

DISSERTATION

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN CHILDREN IN MULTIPLE SETTINGS (CHURCH & SCHOOL)  
LOCATED WITHIN PREDOMINATELY WHITE COMMUNITIES

Submitted by

Kieran Dwayne Coleman

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Colorado State University

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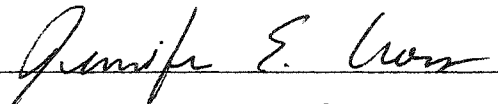
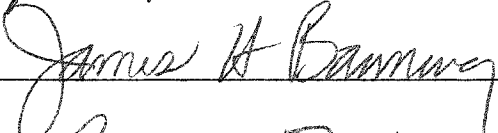

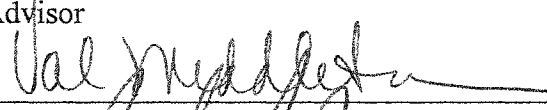
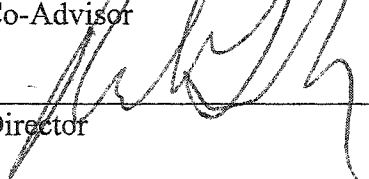
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY KIERAN DWAYNE COLEMAN ENTITLED PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN MULTIPLE SETTINGS (CHURCH & SCHOOLS) LOCATED WITHIN PREDOMINATELY WHITE COMMUNITIES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Co-Advisor  
  
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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN MULTIPLE SETTINGS (CHURCH AND SCHOOL) LOCATED WITHIN PREDOMINATELY WHITE COMMUNITIES

Since the 1960's, there has been a growing number of African American/Black families who reside in predominately white communities. Interestingly enough, after forty years, there is still a small amount of research that focuses on middle class Black families, in comparison to at-risk studies on poor black families. In an effort to add to the research on middle class African American families, this study examines how parents of African American children perceive their children's experiences in two important settings- a multiracial church and predominately white public schools, found within predominately white communities where Blacks represent less than 2%.

This qualitative study involved twelve in-depth interviews focusing on parental perceptions and their children's experiences in church and school settings located within predominately white communities. Five themes were identified in the study. Of the five themes, three themes focused on the school and its influence on the participants' children. These themes are (1) In case you didn't know, (2) It's the intent, and (3) At what cost? The other two themes, (4) The other school, and (5) We care, focused on the relationships and the impact the church had on these children.

Findings in this study indicated the following: (1) a school choice policy played a unique role in helping parents find schools for their children that stressed academic success and cultural responsiveness; (2) a multiracial church played an important role in developing student identity

and broadening cultural experiences, and (3) care plays an important role in the developmental stages of African American children.

Suggestions and recommendations, included in this study, are provided for school districts, teachers and parents of African American children.

Kieran Dwayne Coleman  
School of Education  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Co 80523  
Fall, 2003

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For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you...plans to give  
you -hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the “Council of the Wise.” These individuals, now deceased, have truly been a blessing in my life.

Richard Coleman, Sr. /Grandfather

Otta Peterson, Educator/Musician

Josephine Ward/ Educator

Avie R. Barnes/ Friend

Sister Mary Genieve/Aunt & Educator

Dan C. Simon/ Educator

Because of their dedication to the African American community, this work is dedicated to their memory.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background/Overview of the Study.....	1
Purpose .....	2
Purpose Statement .....	3
Research Question .....	4
Definition of Terms .....	4
Delimitations and Limitations .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	6
Investigator's Perspective .....	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	8
Community .....	8
Types of Communities .....	9
Religious Communities .....	12
African Americans & the Religious Community.....	15
Inclusive Congregations .....	17
Invisible Families .....	19
Racial Identity .....	20
Multiple Communities Theory.....	23

School Communities & Invitational Learning .....	25
Functioning Levels .....	26
III. METHODOLOGY .....	29
Research Design .....	29
Research Setting .....	31
Identification and Selection of Participants .....	32
Research Interview Questions .....	33
Data Collection .....	33
Data Analysis .....	34
Verification .....	37
IV. DATA ANALYSIS .....	38
Profiles of the “Voices” .....	38
Analysis Process .....	45
Theme One .....	46
Theme Two .....	51
Theme Three .....	55
Theme Four .....	64
Theme Five .....	68
Summary (Big Picture) .....	72
V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	73
Overview of Findings .....	73

Assessment of Community .....	73
Schooling .....	75
Education .....	76
Overlapping .....	77
Community Environment/Interactions .....	78
School .....	80
School choice .....	80
Clarifying misconceptions .....	81
Negative experiences .....	83
Overcompensation .....	84
Black males .....	84
Church .....	85
Network .....	85
Meaningful experiences .....	86
Celebrations .....	86
Community and Care .....	87
Recommendations .....	87
Considerations for Future Research .....	89
Lessons to the Community .....	90
Conclusion .....	94
Epilogue .....	96
REFERENCES .....	99
APPENDICES .....	106

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Demographics of Participants .....	39

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Religious Factors .....	13
2	Coding Process .....	36

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of chapter one is to provide an overview of the research study and introduce a broad overview of the communities of school and church. The chapter also defines the purpose of the study, outlines the research problem and question, defines the terms used, explains the study's limitations and delimitations, explains the significance of the study, and describes the investigator's perspective.

#### Background/Overview

The number of middle class African Americans who resided in predominately white communities has significantly increased since the 1960's (Banks, 1989). The result of this migration can be attributed to job or economic opportunity. Many of these individuals consider their success to be the essence of the American dream. "They have well-paying jobs. They live in nice neighborhoods, and their children are exposed to better housing, social, and educational opportunities. Thus, parents are providing a better way of life for their families" (Tatum, 1997).

Consequently, due to the unfamiliarity of growing up in a predominately white community, parents are unaware of the social challenges as well as identity concerns of raising their children in white communities (McAdoo, 1997). Despite their parents' socioeconomic status and their academic abilities, these children may experience feelings of "at-riskness" due to a lack of connectedness, isolation, and "unintentional" labeling. As a result, many parents may begin to wonder the following: What is the best approach

to educating African American children in this particular type of community? Who is responsible for their success? How important are specific entities in this particular setting? In thinking about these questions, parents and educators must be reminded that they cannot provide all sustenance, services, and support that children need to thrive and develop in this complex society (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). It takes the involvement of a variety of entities working as a community to meet the needs of its youth. “Communities are perfect catalysts for developing and fostering strong relationships with family and schools” (Rutherford & Billig, 1995, p. 65). When individuals fail to understand the context of the community, the “total” child suffers. When communities are allowed to play an active role with parents in the development of their children, the potentials are limitless.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to add to a limited amount of research, regarding the social and psychological world of the Black/African American, suburbanite family (Banks, 1989). In previous studies done in the United States, Black families were often portrayed as stereotypically negative and destructive. That is, the focus was on issues perceived as negative such as teenage pregnancy and poverty (McAdoo, 1997) or they were viewed as social problems because they were not readily assimilating into mainstream society (Billingsley, 1973). The majority of other studies focused on social class by generalizing the Black family into one group – that of lower class Blacks living in urban or rural setting (Landers, 1973; Tatum, 1987).

The make up the “Black family” is much more complex and diverse than the stereotypes and it must be recognized that no one segment of the Black community can

truly represent the whole picture. Therefore, research on the Black family requires that one view the family in a diverse context (Tatum, 1987). Researchers such as McAdoo (1997) and Cazenave (1979) have made significant contributions to the literature regarding the mobile middle class Black family (Tatum, 1987); but, a large amount of the research done on this group reflects those living within larger Black communities. Additional research makes reference to middle class Black families who have children attending predominately white schools in racially mixed communities. However, research focusing on Black families living outside the context of the larger black community or living in a predominately white community is minimal (Tatum, 1997). This study focuses on adding to the literature on Black families who live in predominately white settings.

As far back as 1967, Levine urged social systems to become involved in helping African Americans to become successful in order to adapt to these particular settings (Levine, 1967). Two important social systems for helping African American families, and particularly African American youth, achieve success are churches and schools. These systems not only serve as a way of helping youth become successful but, they also affect the beliefs, practices and attitudes of these children.

