Oh, honey. [laughter] Now, let's not go there.” And, I told them one time, not at that meeting, but at another meeting, and I said, “You know, we talk about the lack of discipline in our children. But, if we don’t respect our co-workers, how are we going to treat our children? Teach them to respect?” And, many of [the White teachers] would pass by on the sidewalk and not open their mouths, as [if] you were part of the structure. As Terri continued her narrative, she began to describe her interaction with a specific White teacher. And, there was one [White] teacher who was a troublemaker. She was one of these kind. . . . She had a little clique. She was really a big troublemaker. . . . I did not like her. I did not, because of her attitude.
And, one day, she was coming down the sidewalk, and it would have been very easy just to turn your back and just say, "I don't like you and you don't like me." Anyway, she was coming down the sidewalk, and she had on this cute little outfit. And, I said, “That is the cutest little outfit.” And, she looked at me as if I had slapped her in the face. She was pregnant, and she said, “I am so big.” And, I said, “It couldn’t be that you’re pregnant, could it?” And, she laughed, you know? And, one of my [African American] co-workers was nearby, and she said, “Terri, why did you talk to that, hmm?” So, I said, “Why not? Why not?” I mean, I can be ugly, too. [laughter]

As did many of the teachers, within the context of her narrative Terri described a relationship between African American and many White teachers that was problematic, unhealthy, and unproductive. At the root of the relationship, in Terri’s view, lay a fundamental combination of racial tension and misunderstanding between White and African American teachers. As Terri herself said, “I can see us getting back to where we were back in the 1940s, race-wise.”

Equally as problematic and devastating for the relationship between White and African American teachers was the apathetic disregard displayed towards Terri by her White colleagues for her personhood, her life experience, and her potential contributions towards the education of African American and White children. Statements by Terri such as “it was like ‘nothing’ walked in” and being treated as if “you were part of the structure” reflected a marginalization of Terri as
a person and as a professional by her White teaching colleagues. Additionally, Terri's potential contributions to both teaching her own students and in assisting mostly younger White teachers in understanding how to teach inner-city African American students effectively were deemed irrelevant by "young [White] bucks, who feel they know all of the answers, and they've got all of the solutions, and all of this technology, and all of this other kind of carrying on."

Actions and attitudes such as these displayed by many White people in general, and by many White teachers specifically, are again a manifestation of the effects of White privilege (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000). Even though these White teachers may or may not be aware of their insular world of White privilege (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976), the effects of their assumed superiority and of the perceived irrelevance of the experiences of persons of color remained malevolent nonetheless. As Sleeter (1997) asserted, White people fear being thought of as racist or "bad people," yet at the same time usually do not experience the outrage at racism that would move us to act differently. White people have grown up learning racial stereotypes that inform their thinking whether they consciously like it or not and usually lack an awareness of the institutional racism in which they participate every day. While in an abstract sense White people may or may not like the idea of reproducing White racism, and in a personal sense, do not see themselves as racist, in their talk and actions, they are. (p. xi)
It is indeed accurate to characterize much of the teachers’ dialogue and conversation regarding their relationships with White teaching colleagues as a problematic area of great concern for them. However, the teachers’ relationships with White teachers were by no means uni-dimensional. They often spoke fondly of friendships and collaborations with specific White colleagues, as described by James in the following narrative.

At [our school], she taught English, Susan [pseudonym]. I loved Susan. Susan was just a jewel. She was just adorable. And, she buddied up with an African American teacher, Monty. They taught next door to each other. So, they were like, just buddies. . . . Susan has a great personality. They [the students] loved Monty, too, even though they thought she was a little too strict. But, both of them were strict. They did their jobs. Two excellent teachers. Susan, I just love her. She’s a White female, and Monty is a Black female. And, we’d talk, we’d pass the time of day, we just had fun. It was fun.

White teachers and other White persons such as Susan, who step beyond the world of White privilege to “buddy up” with African Americans and other persons of color, have either consciously or subconsciously reflected upon and taken action with regard to their racial identity and the quality of their interactions with others. In a sense, they are “self-reformers” who think through “their own racial identities as salient aspects of their thinking” and make the appropriate modifications in their beliefs about their place in a world that authentically includes African Americans and other people of color (McIntyre, 1997, p. 5).
In the end, what was perhaps most disturbing and unsettling for these teachers about their experience of the racism of White teachers was that it recalled a lifetime of memories of persistent racism linked to White privilege. In their view, White teachers, people who should know better and do better in terms of relating to African Americans and other persons of color, in many cases simply did not do so. As Pauline said, the levels of trust and rapport between White and African American teachers, at least in her experience, has “gotten shabby over the last few years.” Indeed, for these teachers, their experience of racism among White teachers recalled that of Moyenda (2001), in that,

it is only as adults, when we enter the school setting as...teachers, that we begin to see the racism that was directed at us when we were children. It is then that we remember how, within the elementary school setting, we learned what we could and could not say to our White teachers and how to lie by omission because it was easier to get what we needed if we told them what they wanted to hear, as opposed to what we really thought.

(Berlak & Moyenda, 2001, p. 163)

For the teachers in this study, the racism of White teachers meant that their lessons of childhood in racism and White privilege were all too often reinforced as adults in the world of work.
An area of particular interest and deeply-felt concern for the teachers was their experience of the quality of the interaction between White teachers and African American students. As in the interaction between themselves and many White teachers, the teachers described their perception of an unsettling pattern of racism and discrimination in the relationship between many White teachers and African American students.

Much as in the relationship between themselves and many White teachers, the teachers identified the presence of two forms of racism present in the interaction between White teachers and African American students. First, the teachers did identify incidents of overt racism and discrimination directed towards African American students by White teachers. However, in the scope of the entire discussion by the teachers, these incidents, while very disturbing and unsettling to the teachers, were relatively rare. Much more frequently, the teachers described the same type of unknowing, “unconscious discrimination” and racism linked to an internal sense of White privilege present in the relationship between many White teachers and African American students that characterized their own relationships with their White colleagues (Hale, 2001, p. xx). The teachers felt strongly that this invisible, internal racism present within many White teachers had significant implications in the teaching practices of White teachers who have not accounted for this internal construct within themselves (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). The teachers often discussed these
issues related to this racism linked to White privilege within the context of a larger discussion of an approach to teaching that they identified as an effective "Black teaching style."

Thus, this section of the analysis of data first details the teachers’ descriptions of overt racism directed towards African American students by White teachers. The analysis then considers the teachers’ perceptions of the more prevalent, subtle racism of many White teachers and its implications for teaching practice with African American children.

During the course of the interview process, the teachers identified specific incidents of overt racism directed towards African American students on two occasions. In describing one White teacher’s attitudes towards her African American students, Bernadine discussed her concern regarding an overt pattern of racist thought.

I even had one [White] teacher last year to say that they’re [African American students] “nothing but a bunch of savages.” . . . I actually had this to happen. . . . And, this year . . . [the teacher said,] “The brain of the Black and the White was different.” . . . Oh, oh, maybe I shouldn't have spoken that. . . . But, I’m just saying that if you have [White] people who feel this way, how are you going to get a group of “savages” to act “tame?” So, you [as a teacher] are not going to put forth any effort to bring about any order or structure. You spend all of your time writing referrals, which this teacher does, three or four times a day. And, you spend all of your time writing referrals and telling the office what you want done.
Beyond Bernadine’s obvious concern regarding the overtly racist views of this White teacher, it was the effect of this racism upon the teacher’s practice that was of the most concern to her. Bernadine drew a clear line of connection between the racism of the teacher and the teacher’s inability to relate to the students and to manage the classroom environment successfully. As Bernadine herself said, how could a teacher who viewed African American students as “savages” hope to “tame” them? As Bernadine listened to this teacher’s discussion of “savages” and “the brain of the Black and the White [being] different,” she may well have wondered, as did Moyenda (2001),

> What is driving them [White teachers] to come to my neighborhood?
> Why didn’t they [White teachers] stay where their “innate superiority” was constantly affirmed? They came because they didn’t realize we [African Americans] had our own reality that differed greatly from their own. . . .

Those White people who pull out their White privilege and execute it do so because they have nothing else—no skill, integrity, sanity, critical thought, analysis, theory, belief or value system. There is no substantive essence to White supremacy. (pp. 162-163)

The other example of conscious, overt racism directed towards African American students by White teachers was described by Ethel within her account of a double standard of student discipline and management in her large, predominantly African American high school.

> Discrimination is alive, you know? I’ve seen discrimination here at [our school], because I know some of our Caucasian students can get away
with some of the things that African American students can’t, with a
Caucasian teacher, you know? I know this. I know one Caucasian
student, when she first came to [our school], now she just loves it at [our
school]. She came to the library the other day, [and] she was leaving the
classroom. [She said,] “I ain’t sitting up in there” [the classroom]. And,
they [several White teachers] talked to her, and they guided her, and
thank God, it worked out for her. But, an African American student would
have been out the door, you see? But, the Caucasian was allowed to stay
and grow on into maturity. But, a lot of our African American kids are not
given [as] much of a chance as some of the Caucasian students here [at
our school]. I’ve seen that discrimination.

In her narrative describing the inequities in treatment toward White and
African American students by these White teachers, Ethel used phrases such as
“they guided her,” and “the Caucasian [student] was allowed to stay and grow on
into maturity.” In contrast, Ethel clearly believed that African American students,
given the same set of circumstances, “would have been out the door.” Her
choice of wording in describing how this particular White student was treated in
contrast to African American students implied a belief on Ethel’s part in a wider
pattern of discrimination and racism among White teachers with regards to
African American students. If Ethel’s perceptions were correct, that a pattern of
inconsistency and inequity exists in the approach to discipline and management
of African American students by many White teachers, it may be logical to
assume that this same inequity and inconsistency finds its way into the full
continuum of classroom interactions between African American students and many White teachers. Indeed, Hale (2001) has referred to the effects of such racist and discriminatory inequities and inconsistencies in the interaction between many White teachers and African American students as "imping[ing] upon the life chances of African American children... Inferior educational outcomes are tolerated for African American children day in and day out, in inner-city, suburban, and private school settings (p. xx)."

During the interviews, the teachers certainly acknowledged incidents of overt racism and discrimination on the part of White teachers with African American students. However, the preponderance of their dialogue focused upon a subtle, often unknowing, internal racism linked to White privilege on the part of many White teachers (McIntyre, 1997). In the view of the teachers, the same type of unconscious, unknowing internal racism linked to White privilege, so often evident in their own relationship with White colleagues, affected the relationship between White teachers and African American students. As a group, the teachers expressed strongly and consistently the notion that, unless a White teacher is willing to acknowledge the presence of White privilege within one's self and to adjust one's worldview and teaching style, the effectiveness of the White teacher in working with African American students is extremely limited (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000).

In the view of the teachers, just as White teachers may be unaware of the influence of White privilege in their life experience in general and in their
relationships with African American colleagues in particular, the same holds true in their relationships with African American students. Indeed, many White teachers enter into the practice of teaching with the best of intentions, but they are completely unaware that their relationships with their African American students are shaped and influenced by an internal racism linked to a notion of White privilege fundamental to the fabric of American society (Hale, 2001; McIntosh, 1997). As products of school systems that by and large continue to perpetuate and emphasize predominantly White norms and cultural behaviors, many White teachers have usually had little to no opportunity to reflect upon the role of White privilege in their life experience or to consider making adjustments in their thinking and behavior based on an awareness of the notion of White privilege (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976). They exemplify what McIntosh (1992) has noted.

In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my [White] group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. (p. 34)

Thus, as Gloria commented, many White teachers in school districts throughout the United States are "not prepared [for teaching African American students] and for the Black mentality." Indeed, the teachers in this study focused on the implications for teaching practice which arise from White teachers' assumption of privilege vis-à-vis their African American students.
The discussions of effective teaching practice were often embedded within what these African American teachers themselves identified as “the Black teaching style.” Indeed, Gloria specifically used that phrase in describing her perceptions of how White teachers can become effective in working with African American students.

Black kids are good “bullshit detectors.” They know. They read, you know, they see through you. And, you can’t come in there shuckin’. You can’t come in there [to the classroom] half-ready. I’ve seen some excellent White teachers. But, those were teachers who developed a “Black teaching style.”

Over the course of the interviews, the teachers described three components of a “Black teaching style” that they felt were effective in working with African American students. According to these teachers, the ineffectiveness of many White teachers in working with African American students was rooted in the White teachers’ inability to fully grasp and incorporate the three components of the more effective “Black teaching style.” This inability connected with their lack of self-awareness regarding White privilege.

According to the teachers themselves, the first component of an effective “Black teaching style” included authentic, deeply-felt levels of caring for and about African American children; such caring led to high levels of interpersonal rapport with African American students and their parents. The second component featured high expectations on the part of the teacher for the abilities and behavior of African American children themselves. The third and final
component of “the Black teaching style” was, as Gloria described, a “no-nonsense approach.” This “no-nonsense approach” meant that teachers would not be intimidated by African American students and that they would be willing to discipline and manage the behavior of students and the classroom environment.

The following section considers how the teachers described their own teaching in terms of these components of a “Black teaching style.” Concurrently, the analysis also considers the teachers’ perceptions of the ineffectiveness of many, but not all, White teachers in incorporating these components into their own personal teaching styles.

The first component of “the Black teaching style,” deep levels of caring for the well-being of African American students, came naturally to this group of African American teachers as a result of their sense of kinship and bonding with other African Americans. For them, this deep sense of love and concern facilitated high levels of interpersonal rapport with both their African American students and their parents. For example, Ethel described her connectedness in the following narrative.

> When I look into the eyes of an [African American] kid who tells me, “You made a difference,” I can remember [pause] those were some of the happiest moments of my life. [When African American students would tell me,] “Do you remember when we did this? Do you remember doing this?” And, they share. And, so that’s what motivates me to get up every day and come to our school. That’s what motivates me to want to give that extra ummph, or give that extra time, or give that extra feel to this
profession. That's what motivates me to want to. Because, see, you look at the [African American] kids and you see them, you see the respect for you within them. You know, anytime you go to a place, and a kid will come up to you and hug you, and that kid will come back to see you. . . . A kid grows up, married, brings the family back to meet you [laughter]. I mean, that says something. That says a whole lot. So, that's what motivates me. . . . What motivates me to stay is that I made a difference. I like to think that I made a difference in my own kids and in other [African American] kids, you see? And, that's what inspires me to continue.

In contrast to the high levels of rapport between herself and African American students, Ethel also described a relationship between many White teachers and African American students that was all too often lacking.

In a school like [our school], where the majority of the student population is African American, they should have a majority of African American teachers, so when they look at a teacher, they can see someone who looks like Johnny does, or Sally does, you see what I'm saying? But, what they're seeing now is a majority of Caucasian teachers who don't live in the neighborhood, who. . .a lot of them can't relate to what's happening in African American neighborhoods. They [many White teachers] relate only to what they see on TV. They relate to only what they've heard from their friends. They relate only to what they hear someone else say. You understand what I'm saying? Instead of accepting African Americans at full value, you see, there are barriers, you know? Like if I meet you, you
see, you should expect the best from me, just like I would expect the best from you, you see?

Similarly, during the course of her interview, Gloria compared her own deeply-felt sense of caring and concern with regard to her African American students to the levels of caring and concern demonstrated by many White teachers. As noted earlier in this chapter, Gloria described her sense of bonding, care, and concern for African American children.

Oh, yeah. I love my kids. I get teary, just thinking about [them]....

I think that's why I still work. I know that's why I still work.... It's just when they come in...you know, you can just tell they might have had a hard day, or a hard morning or something, and you just try to learn their names, and you give them dignity, you give them respect especially the little ones. I love the little ones. Yes, it's someone's child, you know? You don't talk to people's children any kind of way. I read the stories to them and, just, to teach them. To know what a title page is. To know the parts of a book. I mean, it's like...it's like reaffirming, these children can learn. We have to teach them.... That's why you're here. If they knew, they wouldn't have to come to school.

However, Gloria severely questioned the levels of caring and concern of many White teachers for African American students. In her view, the lack of caring and concern was linked to racial identity.

The White teachers don't care [about African American students].
Our [African American] kids, invariably, are sitting outside the door, when they [White teachers] put them outside the classroom. They [White teachers] teach above their [African American students'] heads. . . . I think White teachers pre-judge [African American students]. I notice that if they have Black kids in the room, and they don't have any White kids, they're going to get the lightest Black kid to be the pet. Because, they figure that if that kid is light, then that kid is more intelligent that the one that's dark. A lot of times, they can't see beyond the color. The White teachers can't see beyond the color.

The narratives of Ethel and Gloria reflect their perception of a distinct lack of fundamental caring and concern for African American students on the part of many White teachers. If it is indeed true, as Gloria stated, that many "White teachers can't see beyond the color," Terri offered an explanation as to causes. Many White teachers enter the teaching profession and care for all children, but they may lose that sense of caring and concern towards African American children.

I think these teachers, the White teachers, who are on the Kindergarten wing [at our school] are excellent teachers. They find out how to reach the [African American] kids and what to do. And, they don't spend their time talking about dumb this and dumb that, and "he can't learn." They find out sometimes, "I can't reach so and so. I don't know how to reach so and so. What can I do to reach so and so?" And, I would have a couple of young White teachers to come to me and say, "What can I do to reach so and
so?” But, then by about mid-year, they fall into what is better known as “the clique.” And, “the clique” is telling them, “No matter what you do, no matter how you do, you ain’t going to be able to do.” So, you ignore it. You pull your paycheck.

In her narrative, Terri touched upon two important ideas. First, she described new White teachers who initially enter into their relationships with African American students imbued with an authentic sense of caring, love, and concern towards their students of color. As Terri said, they are often “excellent teachers” who truly want to learn from African American teachers, such as Terri, how to reach their African American students in the most effective manner possible. Again, as Terri said, “They find out how to reach the [African American] kids and what to do. And, they don’t spend their time talking about dumb this and dumb that, and ‘he can’t learn.’ “

However, Terri’s second important idea was that, at some point, “mid-year,” many new White teachers seemed to lose much of their initial sense of caring, commitment, and concern for the well-being and life experience of African American children. Indeed, as Terri stated, they become members of “the clique.” The implication was that this was a “clique” of White teachers who, sadly, were merely going through the motions of teaching and just “pull[ing a] paycheck.” The efforts to build bridges with their African American students and to establish deep, meaningful levels of caring and interpersonal rapport were largely gone.
A logical question embedded in Terri's narrative is why so many White teachers, at least in this context, join “the clique.” Why do so many White teachers, as described in the interviews, fail to establish deep connections with African American students?

One possibility is a subtle, invisible, racism linked to an internal sense of White privilege, an “ideology of separateness” often held by White teachers towards African Americans and other persons of color (McIntyre, 1997, p. 135). What they know and believe about African Americans comes largely from “the media, their parents, teachers, texts, peers, and the evening news” (p. 135) and is rarely the result of consistent, meaningful interaction with African Americans and other persons of color. As is the case with many White Americans in general, many White teachers conceptualize and experience their life journey in the context of a separateness between themselves, African Americans, and other persons of color (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997).

Because the notion of White privilege is often invisible to White persons, many simply live their lives with this sense of separateness as routine and normal (McIntyre, 1997).

If a White person or teacher is interested in establishing deep and meaningful relationships with African Americans based on a sense of mutual caring and concern, he or she must make a deliberate and conscious effort to overcome the influence of White privilege within their life experience (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000). This process includes acknowledging the existence of White privilege, educating one’s self as to “the
relationship between [one's] racial identity and the existence of racism,“ and “taking constructive action” to live their lives in an authentically non-racist manner (McIntyre, 1997, p. 18).

Unfortunately, for many White persons and for many of the White teachers described by the teachers during the interviews, a lack of motivation exists in vigorously addressing the role of White privilege in their lives. For many White persons, a life lived within the context of an unknowing, invisible sense of White privilege is the life into which they have been born and have become accustomed to living; it is a life in many ways more simple and more easily led (McIntyre, 1997; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). Indeed, for many White persons, the idea of addressing racism and White privilege in their life experience is a daunting task and the dissonance caused by critically investigating Whiteness, the history of racism, the untold stories of White supremacy, and the advantaged positionalities of White people in our society immobilizes many Whites, thereby, distancing us from engaging in critique. (McIntyre, 1997, p. 136).

The White teachers in Terri’s “clique,” and many of the White teachers described by the teachers during the interviews, have been “immobilized” at the thought of truly taking on the notion of White privilege within themselves (p. 136). However, this immobility, accompanied by White privilege, leads to a diminished lack of caring and concern for African American children, a subsequent lack of interpersonal rapport with those children, and a resulting loss of teaching effectiveness with African American children (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Many
White teachers, such as the teachers in Terri’s story, begin their teaching careers with a sense of caring towards all children, only to join a “clique” within a few months time. They may enter the profession with a limited amount of contact and experience with African Americans and other persons of color (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). For many of them, the abstract notion of teaching and the accompanying general desire to connect with all children was nurtured in a life influenced by the effects, albeit largely unconscious and unknowing, of White privilege. As they began their actual teaching careers, these abstract notions collide with the concrete realities of interaction with children of color within the classroom environment. At that point, these teachers, informed by a life experience of White privilege and unwilling or unable to take conscious steps to combat it, joined a “clique.”