#### Purpose Statement

Churches and schools play a significant role in assisting parents with the academic and identity development of their children. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore parental perceptions regarding their children's experiences relative to attending a multiethnic church and a predominately white school located within a predominately white community.

## Research Question

The following research question guided this study. How do parents of African American children within a predominately white community perceive their children's experiences in their local schools and in a specific multiethnic church?

## Definition of Terms

1. African American or Black is used interchangeably to refer to individuals of African ancestry. Black may also be used to include individuals in the study who are African by nationality, but currently live in the United States.
2. Care is a need and response based action. It is dependent upon relationships. It is a mutual exchange (Gilligan, 1982).
3. Community is defined as of a group of people sharing a common bond or tradition to affirm, defend, and advance their values and self-interest (Miller, 2002). In this study, the term of community will be used as both a place where people reside as well as a concept regarding how entities work together.
4. Education is defined as the process of transmitting values, and beliefs. Education allows individuals to apply learned skills that will assist individuals in recognizing and appreciating uniquenesses, assessing resources, and creation of new resources. (Shujaa, 1994).
5. Ethnicity is defined as a classification of people according to common traits (Marshall, 2002).
6. Inclusive congregations are congregations with a diverse, multiethnic membership.

7. Invisible families are Black families that reside in predominately white communities (Tatum, 1987).
8. Multiethnic is defined as a variety of ethnicities.
9. Overlapping is defined as mixture of schooling and education. Overlapping consists of concepts from both areas, schooling and education, which foster the development of skills, instill citizenship, and provide for an understanding of all ethnic groups and their historical contributions (Lee, Lomotey & Shujaa, 1990).
10. Schooling is defined as the cultural frame by which African American students learn the school curriculum and its standard academic practices (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

#### Delimitations

1. This study is confined to African Americans living in communities located in the Northern half of Winter Range.
2. This study is confined to parents of African American children who are affiliated with the Sunshine Church.
3. Due to the make- up of the church congregation, there were fewer females at the high school level.

#### Limitations and Assumptions

1. This study does not generalize to other religious institutions and parents of African American children across the nation.
2. It is the researcher's belief that the subjects in this study are willing participants who provided honest answers. By building rapport, establishing confidentiality,

and using open-ended interview questions, the researcher hoped to minimize this limitation of the study.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is three fold. First, this study is designed to gain an understanding of how parents perceive the role and influence of school and church on the development of African American children living in predominately white communities. Secondly, this study seeks to provide individuals outside of the African American experience with a better understanding of outside resources and/or characteristics which help to foster a climate conducive to the success of African American students. Thirdly, this study seeks to identify characteristics located within this research setting which may be transferable to other communities to foster positive experiences for African American children in similar settings.

### Investigator's Perspective

I am an African-American male. I have worked ten years in the school systems of Louisiana in the capacity of a middle school teacher and an elementary assistant principal. I am presently employed as an elementary school administrator in Louisiana. I graduated from a predominately white university, and a historically black university. I have also worked in an advocacy office, the Office of Black Students Services, located on the campus of Colorado State University.

My personal and professional career has been strongly influenced by my religious background. I was involved in numerous church-action programs at an early age, tutorial programs, and cultural awareness activities. I have served on local, district, and state church boards involving youth and children.

Finally, I strongly believe that the church and schools are stabilizing forces in the lives of many African Americans. Because of this belief, I decided to focus my study on these two important communities, the church and school.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature focuses on the research involving the concept of community and how this concept supports the academic and social development of youth. This chapter is divided into six major sections: (1) community, (2) religious communities, (3) inclusive congregations, (4) invisible families and racial identity, (5) multiple communities, and (6) schools and invitational learning.

### Community: A Place and a Process

Since the 1960's, the application and definition of community has changed drastically due to the ways in which people experience community. From a territorial term to a term of commonality, the definition has certainly created, according to D.E. Poplin (1972), "a sense of utmost confusion" (p. 7). Many times individuals refer to their hometowns as communities. Other times community symbolizes inclusiveness. As a result, community is more than just a place; it is a process. Community involves social structure. The resurgence of the term community has emerged as an answer to many of today's societal problems. Schools, churches, organizations and individuals have predicated their philosophies and beliefs on the concept of community (Peck, 1987).

For the purpose of this particular study, community is defined as a group of people sharing a common bond or tradition to affirm, defend, and advance their values and self-interest (Miller, 2002). Communities serve as support groups. Communities unite people with common interest. Communities serve as networks that assist in developing strong

individuals to recognize and appreciate different viewpoints, experiences and creativity (Selznick, 1992). Communities are complex, multi-dimensional, rich, and dynamic. They enhance relationships within a group. They assist individuals in dealing with day-to-day problems by empowering individuals to challenge practices that may be contradictory or oppressive to the beliefs and values of the group. In communities, values are shaped by the vision of the group, and the vision provides purpose and direction for the community. When visions are developed, the power and influence of the community is unlimited (Wheatley, 1999).

#### *Four Types of Community*

Nevarez-Latorre (1997) in *Influencing Latino education: Church based community programs* categorizes community into four distinct dimensions -- geographical, cultural/ethnic, functional, and relational. The first two dimensions are general and refer to location and people. The second two provide an abstract understanding of the term, "community," essential to the study. These dimensions, though categorized for the Latino population, closely parallel the system of community for another group of people of color, African Americans. A description of these dimensions relative to African Americans follows.

*Geographical.* The geographical aspect of a community refers to the physical location of a particular group of people. This area can be defined by specific landmarks such as streets, homes, schools, or churches within the community. This area could also be referred to by its socioeconomic characteristics. Overall, these unique characteristics and features are clear to people who live within, as well as outside of these specific boundaries.

*Cultural.* A community can also be identified by its cultural or ethnic features. Individuals share common customs, languages, and histories. However, one must not mistake commonality for homogeneity. Cultural community, according to Nevarrez-Latorre (1997), is “where people of the same culture live together...within the community” (63). In cultural communities, there is a distinct cultural link that unites individuals. These unique links separate particular subgroups apart from other groups.

*Functional.* Functional communities are generally made up of individual volunteers; however, in this dimension, communities are more than merely people. Communities, within the geographical area they serve, take the form of institutions such as schools. These institutions form a network of support for individuals within its confines. These communities serve a particular purpose or need and without the particular purpose or need, the community has no reason to exist (Woods & Judikis, 2002). The purpose and vision is not just understood, but it is also the motivator for the existence of the community. This particular type of community serves as a catalyst for providing and nurturing the essential needs of individuals.

*Relational.* A relational community is informal, but organized. It may exist in one’s memory and consciousness. It is an “underground” operation. Typically, it is not clearly seen or understood by members outside of the community. “It is a network system people develop for support” Nevarrez-LaTorre, 1997, p. 64). Community expresses the relationship between and among all of the individuals, communities, and groups that one has experienced and is experiencing. This dimension of community is highly dependent on mutual trust (Nevarrez-LaTorre, 1997).

From the review of literature, it is evident that community is a complex term because it has the ability to expand from the physical to the abstract. In this study, the term of community will be used as both a place where people reside as well as a concept regarding how entities work together. One important community that functions physically as well as an institution within a specific community is the religious community.

## Religious Communities

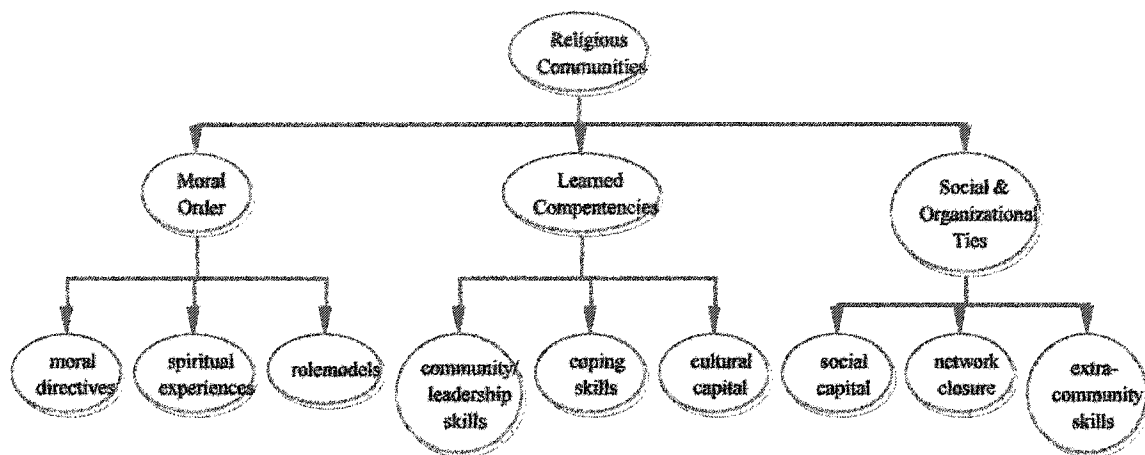
Religious communities fulfill a unique role in educating its membership. Through education, the focus of the church community is no longer just about the teachings of Jesus, but on applying His teachings, within communities (Lampman, 1998). “Together, through a secular and sacred agenda, religious communities provide avenues that guide individuals through multiple life experiences. These experiences assist individuals in searching for meaning and order in life” (Beatty, 1989).

For the past decade, numerous studies have provided empirical evidence of how religion can be a positive factor in the lives of American adolescents (Smith, 2003). When correlating religious variables such as church attendance and importance of religious faith, research has found a significant correlation between attendance, and the lack of juvenile drug and alcohol use, and delinquency (Smith, 2003, p.17). Additional studies, not only support the notion that religion plays a significant part in fostering health, but these studies also provide evidence that church attendance has a positive influence on academic achievement and decreases drop out rates for at-risk youth (Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998; Muller and Ellison, 2001; Scharf, 1998).

In Christian Smith’s (2003) *Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents*, an attempt is made to provide readers with a systematic and integrated outline of the role religion plays among American adolescents. This theoretical framework, according to Smith, is in no way considered to be a literature review. “This information seeks to present a more systematic account of how and why religion exerts significant positive effects on American youth” (Smith, 2003, p. 17). “There are nine distinct factors (moral directives, spiritual experiences, role models, community and

leadership skills, coping skills, cultural capital, social capital, network cluster, and extra-community links) that cluster as a group beneath three larger conceptual dimensions (moral order, learned competencies and social and organizational ties)” (Smith, 2003, p. 19). Together, these reinforcing factors exert positive, constructive influences in the lives of American youth. See Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Religious factors.*



Moral order, the first reinforcing factor based upon the works of Taylor (1985), Etzioni (1988), and Wuthnow (1987), is the idea that substantive cultural traditions are grounded upon and promote particular normative ideas of what is good and bad...worthy and unworthy, just and unjust. This practice, in turn, orients human consciousness and motivates human action (Smith, 2003). It also provides adolescents the opportunity to form and examine ideas as well as make choices that will influence their individual behavior. These spiritual experiences foster self control towards the learning of virtues and values that are often expressed in positive, constructive, pro-social ways (Wuthnow, 1995; Smith, 2003). For example, in many religions, youth are taught to pay tithes from income, seek reconciliation instead of vengeance, respect elders, and honor one’s body as

a temple. As a result, these significant observable traits can be explained by the cultural moral orders that religion exerts on youth in various settings. These settings, in turn, provide youth with adult and peer role models that not only authenticate and fortify moral order, but these settings also provide youth with exemplary representations of lives shaped by religious moral order (Smith, 2003).

Secondly, religious communities play a significant role for adolescents by increasing their competence in skills and knowledge that contribute and enhance their lives. (Smith, 2003). Many religious communities are a part of congregational voluntary associations. These affiliations afford youths the opportunity to serve on committees and participate in organize programs such as fundraising, tutoring programs, speaking engagements, serving as leaders, public speeches and recitations. These associations provide adolescents the opportunity to observe, learn and practice leadership. “Learning such skills clearly enhances the religious capital of youth” (Smith, 2003, p. 23). As a result, these skills may be transferable to areas outside of religious settings (Tocquevillian, 1969).

Thirdly, religious communities provide adolescents with meaningful social and organizational ties. According to Smith, “American religion is one of the few major American social institutions that is not rigidly age stratified and emphasizes personal interactions over time” (Smith, 2003, p.25). Thus, youth are exposed to individuals of all ages within the congregation, and youth are afforded the opportunity to form significant relational network ties. These ties “generate the potential for relationships with older parishioners who may express care for the youth” (Smith, 2003). Smith (2003) believes that

In religious congregations, adolescents are able to form relationships with youth ministers, Sunday school teachers, choir directors, rabbis, parents of friends, and other adult acquaintances, who can relationally tie back to the adolescents' parents. These ties can operate as extra-familial sources reinforcing parental influences and oversight (p. 26).

These meaningful networks afford adolescents the access to additional sources of opportunity, resources and information (Smith, 2003).

#### *African Americans & the Religious Community*

Religious communities play a very important role in meeting the social and psychological needs of African American youth (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). "For many students, it is the first social laboratory that provides them the opportunity to interact extensively with people outside of their family circle" (Thompson-McMillon & Edwards, 2000, p. 111). The church, according to Boyd-Franklin (1989), emerged as a place where children could learn new skills and generate respect for their unique talents and abilities. It is an agent of help, empowerment and change (Moore, 1991). Therefore, the church provided its children with opportunities to reinforce their learned skills.

Additionally, religious communities play a significant role in the positive educational outcomes for African American youth (Sanders, 1998). Through Sunday school, a popular Christian education program, children are provided with meaningful experiences which feature story recitation and scripture readings. Even though these lessons appear to be spiritual and vary from traditional classroom lessons, these lessons develop patterns of thinking and participation that is suspected to help them succeed in school reading lessons (Mason, McCormick, & Bavnagri, 1986). These lessons allow

students to acquire and comprehend basic literacy skills such as memory strategies, speaking, listening, thinking, and reading which are applicable to the school setting.

Psychologically and socially, religious communities provide African American children with a sense of resilience. The church fosters many beliefs and practices which allows young people to effectively cope with society's ailments. "Prayer, meditation, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are examples of common practices" (Smith, 2003, p. 23). With this new resilience, adolescents are also able to grasp the multiple and changing mission of the church in the community (Cook, 2000).

Thus, the church has taken on the tremendous task of transforming neighborhoods into viable communities that promote the advancement and development of all individuals (Starling, 1999). More than ever before, the church is a community beyond its walls. The church seeks to revive and maintain the spirits of African American children by finding remedies or balms for an aching community. The church realizes that parishioners are becoming more critically conscious of their religious experiences. The mission and goals of the congregation are steadily being shaped by the growing demands of today's complex societal issues. Its message is about empowering the community spiritually, culturally, politically, and economically (Starling, 1999).

## Inclusive Congregations

Many people wonder how some public organizations embrace diversity so readily when other institutions, dominated by federal mandates, have such a hard time.

Interestingly, one entity which seeks to embrace diversity is multi-ethnic congregations. “Inclusive congregations believe that it is the church’s responsibility to recognize and model unity through workshops, conferences, and sensitivity trainings” (Ireland, 2000, p. 13). The church has an obligation to be spiritually based yet remain culturally sensitive to the needs of the community (Ireland, 2000). “As Christians we cannot be like ostriches, burying our heads in holes, and expect society to become better. We have a moral obligation, like all other organizations, to exemplify racial reconciliation in the sphere of business and economics, the family, and the church” (Ireland, 2000, p.12).

Inclusive congregations are deeply committed to diversity. Structures or models, which support the operation of the congregation, provide direction for the blending of different traditions. From a variety of music to prayers and chants, the congregation is deeply committed to helping parishioners understand, recognize, and respect the unique gifts different ethnic groups add to the service (TeSelle, 2000).

Inclusive congregations are very concerned about building community. These congregations are committed to institutionalizing values as well as providing members with experiences of closeness, fellowship, and support (Becker, 1993). They are committed to reaching excluded individuals in the community. As a result, social issues are interwoven with theological doctrine, and ultimately, this commitment is known as social justice ministry. There is a genuine consciousness around the theme of religious kinship. “Their sense of common purpose is grounded in high levels of member

commitment, intentional training of new leaders, and revised committee policy that makes room for everybody” (Ammerman, 1997, p. 228).