By their own admission, the African American teachers in this study experienced deep connection, kinship, and rapport with their African American students based on shared experiences. White teachers who establish this same type of interpersonal rapport and connection with African American and other children of color have identified the presence of White privilege within themselves and have taken constructive steps within their own life experiences to live a life as free as possible from its effects. Instead of seeing themselves as living separately from African Americans and other persons of color, they see themselves as joined together at the deepest of levels with all of humanity in a collaborative experience of life (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997).
The teachers expressed a great deal of concern with regard to their perception of a lack of caring and interpersonal rapport between many White teachers and African American students, particularly in light of an increasingly White teaching force (Sleeter, 1993). As Terri said,

I think, after a while, the education world is going to be majority White. You are going to have a majority of Whites who are involved in education, because Blacks are finding, it's more the younger Blacks, are finding it's more financially beneficial to go into another field. So, ten years from now, Lord, I worry about our [African American] children. Because, I don't see the inner-cities changing. I don't see the problems that make the inner-city stumbling stones changing. I don't see it getting better.

Terri and the other teachers in this study view too many African American children going into classrooms each day staffed by White teachers with whom they feel little or no sense of connection and rapport, teachers who view their life experiences as fundamentally separate. Children’s achievement is negatively affected by such disconnection. However, real change in achievement for African American children will come when we extend to them the love and support that White upper- and middle-class families legislate for their children to give them an edge. One part of that agenda is to increase the numbers of teachers who care about the souls of the children. (Hale, 2001, pp. xxi, 75)

The second component of a “Black teaching style” effective in working with African American students focused on the high expectations of teachers for
African American children themselves. However, many times throughout the
interviews, the teachers stated that many White teachers have unsubstantiated,
low expectations for the behavior, abilities, and talents of African American
students based on their pre-conceived ideas regarding those students’ abilities
and talents. For example, as Laverne explained,

Some of the [White] teachers have pre-conceived ideas. Go in there,
everyone is innocent until proven guilty. And, look at that classroom. Be
color blind, go in there, and set the tone and set the standard and make
them listen to you. That’s part of being a teacher. And, until they [White
teachers] get that into their head, they’re going to continue to be frustrated
in that classroom. One teacher came in crying one day. She left. She left
for the rest of the year. She said, “I can’t handle the class. I just don’t
know what to do.” She left. And, I thought she was doing OK, but she
said, “No, I can’t control them.” Control them?! I mean, children are
children. They come in different colors, but they’re all children. . . . They
happen to have Black skin, but they still need discipline. They still need
whatever you’re bringing to them. . . . I think they [White teachers] get
sidetracked and off track, because they have this perception of “Oh, God,
they’re [African American students] bad.”

Within her narrative, Laverne clearly implied that the crying White teacher
was experiencing difficulty with her African American students as a result of “pre-
conceived ideas” regarding African American students. In contrast to Laverne,
who went “in there, and set the tone and set the standard,” the White teacher
instead focused upon her pre-conceived idea that African American students were "bad," and that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for her to manage the classroom environment successfully. Additionally, Laverne increased the scope of this particular conversation to include other White teachers who would "continue to be frustrated" until they could move beyond their pre-conceived ideas of the behavior of African American students and realize that "they come in different colors, but they're all children. . . . They happen to have Black skin, but they still need discipline. They still need whatever you're bringing to them."

Alicia described the low expectations of many White teachers with regard to African American students as one result of a lack of understanding of the African American culture in its entirety. Her extended narrative represents many thoughts of these teachers.

There was a [White] guy on my hall when I was department head; he had a difficult time relating [to African American students]. He came in and he was just upset already, you know, about kids coming in, you know, during pre-planning, and all he did was talk to me about [African American] kids, how he hoped they were going to be. You know, it was like, I don't know what kind of pre-conceived ideas he already had, but he had a rough year. . . . And, I had already said to myself, "He's going to have a rough year, because he's got these pre-conceived ideas about how Black kids act." . . . Some of them [White teachers] are terrified, you know, and to be honest with you, I would be too. . . . Because Black kids, compared to White kids, it's a part of our culture to be emotional. . . . A lot of times,
non-Blacks, they can't understand it or they don't understand it. Even in our religious ceremonies, in churches and different things, we clap our hands, you know, we say, "Amen," it's always some kind of emotion. Some of them get up and shout [in church] and this kind of thing. And, you know, that's a part of their behavior. And, a lot of times in the homes, the parents might yell, you know, and it's not being like something, I would say, [that's] bad, but that's just part of their culture and how they express themselves. And, a lot of times [White] people just don't understand that, you know? Non-Blacks just don't understand that because they've never been around it. . . . A lot of White teachers, they can't fathom that. Their tolerance and their patience is not [there], the patience for the [African American] children is not there.

Later in her narrative, Alicia continued to discuss the pre-conceived ideas of many White teachers resulting from a lack of understanding of African American culture, specifically citing the differing perceptions of African American and White teachers regarding disagreements between students in school. And, when they [students] argue, you know, a lot of Whites say, "That's a fight." But, Blacks don't say, "That's a fight." It's just a little difference between [students]. . . . I just feel that the White teachers, they've got to understand the [African American] culture. And, they've got to want to understand the culture, before they can really reach our [African American] kids. . . . And, that's where I feel that the White teachers are not willing to learn and do the work, the extra work that is needed to get to
know what you’re working with. The Volkswagen parts are different from a Cadillac, do you see what I’m saying? [laughter] So, I look at it like that. You’ve got to learn what you’re working with.

As her narrative progressed, Alicia described a sense of connection and cultural familiarity between herself and her African American students that was in stark contrast to the experience of many White teachers (McIntyre, 1997).

Well, I feel like I’ve got control in my classroom when I walk in. And, I think it’s due to some of the [African American] children in my class, their parents were in school with me. . . . So, I’ve already had a bond and connection at that point. Also, some of the children in my class, I taught their brothers and sisters and cousins or whatever. So, therefore, it affords me to have another type bond. And, because I live in the neighborhood, off Cleveland Road, in the neighborhood they’re familiar with me. Because some of the children do live there. And, I think all of that really helps me in my classroom. And, unlike some others [White teachers], who are having a difficult time, I really think that’s what helps me. . . . I can turn my back, and OK, we’re not to talk, [and I] lay my rules out, and they [African American students] pretty much understand and respect what I say. . . . Like yesterday, I was riding down the street and [they were] hollering at me, “Hey, Ms. Alicia,” when I was at my Mother’s house. You know, all of the children at the bus stop right in front of my Mother’s house, carrying the whole bus load to school. I pass by the bus
and go on to school. I think that kind of helps... familiarity and also my character in the neighborhood as well.

As Alicia described in her narrative, she knew that the White teacher in her department was “going to have a rough year, because he’s got these pre-conceived ideas about how Black kids act.” A significant body of research bolsters the belief held by Alicia and the other teachers in this study that many White teachers tend to harbor low expectations regarding the abilities and behavior of African American children (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Indeed,

it does appear that Black children are particularly susceptible to negative teacher expectations because they differ from most teachers who are White and middle-class. . . . Previous research, most importantly naturalistic classroom studies, documents that White teachers are more likely to have negative expectations for Black students than do Black teachers. (Irvine, 1990, p. 61)

The teachers believed that White teachers’ expectations were grounded in pre-conceived ideas about African American students linked to a lack of familiarity and connection to African American culture. Alicia herself referred to this lack of familiarity with African American cultural norms when she commented that “non-Blacks just don’t understand that because they’ve never been around it. . . . A lot of White teachers, they can’t fathom that.” The ability of these African American teachers to fully understand and relate to the cultural context of children’s lived experience is a “cultural synchronization” (Irvine, 1990, p. 21). In
contrast, many White teachers possess limited detailed knowledge and understanding of the scope and range of a distinctive African American culture. The resulting lack of understanding and sense of connection between many White teachers and their African American students can result in lack of correspondence between Black students and their [White] teachers, particularly as it relates to Black students' presentation of self, their language, and their ways of knowing and processing information. . . . Lack of cultural “sync” leads to hidden conflict, hostility, infrequent communication ineffective instruction, detachment, and negative teacher and student expectations. (p. 42)

The cycle of lowered expectations, pre-conceived ideas, and the lack of familiarity with African American culture, characteristic of many White teachers, is often the result of two factors. First, not only do many White persons see their lives as separate from the lives of persons of color, in many ways White persons and African American persons in America live in fundamentally different worlds (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). For White persons and African Americans, living in those different worlds can mean a very different view of the world and one's place in it, as well as differing perceptions of both the mundane and major events in life. Citizenship in two distinctive worlds helps to explain the often differing perceptions of the same event by White persons and African Americans. For instance, White and African American teachers can often have differing perceptions of the same event of student disagreement. As Alicia said, “When they [students] argue, you know, a lot of Whites say, ‘That’s a fight.’
But, Blacks don’t say, ‘That’s a fight.’ It’s just a little difference between [students]."

In many ways, the latter part of Alicia’s narrative was her description of part of the world that she shares with her African American students. As she said, many of “their parents were in school with me.” Like many of the other teachers in this study, Alicia continued to live in the same neighborhood as many of her students. In the following excerpt from her narrative, Alicia described a sense of connectedness between herself and her African American students.

Like yesterday, I was riding down the street and [they were] hollering at me, “Hey, Ms. Alicia,” when I was at my mother’s house. You know, all of the children at the bus stop right in front of my mother’s house, carrying the whole bus load to school. I pass by the bus and go on to school.

As Alicia “passed the bus and went on to school,” it was quite likely that the African American students on that bus recognized Alicia as a fellow citizen of the same world that they lived in. It is logical to assume that many of the students knew Alicia’s mother, or at least knew that she lived in the neighborhood. They may have heard their own parents mention going to school with Alicia. They knew that Alicia lived in their neighborhood and shared a common experience of life and a “bond and connection” with them. In short, Alicia lived in the same world they lived in. The web of connectedness surrounding Alicia and her African American students had implications for Alicia’s effectiveness in the classroom. As Alicia herself said, “I think all of that really
helps me in my classroom. . . . I do think the connection with the neighborhood has a whole lot to do with it.” Additionally, because she lived the same reality of life as her students, and knew what they were capable of, she approached her teaching of African American students with high levels of expectation. As Alicia herself said, “I feel like I’ve got control in my classroom when I walk in. . . . I can turn my back, and OK, we’re not to talk, [and I] lay my rules out, and they [African American students] pretty much understand and respect what I say.” Thus, for Alicia and for the other teachers in this study, the cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990) that flows naturally from living in the same world as their African American students engenders a cycle of high expectations with regards to their African American students based on their familiarity and connection with their students’ life experiences.

White teachers who hope to possess high expectations with regard to their African American students and to be effective in working with them must be willing to learn about the distinctive world in which African Americans live (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). However, the resistance among many White teachers to learning about and accepting the African American world constitutes the second factor undergirding the cycle of lowered expectations, pre-conceived ideas, and the lack of cultural familiarity with regard to African American children (Irvine, 1990; McIntyre, 1997). Part of that resistance is embedded within the unconscious cocoon of White privilege, which will continue to insulate White persons from expanding and modifying their views of the world and of life, unless the White person takes purposeful action to overcome its effects. As Katz and
Ivey (1977) have suggested, the lack of awareness of the effects and influence of White privilege "provide[s] a barrier that encases White people so that they are unable to experience themselves and their culture as it really is (p. 485)."

However, as Alicia and several of the other teachers stated, many White teachers, even after becoming aware to some degree of the effects of White racism and White privilege, were still resistant to learning about the world and life experience of their African American students. As Alicia herself had said,

And, that's where I feel that the White teachers are not willing to learn and do the work, the extra work that is needed to get to know what you're working with. The Volkswagen parts are different from a Cadillac. Do you see what I'm saying?

Such an observation parallels McIntyre's (1997) assertion that "as White educators, we have been advised by many [African Americans] to teach ourselves but oftentimes, we remain unwilling to do so (p. 13)."

In the end, White teachers must take it upon themselves to break the cycle of low expectations, pre-conceived ideas regarding African American children, and lack of familiarity with the world of African Americans, a cycle described in detail by the teachers during the interviews. As Alicia said,

I just feel that the White teachers, they've got to understand the [African American] culture. And, they've got to want to understand the culture, before they can really reach our [African American] kids.

Indeed, the degree to which each individual White teacher understands and genuinely accepts the validity and meaning of the world of African Americans
constitutes the degree to which he or she will achieve cultural synchronization and high levels of instructional effectiveness with his or her African American students (Hale, 2001; Irvine, 1990; McIntyre, 1997).

During the course of the interviews, the teachers also identified specific White teachers who had high expectations of their African American students, who had accounted within themselves for any pre-conceived ideas about African Americans stemming from a viewpoint informed by White privilege (McIntyre, 1997), and who had achieved a higher level of cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990) and effectiveness with their African American students. In describing two such White teachers, Bernadine said,

A good, strong White teacher who doesn't come with all of these prejudices, doesn't come with all of these mixed emotions about the [African American] children, can get in the classroom and work with these children. We've got two such teachers now [at our school]. They do a dynamic job with these kids. . . . Kids are sensitive. Just like animals, they say that dogs know when to bark and when to bite. Kids are like that. And, so they pick it up. . . . But, if you come across and make them feel that they cannot do, that they're not capable of doing, then you're not going to get any result from them [African American students].

In addition to authentic levels of deep caring for African American children and high expectations for their achievement and behavior, the teachers described a third and final component of “the Black teaching style.” They emphasized the willingness on the part of the teacher to discipline and manage
the behavior of African American and other students within the classroom environment. According to the teachers, the reluctance on the part of many White teachers to discipline and manage the behavior of African American students translated most often into a sense of intimidation among many White teachers in their interaction with African American students. As Laverne explained,

They [White teachers] need to try to understand them [African American students]. Because, I’ve listened to their [White teachers’] conversations, and they don’t understand them [African American students]. You know, they take everything personally. And, like [White teachers think], “Oh, my God, these [African American] children are just so wild.” No, they’re not. And, then, too, they [White teachers] need to understand that you still can hold your ground, just like the Black teachers. Because, the [African American] kids just do that purposefully, try to intimidate them [White teachers], because they know they can. . . . Oh yeah, they’ve [African American students] told me that. . . . I’m only going by what the students told me. I’ve had some real candid [African American] students. I said to them one day, “Why do you all act like a bunch of little monkeys? This is not acceptable behavior.” And, they said, “Look, we do this to all of the teachers, and especially the White teachers, because we know that we can intimidate them.” They just let me know this. So, they [White teachers] need to keep in mind, stand your ground. Listen, be firm with them, just like we [African American teachers] are. . . .
So, they need to keep in mind, do not be intimidated by these
[African American] kids. Stand your ground. And, then, go ahead
and teach. They get intimidated by these kids. They do it on
purpose. And, they know they can. So, they'll keep doing it to
them.

Within her narrative, Laverne touched upon two important ideas regarding
the intimidation of many White teachers by African American students. First, she
categorically asserted her belief that many White teachers are indeed intimidated
in working with African American students. This assertion was supported by
statements made to Laverne by African American students themselves such as,
"we do this to all of the teachers, and especially the White teachers, because we
know that we can intimidate them." Secondly, Laverne noted that if White
teachers hope to be effective with African American students, they must
incorporate within their teaching style, as many African American teachers have,
the willingness to assertively discipline and manage the behavior of their African
American students. As Laverne herself said, they must "hold [their] ground, just
like the Black teachers." In a sense, Laverne implied that White teachers need to
mimic the behavior of African American teachers in being "firm with them, just
like we [African American teachers] are."

As did several other teachers, Ethel compared her willingness to discipline
and her lack of intimidation when relating to African American children with the
experience of many White teachers.
I guess it's because I live in the [African American] community and you hear a lot. White teachers aren't teaching like they should, White teachers cannot discipline African American kids like they should, because, see, they'll write up a [discipline] referral in a moment, in a heartbeat. In my class of 32, I have yet to write up one referral, you see? If I have a kid who's misbehaving, that kid is mine. And, I'm going to treat that kid just like he was mine, you see? "You sit down. I am the teacher. I'm in charge. They're paying me to teach you, you see? When you feel that you can teach, you go to college, do whatever [laughter], you come back." But, this is my classroom. I'm in charge and I call the shots." I've found that a lot of our Caucasian teachers tend to be afraid of some of our [African American] kids, you see? And, so in order to get an African American child to learn, you must first get his attention.

In her narrative thus far, Ethel compared her effectiveness in managing the behavior of African American children with the ineffectiveness of many of her White colleagues. For Ethel, the difference was specifically evidenced in how few times Ethel had to ask for formal disciplinary assistance via disciplinary referrals to the main office as compared to many White teachers. As Ethel said, "In my class of 32, I have yet to write up one referral," whereas it was Ethel's experience that many White teachers will "write up a [discipline] referral in a moment, in a heartbeat" on African American students. Additionally, Ethel alluded to a perception within the larger African American community that "White teachers aren't teaching like they should, [and] White teachers cannot discipline
Ethel attributed the differing levels of effectiveness between herself and many White colleagues in managing and disciplining African American students to a distinctive difference in overall approach to managing the classroom environment. Ethel’s approach in working with her African American students was both assertive and self-confident. As she said, she made it clear to her students that, “this is my classroom. I’m in charge and I call the shots.” On the other hand, it was Ethel’s perception that many of her White colleagues “tend to be afraid of some of our [African American] kids.” Additionally, Ethel implied that the intimidation experienced by many White teachers in working with African American students had implications for their effectiveness in teaching them. As Ethel said, “In order to get an African American child to learn, you must first get his attention.” Within this statement, Ethel linked the inability of many White teachers to “get the attention” and respect of African American students to a sense of intimidation, which in turn led to a lack of effectiveness in teaching African American children.

As Ethel continued her narrative, she cited the specific example of a White teacher at her school who was not intimidated by African American students and who was indeed willing to manage and control the classroom environment.

We have some good Caucasian teachers. Don’t get me wrong. We have some good ones here, who don’t take no stuff, you see what I’m saying? And, I’ll say that with a double meaning. They don’t take no stuff. [laughter] You go into Mr. Devlin’s class [pseudonym], you’d best be in line. And, you’d best pay attention. Mr. Devlin only
gives, I think he only gives something like two hall passes [per student] for the entire quarter, you see? He’s probably changed that now, since we’re in block scheduling. He gives two passes. If you haven’t used up your two passes, you’d better sit there and hold them, because you’re not going out of his class. [laughter] Now, this is a Caucasian teacher. And, you feel like you’ve learned something in there, you see? But, he has order, you know? You can’t play with the light switch in his classroom. That’s a no-no. You’re in there to learn.

But, the problem is, we just don’t have enough Mr. Devlins. . . . And, until we get enough teachers like that, to get our [African American] kids’ attention, then our kids will always want to be entertained, you see? They won’t really want to learn until they really have to, you see? We need teachers who can really get their attention and who can teach.

In this part of her narrative, Ethel’s description of Mr. Devlin linked part of his effectiveness with African American students with an assertive, self-confident approach to his classroom management that was devoid of any intimidation by his African American students. As Ethel herself said, Mr. Devlin was a teacher who didn’t “take no stuff” and who had “order” in his classroom. Again, for Ethel, getting “our [African American] kids’ attention,” as Mr. Devlin was able to do, was synonymous with obtaining African American students’ fundamental respect and willingness to stay within very distinctive boundaries of personal behavior.
Similarly, Alicia provided a portrait of a specific White teacher who, in her opinion, assumed an approach of assertiveness in the classroom environment reminiscent of the approach taken by many African American teachers in their interaction with African American students. In describing her views of the factors that help White teachers to be more effective with African American students, Alicia said,

I feel they [effective White teachers] know how to handle them. They understand when an [African American] kid is not serious.... You know how sometimes they'll say Black kids like to be rambunctious and talk out, they understand that. They can call their bluff, so to speak. ... Like Ms. Parker [pseudonym], she's at another school, she was a long-standing Black teacher at [my predominantly African American middle school], I mean, White teacher [at my school]. But, you actually thought she could have been Black. She could handle it, just like that. [snaps fingers] She could. You know, she had been there so long, she was there like 17 years, and she knew how to handle it. She knew when they [African American students] were serious, she knew when they were not serious, she knew when they were upset and everything. She was that kind of teacher, you know? She didn't hesitate to fire back at them like we [African American teachers] do, you know? ... And, without being intimidated.

Within the context of her narrative, Alicia identified two important elements within the teaching style of teachers such as Ms. Parker, who are effective in
working with African American students. First, Ms. Parker displayed the aforementioned ability to assertively and confidently manage the classroom environment without fear or sense of intimidation. As Alicia said, “She didn’t hesitate to fire back at them like we [African American teachers] do, you know? . . And, without being intimidated.” Secondly, Alicia placed Ms. Parker’s assertive, confident manner within the continuum of a wider, more meaningful relationship with her African American students. As Alicia said, Ms. Parker knew “how to handle them. . . . She knew when they [African American students] were serious, she knew when they were not serious, she knew when they were upset and everything.” This type of understanding and sensitivity on Ms. Parker’s part implied a deeper sense of connection and relationship with her African American students, a relationship which allowed Ms. Parker to assertively discipline and manage and, importantly, caused her African American students to accept that discipline and management of their behavior. Indeed, it was interesting to note that, as Alicia was describing Ms. Parker, she mistakenly called her an African American teacher and said that, “you actually thought she could have been Black.” It would be logical to assume from this statement that, to Alicia, being an effective “Black” or White teacher means incorporating all three components of “the Black teaching style” into one’s practice of teaching African American students, that is, caring, focus on high expectations, and effective management of student behavior.

Indeed, the teachers stressed throughout the interviews that it was the synergistic effect of the interaction of all three components of “the Black teaching
style,” as practiced by either African American or White teachers, that led to its effectiveness with African American students. The presence of any one of the three components in isolation within a teacher’s approach to African American children, in the view of the teachers, led to ineffectiveness. For example, authentic, deeply-felt levels of caring and rapport with African American children were meaningless and ineffective without the accompanying components of high expectations and a willingness to discipline and manage the behavior of African American students. According to the teachers, it was the interplay and interaction among the three components within a teacher’s pedagogy that led to the desired effect in working with African American students. In describing White teachers who, in her experience, had been successful and effective in working with African American students, Carolyn detailed the interaction between the three components of “the Black teaching style.”

They cared. The [African American] kids knew they cared. They had high expectations. They expected the kids to bring in homework. They expected them to be on time and on task. They expected them not to give excuses. They expected parents to be a part of their working relationship with the children. . . . They respected [African American] children, they didn’t talk down to them. They worked long and hard hours. They spent personal time with [African American] kids. They just were real teachers. . . . They just walked their talk. It wasn’t just “Oh, I really do like all kids. I really do think all kids can learn.” They modeled it.
In her narrative, Carolyn touched upon all three components of “the Black teaching style,” as incorporated into the teaching style of effective White teachers. The authentic, deeply-felt levels of caring and rapport were present in that “they cared [and the African American] kids knew they cared.” Additionally, these teachers exhibited the second component of “the Black teaching style” in that they “had high expectations. They expected the kids to bring in homework. They expected them to be on time and on task.” The third component of “the Black teaching style” was present in the sense that these effective White teachers were not fearful or intimidated by African American students, and “They expected [African American students] not to give excuses,” either in terms of their behavior or academic performance.

What Carolyn and the other teachers described as effective practice in working with African American students, including the components of a self-described “Black teaching style,” flowed from the construction of intact, meaningful, reciprocal relationships between students and teachers. As Carolyn herself said, White teachers who are effective with African American students “respected [African American] children, they didn’t talk down to them. They worked long and hard hours. They spent personal time with [African American] kids. They just were real teachers. . . . They just walked their talk.” In short, Carolyn was describing a relationship between effective White teachers and African American students that was comprehensive and holistic in nature, that included both academic instruction and the building of personal relationships. As a cumulative result of their life experiences, the African
American teachers in this study already enjoyed this level of relationship and bonding with their African American students (Hale, 2001; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). White teachers who wish to enjoy this type of relationship and effectiveness with African American students must be willing to do the often difficult, intrapersonal and interpersonal work needed to cross boundaries of culture and ethnicity and to enter into the world of their African American students (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997).

Unfortunately, many White teachers, as suggested in a significant body of research and in the experience of these teachers, are not willing to undertake such a journey of self-expansion, awareness, and sensitivity (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Rather than recognizing and accounting for the presence of racism linked to White privilege within themselves, and its subsequent influences upon both their personal selves and their teaching selves, many White teachers would rather remain comfortable within a cocoon of unconscious, unaware, subtle racism that is cloaked in the best of intentions (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). As Sleeter (1997) has described,

> We can hear our own voices and recognize the dualism that is embedded in White consciousness: believing ourselves to be good, caring people, on the one hand; while on the other hand, believing that the social system is relatively fair, and not wishing to jeopardize our own comfort and advantages by questioning it. (p. xii)

In the end, the failure of many White teachers to evolve both as persons and as teachers beyond this “dualism” affects the lives of African American
students in two significant ways. First, the interviews with the teachers suggest that these White teachers are often ineffective in their instructional interaction with African American students, further perpetuating the precarious situation of many African American students within the American public educational system (Hale, 2001; Irvine, 1990). Secondly, and perhaps of greater long-term concern for the teachers, acts of overt racism as well as the subtle, insidious racism of White privilege present within many White teachers contributes to the ongoing struggle with racism that African American children will be fighting throughout their life journeys. In describing her personal struggle with racism in America, Moyenda (2001) wrote that,

Racism has diminished the quality of my life and, more importantly, has damaged me. There is no denying that other issues in my life contributed to my injury, and I need to focus on those as well. But, there is a significant difference between those other issues and racism. Racism doesn’t stop. Poverty and deprivation cause injury, but for me, those have stopped. . . . Even my own bad habits, engrained as they are, I can stop. But, I have been unable in all my life to avoid racism for more than one day, because it is a pathology that White Americans either refuse or are unable to manage. Unless I stay indoors and don’t answer the phone, watch TV, listen to my radio, or read the paper, I have no choice but to engage it in my daily life. (p. 10)

As significant and important persons in the life experiences of all of their students, including their African American students (Hale, 2001; Irvine, 1990),
White teachers must indeed do all they can to minimize the "damage" done to African American students not only through acts and attitudes of overt racism on their parts but also in the everyday, unconscious, equally malevolent racism linked to White privilege (McIntyre, 1997).

**The African American Teacher as “Bridge” and “Buffer”**

As noted earlier in this section and in this chapter, African Americans and White persons live out their lives in very different worlds (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). While the two worlds intersect at many points in the life experiences of many African Americans and White persons, the distinctively separate and unique historical journeys undertaken by each group have served to forge two contrasting sets of cultural norms and world views (Allen, 2001; Eyerman, 2001). Indeed, the world of African Americans is collectively characterized by an emphasis on "spirituality, emotions and feelings, [a sense of] communalism, [and] an orientation toward time as passing through a social space rather than a material one" (Boykin, 1986, cited in Hale, 2001, p. 116). In contrast, the world inhabited by White persons places an emphasis upon "individualism, independence, individual recognition, competition, and strict adherence to structured rules and regulations" (p. 117).

At various points in the interviews, the teachers identified a role for themselves in serving as bridges and buffers between these two worlds within the educational environment. Specifically, they consistently described their experiences in serving as bridges and buffers between a largely White teaching
and administrative workforce and African American students, parents, and community.

The importance placed by the teachers on this bridge-building role is particularly validated by the fact that the teaching force is becoming increasingly White while at the same time the student populations across the nation are becoming increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse. Indeed, during school year 1999-2000, 84% of the teachers in America were White and only 8% of the nation's teachers were African American (Choy, Provasnik, Rooney, Sen, Tobin, & Wirt, 2003, p. 147). This trend is likely to continue and become even more pronounced. As Sleeter (1992) noted, “the teaching force is becoming increasingly White, and given the lengthened time it is taking to complete teacher certification programs, it may also be becoming increasingly middle class” (cited in McIntyre, 1997, p. 5). At the same time in the nation's classrooms, a “new majority of students is emerging consisting of African Americans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Americans, Arab Americans, and Native Americans” (Campbell, 1996, cited in McIntyre, p. 5). Indeed, in school year 1999-2000, 39% of all public school students in America were classified as members of minority populations, up from 17% in 1972 (Choy et al., 2003, p. 45).

As a result of the increasingly contrasting demographics of the teaching workforce and the student populations in America, difficulties can arise between teachers and students in terms of a whole range of issues such as shared expectations for behavior and achievement, student motivation, and appropriate pedagogical approaches to learning (McIntyre, 1997). If indeed White persons
and African Americans live largely in differing worlds, the White teachers and students of color in classrooms across America also live in differing worlds, with fundamentally divergent views of the world and one’s place in it.

It is at this nexus of disconnection that experienced African American teachers, such as the teachers in this study, can offer their assistance as bridges and buffers between a largely White teaching force and African American students and other students of color. As experienced teachers in the public school system, and as African American persons, these teachers possess a high degree of credibility in both worlds. As experienced teachers, they understand the organizational structure and nuances of the school system. Importantly, they understand how students can and must negotiate their way successfully through the school system. Their long careers in the public school system attest to their dedication to its existence and to its mission. On the other hand, as has been noted and described throughout this chapter, these teachers also know and understand the world of their African American students. They were born into that same world, have grown and matured within that world, and continue to live in that world. A bond exists between them and their African American students and parents that lends itself to an instant sense of credibility in their interaction with these students and parents. Thus, the African American teachers in this study possess the experience and credibility in both worlds necessary to act both as bridges between the two worlds and as buffers when problems arise. It is this role as a bridge and buffer that was described by the teachers at many points during the interview process.
For example, Laverne described a sense of bridge-building in discussing her interaction with African American parents.

They [African American parents] probably think that I can relate to them better [than White teachers] and there’s a lot of [African American] parents who feel like White people just don’t understand us. And, when they see me there, it’s almost like a sigh of relief. . . . This is their mentality, and you have to accept where people are and this is their mentality. . . . They want to know that their child is more than just a number. They want to know that you really care about their child, and you are giving them the best you’ve got. You know, the overcrowding conditions, the bus conditions, but they don’t want this to be a distraction because they still want their child to be able to compete--to be the best they can.

It is clear from Laverne’s statement that African American parents viewed her as a bridge into a school environment that is largely White and many times unable to truly and sincerely understand them and their African American children. As Laverne said, “there’s a lot of [African American] parents who feel like White people just don’t understand us.” In Laverne, these parents see a person who has lived in their world, a person who understands their world, and on the deepest of levels shares and understands their life experience. For them, Laverne was a person whom they could trust to “know that their child is more than just a number” and to “really care about their child. . . giving them the best you’ve got.”
While Laverne's narrative focused primarily upon building bridges between African American parents and the school system, Ethel offered an insight into the role of African American teachers in building bridges between White teachers and African American students.

You see, we [many African American teachers] live with African American kids. We're in the community, a lot of us, and we know those communities. And, especially the new, young Caucasian teachers, you could pair them up with an experienced African American teacher. I think that would be one of the finest things that could help that [young, White] teacher survive in this predominantly Black student environment. I think that's important, you see? I'm trying to remember who said that you never know what it's like until you walk in another man's shoes. You learn a lot about African Americans, but the most important thing, I think, is just working with kids, understanding [African American] kids.

Ethel's recommendation that school districts "pair up. . .new, young Caucasian teachers. . .with an experienced African American teacher" contained two important implications for the practice of teaching and working with African American students. First, her statement implied that, in her mind, Ethel believed that a gulf and a disconnect exists in the relationship between many White teachers, especially young, novice White teachers, and African American students. The gulf may indeed narrow and the disconnect begin to fade as teachers account for and effectively deal with the influence of White privilege within themselves (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). However, as Ethel
pointed out, the mentorship and bridge-building role provided by African American teachers vis-à-vis White teachers and African American students is still sorely needed as White teachers can never “walk in [the] shoes” of African American students. Even with the best of intentions and a conscious, consistent effort on the part of White teachers to overcome the restraints of White privilege (McIntyre, 1997), the effects of citizenship in two differing worlds may be too much to overcome without the bridge-building capacity of African American teachers.

The second important implication contained within Ethel’s recommendation was that experienced African American teachers possess a specific, significant knowledge base useful in a variety of domains of the educational enterprise, including in working with African American children. As a result of their lived experience, as Ethel said, experienced African American teachers “know those [African American] communities.” By implication, these teachers also “know” African American children. They are citizens of the same world. Having lived in the African American world all of their lives, and continuing to live in that world, these teachers have acquired a deeply-textured, multi-layered knowledge base about that world and about the African American children who also live in that world. In many ways, they have spent a lifetime creating that knowledge base through their experiences. Even the most experienced, skilled, and dedicated White teacher can never know and understand the African American world as African American teachers and students know and understand their own world (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001). Thus,
as Ethel said, experienced African American teachers can help White teachers, especially young, inexperienced White teachers in "understanding [African American] kids." By implication, Ethel seemed to say, "to understand them as we African American teachers understand them." Through mentorship and bridge-building, Ethel suggested that White teachers could begin to gain that understanding through tapping into the knowledge base possessed by experienced African American teachers, thereby greatly increasing their effectiveness with African American children.

During her interview, Bernadine specifically identified her ability to act as a bridge and buffer between the educational system and African American students and parents as one of her primary strengths as a guidance counselor. In an extended narrative, her views and experiences were representative of many of the other teachers’ experiences in this area.

One of my strengths is in parent conferences and things of that sort. And, it doesn’t lend [itself] to any particular race. But, when I was at [one of my former schools], it appeared, in most cases, when there were Black parents [involved], it was difficult to communicate with them, from other personnel at the school, if they were White personnel. For some reason or another, there was this resentment [on the part of the African American parents]. . . . They [the African American parents] were more accepting to my dealing with them than maybe the Principal, or the child’s teachers that were White, you know?
As Bernadine continued her narrative, she spoke of performing the same role at another school.

[In] the community, again, I think that I contributed quite a bit there in the welfare of the entire school environment and atmosphere when it came to the parents, because [that school] is located in an area of low income, and there are a lot of parents who felt that certain people resented them because of who they were. So, I was able to bridge a lot there with those parents.

In this part of her narrative, Bernadine specifically used the term "bridge" to describe her activities in serving African American parents within the school setting. Bernadine described difficulties in the relationship between African American parents and White teachers at both schools. In the first instance, Bernadine detailed a breakdown in communication between the African American parents and the White teachers to the point where a sense of "resentment" had formed on the part of the African American parents towards the White teachers. However, Bernadine was able to serve as a buffer between the school and these parents in the sense that the African American parents were "more accepting to my dealing with them than maybe the Principal, or the child’s teachers that were White." It is important to note that Bernadine did not say that she altered the information given to the African American parents in any way. Indeed, she quite likely imparted the very same information to the African American parents that the White teachers were attempting to communicate. However, as a fellow African American, the information as imparted to the African American parents was more accepted by them than it was by the White teachers, thus acting as a bridge.
American parents by Bernadine was couched in a context of trust, shared life experience, and credibility (Brooks & Sedlacek, 1976; Hale, 2001).

In the second school mentioned, Bernadine described a school environment in which parents felt that “certain people resented them because of who they were.” The specific school cited by Bernadine is a low-income, predominantly African American school. Again, Bernadine performed a bridging and buffering role within that school environment to facilitate a more peaceful, functional “school environment and atmosphere.” Unfortunately, Bernadine described an environment within this particular school setting that was tinged with an undertone of racism, as “certain people,” referring to White teachers and staff, “resented” the low-income, African American parents “because of who they were.” In a sense, the White teachers at this school denied the validity and meaning of the world of the African American parents. Thus, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the White teachers to build bridges of communication and rapport with the school’s African American parents themselves. Indeed, for White teachers to work effectively with African Americans and other persons of color, the beginning point is the acceptance of other persons’ worlds and experiences of life as equally valid and meaningful as their own (McIntyre, 1997).

As Bernadine continued her narrative, she described two specific examples of her role in bridge-building, especially in the domain of effective communication between African American parents and the predominantly White school environment.
Everybody around here will tell you, my Principal will tell you, “I’ve learned a lot from Bernadine.” He’ll sometimes say, “I don’t know why she’s [an African American mother] so upset.” And, I would say, “Do you really want me to tell you? You can’t say that.” [And, the Principal would say,] “What do you mean?” [Bernadine said,] “You can probably say that to Whites, but you can’t say that to that Black parent. You’ve got to know that.” And, I find that a lot of times, this is where the breakdown in communication comes in with Whites towards Blacks, because there are certain things that you just can’t say. And, it’s not because you’re prejudiced. As I was sharing with him, you say it because that’s the way that you’re used to expressing yourself, and you would say it as if you were talking to a White, but you just can’t do it. . . . And, that’s what I was trying to explain to my Principal. You’ve got to know the difference in what you can and what you can’t say. And, the only way you can know that, you’ve got to be around somebody honest, like ole’ honest Bernadine, who’ll let you know, you can’t do it that way. [laughter] My [White] clerk, she tells me all the time, you know, I’ve learned so much from you. I’m so glad, because I was getting myself in so much trouble [with African American parents]. I didn’t know whether I shouldn’t say that or do that.” I said, “No, you just can’t do it that way. . . . I can’t answer all that. All I know is that it does offend. Just don’t do it.” [laughter]
As Bernadine completed her narrative, she described an encounter and discussion with a White teacher following a conference with an African American parent.

Just this morning, one of the [White] teachers came in, and we had a parent conference on yesterday. And, one of the finer things this [African American] parent said to the [White] teacher was, “I’m going to leave you in the hands of God, because I’m a praying person, and I pray that if you can live with this, then I can live with it. But, I’m going to pray for you because I’m a Christian.”... And, so I just sat and listened. I had no comment to make on it. And, I was sharing with this teacher this morning when she came in, she said, “You know, she was telling me that she was a Christian. I’m also a Christian, but that doesn’t have anything to do, really, with what we were talking about.” And, I said, “Well, it did have something to do with it for her. It didn’t for you, and it really didn’t for me. If you note, I had nothing to say about it, but I think it had a lot to do with that [African American parent] expressing herself.” So, we went into an understanding of Black culture; that many times there’s an allurement to praying for somebody for something they’ve done, or leaving them in the hands of God. That is just a kind of communication that Blacks do. It has nothing to do with, like, a superstition, or, you know, something like that. But, it’s just part of the communication.

In these two specific examples, Bernadine continued to bring forward two important points with regard to her role as a buffer and bridge-builder. First, she
continued to detail the misalignment that often plagues the communication process between White persons and African Americans in the school setting. While the exact nature of the misalignment between Bernadine’s Principal and African American parents was unclear, it was clear that misunderstandings had occurred that were linked to life experiences shaped by living in differing worlds. As Bernadine said to her Principal, “that’s the way that you’re used to expressing yourself, and you would say it as if you were talking to a White, but you just can’t do it.” What Bernadine did not say, and quite likely meant was, “you just can’t do it to an African American.” The nature of the miscommunication between the White teacher and African American mother was quite clearly detailed by Bernadine. The White teacher failed to understand and appreciate the connection drawn by the African American mother between her faith, her child, and the experience of her child in the school environment. While the White teacher felt that the mother’s Christianity had nothing to do with the discussion of her child’s progress in school, Bernadine pointed out to the teacher that, to this particular African American mother, “it did have something to do with it. . . it had a lot to do with that [African American parent] expressing herself.”

However, the second important point contained within these two examples of bridge-building was that the White persons were listening to and respecting the insights regarding African Americans provided to them by Bernadine. Bernadine even characterized the principal as saying, “I’ve learned a lot from Bernadine.” During her narrative, he appeared to take in what Bernadine had to say regarding the differing communication styles of African Americans and White
persons. Bernadine’s statement, “Do you really want me to tell you? You can’t say that,” followed by his question, “What do you mean?” indicated both a comfort level between Bernadine and her Principal in discussing such matters and an authentic interest on her Principal’s behalf in hearing Bernadine’s answers and insights. Additionally, Bernadine reported the statement of her White clerk, “I’ve learned so much from you.” This statement indicates both an interest in attempting to communicate more fully and effectively with African Americans and having actually conversed with Bernadine in the past regarding the world of African Americans. Finally, the White teacher and Bernadine engaged in a conversation providing insight into “an understanding of Black culture.” The willingness on the part of this particular White teacher to engage in such dialogue would seem to indicate a sensitivity on her part and a willingness to truly listen to Bernadine’s perceptions and experiences within her world as an African American. In short, these three White persons actually did what Ethel alluded to earlier in this section. They were willing to tap into the knowledge base of experienced African American teachers, such as Bernadine, to learn more about the world of African American students and parents, a world that they recognized as differing from their own.