Finally, inclusive congregations allow for the “voices” of American diverse population to contribute meaningful experiences. These congregations are comprised of various individuals whose voices contribute to public forums for discussions and reflections of not only religion but social issues. These congregations are reflections of themselves as well as the community.

## Invisible Families in Predominately White Communities

What does it mean to be an established, successful African American, raising a family in a predominately white community? Is it the essence of the American dream? Is it isolation? Or is it a combination of opportunity and alienation. These are the questions many African American families in white communities face today (Tatum, 1987).

Invisible families, according to Tatum, are African American families that live in predominately white communities. This term is used to describe these families because they are barely visible in the community relative to other Black families. These isolated families reside in communities due to educational or economic opportunities (Tatum, 1987). Interestingly, the adults that are now raising their children in predominately white neighborhoods grew up in segregated or racially diverse communities and thus may view this type of suburban experience as a better way of life for their children. However, despite the economic opportunities provided by living in predominately white communities, parents and children are placed in unique predicaments because of the concept of “duality of socialization.” (Woodson, 1933/1992) That is, “Blacks must take on the behavior of the culture in which they live, and at the same time, take on those behaviors that are necessary to be upwardly mobile” (Hale-Benson, 1986, p. 62). Generally, these parents are considered to be middle class, according to their income and occupation, but their belief systems and values have been transmitted through their early and current socialization -- a process that could have possibly been considered lower class (Hale-Benson, 1986). Consequently, Dubois (1961) believes these children possess “two warring souls” because they are products of their culture and they are shaped by the demands of the Anglo-American culture.

Due to this warring of souls, individuals will develop a variety of beliefs and ideas regarding their ethnic group and their identity within society. These beliefs may be predicated upon “Blackness” and the process of trying to understand their identity.

### *Racial Identity*

African Americans are unique in discussions concerning race and ethnicity because this particular group is an example of both. This group shares common genetic traits (race) as well as common traditions shaped by their socio-cultural circumstances in the society (Marshall, 2002).

These two terms, race and ethnicity, are often used interchangeably. However, there is a distinct difference between the two. The concept of race is based upon the biological traits of human individuals, whereas ethnicity or “ethnic identity” draws upon the language and custom of individuals (Baldwin, 1998). Interestingly, according to Tatum (1997), ethnic identity and racial identity may intersect since there are some students included in this study who share similar biological traits although they have different customs and traditions (Helms, 1993). This study will focus primarily on race.

Using psychologist William Cross’ (1994) racial identity development model as a framework in understanding Black racial identity and identity theories, Tatum and Marshall (2002) categorize Cross’ model into four stages. These theorists use this model to help African Americans understand their Blackness and develop healthy racial identities. The four stages of Cross’ model are conformity, dissonance, immersion/emersion, and internalization and commitment.

*Conformity.* Formally known as the pre-encounter stage, this stage is where blacks tend to idealize the white culture. According to Tatum (1997) “the black child

absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture...it is better to be white” (p. 53). Individuals in this stage may view the dominant race (images and lifestyles), however distorted, as higher than their own culture. These individuals may affiliate with white clubs, organizations and neighborhoods as a way of assimilating into what is believed to be the “perfect” culture. Moreover, these individuals may tend to speak or behave in ways valued by whites as a way of being accepted. As a result, in terms of race, these individuals see themselves as a part of the human race rather than an outward classification of their ethnicity (Marshall, 2002).

*Dissonance.* This stage, formally known as the encounter stage, is usually initiated by events or series of encounters that will cause the individual to acknowledge the personal impact of racism (Tatum, 1997). Individuals begin to develop ideas and opinions about what it means to face racism. This event prompts the status shift from conformity to dissonance. Overall, the discomfoting experiences cause individuals to seek a new reference group and an identity saturated in the black culture.

*Immersion/Emersion.* In this stage, individuals have a strong desire to immerse themselves within the Black culture and its symbols. In this stage, individuals are “pro-black,” or they exhibit the “blacker than thou” attitude (Tatum, 1997). Individuals seek to explore opportunities that support and affirm their race and identity. Unlike the anger towards whites in the encounter stage, the immersion/emersion stage allows Blacks to focus on self-discovery and exploration of cultural connections (Tatum, 1997). They begin to find positive images and symbols of their race. As a result, individuals seek participation in organizations with exclusive Black membership to avoid interacting with whites, except when absolutely necessary. The Black individual, in this stage, is

energized by the information learned in this stage. Overall, the ultimate goal of individuals in this stage is to unlearn all of the negative stereotypes about his/her racial identity and redefine oneself based upon one's own understanding of his/her race. (Tatum 1997).

*Internalization/Commitment.* At this stage, Black individuals have developed a sense of security about their racial identity. They are able to distinguish between the good and bad stereotypes of both groups as well as associate with other groups. Without the fear of losing their racial identity, Black individuals are able to be a part of both worlds (Tatum, 1997). Meaningful relationships are established between cultures. Moreover, these individuals, according to Tatum (1997), "have found ways to translate a personal sense of racial identity...and expressing a sense of commitment to the concerns of blacks as a group" (p.56). "This commitment is characterized by activism. Individuals are engaged in activities such as workshops, community building seminars, and providing supportive voices for specific oppressed groups. These activities are aimed at eliminating the oppression of Blacks as well as that of other oppressed groups" (Marshall, 2002, p.53).

It is important to note that not all Blacks enter into the model at the same level. Others may experience various levels more than one time. However, factors such as peer pressure, parents' identity, and environmental cues can have a significant impact on where blacks, adolescents or adults are in this model (Marshall, 2002). Thus, the significance of this section is to provide a framework in which all individuals examine their views and the way their views impact their interactions with Blacks in non-diverse settings.

## Multiple Communities Theory

It is not unusual for individuals to be part of several communities. Woods and Judikis (2002) explain the simultaneous nature of membership in multiple communities through six unique traits. These characteristics are

1. Membership is held simultaneously in several communities.
2. Each community influences the beliefs, behaviors and values of individuals.
3. These influences vary from harmonious to conflicting.
4. Individual's behavior is understood in terms of the collective experiences and influences within and across communities.
5. Similarities and contradictions in the influences of the community are important in determining and understanding the needs, values, and behaviors of individuals.
6. Relationships between communities affect the role people play within and between communities. (p. 30)

These theorists argue that individuals must be aware of the role multiple communities play in shaping and reinforcing values. When viewing the literature on Black children in predominately white communities, many times, ideas or actions transferred from one community to the other can create conflicting influences. The intensity of these influences is dependent upon the role in which the community is playing at that particular time. Consequently, being a part of multiple communities can force individuals to prioritize communities and their influences to decide which community influence will prevail (Woods & Judikis, 2002).

For example, Thompson-McMillon and Edwards (2000) present a case study featuring an African American student in a predominately white preschool. These researchers discuss the differences of viewpoints that the young boy's African American church and predominately white school have concerning his behavior. In his church community, he is considered to be bright and energetic. However, in school this same behavior is considered aggressive and disobedient. Even though the classroom is more flexible than the Sunday school class, he had problems assimilating in the classroom culture. Unlike Sunday school where the goal was to reinforce students' literacy skills, classroom participation in school was based on behavioral skills. Even though he was academically able, his success was predicated upon a different type of literacy.

One approach critical to minimizing conflict among multiple communities is the process of negotiation. "Negotiation, the process of looking for ways to solve differences, is an important approach to solving conflicting interest within communities. This approach provides avenues that will allow individuals to honor their commitments to the community through an on going thought process or commitment with other community members (Woods & Judikis, 2002, p 19). When individuals are able to negotiate between communities, they will be able to diminish existing conflicts and partake in meaningful experiences because their success is dependent on the climate of the community.

## School Communities and Invitational Learning Theory

One of the greatest challenges faced by schools is its growing diverse student population. For many years, educational leaders believed that schools functioned to promote the “ideal” values of America’s dominant culture. As a result, the process of assimilation became “the dominant approach to dealing with the large influx of new students” (Riehl, 2000, p.55). Until recently, educational leaders tended to be supportive of this approach; however, over time, due to disagreements over assimilation versus acculturation, educational leaders were forced to address questions concerning diversity in schools. Because of these realizations, the term assimilation has been subsumed by a more reflective term such as acculturation that recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness students bring to the school community. Many educators have begun to believe that all students should be afforded the opportunity to comfortably and effectively participate in the school community.