In the end, according to the teachers in this study, many White teachers across the nation must do what the Principal, the clerk, and the White teacher in Bernadine’s narrative have done in order to be effective in their work with African American students and parents. First, they must understand and appreciate that the world that they have lived in all of their lives is, in many ways, very different
from the world of their African American students and parents (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Then, they must address and deal with the assumptions and racism associated with White privilege within themselves and authentically view the world of African Americans as equally valid, multi-faceted, and meaningful as their own (McIntyre, 1997). Lastly, they must have the sensitivity to begin actually learning about the world of African Americans, including the cultural and interpersonal nuances associated with that world (Irvine, 1990). It is a world that is very knowable, provided that White persons and teachers are inwardly motivated to learn about the world of African Americans (McIntyre, 1997). Indeed, it is a world that, according to the teachers in this study, many African Americans are willing to share and to help White persons understand more fully and completely. Experienced African American teachers, such as the teachers in this study, can serve as critical bridges into the world of African Americans for White educators. Those educators who choose to cross those bridges will likely find their understanding of African American students and parents significantly enhanced and their instruction of African American students much more effective and meaningful. In the end, their own world will become a much more inclusive and shared world as a result of the experience. White educators who sincerely desire to connect with and be effective with African American students and their parents must be willing to undertake a personal and professional journey between worlds on a daily basis. They must be willing to listen to African American teachers, who themselves are experienced travelers between the White and African American worlds. As
Freire (1994) has noted, “You never get there by starting from there, you get there by starting from here” (p. 58).

For many White teachers, African American teachers can be of great assistance in traveling from “here” to “there” in terms of their personal and professional relationship with African American students, parents, and other citizens of the African American world.

The Perils and Promises of School Desegregation: The View of African American Teachers

During the course of the interviews, discussion of the topic of school desegregation led to the expression of deeply-felt beliefs and opinions on the part of the teachers. As a group, they consistently articulated a great deal of concern and ambivalence with regards to the effects of school desegregation upon African American students, African American teachers, and the African American community. On the one hand, the teachers certainly acknowledged the importance of and need to increase cross-cultural interaction, understanding, and tolerance implicit in school desegregation. However, they much more frequently described their view of school desegregation efforts as well-intentioned, largely failed efforts that, in the end, may very well have been more harmful than helpful to the African American community. These unfavorable opinions regarding school desegregation were often stated very frankly by the teachers, for example, Gloria’s judgment, “I will be honest. [School] integration is the worst thing that ever happened to the African American child.”
Thus, this section will begin with a review of the environment of school desegregation initiatives and efforts within which these teachers have lived and worked during their personal lives and teaching careers. This description is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the history of school desegregation in the United States. The intention is to provide a context for a richer, more meaningful understanding of the teachers’ comments and experiences. In many ways, the arc of the teachers’ lived experiences, both as children and as teachers, merges and is synchronized with the arc of modern desegregation initiatives and efforts in the United States. Thus, placing the narratives and comments of the teachers in historical context adds layers of meaning to their perceptions and thoughts. Following the contextual review of school desegregation and the experiences of the teachers embedded within that review, the positive effects of school desegregation, as described by the teachers, will be examined.

The modern era of school desegregation in which these teachers grew up as children and have worked in as teachers can be divided roughly into three distinct periods (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). The first period began in 1954 with the Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka striking down the “separate but equal” doctrine, which had governed the structure of racial relations and interaction in the United States since the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling of 1896. The decade following this decision was characterized by school districts across the nation, and particularly in the South, seeking ways to avoid implementing the Brown decision. During this
period, individual schools and school systems remained highly segregated. Indeed, as recounted earlier in this chapter, all but one of the teachers went to segregated, African American schools as children during this period, schools that continued to be very separate and very unequal as compared to the predominantly White schools in the same cities.

This period of institutional avoidance of the directives of the Brown decision continued until the mid to late 1960s. Between 1964 and 1971, the federal government began to break down state resistance to school desegregation through the combined instrumentation of the threat of withholding federal funding for non-compliant school districts and federal court decisions. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 authorized the federal government to withhold federal funding from any school district continuing to practice institutionalized, de jure school segregation. Court decisions such as Green v. County School Board of New Kent County (1968) and Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971) struck down camouflaged methods by which states and districts continued to attempt to avoid the directives of the Brown decision and, importantly, set numerical targets to define and quantify racial balance in the schools. These and subsequent court decisions authorized means such as bussing and numerical quotas in the makeup of teaching staffs as appropriate in achieving the goals of desegregation and the racial balancing of schools.

It was at this point in the early 1970s, both in the life of the nation and in the lives of these teachers, that the second period in modern school desegregation began. The period of federal and judicial activism in school
desegregation was indeed characterized by the implementation of cross-town bussing of students, racial quotas in the balancing of school teaching staffs, and other proactive methods to help achieve the goal of school desegregation. This period lasted from the early 1970s through the early 1990s (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). For this particular group of teachers, this period was the time during which they began, nurtured, and continued their teaching careers. Indeed, the effects of court decisions made during this period often affected their personal teaching careers. For example, several of the teachers found themselves involved in massive transfers of teaching staffs during the 1970s and 1980s. As Pauline explained,

> It was only my second year of working, when the county, the state, and the nation, and I don't know who did it now, but, anyway, we had to integrate the teachers on a wholesale basis...around 1970. . . . Because, when I went to [one school] in 1968, it was predominantly White, and I was the Black teacher there. No, there may have been two others, but the county had not done this massive switch at that time. They did that in about two more years, which would have been around 1970. And, from [another school], in the middle of the year, I switched places with this [White] Kindergarten teacher at [a predominantly White school]. She took my place [at my school], and I took her place [at a predominantly White school]. I must have worked there five years or so.

It was also during this second period in modern school desegregation that many of the teachers in this study, as well as others in the African American
community, began to question the necessity, validity, and benefits for African Americans and White persons of required school desegregation itself (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). Indeed, the African American community has historically been divided and ambivalent in its view towards the desegregation and integration of American society (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). Since the Plessy decision, African Americans have wrestled as a culture and as a people with issues of desegregation and integration. Indeed, African Americans have sought to collectively determine the most beneficial approach to desegregation between two very different viewpoints. First, should African Americans demand that “separate but equal” actually become a valid and concrete reality in American society, that “schools and other segregated institutions be given the resources to achieve equality” (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002, p. 20)? Or, should African Americans “challenge the concept that segregation could ever be equal” (p. 20), thereby necessitating the implementation of formal, sanctioned desegregation policies in order to ensure the access of African Americans to a rightful and equitable station in American life and society? This historic ambivalence within the African American community towards the whole notion of desegregation and integration into American society was often reflected in the teachers’ comments and narratives. During an extended narrative, Laverne reflected the historic ambivalence within the African American community regarding the goals, strategies, and effects of desegregation upon African American students and teachers.
I don't know. I cannot tell, or I can't discern, just from the fact that integration has happened, I don't know what that [desegregation] was supposed to accomplish. That's simply because I always consider how Congress can sit there and put all these different laws into the books, and close the book, and all is well. Unless you change a [White] person's mind and heart and educate them, you have done nothing but put words on paper, and paper doesn't stand for anything. So, do I think integration is effective? No. Do I think it’s working? No. I don't know what it's supposed to do. It's simply, OK, you’re here together, and it’s something about an issue that’s being forced, that always has that tendency to make you not want to do this. . . . Now, do we need to integrate? I don’t know, because we need to learn about each other, so we can get along. We need to know what makes the other tick. But, putting us in that classroom setting does not do it; just simply sitting beside a White kid, who still doesn’t like you, who still has not been taught about who you are and how you think, and what makes you react to certain things. So, there still has been no education happening as far as who we [African Americans] are. What makes you act differently than I act? So, the education piece is missing, and I’m thinking, for integration to be effective, there needs to be that piece there. And, it’s not there. So, putting us together in the same environment does not help us love each other, does not help us understand each other. Putting those White teachers into [a predominantly African American school], they [the White teachers] still
don't understand who we are, and nobody's going to take the time to sit
and tell them, and the [African American] students certainly aren't. See,
they're [the White teachers] still in a quandary. None of the myths have
been dispelled. So, what is integration really doing?

The collective ambivalence towards the notion of school desegregation
within the African American community as a whole and among this group of
African American teachers was evident within Laverne's narrative. She certainly
acknowledged the need for meaningful cross-cultural interaction and
understanding. As she stated, "we need to learn about each other, so we can
get along. We need to know what makes the other tick." However, just as
emphatically, she questioned the focus, benefits, and effectiveness of
desegregation in statements such as, "I don't know what that [desegregation]
was supposed to accomplish. . . . I don't know what it's supposed to do. . . .
Do I think integration is effective? No. Do I think it's working? No."

As did several other teachers in their comments and narratives regarding
school desegregation, Laverne deeply questioned the validity of the "harm and
benefit thesis" (Armor, Rosell, & Walberg, 2002, p. 5), which has served as the
theoretical underpinning of the modern school desegregation movement. First
brought forward through the work of social scientists in the 1940s, the harm and
benefit thesis asserts that

if schools, staff, and programs are thoroughly integrated and resources
allocated equitably, the psychological and educational harm of
segregation would be eliminated, and African American children would be
able to compete with Whites on an even footing not only in school, but in their adult lives.” (p. 5)

However, Laverne questioned the benefits. These teachers echoed the doubts of members of the African American community regarding such benefits as naturally flowing from their simply sharing physical space with White students in desegregated schools (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). As Laverne said, “putting us in that classroom setting does not do it; just simply sitting beside a White kid, who still doesn’t like you, who still has not been taught about who you are and how you think, and what makes you react to certain things. . . . Putting us together in the same environment does not help us love each other, does not help us understand each other. . . . None of the myths have been dispelled.” Additionally, evidence suggests that school desegregation, in and of itself, has not led to the desired improvement in academic achievement among African American students (Armor, 2002). Indeed,

whether one examines data from historical studies, more recent national studies, or district-level case studies, it is quite clear that the racial composition of student bodies, by itself, has no significant effect on Black achievement, nor has it reduced the Black-White gap to a significant degree. (p. 183)

As previously stated, the second period in the modern era of the desegregation of schools, lasting from the early 1970s through the early 1990s, featured federal and judicial activism in forcing states to set numerical targets in the racial balancing of schools (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002). One method
commonly implemented across the nation to achieve racial balances in schools during this period was mandatory, forced bussing of both White and African American students. During an extended narrative, Terri discussed her concern over the impact of bussing with regard to African American children and the African American community.

I think the worst thing that ever happened to our Black kids and to our Black community was bussing. . . . I would have the [African American] children in Kindergarten and Pre-K. And, to see these little kids who were eager to learn, bright, intelligent children, come back in 6th grade [after five years of bussing]. It was like a wall. They were wild. They were rude. Many of them had learning problems, because they had not gained the skills on each grade level that they should have learned. And, I know that in those first years of forced bussing, many of those [African American] kids were pushed aside. They were not worked with the way that all of the [White] children were worked with. So, of course, their learning, their academic skills, went lacking. . . . I believe that if a child lives in a certain neighborhood, where a school is, yes, they should be allowed to go to that school. I know something had to happen to make equal education. But, I don’t think bussing was the answer. . . . I think when you’re forcing kids to wait on the street corner at 6:30 in the morning, I’m talking about five and six year olds, to be out on the corner, to go over to a school where they’re not welcome to. Many of
them are tired when they get there. The [African American] parents who would have been active at the local school were not able to get over to the [predominantly White, suburban] school. They were not involved in the PTA. The [White] people [at the other school] did not want them involved.

As Terri continued her narrative, she expanded the scope of her thoughts to include her perception of the continuing impact of forced bussing upon the African American community.

You have parents that now, because they were in that forced bussing, who don't even know how to be parents. I think our inner-city schools have hurt so, because of bussing. You've got [African American] parents now with arrogant attitudes who teach their children to hate Whites, who have the disrespect that was taught to them in school. And, so now you see in their children...you have kids who don't have manners. The parents don't go to church, and because there is no church in school, that, at one time was, there are no moral values being taught. And, the [inner-city] schools are coming apart.

Within her narrative, Terri again reflected the historic ambivalence towards desegregation present both within these teachers and within the larger African American community. She acknowledged the need for equity in the schooling of all children by stating that “I know something had to happen to make equal education.” However, as did many of the teachers in this study and many persons in the African American community, she questioned the method of
achieving that goal in stating, “I don’t think bussing was the answer.” Additionally, Terri was especially concerned with the impact of mandatory bussing upon African American children. African American children who began their bussing experience as “kids who were eager to learn, bright, intelligent children” returned as truly damaged children who “were wild. They were rude. Many of them had learning problems.” An even worse consequence for Terri was the negative impact of mandatory bussing upon those African American children which continues today, as these children have become adult members of the African American community. As Terri said, “You have parents that now, because they were in that forced bussing, who don’t even know how to be parents. . . . You’ve got [African American] parents now with arrogant attitudes who teach their children to hate Whites, who have the disrespect that was taught to them in school.”

Eventually, in Terri’s view, the damage inflicted by the experience of mandatory bussing upon those African American children, now parents, filters out into the larger African American community in the behavior of their children. As Terri said, “now you see in their children. . . .you have kids who don’t have manners. The parents don’t go to church, and because there is no church in school, that, at one time was, there are no moral values being taught. And, the [inner-city] schools are coming apart.” For Terri, the generation of African American children who experienced mandatory bussing is, in many ways, a lost generation. In her view, a lingering and continuing effect of mandatory bussing
may very well be that their children will become another generation lost in the African American community.

Research in the field would suggest that Terri’s concern could be well-founded.

Despite the shameful physical condition of many of the former all-Black schools, their loss and departure of the children to strange and distant neighborhoods deprived African American parents of their former influence on their children’s education. Dempsey and Noblit (1993) described the decrease, after desegregation took place, in the closeness and family atmosphere that had existed in small, Black community schools. The schools had been the focal points for the communities, teachers were revered, and families and extended families alike could be counted on for promoting the children’s education. (Ehrlander, 2002, p. 274)

The third period in modern school desegregation began in the early 1990s and continues into the present time. This period has featured a drastic reduction in both federal and judicial activism in issues regarding school desegregation, as many districts across the nation, such as the Duval County Public Schools, have been declared unitary. During this period, federal courts and local municipalities have focused on identifying and maintaining the characteristics of a unitary system (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002).

For the teachers in this study, the current period in the school desegregation movement has been a time of grappling with two facets of their
personal experience with school desegregation. First, the teachers spoke of the problematic nature, for themselves, for African American children, and for the African American community, of the continuing requirement by local school districts, including their own, to maintain racial balancing of school faculties. This requirement, a legacy of the activist period of school desegregation in the 1970s and 1980s, continues to be commonly featured within the unitary status of many previously segregated school districts across the nation (Armor, Rossell, Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). Second, the teachers are still experiencing the continuing effect and legacy of many of the activist school desegregation initiatives that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. For them, many of these policies, though well-intentioned, tore at the fabric of the African American community, deeply affecting their experience of teaching and, through them, affecting African American children.

During the current period of so-called unitary status across the nation, African Americans are continuing, both personally and collectively, to come to terms with the lingering impact of desegregation initiatives of the 1970s and 1980s. In a sense, the teachers in this study very much reflect the efforts of the African American community to find its collective way following the tectonic societal and cultural shifts of the 1970s and 1980s linked to the desegregation of schools, housing, and facilities (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002).

These teachers remembered growing up as children in intact, completely functional, cohesive, supportive, albeit segregated, African American
communities during the period following the Brown decision. As young teachers growing into professional and personal maturity, they found themselves caught up in the whirlwind changes of the 1970s and 1980s. During that time in their lives, an activist judiciary and federal government changed their personal and professional experiences and their community’s life forever, rightly or wrongly, through the process of desegregation. Now, in the period of unitary status, the teachers wondered aloud during the interviews what consequences those desegregative efforts have truly wrought upon themselves and their African American community. It is the ongoing, persistent, continuing legacy of the effects of desegregation that was of great concern for the teachers. The African American communities of their childhoods and the African American communities of today, where some still live, are very different places. For example, in discussing her concerns with regard to the impact of desegregation of schools upon the African American community, Alicia said,

I remember when we had basically all Black teachers [during segregation]. To me, as a student, I saw more control. . . . A lot of the [African American] teachers, they lived in the neighborhood. One teacher, who worked [at my elementary school], she lived down the street. So, we acted up, she stopped by your house, and she told your parents. You know, you might not have been in her class, but, you know, you got in trouble for it. And, I think that was lost [during desegregation], you know? And, the people who drove the bus to the school, they lived right down the street. They lived right down the street from my Mom and, you know, the
bus man lived in the neighborhood. You know what I'm saying? Then, I had another teacher, Mr. Franklin [pseudonym], he lived on the next street. So, it was that kind of thing. It was a neighborhood thing. . . . You know, it was a difference [before desegregation].

Alicia's description raised two important points relevant to the ongoing debate regarding the wisdom and effectiveness of desegregation, or at least desegregation as carried out within our society. First, Alicia referred to "that" being lost during desegregation when she stated, "I think that was lost [during desegregation], you know?" In the context of her interview and this particular excerpt, Alicia implied that what was lost in the African American community, to a large degree, was the sense of community connectedness and cohesion that the teachers experienced as children, a web of connectedness that was supported by the pillars of the home, the school, and the African American church (Thompson, 2001). Secondly, she linked this loss of community connectedness, at least in part, to desegregation. For Alicia, the "neighborhood thing" of her youth has now become something else indeed. A sense of belonging and a collective concern for everyone in the community has somehow been lost, perhaps forever.

Indeed, research would seem to suggest that African Americans and African American communities have "paid a high price" for whatever societal and material gains have been realized as a result of the last half-century of school and societal desegregation (Ehrlander, 2002, p. 273).
The closing of Black schools resulted in the loss of gathering places that had served not only as educational facilities, but as community centers. Secondly, Black students bore the brunt of the burden of bussing. Thirdly, Black teachers and administrators were dismissed and demoted in disproportionate numbers. Finally, Black students faced increased disciplinary action in new schools. (Ehrlander, 2002, pp. 273-274)

The ongoing and persistent legacy of 1970s and 1980s school desegregation efforts have affected and continue to affect these teachers in both their personal and professional lives and, through them, the educational experience and lives of African American children. At various points throughout the interviews, the teachers described their efforts to make the best of the desegregation strategies during the 1970s and 1980s such as mandatory bussing, transfers of African American and White teachers, racial balancing of school student populations through magnet programming, and the racial balancing of faculties and school staffs (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). Even today, during the unitary period in school desegregation, the ongoing and residual effects of those strategies continued to influence the teachers' experience of teacher worklife and their personal and professional identities. Indeed, as Pauline explained,

If you really take a look at it, we've always called our society a "melting pot." Now, they call it a "salad bowl," where you all just sort of blend in, and, we [African American] educators realize that we just don't want to
blend in and be part of, we want to be a part of, but still maintain our identity. And, it seems that every other...not every, but most other nationalities, races, [and] cultures that go to make up this American culture has not been asked to give up their identity. While remaining and keeping the respect of the general population, we [African Americans] feel like we've been sort of asked to give up our identity and accept the identity, the culture of someone else. I want to always be respectful to everyone. But, I always want to be me, which is a Black American, and to be respected for that.

For Pauline and the other teachers, part of the “high price” of desegregation for African Americans such as themselves (Ehrlander, 2002, p. 273) was the loss, in their view, of much a distinctive identity that, for them, has characterized the African American teacher throughout history. As Pauline said, “we want to be a part of, but still maintain our identity. . . . We [African Americans] feel like we’ve been sort of asked to give up our identity and accept the identity, the culture of someone else.” For the teachers in this study, a lingering, unintended, continuing effect of desegregation has been to dilute the strength, the power, the pride of performance, and the dedication to African American children and community that they remember the African American teachers of their childhood possessing. Carolyn, too, reflected upon this loss of identity for the African American teacher.

Culturally, there's some things that are happening with African American teachers that I know did not happen before desegregation. And, I'm often
very careful about the way I say that. I don't think it had anything to do with the fact that there were Black teachers teaching Black kids [during segregation]. I think that expectations were higher of Black children from Black educators. I think it was sort of expected and assumed by some of the Caucasian teachers [during desegregation] that, “Well, they’re [African American children] not going to rise to that [level] anyhow. So, why should I put that kind of pressure on them?” Whereas, our African American teachers [during childhood], I remember very distinctly, you know, corporal punishment was right there in the classroom. We used to get that swat on our hand, or whatever. And, there were things that just weren’t tolerated in terms of your academics, let alone behavior. I mean, we had never gotten to the behavior thing, because you get that little thing in your hand for not having your homework, or whatever. So, it’s like a whole new world [in desegregation]. . . . But, it just wasn’t tolerated when I was a child in all-Black schools. And, my experience is that expectations seem to have been watered down across the board. . . . It’s gotten really lax [during desegregation]. . . .

As Carolyn continued her narrative, she recalled the strength and presence of the African American teachers of her childhood and her sense of connection to them.

I know that [White] people say that we [African American teachers] do too much towards the punitive side, and pointing out the negatives, or that African American teachers are really harsh in their tone, or whatever. But,
its sort of cultural. It’s sort of the way we were raised, in our homes, as
well as our schools. [A junior high near my home] was when I went to my
first integrated school. I never knew there were things like gymnastics
equipment and all of this stuff in schools. In my [segregated African
American] schools, we had the books that the Caucasian schools
discarded. And, sometimes they had covers and sometimes they didn’t.

But, that wasn’t important, because the [African American] teacher made
us see that what was important was what’s between those covers, what’s
inside the book. And, that’s what you’ve got to work on, and, you’ve got to
be good at this, and, you’ve got to be an excellent student, and, there are
no excuses. . . . And, I guess that’s one of the reasons why it was
successful having African American teachers in African American schools
[during segregation], because the kids knew that they weren’t going to be
able to get away with that stuff, because, when the teacher came to your
house, then Mom was going to know the real deal. She was going to
know the whole picture, and, not just the part you told
her [laughter].

After 35 years, Carolyn retained these vivid memories of the African
American teachers in her childhood, segregated schools. Carolyn remembered
the strong sense of student discipline as exhibited by her African American
teachers as expressions of deep caring, especially when viewed through the lens
of the African American cultural context. As she said, "I know that [White] people
say that we [African American teachers] do too much towards the punitive side,
and pointing out the negatives, or that African American teachers are really harsh in their tone, or whatever. But, its sort of cultural. It’s sort of the way we were raised, in our homes, as well as our schools.” For Carolyn, the fact that “corporal punishment was right there in the classroom” meant that her African American teachers cared enough to discipline her and her fellow students in contrast to today, when “expectations seem to have been watered down across the board.” Additionally, Carolyn remembered the inspirational nature of her connection with her African American teachers. Even in the worst of conditions, when “we had the books that the Caucasian schools discarded,” her African American teachers rose above those conditions and “made us see that what was important was what’s between those covers, what’s inside the book. And, that’s what you’ve got to work on, and, you’ve got to be good at this, and, you’ve got to be an excellent student.” Finally, Carolyn remembered the deep sense of connection that she experienced with her African American teachers. They lived in her neighborhood. They went to the same churches and stores that she went to. They knew her parents and her parents knew them. They lived in the same world that she and her parents lived in. As Carolyn said, “the teacher came to your house, [and] then Mom was going to know the real deal.”

However, for Carolyn and the other teachers, the various desegregation orders and strategies since the 1970s have torn away at the distinctive, historic identity of the African American teacher. The processes supporting desegregation have eroded the distinctive identity of African American teachers, at least in part due to the reassignment of teachers, making most school faculties
predominantly White. The result has often been the dominant influence of many White teaching colleagues who are too often afflicted with diminished levels of caring, expectations, and effectiveness with regard to African American students (McIntyre, 1997). Terri described this sense of the erosion of identity as it developed alongside desegregation.

I've seen many Black teachers who were good teachers, who cared, but, it's more popular to become part of the system. Not to stand up and realize, like in faculty meeting, when things are being said negatively about [African American students], but to go ahead and conform, and say, "Yeah, [African American] Johnny is bad. Johnny can't read." . . . I've seen other Black teachers become very bitter, because they feel they're knocking their head up against a stone wall, because they see what's going on wrong. They see what's happening, like at my [predominantly African American] school. There were so few Black teachers. And, when you're trying to build these [African American] kids up, say there's five of you [African American teachers] trying to build these [African American] kids up, there are 25 [White teachers] pushing them down. And, you're seeing that this [African American] child that I had last year, and he's in another [White] teacher's classroom, and she's criticizing him all the time, and, it's like they [the White teachers] don't care.

In Terri's view, far too many of her African American teaching colleagues have been influenced by ineffective, uncaring White colleagues to suppress their historic identity comprised of caring, high expectations for African American
students, strength, pride in their performance, and dedication to African American children and the African American community. As a result of desegregation and the racial balancing of faculties, they have all too often exchanged that legacy and identity with membership in “the system;” furthermore, this system has predominantly White faculties and staffs (Choy et al., 2003), who may or may not experience deep levels of caring, commitment, and dedication to the effective education of African American children (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). As Terri implied, part of the problem may lie in the fact that African American teachers are indeed heavily outnumbered in the ranks of teaching by their White colleagues. As Terri said, “when you’re trying to build these [African American] kids up, say there’s five of you [African American teachers] trying to build these [African American] kids up, there are 25 [White teachers] pushing them down.”

According to the teachers, an important component within the historic, distinctive identity of the African American teachers has been a sense of cohesion and solidarity with other African American teachers. During the second period of modern desegregation of schools during the 1970s and 1980s, the strategy of racial balancing of school faculties and staffs led to the disassembling of many previously completely or predominantly African American teaching staffs (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). During the interviews, the teachers lamented the effect of this strategy upon their traditional sense of cohesion, kinship, and solidarity. James cited his own experiences as an example of the potential effects of the strategy of racial balancing of school faculties.
I worked at a [predominantly African American high school] for five years. And, when they came back to fix what they didn’t do right the first time, that’s what caused all the problems. You had a large cluster of African American teachers working [there]. They were very comfortable. The school was under good control. . . . [Our African American Principal] came back to the school and brought back some sense of organization, some structure. He was just a darn good Principal. . . . And, then, it came back, because the staff was not racially balanced. . . . and those [African American] people didn’t want to move. And, they [the school district] said, well, they needed to move. . . . We [the African American teachers] weren’t doing it. They [the African American teachers] weren’t going to interview [at other schools]. Why would I have to go and interview for a job when I already have one? I thought that was unfair. . . . But, nobody wanted to interview for a job that they really didn’t want. They were comfortable. But, it was just devastating, because they destroyed the faculty. . . . so they could get that racial balance, that they were seeking to get to comply with the court order. But, in the same vein, it was devastating. As a matter of fact, when I talk to [former African American] colleagues right now, they’re trying to get back. They want to get back. They want to get back to that school, even though it won’t be the same, because once you have a faculty that has gelled, that’s the world. Because, before the [African American] kids even hit that campus, or hit
that school from wherever they're coming from, they know the teachers.

The whole community knows them.

Within his narrative, James described a school environment in which predominantly African American teaching faculty felt a strong sense of solidarity and cohesion. In his words, it was a faculty that was "comfortable" and had "gelled" as a group. In fact, as James related, the sense of camaraderie and bonding among the African American teachers at the school was so strong that, even after the disbursement of the faculty out to other schools, the teachers were still trying to return to the school, "even though it won't be the same." James also described the forced racial balancing as "devastating," not only to the African American teachers themselves but also to the larger school community. In effect, James described the disruption of the sense of connectedness both within his particular group of African American teachers and outwards towards the school community. During the same time period as James's narrative, similar disruption occurred throughout the nation as a result of racial balancing of school staffs (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002).

The deep sense of kinship, bonding, and connection that these teachers shared with their African American students affected the students as well. The experience of school desegregation altered their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity with lingering and residual effects on their African American students. For the teachers, school desegregation has largely torn asunder the web of connectedness that has traditionally bound together the African American teacher, the African American school, the African American
child, and the African American community. Ethel's narrative is very representative of the teachers' thoughts and perceptions in this area. Ethel began by discussing the effects of desegregation upon African American teachers. Then, because of the natural linkage in her thinking between her own experience and the experience of her African American students, she began to discuss the effects of school desegregation upon African American students.

Well, it [desegregation] has divided us [African American teachers] as such. . . . It's divided us, because it shipped out a lot of our [African American] teachers back there in the 1970s. They took a lot of our strong teachers, a lot of our better [African American] teachers, and shipped them to predominantly White schools, you see? . . . We sent our best over there, to teach in the predominantly White schools. By and large now, the White schools should have sent their best over here to teach. But, that was not always the case, you see? That was not always the case. You want to get rid of somebody over there [in the White schools], send them over here, see? And, so it's been like that. . . . I want to say some of the White teachers that we get are perhaps "rejects." But, this year, we have a lot of young White teachers. So, they're not "rejected" from anywhere [laughter]. . . .

At this point, Ethel began to discuss the effects of school desegregation upon African American children.

I think it's been harmful for our [African American] kids to a large extent. It's been harmful because, first of all, here again, a lot of
the Caucasian teachers are not products of this community. . . .

When you have a lot of the Caucasian teachers who are not part of this community, they don’t have a handle on the discipline of the [African American] kids. . . . And, so this has presented a problem, you know? . . . I really would like to see [our predominantly African American high school] with a predominantly African American faculty. . . . It would change our kids. . . . We have four classes [per day] at [our school] right? Nine times out of ten, three of those classes will be taught by a Caucasian teacher. Sometimes, four out of the four will be taught by a Caucasian teacher. So, what I’m saying is that this is what our [African American] kids are seeing. . . . And, they’re [the African American students] not relating, if you’ve got four Caucasian teachers, and you see them day in and day out, you know, you’re not seeing . . . African Americans as a teacher.

For many of the teachers, the experience of school desegregation has, in Ethel’s words, “divided” the African American community. For them, where once a seamless continuum of connection existed between the African American teacher, school, children, home, and community, divisions and disruptions have now occurred as a result of desegregation. As a result, the educational experience of African American children has largely suffered. As Ethel said, African American students at her school could quite conceivably have “four out of the four” classes taught to them each day by White teachers who are “are not products of this community.” In Ethel’s view, the lack of connection and cultural
synchronization (Irvine, 1990) between their African American students and these White teachers has led to her observation that many of the White teachers “don’t have a handle on the discipline of the [African American] kids.” Because of school desegregation, strong African American teachers who might otherwise have been some of these students’ teachers have been “shipped . . . to predominantly White schools.” Even worse, while the White teachers who were sent to predominantly African American schools should have been comparably talented and dedicated teachers, “that was not always the case.”

In the end, school desegregation has been, in Ethel’s words, “harmful for our [African American] kids to a large extent.” In the teachers’ view, the educational experience of African American children evolved from a segregated, nurturing, effective enterprise during their own youth in the Brown period of desegregation, through the turbulent 1970s and 1980s, to a problematic, unsettled time in the unitary period of school desegregation. Bernadine’s explanation of the effects of desegregation upon African American children is telling.

That’s why I say that it’s one of the worst things that could ever happen [school desegregation]. We’ve lost our [African American] kids when it comes to discipline. We’ve lost them when it comes to putting forth their best effort. Maybe we had some that couldn’t read [during the period of segregation]. But, it sure wasn’t because they didn’t try. They were sitting there trying to say the word, trying to read. But, now they sit back and do nothing. So, I don’t know what the explanation for that is. . . . Something
is happening that would cause the [African American] children not to respond and not to learn as well. And, then you can get someone else to work with them [an African American teacher], and you get a whole change and turnaround. . . . But, I feel for the most part, its probably one of the worst things that have happened to us.

The racial balancing of school faculties, begun during the 1970s and 1980s during the activist period in school desegregation, continued during the unitary period in many school districts (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). One aspect of this racial balancing that several of the teachers found to be particularly distressing involved the placement of novice and first-year White teachers into predominantly African American schools. The teachers described a cycle that began with the placement of White teachers into predominantly African American schools. The White teachers would stay a minimum number of years in the predominantly African American schools, in effect, learning and perfecting their practice of teaching while at the school. Then, in the final stage of the cycle, the young White teachers would transfer at the first available opportunity to a suburban, predominantly White school. As Pauline would attest, “It’s a real phenomenon. I think you [as a White teacher] get your training, and, then you’re gone.”

Terri described her sense of resentment regarding the impact of this phenomenon upon African American students and schools.

You see many White teachers, as soon as they get their feet wet in the inner-city schools, they move to the more affluent [White] schools. And,
that also makes you [as an African American teacher] bitter. I think after being at [my predominantly African American school] all those years, and seeing White teachers come and go, and realizing that [White] teachers who couldn't make it in more affluent schools would come in and cripple so many [African American] children. . . . [It made me feel] very resentful, very resentful. Because, our [African American] children were being short-changed. We got the overflow of young, inexperienced [White teachers]. One year, we had seven, as small as our staff is, we had seven new teachers. And, five of those were new to the teaching field. They were right out of college. . . . No work experience. . . . We know that the first year of teaching is survival. It's called survival. We've been there.

Research would suggest that Terri may very well be accurate in one of the major perceptions contained within her narrative. Nation-wide data tends to support her sense that first-year, novice White teachers are placed into inner-city schools on a disproportionate basis. In school year 1999-2000, 21% of all first-year teachers were placed into schools whose student populations were classified as 75% minority in nature (Choy et al., 2003, p. 59). Additionally, only 14% of beginning teachers were placed into schools that were classified as less than 10% in minority student population (p. 59). However, it was not the placement of young, White teachers into predominantly African American, inner-city schools that made her feel so "very resentful." Terri's focus was the lack of emotional investment on their parts with regard to the African American children whom they were teaching, combined with the certainty that they were, as young,
inexperienced teachers, making their share of mistakes in the education of these young African Americans. As she said, “as soon as they get their feet wet in the inner-city schools, they move to the more affluent [White] schools.” Because of the inexperience of these young, White teachers, “our [African American] children were being short-changed” in the sense that “the first year of teaching is survival.” In effect, Terri was dismayed in witnessing a cycle of staffing that, in her view, “cripple[d] so many [African American] children,” as inexperienced or ineffective White teachers came in, made their mistakes and learned their craft—in effect on the backs of African American children—and left at the first opportunity for suburban, predominantly White schools.

Witnessing this phenomenon led to a resentment exacerbated by the fact that African American teachers, employed in suburban, predominantly White schools were often prohibited from transferring into inner-city, predominantly African American schools (Armor, Rossell, Walberg, 2002; Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002); this experience repeated itself in districts across the nation. Even during a period of unitary status in school desegregation, this prohibition kept African American teachers away from the African American students with whom they quite likely would have been highly effective and successful. As Pauline explained,

    When it happened [massive transferring of teachers to achieve racial balancing], those of us who were perceived as being good Black teachers, we got pulled. And, you had a hell of a time trying to get back across that water [laughter]. . . . The transfer process? Well, of course I had
submitted an application to be transferred [to an inner-city, predominantly African American school] at least three times and had never heard anything. I had just taken it upon myself to go downtown, because I started thinking, “This was unfair.” I wanted to see somebody who could help me. And, my feelings about it back then, and I pretty much feel the same way now, I thought it was an unjust procedure, because it seemed like people were constantly coming and going, but they were Caucasian. Those of us who were Black and were trying to get to this [predominantly African American] side of town had been there for eons. Those [White teachers] who worked in the inner-city and wanted to leave after three years at max, were allowed, or were found, a position. So, it didn’t sit real well with me, and that’s what really made me go downtown. I just felt like I had to say something, even if it didn’t do me any good. But, it did [and Pauline was transferred to an inner-city, predominantly African American school].

The interviews revealed the teachers’ collective concern with regard to the wisdom and effectiveness of school desegregation. Indeed, some of them could be described as disagreeing with the historical priority placed upon school and societal desegregation by leading local civil rights organizations. Carolyn spoke directly of her perceptions of a sense of disconnection between the goals of the leading civil rights organization, the NAACP, with regards to school desegregation and the wishes and hopes of the African American community.
I have very strong feelings. First of all, I think that the NAACP never did really quite recognize what the African American community was saying to them. They [the African American community] were saying, “We want more equity in schooling. We want our children not to have the second-hand books and not to have the lack of equipment and that kind of thing.” Somehow, someone equated that with sitting next to a Caucasian child. . . . And, so, I think that we sort of did a disservice, forcing people to leave their neighborhoods period, to go to other schools. . . . And, that, to me, has been the biggest confusion, that, it didn’t mean that, because you were sitting next to a Caucasian child, that you [as an African American child] were going to get what was right or fair. . . . I don’t think the NAACP quite got it.

As previously detailed in this section, the NAACP and many other leading civil rights organizations have historically placed a priority on the desegregation of schools as the appropriate strategy for ensuring equality of education for African American children (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002). It was clear from Carolyn’s narrative that she felt “very strongly” that she, and most members of the African American community, desired a truly authentic separate but equal educational opportunity for African American children, with emphasis on the “equal” component of that doctrine. Indeed, research suggests that a disconnect between the NAACP and many members of the African American community may have existed over the years of the desegregation movement. This lack of connection may reflect the historic and ongoing debate within the African
American community as to the best approach to equal access to educational opportunity for African Americans (Ehrlander, 2002). The local NAACP seemed to strive for full desegregation, while the grass roots of the African American community, as Carolyn suggested, may have desired other approaches. As Armor and Rossell (2002) have asserted,

Unfortunately, the civil rights attorneys who filed desegregation lawsuits all over the United States in the 1970s never consulted their clients. Experts for the NAACP, the Legal Defense fund, the U.S. Justice Department, and the ACLU drew up and defended mandatory reassignment plans that were supported by only a minority of Black parents in the districts in which they were implemented. . . . Just as under de jure segregation, Black children were now being assigned to a school solely because of their race, albeit for noble purposes. (p. 311)

Similarly, the teachers expressed a great deal of concern with regards to the effectiveness and wisdom of the desegregation movement. However, at no point in the interviews did the teachers downplay one of the major implicit benefits of desegregation, namely the fostering of meaningful cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions and understanding between White and African American persons. On the contrary, they consistently identified this interaction and understanding as the chief benefit of school desegregation.

As James said,

We know that, especially now, going into the 21st century, that you’re going to have to teach children, who will eventually become adults,
that this is how our country is. Our country is a multicultural country.

So, why try to segregate the races? Because, we all have to live in the same communities, the same city, the same state. . . . So, the integrated [school] setting gives that.

Certainly, the modern school desegregation movement, which has so deeply affected the personal and professional lives of these teachers, has fundamentally changed America (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002). The formal, institutionalized instruments of de jure segregation are all but eliminated and gone. African Americans and other persons of color have access to opportunities within American life and society only dreamed of before the Brown decision of 1954.

Sadly, though, during the so-called unitary period in school and societal desegregation, a creeping, invisible, informal re-segregation of America’s schools and cultural life may be taking place. The impetus towards continued desegregation of schools and facilities may be waning among all walks of American life (Ehrlander, 2002). As former President Bill Clinton noted during a speech at Little Rock’s Central High School noting the 40th anniversary of the integration of that school,

Segregation is no longer the law, but separation is still the rule. . . .

Today, children of every race walk through the same door, but then they often walk down different halls. Not only in this school, but across America, they sit in different classrooms, they eat at different tables. They even sit in different bleachers at the football game. Far too many
communities are all White, all Black, all Latino, all Asian. Indeed, too many Americans of all races have actually begun to give up on the idea of integration and the search for common ground. (Clinton, 1994, cited in Ehrlander, 2002, p. 300)

What is remarkable about these teachers is that they maintained their equilibrium as they lived out their lives as children and adults during the history of school desegregation in America. As African American teachers in practice during much of the desegregation movement, they could very easily have found themselves in a “no-man’s land” of confusion as to who they were as teachers and their sense of place in American education. Through the swirl of events beginning with the Brown decision, through the tumultuous desegregation events and strategies of the 1970s and 1980s, and into the period of unitary school districts and systems, they have stayed the course. Even when the ideas and methods of school desegregation may very well have been against their better judgment, they stayed the course. Every day, they continued to love and have high expectations for their students, and shared a special sense of bonding and kinship with them. Every day, they remained strong in their commitment to their students and to their African American communities. Every day, they maintained a strong sense of pride in their performance and pride in their students’ performance, particularly in the performance of their African American students. Every day, they accepted no excuses and offered no excuses in their work. In short, they have kept the faith with the African American teachers who came before them and have maintained within themselves the distinctive identity of the
African American teacher in an environment that has, at times, torn away at that identity.

The teachers seemed to sense that, if America is to truly become a more unified and better society in terms of racial and cultural relations, school desegregation is, at best, merely one tool in the construction of that society. For the teachers, America will become a better, more evolved, more tolerant, more compassionate, and more understanding society when a comprehensive continuum of changes occur within the individual and collective hearts and minds of people living in our society. As Laverne said,

Unless you change a White person's mind and heart and educate them, you have done nothing but put words on paper, and paper doesn't stand for anything. . . . We need to learn about each other, so we can get along. We need to know what makes the other tick.
The Global Dimension

Thus far in the analysis of data, two dimensions of the teachers’ personal and professional identities have been examined. Within the first dimension, the self, the teachers’ thoughts, perceptions, and experiences regarding the notion of race were analyzed through the filter and screen of African American collective memory. Additionally, discussion of the dimension of the self included the effects and influence of gender, and the combination of race and gender, upon the life experiences and personal and professional identities of the teachers. Indeed, the path to understanding the teachers’ experiences of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity began with an understanding of their selves and who they were as persons. The path to understanding then led outward to the second dimension, the interactive dimension of their lived experiences as teachers. Discussion of the interactive dimension of their experience included the quality of their interactions with colleagues, with the communities they served, and with systems and organizations. Components of the interactive dimension given priority by the teachers themselves, included their experiences of personal interaction with White teaching colleagues, their perceptions regarding the interaction of White teachers with African American students and their parents, and their lived experiences within the context of school desegregation.