Purkey and Schmidt (1990) contend that the school’s climate is generally enhanced when the culture of all individuals is supported and nurtured within the community. In fact, when differences or uniqueness are recognized and appreciated, a foundation of respect, trust, and intentionality supports the physical and psychological environments of the institution. This process occurs when school settings are open to change and establish inviting relationships that facilitate learning. Invitational theory serves as a blueprint for school leaders to establish “inviting” environments. According to Purkey and Schmidt, there are four levels of functioning. These levels are intentionally disinviting, unintentionally disinviting, unintentionally inviting, and intentionally inviting.

### *Intentionally Disinviting/Level One*

This is the level where school personnel or policies are deliberately “designed to dissuade discourage, defeat, or demean” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 22). For example, the author speaks about a school leader who attended a conference on invitational learning. After her return, she decided that she would send the principal a note concerning the poor conditions of the restrooms on the school campus. Sadly to say, the principal replied, “What do you think this place is, the Hilton?” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). With an attitude like that, it is not surprising if the morale or the apathy level of the students and personnel is low. Individuals at this level are deliberately disrespectful and they may justify their actions by alluding to responses such as “this is getting their attention.” “This is the only language they know.” and “getting their attention” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 23). These opinions may be based upon prejudices and frustrations that hinder building positive and inclusive relationships in school communities.

### *Unintentionally Disinviting/ Level Two*

“This level is a result of a lack of stance because there is no philosophy if respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 25). These individuals may be considered to be uncaring or thoughtless, by others; however, these individuals probably are not aware that they are being disrespectful. As a result, they may come across as disinviting. For example, a teacher who asks Native Americans about their plans for celebrating Thanksgiving may be disinviting.

Another example of unintentional disinviting can be found in Delpit’s (1995) book entitled, *Other’s People Children*, This example of unintentional disinviting alludes to the process when diverse groups are engaged in a dialogue with individuals of the

dominant culture. For example, in this conversation process, diverse groups base their perspectives on experiences whereas their white counterparts base their perspectives on research. Out of frustration, in the dialogue, these diverse individuals simply silence their dialogue. Individuals of the dominant culture believe that, in the end, their logic is understood because there is no more dialogue. “Intentionally, individuals of the dominant culture do not intend to be disinviting, but the damage is already done” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 25). “Teachers must understand that they are not the only experts in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them” (Delpit, 1995, p.33).

Teachers must become aware that experiences of children vary, and they must “have some knowledge of children’s lives outside of the realm of paper and pencil work and even outside the classroom. Not knowing student’s strength leads to our teaching down to children from communities that are culturally different from their teachers (Delpit, 1995, p. 173).

#### *Unintentionally Inviting/Level Three*

This level occurs when individuals are often effective, but they can not explain their philosophy (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). “For example, young teachers often fall into a similar trap. While they are likable, entertaining, funny and graduated just in time to save education, these individuals lack intentionality regarding their goals” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 27). “Invitational Learning involves not only encounters with students in positive and caring ways, but also a teacher’s personal relationship with the content and essence of what he or she teaches” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 26). Consequently, the weakness of these individuals, at this level, is the inability to identify

the reason for success and failure. These individuals know what works, but can they explain why? (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990)

*Intentionally Inviting/Level Four*

This level is the highest level at which individuals are able to experience success. Teachers are cognizant of their students' abilities and search for the appropriate resources to assist their students to become successful. For example, at this level, teachers are committed to their students. The total school, all personnel, is involved in motivating students to achieve. Programs are implemented that reflect the appreciation of the diverse gifts and talents of students (Kuykendall, 1991). In another example, the teacher notices that there are some students within the classroom who were experiencing some difficulties with school. This teacher responded, "I may not do anything else for you this year, but not one of you is going to come out of here a nobody. I will fight til the end, but I will not allow anyone to come out of here thinking of himself as a zero" (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990, p. 28). Individuals are aware of everyone's abilities and talents. These individuals are so skillful until the skills appear to be invisible. Overall, the expectations of the school and the teachers are clear and understood. School personnel are supportive of students and their needs. Thus, the school enables students to experience connectedness and a sense of worth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework for understanding the methodology used in conducting this study. This section highlights the major components critical to conducting qualitative research. These components are the rationale for the design, research setting, identification and selection of participants, research interview questions, data collection and analysis, and verification.

#### Research Design

“Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities- the capacity to learn from others” (Patton, 1990, p. 7).

Because the major focus of this study is to gain an understanding of parental perceptions regarding their children’s experiences in school and church communities, the research design of this study will be framed within the qualitative paradigm.

Qualitative research is naturalistic because the researcher spends much of his or her time in the field. The researcher also plays an active part in the study. By being involved within the setting, the researcher becomes acquainted with the context and the participants of the study in an unobtrusive and non-threatening manner. These settings provide for experiences and meanings to unfold naturally because the researcher has the advantage to quickly process data, clarify, and summarize the participant’s responses as the study evolves (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Through the unfolding of these participants’ experiences, the researcher is exposed to the richness or descriptiveness of the data.

Thus, the researcher gains first hand experience at watching the data emerge without any predetermined constraints (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research is descriptive. Rather than being influenced by numbers, qualitative research is influenced by words, pictures, and symbols. These attributes enable the researcher to get a clearer understanding of the phenomena (Merriam, 1998). The researcher analyzes transcripts, field notes, and other documents as they appear, paying close attention to the richness of not only the word but also the recorded gestures and physical observations. These data allow the researcher to answer questions about the participants' experiences and meanings. As a result, rich information provides emergent themes.

Finally, qualitative research is inductive. Unlike quantitative research, it is based upon open ended questions rather than variables and hypotheses. This process allows the researcher to edit or redefine questions as the researcher seeks to understand the perspectives of the participants. "Qualitative research findings are in the form of themes, categories...which has been inductively derived from the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). As a result, themes emerge from the data providing for exploration and discovery. Through these discoveries and intense saturation, these themes provide validity to the findings of the study.

Due to the uniqueness of this study, the researcher has chosen to utilize the general qualitative study approach. According to Merriam (1998), there are three basic characteristics for this type of research.

1. General qualitative research includes description, interpretation, and seeks to gain an understanding.

2. General qualitative research identifies reoccurring patterns in the form of themes or categories.
3. General qualitative research may delineate a process (p. 12).

Additionally, basic or generic qualitative research derives from concepts, theories or models. This research, in general, makes an attempt to “discover and understand phenomena, a process, or the perspectives ...of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11).

### Research Setting

Nestled snugly at the base of the “Nugget Mountains” is a geographical area known as Winter Range. The average population, encompassing two counties, is 432,430 (Northern Colorado Economic Development Corporation, 2003). This area contains a large population of young adults, and 87% of this population has a high school degree or above (Northern Colorado Economic Development Corporation, 2003, p.2). The area has a diverse population due to the fact that is part of the business “hub” of the state and contains several universities. The area has attracted a small population of people of color. This area’s ethnic percentage of African Americans is less than 1% (Greeley/Weld County Economic Development, 2000; U.S. Census, 2000). In the three major school districts within this region, African American students make up less than 1 % (Annual Report Accomplishments, 2001; About Poudre School District, 2001; District Information, 2002). The majority of African Americans living in this area are considered to be educated, middle class families. There are no geographical neighborhoods that are predominately African American in Northern Winter Range.

However, in this cultural desert, one may find a particular church known as the Sunshine Church. Ironically, this church was created thirteen years ago to assist the university with retaining Black students. Over time, the racial makeup of this congregation has become approximately 59% Black, 27% White and 14% other individuals with varied racial identities (Lackett, 2002). Uniquely, the membership is also comprised of varied religious denominations. Thus, the church prides itself on being a nondenominational, multicultural church.