Thus, following explorations of the dimension of the self and the interactive dimension, the final dimension of the teachers’ personal and
professional identities to be examined is the global dimension. The teachers described a global dimension of their personal and professional identities including the role of transcendent notions of personal spirituality, a sense of mission and calling to teach, and the role of love in their experience of teaching.

This interpretation does not necessarily mean either that all teachers must encounter a global dimension in their experience of teacher worklife or that the presence of the global dimension is necessarily a required characteristic of effective teaching. However, for these and other teachers, there is a dimension of teacher worklife beyond the mechanics, pedagogy, and day-to-day tasks of teaching.

A part of their teaching experience, for them, involved a deep sense of personal spirituality, a spirituality that directly influenced their interactions with students and their work environments. Thus, this discussion proceeds from the point of view that notions of personal spirituality, sense of mission and calling, and a place for love in teaching are real, and valid, and meaningful for these teachers and their comments, perceptions, and experiences will be viewed in that light.

Indeed, research suggests that the acceptance of the role and influence of personal spirituality in one’s life and work is becoming a growing trend in both the public and private sectors. Among many persons throughout our society, there is a renewed interest in the linkages and connections between personal spirituality and the experiences of one’s life and work. Working lives that focus only on attending to the completion of one task after the other in the workplace, devoid of
a context of purpose and meaning, are, in the end, simply unfulfilling to an increasing number of people (Miller, 2000). Indeed, many people detect an emptiness in society and in their own lives. In attempting to find the source of this emptiness Moore and others have asserted that part of the problem comes from a lack of soul. Without soul, our society seems to lack a basic vitality or energy. . . . People on the streets, subways, in the shopping malls often look exhausted, disgruntled, or angry. As a result, people seek fulfillment, or escape, in alcohol, drugs, work, and a variety of other addictions. (p. 3)

The teachers here described their life’s work in teaching as, in many ways, the antithesis of the “emptiness” described by Miller. Their personal identities and working lives as teachers have been rich, meaningful, and satisfying experiences. For them, the foundation for their lives and for these subsequent meaningful and satisfying careers has been a deeply personal, intimate sense of personal spirituality. Thus, the next section in the analysis of data examines the role of a strong sense of personal spirituality, expressed without exception by the teachers during the interviews.

With Heart and Soul: African American Teachers and a Personal Spirituality in their Practice of Teaching

The notion of personal spirituality as a component of the teachers’ personal and professional identities appeared in an earlier section of the analysis of data entitled “Collective Memory: Personal Spirituality as Mediator and Life Guide.” The examination and discussion within that section established the
importance and preeminence of a sense of personal spirituality in the lives of the teachers. Indeed, this personal sense of spirituality served as the fundamental guiding force in the teachers’ experience of life.

The teachers described four effects of personal spirituality upon their experiences of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity. Two of those effects, the linkage of personal spirituality to African American collective memory and the manifestation of that spirituality in the form of church participation, have already been discussed in the aforementioned section of analysis. Two other effects and influences of personal spirituality upon the working lives of these teachers are next examined. First, the role of personal spirituality in the teachers’ decisions to both enter and remain in the profession of teaching is detailed, decisions that the teachers often referred to as a mystical “calling” to teach. A second effect examined is the influence of their personal spirituality in their practice of teaching, and particularly in their interaction with students.

*African American Teachers and the Call to Teaching*

For the teachers, their personal sense of spirituality was far more than a token visit to church on most Sundays and occasional acknowledgement of a life beyond the physical plane of existence. In many ways, their belief in what they termed God gave their life purpose, meaning, and direction. For them, everything in their personal and professional lives flowed from their all-encompassing relationship with God. They believed that the events and major moments and decisions in their lives largely unfolded according to a design
under the control of God. In this belief, they found security, comfort, and, they believed, guidance and direction. Thus, for them, from the context of this relationship with God, and His design and plans for their lives, came the call to enter into the profession of teaching. In the following extended narrative, Carolyn described her sense of a life under the guidance and direction of God and the sense of a call to teaching that was a part of that guidance and direction.

I was just always the child that had the dolls and the teddy bears and I would be there teaching to them. And, I just knew that I wanted to be a teacher. . . . Again, I thought that I was going to save the world. But, once I realized that there were some kids that just weren’t going to let me save the world [laughter], I also came to the notion that, “I’m just going to help every child to be the best they can be.” And, that, in and out itself, was the reward. That was when the light bulb came on, then I knew I was doing what I was here to do. And, I just kind of felt that that’s what I was supposed to be in education doing, that teaching was God’s calling on my life, to be a teacher. Because, I found myself doing it in so many settings.

. . . I don’t think that I had the most to offer, or the most talent, or whatever. It’s just that I was always able to get people to just see the good in themselves and to tap into what made them feel good about themselves.

As Carolyn continued, she began to expand the conversation from the call to teach to her perception of God’s guidance and direction in her life.
My parents encouraged me to get my Master’s degree. And, I’ve recently told my Mother that Florida A & M was offering a doctoral program. . . . I always know whenever those kinds of things are presented to me, it seems that it was something I was supposed to do, because I usually make it despite the odds, and I know that it has nothing to do with me being this “bright person,” so far ahead of everybody else. It was just that it was meant for me to do at that particular time. And, that was the reason I got it, not because I was so much better than anybody else. It’s just that it was meant for me to do at that point in time. So, when I hear about new stuff coming up, it’s like, “Oh, Lord, is this what I’m supposed to be doing now? I don’t want to do this right now.” And, if I get it, out of 25 people, then I’ll know that I was supposed to do it. And, if I don’t, I’ve come to understand that I wasn’t supposed to do that at that time, rather than seeing it as a reflection of my ability, or lack thereof. So, that’s part of my growth process, where I’ve just come to understand, “Hey, don’t take it personally. This just wasn’t meant for you to do.”

At several points in her narrative, Carolyn pointed to a sense of guidance and direction for her life flowing from her relationship with God. Indeed, she directly stated that “teaching was God’s calling on my life.” Additionally, she linked her success to answering God’s call on her life to be a teacher. As Carolyn said, even though she didn’t “think that I had the most to offer, or the most talent,” she was a successful teacher who was able to “get people to just see the good in themselves and to tap into what made them feel good about
themselves." Furthermore, Carolyn implied that God’s calling to her may have begun as a little girl, because, “I was just always the child that had the dolls and the teddy bears and I would be there teaching to them. And, I just knew that I wanted to be a teacher.” Later, as she was actually into her teaching career: “That was when the light bulb came on, then I knew I was doing what I was here to do.” It was implied by Carolyn that “the light bulb coming on” was when she realized that she had indeed answered correctly the call of God to become a teacher and that He had been calling her to teach since she was a little girl.

Carolyn also acknowledged her belief in the ongoing guidance and direction in her life provided by God. Statements such as “it’s just that it was meant for me to do at that point in time” implied both a belief in God’s plan and design for her life and a submission to that plan and design in her comforting belief that God’s will was what was best for her life. As Carolyn said, “I get it, out of 25 people, then I’ll know that I was supposed to do it. And, if I don’t, I’ve come to understand that I wasn’t supposed to do that at that time.”

For Carolyn and the other teachers, the merging of their spiritual lives and the secular world was commonplace, normal, and natural. For example, Carolyn’s statement to God, “Oh, Lord, is this what I’m supposed to be doing now?” was by no means a rhetorical exercise on her part. She specifically meant that, in the context of an ongoing, intimate, personal relationship with God, she was asking for guidance and direction in her professional life and was trusting in faith that God’s will would be done for the ultimate good in her life. Indeed, to understand the position of the teachers’ faith and spirituality in their professional
lives is to know that, for them, "the separation between the spiritual and the secular is false. To deny spirit is to deny an essential element of our being and thus diminish ourselves and our approach to education" (Miller, 2000, p. 9).

This lack of separation in the teachers' thinking "between the spiritual and the secular" (p. 9) was commonplace within their narratives regarding the role of spirituality and subsequent sense of calling in their work as teachers. Terri also connected her relationship with God and His calling on her life to be a teacher.

I think any good teacher has to [consider his or her teaching to be a calling]. I think it's just like becoming a minister, or a good doctor. You have to have that calling. It has to be an innate type of thing. You've got to care, first of all, about your fellow man. . . . If you don't care, if you don't have God in your life, to teach you how to care, there's no way you're going to be successful. You can make all the money in the world and not be successful. . . . Money? Sure, I think everyone would like to have ample money. But, that wasn't important to me. . . . Material things are not important [to me]. It's when God takes me home, I think there are a lot of people who will miss me. And, there are a lot of lives that I will have touched. And, I think that's what God sends us here to do. To be His tools, to touch lives, and I did it in the field of education, because I felt that was where God wanted me to be. . . . And, my saying is, "By the grace of God." Many nights, I have to say, "OK, Lord, what do I do?" . . . I would be in class [at UNF] with people that I knew were not going to be very good teachers, because they didn't have it here [points to
heart]. They didn’t have that calling that I think you need to be a good
teacher. They would know all the skills. They’d know all the criteria that
goes into a lesson plan. . . . You many know all this stuff, but not know
how to give it to your children.

Within the context of her narrative, Terri painted a self-portrait of a person
who believes in God and who has an all-encompassing relationship with God.
For Terri, from this relationship flows direction, meaning, and purpose for her life,
including a very distinct call to teach. Indeed, Terri likened being a good teacher
to “becoming a minister.” Additionally, Terri touched upon her perception of three
stages in her calling. First, the origin of one’s calling to teach is rooted in a
fundamental sense of caring and compassion towards others that is given to us,
according to Terri, by God. As Terri said, God will “teach you how to care.” The
second stage in one’s calling is when one answers the call from God to teach
and takes up his or her profession under the guidance and direction of God. As
Terri explained, “that’s what God sends us here to do. To be His tools, to touch
lives, and I did it in the field of education, because I felt that was where God
wanted me to be.” Lastly, one has a peace and assurance at the end of one’s
life and knows that he or she has answered the call and done the will of God in
his or her life. As Terri described, “it’s when God takes me home, I think there
are a lot of people who will miss me. And, there are a lot of lives that I will have
touched.”

Terri also expressed her belief that, without a sense of personal spirituality
and call to teaching, technical expertise in the pedagogy of teaching will not
necessarily help one become an effective teacher. Based upon her experience
and beliefs, persons who lack a sense of purpose and calling are “not going to be
very good teachers, because they didn’t have it here [points to heart]. They
didn’t have that calling that I think you need to be a good teacher.”

Bernadine continued the theme of answering one’s call to teaching by
providing both a context for her beliefs and examples of her beliefs in action.

When I went for the interview [at another elementary school], I never
shall forget, the Principal asked me, “What was it about wanting to work in
the community that I would be working in that would cause me
to want to work in that community?” And, my answer to her was,
“I guess it’s my missionary spirit.” I just like going into challenging
areas to help. And, I like to get really involved. I don’t like to
help from a distance. . . . Usually, when I go to a school, I’m
always told, “Oh, the other counselor didn’t get that involved.”

Well, it doesn’t bother me to get involved. If I need to take someone to
Social Services, or, if I need to go into a home, you know, or, if I need to
stay after school to help a child with tutoring, because I see a need there. .

. . In some cases, I’ve caused parents to upgrade their living conditions.
And, it’s a good feeling to know that you’ve caused someone to go back to
school, or if you’ve encouraged somebody to stop doing or living in the
manner in which they’ve been living.

Bernadine began her narrative by describing herself as possessing a
“missionary spirit.” In the context of the entirety of her interview, it was quite
clear that, for Bernadine, being a “missionary” carried with it spiritual connotations. Her self-identification as a “missionary” implied that God had given her a specific mission to perform, namely, becoming a school guidance counselor. Additionally, Bernadine appeared to link her “missionary spirit” to her fundamental approach to being a school guidance counselor. For Bernadine, this sense of mission and calling motivated her to focus on the entire continuum of human needs when dealing with children or parents, rather than a more narrow focus on strictly academic progress and proficiency.

The sense of answering a call, so commonly and pervasively described in the interviews, implied a view of teaching as, literally, a vocation rather than merely a profession. Indeed, whether they feel they have answered a spiritual calling, as these teachers believe they have done, or whether the source of their calling is secular, many teachers view their work as a vocation based upon a calling (Huebner, 1987). In addition to a spiritual calling, teachers could view themselves as called to the vocation of teaching by sources such as, “students, by the contents and its communities, and by the institution within which the teacher lives” (Huebner, 1993, p. 411). For those teachers who view their work as a calling, either by spiritual or secular forces,

A vocation is living life intentionally and openly, not routinely. It means to be prepared to accept newness and surprise, pain and happiness; for these are dimensions that make us rethink, almost daily, who and what we are. Such a life cannot be lived in isolation and privacy.
To accept the vocation of a teacher is to answer the call of children and young people. (Huebner, 1987, p. 380)

The teachers consistently stressed that, while their call to teaching began with God in a very spiritual manner, that call was nurtured within them by other forces throughout their lives and careers. At times, the teachers described the influence of family, their personal experience in schools where they taught, or their church experiences as nurturing the call to teach within them. However, much more prevalently, the teachers identified specific teachers from their childhoods who acted as mentors for them and helped to develop and nurture the initial call to teaching that they had experienced. Lorraine’s remembrance of the influence of her high school choral director was representative of the teachers’ accounts of how one particular person from their educational experiences influenced them in responding to their call to teach.

She [her high school choral director] brought out what I had... I dressed at her house [on the way to school] and whatever financial shortcomings there were, she was willing to help. She and her husband were a lot of help, to my parents and to other children’s parents. I truly believe that had it not been for her, I would not have received that scholarship, that full scholarship, that I did get to Bethune-Cookman. As a matter of fact, she contacted the choral director down there and told him that she had a contralto that he just wouldn’t believe... We lived on her every word. Even when she had interns to come in, the way she guided
them, you know? And, it was then that I decided that I wanted to be like her. Thus, when I finished school, I began my teaching career.

As was the case with the other teachers, Lorraine felt that her work as a teacher was in response to a calling that she had received. However, it was clearly the influence and mentorship of her high school choral director that awakened and nurtured that calling. As Lorraine stated, “It was then that I decided that I wanted to be like her. Thus, when I finished school, I began my teaching career.” As Lorraine and several of the other teachers discovered, the power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us, models that may turn out to have little to do with who we are as teachers. Their power is in the capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives. If we discovered a teacher’s heart in ourselves by meeting a great teacher, recalling that meeting may help us take heart in teaching once more. (Palmer, 1998, p. 21)

These teachers have viewed and continue to view their work as teachers as much more than a job or even a profession. For them, their careers have been a vocation, a work that they feel began with a calling from God and a work that has been sustained by the guidance, direction, and assistance of God. As James said so simply, I’ve been called [to teaching]. It’s spiritual. . . . Because, what’s non-spiritual, we can see—killing, robbing, disrespect. Those are things that are non-spiritual. The things I do [in teaching] are the opposite of that. . . .
It's [the call to teach] spiritual, Larsen. God speaks to you... You can't draw it out and make it into a picture. It's an inward thing.

There's a spiritual communication with God... God's been good to me, I know that, because I can see it... That's my testimony.

In the end, these teachers have indeed accepted the call to teach, whether the source is spiritual or secular (Huebner, 1987). In the course of living out that call, they have touched, changed, and enhanced the lives of countless children.

*African American Teachers and the Influence of Personal Spirituality in their Practice of Teaching*

Just as the teachers described their entry into and subsequent careers in teaching as based on their response to a calling from God, they also detailed the influence of that personal spirituality upon their practice of teaching. The primary influence of that personal spirituality was manifested in the relationship between them and their students, both White and African American. Just as a call to teaching flowed from the teachers' all-encompassing relationship with God, a sincere, deeply-felt love for their students flowed from that same relationship and source. It is important to note that, for the teachers, this love for their students was very human in its expression, but was divinely inspired. Laverne noted that,

Teachers stay in the classroom because of the children; because they love what they do, because they see a need, because they love children... I think that I have a particular obligation to students... It doesn't matter what color... I just feel obligated... I said I was going to do
this [teaching]. Then, when I got feedback from the students, I said, yeah, I did the right thing. That let me know. There are always signs. God speaks to you in a lot of different ways. You find out [from God] whether you’re on the right track. I knew that it [teaching] was the right thing for me.

The context of Laverne’s interview indicated that the “particular obligation” and the “love” that she felt for her students flowed from her relationship with God. The “feedback” from her students was a “sign” from God, which reinforced her decision to enter and remain in teaching. In Laverne’s mind, her success in teaching was God’s way of “speaking” to her and keeping her on the “right track.” While Laverne implied the source of her personal love for students as linked to her relationship with God, she also recognized that many other teachers also loved their students just as deeply. She said, “Teachers stay in the classroom because of the children; because they love what they do, because they see a need, because they love children.”

The love for their students described by the teachers was an altruistic, self-sacrificing, motivational love. Although their love for their students may have been divinely inspired, it was very much a love that was rooted in the practicalities of the day-to-day, real life in the classroom. When the teachers used the word “love” in describing their relationships with their students, they were not speaking of a sense of generic, unfocused warm feelings towards others. Indeed, in their use of the word “love,” they referred to a directed “love”
that influenced and guided their teaching and interactions with students in the
context of daily realities, both positive and negative.

Indeed, Lorraine's representative narrative portrayed a love for students
that was, for her and the other teachers, divinely inspired but rooted in the
practicalities of teaching.

If you don't love them [students], you can't teach them. If you don't have
the patience, then you have to mentally and physically be prepared for
those who move fast, those who move slow, and those that move in-
between. And, you have to accept each child for what that child is.
You find them where they are, and take them forward, move them forward.
And, without love, patience, and understanding, you're going nowhere real
fast. And, I see teachers fail because of that. I've seen them fail because
they watch the clock. It's like a job, that's what it is. It's just a job. That's
all it is. But, if you can't take it and go above and beyond the call of duty
as a teacher, you're not going anywhere. . . . But, like I say, the love and
the need of the children that I taught through the years, Black and White
[motivated me], because I've had some of the worst ones--got a couple on
Death Row. . . . Got a couple in jail for umpteen years. I knew they were
headed for that, but not while they were there [at school with me]. . . .
These were the kids that I had to beg to go home, so I could go home.
You see what I'm saying? And, these kids didn't look at me as an
African American. They looked at me as a teacher, who had what they
needed and was willing to give it all.
Lorraine described a love for her students that was comprised of three components. The first component of this love was an extraordinary sense of self-sacrificial caring for and about her students. The love described by Lorraine and the other teachers was a sense of caring and concern for students that went "above and beyond the call of duty." Indeed, the loving teacher must be "willing to give it all." The second component of love for students was an abiding sense of "patience" with students, both in their rate of grasping academic material and in their learning styles. As Lorraine said, those teachers without this patience "have to mentally and physically be prepared for those who move fast, those who move slow, and those that move in-between." Lastly, the loving teacher must be willing to "accept each child for what that child is." Because of the love they feel towards their students, Lorraine and the other teachers "find [students] where they are, and take them forward, move them forward," rather than require students be held to a set of arbitrary goals and objectives that may not be relevant or realistic.

Bernadine also described the influence of love in her work as a guidance counselor. Her view also represents the teachers' tone regarding their belief in love for their students as an important component in their practical, day-to-day work.

I tell people all the time, kids are like dogs. You know, people always say that when a stranger goes up to a dog, if he growls at him, you beware of that stranger. And, if he licks him, you've got a good person [laughter]. I feel that kids have the same instinct. They know when people care. They
can sense it. They can feel it. They know when you’re just doing your job, and when you’re beyond it. They don’t say it. They can’t express it that way, but they know. Like I had a child up here the other day, and he said to me, “You know what? . . . You’re the only person I’ve ever met that cared about me, that seemed to want me to succeed and do something good. None of my other teachers, nobody has ever sat down and talked with me, or cared about what I was doing.” That hurt, to think that this child has repeated 5th grade twice, been in the system all this time, and he can’t reflect back to any time that somebody cared. So, it’s love, definitely. . .

At this point, Bernadine described how her sense of love for her students motivated her in her day-to-day work as a guidance counselor.

See, I want to help a child to see if my skills and my knowledge, strategies, experimental, or whatever you want to call it, can bring this child from where he is. I can also go in there and do it because I really genuinely care. I want this child to do better. Not because I’m paid, or this is my profession, and I want to see how can I get this child to read? . . . I’m doing it because I care for this child. I genuinely love this child. And, they [the children] know it. They know it.