#### Identification and Selection of Participants

For the benefit of this study, purposeful sampling was the method of choice. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to “discover, understand, and gain insight” from “a sample for which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). In purposeful sampling, the research establishes criterion for the participants in the study. The basic criteria for participants in this study are that parents must have a child or children who attend school, reside in a community with less than 1% of African Americans, and parents and children must be affiliated with the Sunshine Church.

A research proposal was submitted to Colorado State University Human Subjects Committee for approval of the study. This proposal discussed the necessary procedures for conducting the study with the participants. Upon approval from Colorado State University Human Subjects Committee, the researcher contacted a local church and was given a public membership list. From this list, participants were contacted and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. To protect participant anonymity, participants were assured complete confidentiality by having their name and locations changed to protect their identity. After several conversations, the researcher sent letters to

interested participants explaining the purpose of the study, and to obtain written consent of the participants for participation in the study. Finally, the letters were followed by telephone conversations between the researcher and the participants to secure dates for the scheduled interviews.

### Research Interview Questions

The following questions guided the interview as well as assisted the researcher with the investigation of the study:

1. Would you please tell me about yourself?
  - a. Are you a native of this area?
  - b. If not, what influenced your decision to move to this area?
  - c. Would you please tell me about your child/children?
2. What is your definition of community?
3. How would you describe the make up of your child's school? Church?
4. What are the experiences of your child in school? Church?
5. How are they similar? How are they different?
6. What are your experiences in interacting with your child's school? Church?
7. How are your thoughts influenced by your child's experiences in either or both settings?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

### Data Collection

Interviews are important to all qualitative research because they allow the researcher to capture the perspectives of the participants. Interviews provide the researcher with in-depth information because the questions are open and broad. These

questions give participants the opportunity to focus on various elements of their experiences.

For the benefit of the study, interviews were the primary instrument for data collection. The researcher conducted personal, face-to face interviews with twelve participants. These interviews lasted approximately one hour. Pseudonyms were developed to protect the identity and location of the participants. The interviews were informal and interactive. When additional information was needed, a phone interview was conducted by the researcher. Finally, during the interview, the researcher used an audio recorder and note pad to accurately record the participants' voices and gestures.

#### Data Analysis

In the analysis process, according to Patton (1990), the researcher should search for meaning in data, reduce non-essential information, and identify significant patterns. Interviews with the participants were transcribed immediately after the face-to-face interview to capture the "fresh" perspectives of the participants. During the transcription process, interviews were read and compared with the audiotapes by the researcher. Rereading these transcriptions allowed the researcher to accurately record the voices as well as "get a sense of what the text is about" (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 144). This process ensured the researcher of his "conscious effort to stay in the words of the participants, without theorizing or analyzing based on the researcher's experiences and notions, and to focus on the phenomenon that appeared" ( Ray, 2001, p.40).

The researcher utilized the constant comparative method to analyze data. This method was appropriate "because the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive concept building orientation of all qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p.

159). It is also used in research designs that do not seek to build a substantive theory such as this study. Additionally, the objective of this analysis method was to constantly compare emerging themes from the data through three levels of coding. These levels are known as open, axial, and selective codes.

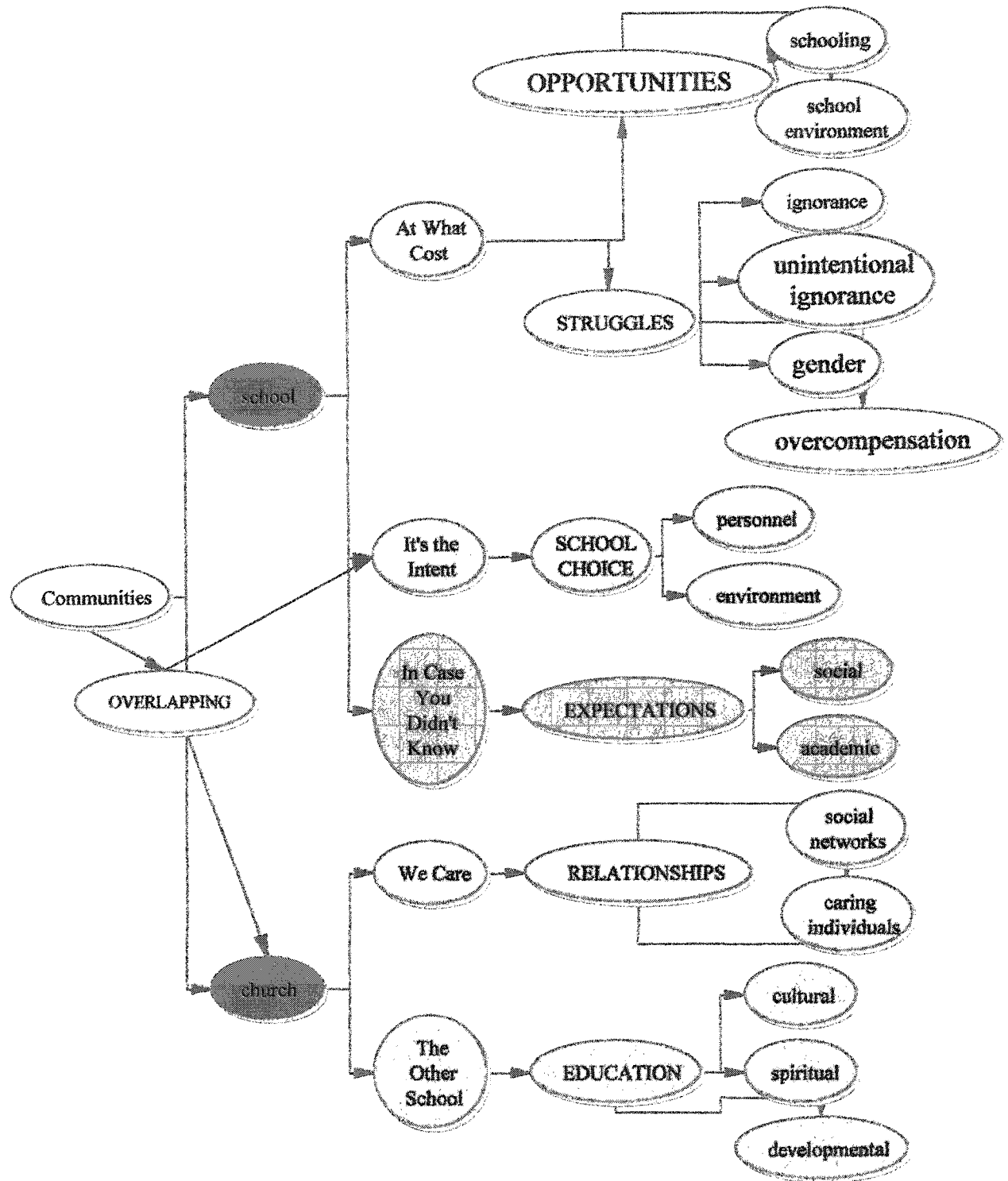
Open coding allowed the researcher to closely examine the data. In this stage, data was closely analyzed for similarities and differences. This analysis stage allowed the researcher to develop questions, make new discoveries, and form initial categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In axial coding, the researcher used broken down data or initial codes to make connections between categories essential to the theme. This process allowed the codes to be placed in relational or central categories. Even though open and axial codes may be considered as two distinct procedures, the researcher was actually moving back and forth between the two forms of coding.

Finally, selective coding enabled the researcher to integrate the categories, at the point of saturation, into a coherent story. This process stage allowed the researcher to explain the theory or phenomenon that has emerged (Creswell, 1990).

In this study, transcripts were numbered, read, and compared with audiotapes to accurately reflect the participants' perspectives during their respective interviews. Then, transcripts were coded with the aid of HYPERresearch. With the help of this qualitative software package, I generated a master list of codes. The majority of all codes had frequencies of three to five, and four codes generated over twelve frequencies. These codes were sorted and arranged manually into five clusters or units of similar meanings. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the results of this process.

Figure 2. Coding process



## Verification

Because of the variety of multiple perspectives in qualitative research, researchers are encouraged to utilize credible a method or methods to assess the trustworthiness or the accuracy of their study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address the issue of credibility, the following verification procedures were used by the researcher.

Members' checking was used to ensure the participants in the study that their "voices" were accurately reflected. That is, individuals were provided with a brief summary of their interview to see if the data accurately reflected their statements.

Peer reviews were also used to examine the research chapters, proposal, and research instruments for corrections. In this study, the researcher utilized the expertise of colleagues and peers to examine and analyze the procedures, texts, and references. This process ensured the credibility of the research study.

The researcher utilized the technique of an audit trail (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher provided detailed documentation, transcripts, and notes for informed colleagues to replicate the study.

Finally, the researcher's biases were stated from the outset of the study. My personal and professional careers have been strongly influenced by my religious background. Also, as a student in a predominately white setting, I have experienced isolation from the faculty and staff. Thus, the researcher tried to minimize biases by developing open-ended questions, and having the participants explain their statements.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will include an introduction to the participants, a descriptive view of the researcher's coding and analysis process, a description of the thematic findings of parental perceptions regarding their children's experiences in predominately white schools, and the role of an inclusive church in providing balance for African American youth located within a predominately white community.

#### Profiles of the "Voices"

You and this young, so-called lawyer have proven you know what they are, they're Africans-Congratulations. What you don't know, and as far as I can tell you haven't bothered in the least to discover, is who they are. What is their story  
(Hale, 2001, p.37)?

One of the greatest attributes of qualitative research is its ability to focus and connect to the meanings of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this ongoing process, the researcher is able to transfer data into meaningful stories (Mishler, 1986). The narratives in this study provide readers with a glimpse of how parents of African American children, in predominately white communities, form and connect the meanings of their children's experiences within two specific communities, schools and churches. These stories, in return, are beneficial to researchers and readers because they help individuals gain an understanding of the role of communities in educating African American children.

Twelve participants were selected to share their stories regarding their children's experiences in predominately white school communities. Eleven interviews were conducted by the researcher. One interview consisted of a couple. Eight females and four males were interviewed for this study. These participants were all educated at a four year college, with the exception of one participant who was educated at a technical school. A total of 21 children, ages ranging from five to seventeen years old, from four school districts, are a part of this study. Table 1 illustrates more specific demographic information regarding each participant.

Table 1.

*Demographic Data of Participants*

Participants	Gender	Children
A	Female	Three [Elementary, Middle, High]
B	Female	One [Elementary]
C	Female	One [Elementary]
D	Female	One [Elementary]
E	Male	Two [Pre-Kindergarten, Elementary]
F/G	Male/Female	Three [Middle (1), High (2)]
H	Male	Two [Elementary, Elementary]
I	Male	One [Elementary]*
J	Female	One [Elementary]
K	Female	Three [Elementary (1) High (2)]
L	Female	Three [Elementary (1) High (2)]

Note. All children are enrolled in public schools unless indicated by an \*

In order to become more familiar with the participants as well as gain a better understanding of how the researcher was able to analyze his data, the researcher has provided brief biographical information regarding the participants and their children. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and location of the participants and their children.

#### *Participant A*

Participant A is a married female, early to mid-forties, who came from a large metropolitan area in the West. She grew up in an ethnically diverse environment. After graduating from college and living on the West coast, her husband was transferred to the Winter Range Area. She has been in this area for approximately six years, and she serves as program director of an early education program. She is the mother of three children, and most of their schooling has been in the Winter Range Area. Participant A has three children. She states the following:

She is the oldest child and a junior at a local high school. She is active in the music program and runs track. She wants to attend a college outside of the state of Colorado. The majority of her friends are white, Mexican-American, and Asian. She enjoys school. [Middle child] She is in middle school, and she has a diverse core of friends. She has a more diversified group of friends. [Third child] He is in elementary school. He has a mild disposition and is active in sports. He is like his father who is also mellow and relaxed. He earns good grades. He received several commendations from the principal because he is calm, and he is a leader.

#### *Participant B*

Participant B is a divorced female in her mid-thirties and comes from a mid-sized city in the Southern part of the United States. After graduating from a historically black college, she received a fellowship to pursue a graduate degree at a university in the

Winter Range Area. She has one son, and his prior schooling occurred in a predominately black elementary school setting. He is currently enrolled in an ethnically diverse elementary school. She states, “He is a sociable young person. He doesn’t have problems making friends, and he is very outgoing and loves school.”

*Participant C*

Participant C is a single mother in her early twenties. She comes from a large metropolitan city on the West Coast. She grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood due to Navy housing. After graduating from a university on the West Coast, she was advised by her mentor to apply to the graduate program at an institution in the Winter Range Area. Her son, who attended a predominately black Christian Academy on the West Coast, is in the first grade at a local elementary school. She states, “He is playful and he will be himself. He loves school.”

*Participant D*

Participant D is a single mother from the Midwest. She is in her late thirties and grew up in a diverse community. Through a desegregation program, she attended a racially diverse suburban high school. After graduating from college, she worked in a community college setting. Five years ago, she relocated to the Winter Range Area to take an administrative position at a local university. She has one daughter, primarily schooled in the Winter Range Area. She is a first-grader at a local elementary school. “She is very outgoing, very creative, artistic, and friendly.”

*Participant E*

Participant E is a married father in his late thirties. He comes from a large metropolitan area on the East Coast. He believes that his early experiences were

influenced by a very diverse upbringing. After graduating from college, he relocated to the Winter Range Area to be with his fiancée. However, after two weeks, he decided to return to the East Coast. Eventually, he came back to Winter Range Area and served as a paraprofessional at a local school. Later, he was appointed to an administrative position at a university. He has been in the Winter Range Area for approximately five years, and he has three children. Two children are enrolled in school. One attends a pre-kindergarten program and the other child attends an elementary school. While describing his school-aged children, he states, “He is excited and fascinated to be among his peers, and he loves attending school and playing with his friends.” “She is happy go lucky, and she is always happy to be around her friends.”

#### *Participants F & G*

This couple, in their mid forties to early fifties, comes from a large metropolitan city in the Mid-West. They grew up in a predominately black school setting; however, their educational experiences have afforded them the opportunity to work in diverse settings, due to their executive positions in a nationally recognized company. They have been in the Winter Range Area for approximately eight years. They have two children at the high school level and one child in middle school. Participants F & G share the following descriptions about their children.

The oldest is quiet, and probably cerebral. He is athletic and popular.

As a result, everybody knows him and likes him. Sue is the artistic type. She loves dancing and music. Cindi is probably more of the leadership, student council type student. She loves art. Our youngest one is a tomboy. She is involved in basketball and volleyball.

### *Participant H*

Participant H is a divorced father in his early forties, who comes from North Africa. He grew up in a predominately black African setting. American missionaries heavily influenced his educational experiences. After graduating from college, he relocated to the United States to attend graduate school. Eventually, he obtained an administrative job in the Winter Range Area at a university. Currently, he has two children in a predominately white elementary school. When describing his daughter and son, he states, “She is a well-organized girl for her age. She is very helpful at home, and according to her teachers, she is well behaved in school.” “He is a good child who likes to receive lots of direction.”

### *Participant I*

Participant I is a married father in his early forties. He comes from Western Africa and grew up in predominately black African setting. His experiences were influenced by the British traditions. After graduating from a boarding high school in Western Africa, he came to the United States for better educational opportunities. He graduated from college, and his professional experiences as a corporate senior administrator, allowed him to work in several metropolitan areas across the United States. Additionally, he has served on several school committees. He has one daughter enrolled in a private Christian academy at the elementary level. When talking about his daughter, he states, “She loves school and enjoys playing with her friends.”

### *Participant J*

Participant J is a married female who is in her early forties. She is an international student from Central America. Missionaries influenced her educational experiences. As a

result, she was later encouraged to pursue educational opportunities in the United States. While in the United States, she met her husband and eventually they relocated to the Winter Range Area. They have two children. The oldest child attends a diverse elementary school. “She is a very energetic, inquisitive child. She is highly perceptive about people and their feelings. She has a high sense of justice and equality. She notices when she is treated differently from others and that distinction bothers her.”