Bernadine’s love for her students found practical expression in two ways. First, the student cited in her narrative was able to sense Bernadine’s sense of love and caring towards and about him. As Bernadine said, “Kids are like dogs. . . They know when people care.” Thus, Bernadine’s sense of love and concern,
sensed by this student, gave Bernadine entrée into the formation of a relationship with the student that could ultimately lead to resolution of the student's difficulties. Secondly, Bernadine's love and concern for the student evolved into an altruistic, self-sacrificing motivation to help the student. As Bernadine said, “I want this child to do better. Not because I’m paid, or this is my profession, and I want to see how can I get this child to read? . . . I’m doing it because I care for this child. I genuinely love this child.”

Terri also alluded to the practical nature and element of self-sacrifice in her love for her students. At the time of her interview, Terri had recently been hospitalized.

Many times when I was ill, and I’d go to work, and the other teachers would look at me and say, “What’s going on here?” And, I would say, “My kids need me.” And, they [the students] would walk into the classroom, and they’d had a substitute teacher, and they see you, and their faces just light up, and they’re just all over you. And, you’re in the hospital and parents are calling because they say that their child needed to talk to you.

. . . They know you love them [the students]. . . . I had a little boy that came back to me and he had been one of my [Kindergarten] students. And, he had come back in the 6th grade [to our school], and he was a discipline problem. . . . And, I asked him, “Why,” because in Pre-Kindergarten, he had been so eager. He loved school, he was doing well academically. . . . And, I’m saying now [to the child], “Excuse me, but you were so eager and such a sharp little fellow when you were in Pre-
Kindergarten. What happened? Why are you cutting up now? Why are you not getting your work?” And, he told me, “Ms. Terri, when I was in Pre-Kindergarten, you listened to me. You loved me. They [my current teachers] don’t like me. I can do something and as soon as I do it, I’m in trouble. But other boys in the class, they’ll do it, and it’s OK. They can get by with it. She [the teacher] just doesn’t like me.” . . . [And Terri said,]

“What’s the difference now?” And, he said, “Well, you liked me. I didn’t want to hurt you.” . . . I could always go up to the biggest clown in school [laughter] and never raise my voice, and [say], “What is your problem?” . . . And, I would say, “Now, do I have to put you across my knee?” [laughter] And, they would say, “Oh, Ms. Terri, now you wouldn’t dare.” And, I’d say, “Go ask your Momma if I wouldn’t dare.”

Terri began her narrative by alluding to the altruistic, self-sacrificing nature of the love that the teachers had for their students. As Terri said, despite her physical illness and difficulties, she came in to work because “My kids need[ed] me.” For Terri, the needs and welfare of her students outweighed her own difficulties.

Additionally, Terri’s narrative described a role for love in the classroom that was cited most often and consistently by the teachers—the role of a teacher’s love as a bridge of personal connection between themselves and their students. For the teachers, their love for their students was at one end of the bridge. The students’ innate, unspoken awareness of and receptivity to this sense of love was at the other end. Thus, the students’ receptivity to their teachers, based on
their feeling that their teacher loved them, gave the teachers entrée into the
students' circles of trust. From that sense of established trust comes a
willingness on the part of students to accept the direction and guidance offered
by the teacher.

The child cited in Terri's narrative knew in his heart that Terri, in contrast
to his current teachers, "loved" him. Thus, he was willing to submit to her
involvement in his current dilemma. Terri also noted that when students
recognized her love for them, they were willing to submit to her guidance and, if
necessary, discipline. As Terri said, "I could always go up to the biggest clown in
school [laughter] and never raise my voice, and [say], "What is your problem?"... And, I would say, "Now, do I have to put you across my knee?" [laughter] And,
they would say, "Oh, Ms. Terri, now you wouldn't dare." And, I'd say, "Go ask
your Momma if I wouldn't dare." It was highly unlikely that the "biggest clown in
school" would have submitted so willingly to Terri's direction and guidance unless
he or she first had developed a sense of trust in Terri based on a perception of
being loved by her.

The importance and role of a teacher's love for students is not often
discussed within educational dialogue and conversation (Miller, 2000). As
Huebner (1985) explained, "love is a sticky wicket in educational circles. The
word appears to be verboten in education as it conjures up images of softness,
privatization and indulgence" (p. 363). Nevertheless, whether the source is
spiritual, as is the case with these teachers, or secular, the presence and
influence of love in the educational enterprise is an accepted reality (Huebner, 1985; Miller, 2000). Indeed, Huebner (1993) asserted that the work of love is obvious. The teacher listens to the student, and speaks with great care, that the gift of language, jointly shared, may reassure and disclose a world filled with truth and beauty, joy and suffering, mystery and grace. The teacher makes promises to the student. The journey of the student is filled with hope, rather than despair; more life, rather than less. The teacher introduces the student to the “otherness” of the world, to that which is strange, and assures the student that the strangeness will not overpower but empower. If the encounter with the “other” requires that old ways of knowing, relating, feeling, be given up, the teacher assures the student that during the resulting vulnerability, no harm will come and that grief will be shared. . . . These positive images, derived in part from the redemptive myth of love, disclose the negative power of the social/political context wherein the life that is teaching is led. (p. 412)

Just before the time of her interview, Terri had been placed on indefinite medical leave by the school district. Towards the end of her interview, she began to speak about what could become the end of her active teaching career. Her comments reveal many of the teachers’ feelings about their relationship with God, about the spiritual dimension of their lives, and about its connection with their experience of teaching. Her words demonstrate her love for her students,
her belief given to her by God, and her belief in God’s direction and guidance in
her life.

I am so thankful that I have been able to touch their [her students’] lives; teaching, and not just teaching school work, but, like I said, teaching love and how to be loved. And, I just...and I’m getting tearful talking about it. . . I am just so grateful for the opportunity to have taught. Even though I was going through some very troubling times, I thought I wouldn’t have been able to reach the lives I was able to reach before. But, when God opened up that door for me back there, with my illness, it was like God was telling me, “That part of your life [teaching] has come to an end.” It doesn’t mean that God still doesn’t have work for you to do. It doesn’t mean that He still doesn’t have lives that He wants you to work with. But, now, you’ve got to get your body well and move on from there. And, that’s where I am right now. Realizing that I’ve got to get the body straight and then finding out what God wants me to do—where He wants me to go from here. And, I do hope it’s working with children.

Terri’s comments, shared by other teachers during the interviews, indicate the sense that their work in teaching was part of a much more global and transcendent enterprise; they were part of a work within our society larger and more important than themselves. For them, their work in teaching was always about more than just teaching skills and the day-to-day routine of lesson plans, grades, and standardized tests. As Terri said, her work with children was in many ways about “teaching love and how to be loved.” Indeed, the teachers
seemed to have an innate, internal understanding that their work with children was a journey of the self. The language of growth and development is a rather mundane way of talking about the mystery of participating in the transcendent, or in uniquely Christian language, the mystery of incarnation, death and resurrection. We do not need "learning theory" to explain human change. We need them to explain our fixations and neuroses, our limits, whether imposed by self or others. The question that educators need to ask is not how people learn and develop, but what gets in the way of the great journey--the journey of the self or soul. Education is a way of attending to and caring for that journey. (Huebner, 1993, p. 405).

The teachers’ faith in God and in their relationship with God has helped them to come to their own peace and understanding with regard to fundamental questions of life such as: Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? Why am I here on Earth? What work should I be doing? How should I live my life? From that relationship with God, comes guidance and direction for their lives, including their call to teach and their love for their students. Their relationship with God is their link to the transcendent and eternal, and, through that relationship, notions of transcendence flow back through them into their work as teachers. In their view, they could just as easily have been called by God to be accountants, attorneys, or truck drivers. But, they feel that they were called by God to be teachers, and, obedient to that call, they have poured their hearts
and souls into their work with countless children over many years. Their faith, their relationship with what they call God, and their willingness to believe in a transcendent dimension of life in general and in the art of practice of teaching in particular have sustained them. Implicit, too, is a sense that

There is more than we know, can know, ever will know. It is a “moreness” that takes us by surprise when we are at the edge and end of our knowing. There is a comfort in that “moreness” that takes over in our weakness, our ignorance, at our limits or end. Call it what you will. . . .

One knows of that presence, that “moreness,” when known resources fail and somehow we go beyond what we were and are and become something different, somehow new. . . . It is this very “moreness,” that can be identified with the “spirit” and the “spiritual.” . . . Spirit is that which transcends the known, the expected, even the ego and the self. It is the source of hope. It is manifested through love and the waiting expectation that accompanies love. (Huebner, 1993, p. 403)

The spiritual, then, encompasses aspects of love, forms of duty and obligation, as well as connection to knowing, not knowing, and learning.

Chapter Summary

Discussion of the effect and influence of personal spirituality upon the teachers’ experiences of worklife and personal and professional identity ends the analysis of data. At the beginning of this chapter, the three dimensions of these teachers’ worklives and personal and professional identities, as described by the teachers themselves, were described for analysis and discussion. The
dimension of the self explored the teachers' experience of the role and influence of race and gender throughout their personal and professional lives, particularly as viewed through the lens of the teachers' version of African American collective memory. The interactive dimension examined their own relationships with White teaching colleagues, their perceptions of the interactions between White teachers and African American students, their self-described role as a bridge and buffer, and their views on the experience of school desegregation. The global dimension has considered the teachers' views and beliefs regarding what are essentially transcendent notions of being “called” to a career in teaching, the influence of personal spirituality in the experience of teaching, and the love they have for their students, which they see as divinely inspired but practically implemented.

The synergy created by the interaction of these three dimensions within the personal and professional identities of these teachers makes their stories at once compelling and enlightening. Their lives are indeed multi-layered and richly textured. As experienced and perceptive human beings, and as African American persons, they came to the interview environment with extensive and diverse backgrounds and, importantly, with a deep desire to communicate effectively and passionately about those backgrounds. They did so, and through their words, we come to understand them as human beings and their experiences of teacher worklife and personal and professional identity in richer and more meaningful ways.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, THEMES, IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter presents a summary of the research, conclusions drawn, and recommendations for further study. The chapter begins with a synopsis of each of the preceding four chapters. Following that summary is a series of overarching themes from the analysis of the research data tied to the implications of these themes for the practice of educational leadership. Finally, the chapter closes with recommendations for further research based upon the findings of this study.

Summary

Chapter 1, the introduction to the study, provided a framework for the identification of three assumptions guiding the research design. First, the notion was put forward that African American teachers bring a unique perspective, and set of skills, knowledge base, and experience to the education of all students, particularly African American students and other students of color (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1990). Secondly, the unique perspective and skill sets of African American teachers are becoming increasingly valuable as student populations across America become increasingly diverse, while simultaneously the educational work force becomes increasingly White (Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1990,
1997; Irvine, 1990, 1991). Lastly, at the very time that the presence of African American teachers is most critically needed in the schools, their numbers are dwindling (Graham, 1987; Hodgkinson, 1992; Smith, 1988). Fundamentally, the degree to which the unique journeys of African American teachers are researched, documented, and understood pales in comparison to the research focused on the experience of teachers in general (Foster, 1990, 1997; Fultz, 1995; Irvine, 1990; King, 1993). Their critical voices are indeed largely unheard. Thus, increased understanding of the worklives of African American teachers was seen as highly beneficial in supporting their work with students and their role within the educational enterprise in America.

The review of related literature in Chapter 2 focused on research in the area of teacher worklife. Indeed, with regard to the African American teachers in this study, it is through their experience of teacher worklife that we begin to better understand them as teachers and, ultimately, as human beings. Thus, an enhanced understanding of the important themes in research on teacher worklife served as an appropriate foundation for understanding African American teachers' worklife and their personal and professional identities.

Chapter 2 presented research related to teacher worklife in two sections. First, important themes and issues regarding teacher worklife in general and African American teachers in particular were considered and examined. The chapter also included a historical overview and perspective of the journey of African American teachers within American society. This overview served both to identify African American teachers as a unique subset of the American
teaching force and to provide a clearer and more meaningful historical context in which to place the experiences of these particular African American teachers.

Chapter 3 described the methodology of the study in terms of data gathering, the in-depth interview process, and data analysis through the use of appropriate literature as interpretative screens. Additionally, discussion included analysis and critique of the role and influence of the researcher as a central tool in the research process.

However, the most prominent component of Chapter 3 was the description of the evolution of the research question and the focus of the study. What began as a study inquiring into teacher worklife from the perspective of African American teachers evolved into a much wider-ranging, intimate exploration of the teachers' personal and professional identities. Experienced African American teachers willingly collaborated in the study to influence the direction and tone of the interviews. Through such involvement, they were able to find opportunities to share their rich perspectives on the lives they led in schools. A shift of almost tectonic proportions occurred with regard to the focus of the study. The experience of teacher worklife became a conduit through which the teachers themselves told a much wider-ranging, personal, intimate, and spiritual exploration of their personal and professional identities. Thus, ownership of the study became shared; teachers' voices were not merely reflected in the quoted narratives but were also embodied in the research design.

The analysis of the data began with the teachers' stories of their experiences of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities. The
intent throughout Chapter 4 was to move from individual narratives to
descriptions and interpretations of the data which the teachers might themselves
recognize. For example, the emphasis on certain topics was proportionate to the
emphasis and importance placed upon these topics by the teachers themselves.
In addition, the teachers implied a necessary sequence to understanding their
experiences of worklife and personal and professional identities. Indeed, through
their words, they collectively seemed to say,

“To understand my experience of teacher worklife and personal and
professional identity, you have to first understand me. You have to
understand me, especially in terms of how I understand the effects of race
and gender upon my life. Then, you can begin to understand how I
interact with my work environment. And, you must understand that there
is, for me, a spiritual component to the work I do as a teacher.”

This sequence of understanding, as identified by the teachers themselves,
provided the roadmap for the analysis of data [see Figure 1 on page 71]. Thus,
the analysis began with an examination of the dimension of the self. The
teachers spoke to two prominent factors of the self--race and gender. Their
version of African American collective memory framed their accounts of how they
viewed the experience and influence of race in their lives. The consideration of
the dimension of the self also included how gender issues have affected the
teachers, of whom nine were women; gender was placed in historical terms, in
their holistic orientation towards their students and in their sense of solidarity with
other African American women.
The teachers’ version of African American collective memory included five components. First, the teachers expressed an awareness of themselves in historical context. They viewed their lives as inseparable from and inexorably linked to the collective and historic experience of African American people everywhere. Secondly, the teachers described a sense of roots and the connection with family and community. They spoke nostalgically of their memories of the intact families and communities of their childhoods and of their concern with the current state of African American families and communities. Thirdly, so much of the teachers’ dialogue and conversation came in the form of purposeful storytelling which connects clearly to the historic African American traditions in storytelling. The fourth component of the teachers’ version of African American collective memory was an exploration of their sense of kinship with all other African Americans, especially with African American children and students. The teachers’ sense of spirituality also marked the fifth critical dimension since it has served as a mediator and life guide for them as they internally navigated among the various components of African American collective memory.

The focus in the analysis of data then moved outward from the dimension of the self towards the interactive dimension of the teachers’ experiences of worklife and within the realms of their personal and professional identities. While the teachers cited instances of overt racism within educational circles, they also expressed a great deal of concern with regard to the impact of a subtle, insidious racism on the relationships with White teachers, among themselves, and with African American children. Their descriptions of unspoken, subtle racism link
clearly to the assumptions of White privilege (McIntyre, 1997). The teachers very much viewed themselves as a bridge and buffer between a largely White, often insensitive educational establishment and African American children, parents, and communities. Also, within the interactive dimension of experience, the teachers spoke at length about their experiences with school desegregation, an arc of lived experience that paralleled the modern school desegregation movement. While the teachers certainly emphasized the importance of cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding and interaction, they expressed serious reservations with regard to the effects of school desegregation upon themselves, African American children, and the African American community.

Finally, the implied roadmap of understanding provided by the teachers came to the global dimension of their experience of teacher worklife and personal and professional identities. In this dimension, the teachers identified transcendent notions of a sense of “calling” to the teaching profession and the effects of a deeply-held spirituality in their personal lives and in their teaching experience. One particularly important component of this personal spirituality for the teachers was the manifestation of a “love” for their students that had practical applications for their work in the classroom.

From Themes to Implications

Analysis of the interview data led to the identification of several themes relevant to the educational enterprise in general and to the practice of educational leadership in particular. The concept of a theme is both simple and complex. Eisner (1991) offered one definition of themes:
Themes are the dominant features of the situation or person, those qualities of place, person, or object that define or describe identity. In a sense, a theme is like a pervasive quality. Pervasive qualities tend to permeate and unify situations and objects. (p. 104)

Several “dominant features,” or themes, of the teachers’ dialogues and conversations reoccurred during the interviews. The teachers structured much of their conversation and dialogue around these overarching themes related to issues of personal and professional identity. The themes unified the data by bringing together different perspectives in terms of a particular topic.

The themes pervasive within the teachers’ dialogue and conversation are of particular relevance and importance to educational leaders interested in a commitment to transformational leadership of schools and organizations (Burns, 1978). The leadership of transformational leaders is characterized by a commitment to deep levels of collaboration with their colleagues within the work environment towards achieving a collective, shared vision for the organization. Insights into personhood and personal and professional identity such as those shared by these teachers during the interviews would likely serve to enhance significantly the human understanding between transformational leaders and their teacher colleagues.

The multi-layered, multi-dimensional lives of the teachers and what they had to say about themselves, about children, and about how to most effectively educate children most effectively would be of interest to transformational leaders who wish to “empower others rather than subordinating others” (English, 1994, p.
Leaders who truly wish to work collaboratively with others to transform the school environment into the most productive, nurturing place possible for all children would want to listen to and connect with teachers such as these participants. These teachers have led rich personal and professional lives, lives consisting of "multiple layers of interpretation and meaning" (Doll, 1993, p. 288). All too often, the insights of African American teachers are politely ignored by school and district officials. Educational leaders need to learn from these teachers and the richness of their experiences in order to work more effectively and closely with others in providing the best possible learning environments for our nation's children.

It is impossible to listen to these teachers and not be aware of the depth of personhood and commitment that they brought to the classroom each day. Leaders interested in transformational leadership would sense the need to tap into and connect with this depth of emotion. So often, educational leaders are wary of such depth of commitment and emotion and are reluctant to travel there with the teachers working with them. However, the willingness to do so could make the difference between a superficial style of management and a deep, transformational leadership experience.

Thus, the remainder of this section will be devoted to the examination and discussion of recurring, overarching themes embedded within the teachers' conversation. These ideas and notions, so passionately and eloquently expressed by the teachers, could be of significant importance and meaning to the transformational educational leader in his or her work.
The persistent, recurring presence of the notion of race within the teachers’ dialogue and conversation remained a constant theme throughout the interviews. Race and racial identity, for them, are both a cornerstone and, in many ways, a primary filter for their life experiences. Educational leaders, and White educational leaders in particular, need to understand that, as a result of the effects of collective memory (Eyerman, 2001), African American persons simply view the world in a way that is fundamentally different from their own White processing (McIntyre, 1997). According to the teachers themselves, they view the world through the lens of an African American collective memory that is historically very different from the collective memory of White persons. For them, overt and subtle racism has been, is now, and will always be a reality in their experience of life, even in the context of their interaction with White teaching colleagues (McIntyre, 1997). They feel that they must consciously and subconsciously account for that reality on a daily basis in their lives, a daily accounting that White persons do not have to make. From the realities of racial identity and African American collective memory flows a very different life path and journey from that which White persons experience.

Analysis of the teachers’ conversations and dialogues resulted in the identification of two subthemes closely linked to the effects of racial identity and collective memory in their lives. First, these teachers placed a tremendous importance and value on the education of African American children. They connected this emphasis to their unique historical journey within the broader American experience. The data analysis in Chapter 4 described the story of their
belief in education for African Americans as a tool for social mobility and entrée into American society (Dorsey, 2001). Their accounts came forth so fervently and so often that the story itself represented the redemptive power of education in the African American community.

However, the teachers spoke frequently and passionately of their perceptions of a significant sense of disconnection between the largely White educational establishment and many African American children. This disconnection was a second subtheme. The teachers spoke of many White teachers who are ineffective with African American children and who appeared to have a limited emotional investment in the education of these children. They recounted many examples of White teachers who did not seem to understand African American children, who were intimidated by African American students, and who transferred from predominantly African American schools at the first opportunity. They spoke of the high price paid by African American children, teachers, and communities during the school desegregation movement of the 1970s and 1980s, only to find African American children losing ground during the resegregation prevalent during the current unitary period (Armor, Rossell, & Walberg, 2002; Ehrlander, 2002).

Educational leaders who desire to work collaboratively on the deepest of levels with African American teachers must react to such perception and insight in several ways. First, they must honestly and sincerely accept the life experiences of African Americans as equally valid and meaningful as their own. Then, they must acknowledge and account as much as possible for the
assumptions of White privilege buried deep within their inner selves (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Lastly, as much as possible, they must be willing to do the hard work to move beyond the assumptions of White privilege to understand and appreciate how African Americans and other persons of color see, understand, and live in the world.

Once their own difficult intrapersonal work has been done, the educational leader must consciously and deliberately set out to influence the other White teachers and employees at his or her school or work setting to, in their own way, make the same journey in their own ways, one person at a time. The educational leader will have a difficult job; many White teachers, even with the best of intentions, are too comfortable within the cocoon of the assumptions of White privilege to significantly change their world views and way of life (Hale, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). A memorandum will not do. A series of fuzzy, feel-good human relations workshops is not sufficient or appropriate. If an educational leader truly wishes to incorporate African American and other teachers into a school setting that provides an enriching and meaningful educational experience for all of the school’s children, both African American and White, he or she must live out a life of influence every day in the work place. As freed as possible from the effects of White privilege, he or she must systematically and consciously influence others, through day-to-day example and interactions, to make that same journey. Only then can the White educational leader hope to experience the full sense of unity and purpose with African American teachers.
Another theme embedded within the dialogue and conversation of the teachers is the presence within them of a unique, valuable, and expansive knowledge base about life and about teaching children. The knowledge base within them is deep, wise, and powerful. Indeed, the knowledge base within them was formed and strengthened through a lived experience that has been on so many occasions challenging and difficult. Many of them have known what it is like to be financially poor. They know what it is like to suffer the overt and subtle racism still so prevalent within American society. They know what it is like to be an African American and to get up every day and attempt to carve out a niche for one’s self in a society in which, as Carolyn stated, "you have a strike against you. You’re already African American."

Educational leaders would be well-served to tap into the unique and hard-won knowledge base of these and other African American teachers. These teachers know how to teach children, and they especially know how to teach African American children and other children of color effectively (Foster, 1997; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 1990). In so many ways, they have already lived the lives that many African American students and other students of color are living now. They understand these students on the deepest of levels, in a way that only a person who has lived that same life can understand. Educational leaders who are truly committed to equity in the educational experience for all children can learn from these teachers how to reach these children and how to work with them effectively and humanely.
Educational leaders in both the school setting and in district leadership would do well to consider Ethel’s suggestion that inexperienced White teachers should “buddy up” with experienced African American teachers. Whether informally or formally, educational leaders should consider implementing a systematic program of mentorship between experienced African American teachers and inexperienced White teachers, particularly in predominantly African American schools. This type of mentorship could greatly enhance many White teachers’ understanding of the unique world of African American children and produce significantly higher levels of cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990) among White teachers in their interaction with African American students.

Just as these teachers know African American children through their shared lived experience, they also know the African American families and communities from which these children come. Indeed, most of the teachers still live, by conscious choice, in predominantly African American communities. Just as with African American children, these teachers share the commonality and kinship of the African American experience with African American parents and community members. This sense of kinship brings with it an immediate credibility in the teachers’ interactions with parents and the community. Educational leaders, especially White educational leaders, would do well to tap into the knowledge and kinship implicit in the relationships among African American teachers, African American families, and the African American community. Those educational leaders who do so will encounter fresh insight into a world and life experience that they may find very different from their own.
Acceptance of this insight and awareness of the African American community can only be helpful in their day-to-day work as educational leaders. Indeed, as these teachers stated during their interviews, African American teachers can serve as a bridge and a buffer between a largely White educational establishment and the African American community.

Tapping into the knowledge base of experienced African American teachers can help support educational leaders in their relationships with African American teachers with whom they work. The insight and perceptions of experienced African American teachers can help develop leaders' knowledge about themselves that can assist in working fully and productively with African American and other staff members of color. The knowledge these teachers provide also yields much needed perspective for educational leaders as they seriously and deliberately recruit African American teachers for their faculties and staffs.

A third theme contained within the teachers' stories was their view of teaching as a function of human relationships. In 28 hours of interviews, specific methods within the pedagogy of teaching were discussed for approximately 10 minutes during one interview. For these teachers, teaching was primarily the art and practice of working harmoniously with others, younger and older, towards a common and shared experience of learning. These teachers did not talk about lesson plans, standardized tests, standards, or rubrics. They told the story of how they reached the inner world of children and how others could do the same. They told the story of how they related to themselves, how they related to others...
in their world and work environment, and, ultimately, how they related to God. For them, teaching was all about relationship and human connection. They felt that one is able to teach children because one can form holistic relationships in which the give and take of teaching and learning are central.

Understanding this theme provides an important lesson for educational leaders. The teachers would likely remind educational leaders that curriculum guides and standards are, at best, only useful tools in the education of children. Human beings, with all of their frailties and idiosyncrasies, teach children. For the teachers, the learning that takes place in children takes place in the context of a very human, supportive relationship between teacher and student. This is not to say that teachers should be overly permissive with children in terms of their behavior. On the contrary, the teachers frequently stressed the need for teachers to discipline, to manage, and to "control" the classroom. But, in an age of pervasive accountability within education, the teachers clearly called for educational leaders and others to remember and hold dear the place of human relationships in the practice and art of teaching.

By the mere fact that these teachers came forward to participate in these interviews and this research, they implicitly identified themselves as leaders. Their sense of leadership was confirmed throughout the interviews, as the teachers spoke so eloquently, passionately, and clearly about their lives as teachers and their personal and professional identities. By virtue of their experience, their extensive and deep knowledge base, and a willingness to share that experience and knowledge base with others in the educational arena, they
identified themselves as leaders within the school environment. Their identification of the power of mentoring younger, less experienced teachers indicated both their willingness to exercise leadership and their belief in experienced teachers as the most appropriate persons to offer mentoring to younger teachers. Another aspect of leadership displayed by the teachers was their communication of a distinct vision for schools and for young teachers.

The teachers spoke with confidence, shared in great detail their reflections and analyses of life in schools, and offered broad perspective on the educational landscape. At the time of the interviews, none of these teachers held formal positions of leadership in their schools. However, their participation and performance in this study speaks to the notion that they are likely informal leaders within their school environments. Because of their knowledge bases, experiences, and personal leadership abilities, other teachers are likely to be willing to listen to their views on topics of importance. The wise educational leader would need to work closely with teachers such as these for two reasons. First, these teachers would be a valuable resource in helping the transformational leader to collaboratively build a common vision and purpose within the educational environment. Secondly, influential teachers such as these can be enormously helpful in encouraging others to implement the commonly-shared vision, purpose, and goals of the educational organization.

The final theme embedded within the teachers’ conversation and dialogue is perhaps an unexpected one—joy. These teachers were possessed of a sense of joy and a fundamental optimism that was truly remarkable. They loved being
teachers and a palpable sense of joy flowed from that love of teaching and children. They laughed heartily and often. Even after all they had been through, both as human beings and as teachers, they communicated a fundamental sense of optimism about themselves, about education, about children, and about life. Their joy was rooted in a deeply felt sense of connectedness between themselves and their students and a respect for the work they did every day as teachers. As Palmer (1998) described,

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (p. 11)

This is not to say that the teachers had a simplistic, naïve, or "Pollyanish" view of life and the world—far from it. They were persons rooted in the realities and practicalities of life. But, even as they discussed in depth many of the hard realities of their lives as African Americans and as teachers, their joy as teachers and their fundamental optimism shone through.
The teachers would likely urge educational leaders to do all they can to
protect that sense of joy in teaching and that fundamental optimism about the
future that many teachers share. These teachers knew and understood that they
were teaching in an era of difficulty for teachers, with stresses arising from an
unprecedented accountability in education. Educational leaders, at both the
school and district levels, must do all they can not to exacerbate an already
difficult situation for teachers. The teachers would likely urge educational leaders
to make conscious efforts to minimize unnecessary directives, to set realistic and
attainable achievement goals for students, to have more realistic and humane
expectations of the work of teachers—in short, to make a conscious effort to
protect teachers from unnecessary burdens in their working lives that drive the
joy from their work.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study set out to investigate teacher worklife from the perspective of
experienced African American teachers. As the interviews and the study
progressed, the focus shifted to a more far-reaching discussion of the teachers’
personal and professional identities. The study provides rich, thick description of
10 African American teachers’ stories of teacher worklife and personal and
professional identity, told as closely as possible to how the teachers themselves
would tell their stories. These stories provide readers with schema with which
they may construct generalizations. Through the teachers’ stories, readers gain
an in-depth “accessibility” to the world of these teachers (Donmoyer, 1990, p.
193). While in that world, readers may very well undergo a shared, “vicarious
experience” with the teachers as they tell their stories, leading to the construction of generalization by the reader appropriate to their own life experience (p. 192).

However, two types of studies could further enhance, define, and make more clear the knowledge and insight derived from this research. First, study of the thoughts and perceptions of a younger generation of African American teachers could be invaluable as a complement to the findings of this study. As a result of the serendipity of volunteering to participate in research, the 10 experienced teachers who happened to step forward were very much members of one particular generation of African Americans. They were members of a generation of African Americans who grew up during the 1950s, came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, and matured in their careers through the 1990s and into the 21st century.

During the interviews, the teachers themselves often speculated as to the mindset and the world view of the younger generation of African Americans. Indeed, several of the teachers referred to themselves as “dinosaurs” in comparison to a younger generation of African Americans. As Laverne described,

I know that I’m a dinosaur [laughter] . . . I believe in doing the basics. I believe in doing the right thing. I have very old-fashioned ways. . . . I mean, I’m a straight arrow. I am in church most Sunday mornings, and I believe in being a spiritual person. . . . And, I don’t like all this rap music. I like music that has meaning, that has words. . . . When I was up in Atlanta, one of the things that turned me off was [that] there were some
Blacks who were teachers or whatever, quote “professionals,” and then they figured, “Oh, I've made it. This is it.” They've got a $300,000 mortgage, they've got their Volvo. They've got their teacher's position. This is heaven. I've reached my pinnacle, all is well. There's more. Like I said, here's my “dinosaur syndrome.” What about the things that are pure, loving, kind, the beauty of soul? Am I a giving, loving, sharing person? That's more important to me than what you do to make a means to an end.

As in Laverne's case, when the teachers referred to themselves as “dinosaurs,” they alluded to an altruistic, self-sacrificing lifestyle and career in teaching, one which focused upon service to others. As Laverne said, a “dinosaur” such as herself is “a giving, loving, sharing person.” In referring to themselves as “dinosaurs,” the teachers seemed to speculate indirectly as to their legacy in teaching. The word “dinosaur” alludes to the last of a dying breed. In a sense, then, the teachers seemed to wonder whether they were the last of the strong tradition of African American teachers as we have known them. “Are we the last of the tradition of African American teachers whose primary motivations are the welfare of African American children and the importance of education to the future of the African American community and people? Are we the last of a long line of African American teachers for whom the primary concerns are ‘the things that are pure, loving, kind, the beauty of soul,’ not materialism and consumerism? In short, are we the last of a long line of African
American teachers for whom our work was a vocation and calling and not simply an occupation?"

The teachers’ concern regarding their legacy among the younger generation of African American teachers is a valid subject for research. How do younger African American teachers view the notions of racial identity and gender? How do they view the quality of their interactions with colleagues, educational systems, and organizations? Do they view their work in teaching as a "calling," as these teachers do? How would they describe aspects of their personal and professional identities? In-depth interviewing of a less seasoned group of African American teachers with regard to these and other topics may yield interesting and meaningful results, especially in comparison and in contrast to the teachers in this study.

A second research study which could add layers of meaning to the results of this study would be to conduct in-depth interviews of experienced White teachers in the same high school feeder pattern as these teachers. In a sense, such a study would serve to complete a cycle of understanding and meaning that began with the African American teachers. Would such teachers confirm the assertions of the African American teachers with regard to the assumptions of White privilege (McIntyre, 1997) that the African American teachers found so prevalent among White teachers? How would the White teachers describe their interactions with African American children, teachers, and parents in comparison to the African American teachers’ perceptions of those interactions? Is there a spiritual dimension to the White teachers’ practice of teaching? These and other
topics for discussion could serve to provide added layers of meaning and understanding to the insights provided by the African American teachers.

A Farewell

The title of this dissertation is “Across the Divide: The Working Lives of African American Teachers in the Classroom.” In many ways, the issue of race in our society remains a divide and a chasm that is all too seldom crossed in any meaningful way by members of either race (Allen, 2001; Eyerman, 2001). This study has in large measure focused upon the nature and quality of that divide between African Americans and White persons in American culture and society. Indeed, the teachers spoke eloquently and passionately about the divides between themselves and many White teaching colleagues and between African American students and many White teachers as part of the wider societal divides between the races. They described the divide between the realities of teaching for many teachers and the uninformed, perceived reality of life in the classroom held by many educational leaders.

But the good news for the children taught by these teachers, the communities in which live, and the schools in which they have served is that these teachers have spent a lifetime crossing these and many other divides in our society. They have crossed those divides to teach the children they loved and to live the lives they felt called to experience. Perhaps not surprisingly, as experienced “divide-crossers,” they each decided at some point in their interview to cross the divides of race and gender along with me to tell their stories of life.
and teaching—which, for them, was one seamless story of touching the lives of others.

I experienced many wonderful and truly remarkable moments with these teachers during the interviews for this study. In addition to what is contained in this document, they shared many stories with me of their lives as persons and as teachers. In a very real sense, during that one particular moment in time in the interview setting, they were willing to open the window and let me have a glimpse of who they were as teachers and as human beings—a rare and wonderful and life-changing moment indeed.

However, one particular moment stands out that, for me, encapsulates why the interviews took place and why this dissertation has been written. The interview with Carolyn took place on a Saturday morning in the main office at the middle school where I was working at the time. Her husband gave her a ride to the school, and when Carolyn arrived at the designated time of 9:00 a.m., the interview began. On that particular day, Carolyn and her husband were going to the Florida A & M University homecoming football game, set for mid-afternoon on that day. The plan was for Carolyn’s husband to drop her off, for her to participate in the interview, and for them to proceed to Tallahassee, a drive of approximately three hours. The interview, set for approximately two hours, continued for over three hours, due to Carolyn’s willingness to share and explore many of the topics that both of us were interested in exploring.

Carolyn’s husband came back to the school three times during the interview to pick her up. Each time, Carolyn would go outside and tell him to
“come back in 20 minutes or so.” I might add that with each return trip, Carolyn’s husband appeared to become increasingly agitated. Finally, Carolyn’s husband returned for a fourth time to pick her up for the ride to Tallahassee. At that point, I told Carolyn that I certainly understood the importance of the game and the event and the inconvenience to her and her husband on such a special weekend day. I told her that we certainly could finish the interview at another time. When Carolyn got to the front door of the main office, she turned and told me something that I never shall forget. She stopped for a moment at the door and said to me, “Oh, no, Kris, that’s OK. I’m just so glad that someone wanted to hear the story.” With that, she went outside, told her husband to come back for a fifth time, in about 20 minutes, of course, and came back in and completed her interview...and told her story.

And, now, you have heard their stories, too.
Appendix A*

Letter of Invitation to Potential Study Participants

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
10913 PINE ESTATES ROAD EAST
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32218

SHELTON HOBBS
PRINCIPAL

CAROL SULLIVAN
VICE – PRINCIPAL

Dear __________:

My name is Kris Larsen. I am the Assistant Principal for Community Education at Highlands Middle School. I know this is a terribly hectic time of the year for all of us in our schools, and I’d really like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

I am currently completing my work in the Doctoral Program at the University of North Florida. At this time, I am working on my doctoral dissertation. The study I’m working on is centered on an area of study called “teacher worklife.” “Teacher worklife” involves the experiences of teachers in their general working conditions and their experience of the social, cultural, and organizational dynamics of their schools. As you can imagine, there is a great deal of research literature available on the topic of teacher worklife in general. However, there is very little research available in educational research on the topic of the experience of teacher worklife from the perspective and point of view of African – American classroom teachers. The study I am working on, and which I hope you will consider participating in, is centered on the experience of teacher worklife from the perspective of African American teachers.

Our study will consist of interviewing African American teachers about their experiences in their working lives as classroom teachers. If you are kind enough to agree to participate, our interview will probably take about 1 ½ to 2 hours, at a location and time of your choosing. I will certainly be asking particular questions for you to respond to, but, in general, the direction of the interview will be dictated by you, the participant, in the sense that we will be talking about issues and experiences that are important to you in your experience of teacher worklife. Please be assured that this is very much an anonymous process. Both in all rough drafts and in the final study, pseudonyms will be used if any particular person is referred to. Every effort will be made to protect each interview participant’s identity, even though it is fairly unlikely that any “controversial” material will emerge from our discussions.

If you feel that you would like to be interviewed for our study, please send back to me the enclosed form entitled “Interview Response Form.” I have enclosed two envelopes for you. One can be sent back to me in the school mail. The stamped envelope can be sent back to me at school through the U.S. Mail if at some point this summer you decide that you would be interested in being
interviewed for our study. I will be working all summer here at Highlands Middle School, so either letter would definitely get to me.

I do hope that you will consider being a part of our study. I truly do believe that your interview will be a meaningful opportunity for you to reflect upon the experience of your own career, and will make an important contribution to a much neglected area of educational research. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at school at 696-8771. Again, thanks so much for your time and consideration at this hectic time, and I do look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kris Larsen, Asst. Prin. Community Education
Highlands Middle School #244

*adapted for purposes of confidentiality
INTERVIEW RESPONSE FORM

NAME ________________________________________________

SCHOOL NAME _______________________________________

SCHOOL NUMBER ______________________

MALE _________ FEMALE _________

CURRENT ASSIGNMENT FOR SCHOOL YEAR 1997 – 98:
(1ST GRADE TEACHER, 8TH GRADE SCIENCE TEACHER, ETC.)

______________

TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS IN TEACHING: ____________

WHAT GRADE LEVELS AND/OR SUBJECTS HAVE YOU TAUGHT DURING YOUR CAREER? _________________________

____________________________

____________________________

PHONE NUMBER WHERE YOU CAN BE REACHED TO SET UP A TIME AND LOCATION FOR OUR INTERVIEW:

SCHOOL PHONE NUMBER: ___________________________

HOME PHONE: _____________________________

Please forgive me for being so forward as to ask your home phone number. The only reason is that it is so late in the school year (my dissertation proposal was only approved recently), and I know that many teachers will be leaving soon for the summer. If you would feel more comfortable contacting me, my school phone number is 696-8771 and my home phone number is 448-9801.

Please bear in mind that this form does not commit you to anything. It simply indicates your interest in possibly being interviewed and gives me the information I need to contact you (or vice versa).

Please send this form back to me at school, either in the school mail or in the U.S. Mail. I really appreciate your time and consideration, and I
truly look forward to hearing from you and meeting with you. Thank you again.

*adapted for purposes of confidentiality
Appendix C*

Informed Consent Form for Research Participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Kris Larsen. I am a doctoral student at the University of North Florida currently engaged in conducting research for a dissertation study entitled “Across the Divide: The Working Lives of African American Teachers in the Classroom.” During the course of this research, I will be conducting interviews with African American teachers who teach at schools in the Raines High School feeder pattern. These teachers will share with me their thoughts and perceptions of the experience of teaching as they have experienced their work over the course of their careers. Our interview should last approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours.

It is my desire to ensure that the interview experience is pleasant and comfortable for you at all times. If at any time you have a question about the procedures, please feel free to ask and I will be happy to answer each and every question or concern you have. A tape recorder will be present and operational during our interview. However, the taping will stop at any time you feel uncomfortable or need a pause in the interview process.

The interview we do together will be transcribed at a later time shortly after the interview has taken place. At that time, I will give you a copy of the transcript of the interview. You will have an opportunity to correct any errors of fact or intent which you find in the transcript (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The edited interview will then be retyped and used in the study. You may decide at any
point not to participate in the study, including after the completion of the edited transcript.

While there is no monetary compensation for your participation in the interview process, it is my belief that this type of reflection upon your experience of teaching will be tremendously beneficial both to the educational community at large and to you personally in your practice of teaching.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this study you have several very definite rights.

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or characteristics which could identify you in particular be included in the dissertation.

I have read and I understand the procedures described above. I agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Signatures:

______________________________
Research Participant

________________________ (DATE)
Principal Investigator

(Date)

*adapted for purposes of confidentiality
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Kristen Marinus Larsen III

Vita

Education

Doctor of Education-2004
University of North Florida

Master of Education in Educational Leadership-1990
University of North Florida

Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education-1976
University of North Florida

Associate of Arts-1974
Florida Community College at Jacksonville

Professional Experiences

District-level administrator-1998 to present
Director, Alternative Education/Safety Nets
Duval County Public Schools, Jacksonville, Florida

Highlands Middle School-1991-1998
Assistant Principal for Community Education

Duval County Public Schools-1977-1991
Teacher

Awards/Honors

Duval Adult and Community Educators-1997-1998
President

Outstanding Student Achievement-1991
Educational Leadership
University of North Florida

Teacher of the Year-1983-1984
Susie Tolbert Sixth Grade Center

Professional

Multicultural Studies

Teacher efficacy and empowerment

Teacher leadership