*Participant K*

Participant K is a single mother, nearing forty who comes from the Southern part of the United States. She attended an experimental racially diverse high school, and later she graduated from a historically black college. After graduating from college, her professional experiences allowed her to live in several metropolitan cities across the United States. Approximately, three years ago, she relocated to the Winter Range Area for a corporate job, but since has been laid off from corporate industry. She has three children. The oldest child, who started school in Winter Range, has returned to the South, and the other two children attend a public elementary and high school. While describing her children, she states the following:

Johnny is smart and athletic. He has the ability to retain trivial knowledge. He is kind and passive, but he is also passionate about many things. He likes to keep peace. Louis is very athletic, but he is totally opposite from the oldest child. He stands up for his rights and for the rights of others. He likes to take up for the underdog. He loves a challenge and a debate. Sharon is very loving, kind, quiet, and soft-spoken. She is artistic. She loves to read, and she doesn't mind being alone.

### *Participant L*

Participant L is a married biracial female in her early thirties from a large metropolitan city on the West coast. As a child, she grew up in a predominately white community. She attended a small international academy that afforded her the opportunity to be a student leader. After high school, she married and relocated overseas, due to the military. After a period of years, she returned back to the states and eventually moved to the Winter Range Area. She has three children enrolled in public schools. Two are in high school, and the other child is in elementary school. When discussing her children, she shares the following information.

Heath is athletic and loves basketball and wrestling. He is self-motivated. He likes socializing with his friends. Tommy is athletic - basketball, football and track. He likes math, and he is very aggressive and competitive. Lisa prefers basketball and swimming. She is very active in school and church. She does well in school.

### Analysis Process

Because qualitative research is rich and emergent, the task of managing and analyzing data can be quite time consuming. According to Merriam (1998),

At the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has a selected sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming (162).

For the benefit of this study, I referred to Merriam's *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* as a reference for organizing and analyzing data. In this process, five themes emerged from the data. They are *In case you didn't know*, *It's the intent*, *At what cost*, *The other school*, and *We care*. A description of these themes follows.

The following themes are addressed and supported by excerpts from individual interviews. Moreover, these themes seek to analyze as well as support what the participants believe are the experiences of their children in church and school settings located within predominately white communities.

*Theme One: "In case you didn't know"*

*In case you didn't know* refers to parents clear and adamant statements regarding their desire for their children to not only receive a quality education, but to make sure that school officials, unfamiliar with the Black middle class family, make no assumptions regarding their involvement in their children's educational process. Hence, these expectations are vocalized, through conferences, daily contacts, and parental involvement, as a way of clarifying any misconceptions regarding parental involvement and high expectations from a racial group barely seen in the community.

Participant A provides an example of how she and her husband frequently inform their daughter's teacher about their expectations and fair treatment.

Frankly, you have to be honest with people and say you're not going to put up with anything, or be disrespected. One of the first things that my husband and I do when we meet the teacher, and especially with Susie's teacher on the first day of school, is say that our child is African American and will not be disrespected in the classroom. It takes them back, because it is their first instance.

Participant C, a single mother from the West Coast, has this to say about clarifying her expectations.

I think I did a good job of clarifying most things when I first arrived like establishing a rapport. Letting them know who we are and where we were from and where he came from in regards to schooling and what he had been learning. The environment he had grown up in so far and I made sure that I told the teachers and principal in such a way that there were not any misconceptions. I made sure that I had persistence at the school so there were no misconceptions. I think that my persistence is a better indicator because I was able to verbally discuss with them face to face instead of over the telephone. I feel like when you have a personal contact with somebody it is a better way to communicate. They can see visually and hear what you are saying so that they can get both sides of it.

In this particular interview, the participant appeared to be really adamant about her involvement with her child's school. When asked if she had to clarify the misconceptions because of her race, she stated the following:

I don't know. I never really thought of it like that, but I'm just that kind of parent. If something happens, I am going up to the school regardless of where we are at or what happens because I want to deal with it, and know what is going on. I don't like to get stuff later on or after work or on a message. I want to know and deal with it right away.

In regards to parental expectations, Participant D shares an incident in which she has a problem with the academic goals/expectations at her daughter's school. She states the following:

When we moved to Winter Range, she had a setback. Most kids have adjustments when they are moving, but what I found the pre-kindergarten she was enrolled in, when we moved here was not actually a pre-kindergarten program. It was a day

care, and they just renamed it pre-kindergarten. Simply, I guess to get people interested in having their kids academically prepared to enroll there. I found that my daughter was not learning to count. She was not learning words, her address and sight words, as in the other center [in the Mid-West]. I felt like they were holding her back. She could have been learning more, and I did discuss this with her kindergarten teacher, and they instituted a kindergarten program after that.

When asked of their reaction to her comments, she replied:

I don't think they were surprised [about the activities within the program]. I think they were surprised that they were called on the fact that they were not doing a kindergarten program, when they said they were. I don't think anybody else pushed the issue with them because they assumed it was a daycare. But, I specifically asked for a kindergarten program, and they said they had it. I think... they were a bit intimidated by me because I am direct, especially when dealing with my child and her education.

Participants F/ G provide the rationale why it is extremely important for them to be involved in their children's educational process. They state the following:

One of the challenges we face is that the minority population is Hispanic, and we have to be careful in making sure that our kids aren't treated like them. I don't mean that in a negative sense; culturally, there is very little involvement and many aren't aware of what is going on with their kids. We are more involved than our parents. We are very involved with our children... We have always been involved, because if you are not involved, the school system feels you don't care. Then, they don't care. If something is not going right, we want to know about it, and we expect you to tell us about it. Don't write us off, and we find out down the road that it has been going on for a while.

Furthermore, participants E, I, and K express their views regarding their role in defining their expectations for their children.

I was very intentional with meeting with the principal. I had to meet. I would have done this even if it was a predominately black school or diverse school. That is just me as a parent because I have a set of expectations. When searching [for schools], me and my wife intentionally met with the principal and staff to see if it was a good fit. (Participant E)

I think it is important to let them know that we care about our children's education. We are not just sending her there and expecting that they will be her sole teacher and not the parents. We want to be involved and also in the process. (Participant I)

I have always been involved because I wanted to make sure that I or my kids didn't fall into those stereotypes of single black parents. Oh, they don't care about their kids. They just send them to school. They don't care about what is going on and they don't participate. So, I made an effort to make sure that I stopped by the school to check and see what is going on. I want them to do well, and I want them to succeed. Your foundation, education, is the key. When we came here, it wasn't that I wanted to show my kids that I cared, but I wanted to show the teachers and the principal and all these other people that the stereotypes they may have in their head, is not me. You need to erase that off because that's not me. I'm not that typical or whatever you have in your mind of a typical single black mother. I wanted to show them the difference. (Participant K)

Participant L provides an example in which she had to "enlighten" her child's teacher regarding her expectation for her son.

My oldest son has dyslexia, and he is in the special education program. He is mainstreamed, but he also takes a resource class. He maintains a 3.0 but struggles with comprehension. So, I have to get tutors for him. I know that you [people with

dyslexia] can be successful. Most people with dyslexia have high IQs. We went for an IEP meeting, making sure he is eligible for next year's program. Well, she asked him, "What are his goals." He was like I'm going to college. She looks at him... She said to him, "Well you know you don't have to go to college. Maybe you should think of other options. Maybe college is not for you. You can go to a junior college or maybe a trade school." We just looked at her. She later wanted to know why I was involved because she told me last year that he is in high school so I really don't have to set up these meetings or his classes. He can do his own classes. I said, "I'm here to help him achieve his goals."

Finally, in capturing the essence of this theme, Participant J's shares the following comments regarding parental involvement. He states the following:

[Involvement] is different for each parent. I say to myself, in America, if your parents are not involved in school, you [students] will fall by the wayside.

#### *Summary*

These narrations indicated that parents tried their best to make their children's experiences positive by frequently keeping the lines of communication open with school officials. Many times, these parents made sure these lines of communication were open by frequent visits to the school. This process assured the school officials that parents were serious about being involved and staying informed about their children. Additionally, for other parents, contact was important, not only for their children's progress, but also for awareness. Through involvement and frequent contact, these parents were determined to erase any misconceptions or stereotypes associated with black people or people of other races. Overall, these parents wanted teachers to understand that their actions were being watched and demanded that their children be treated fairly and

receive a quality education. If there was a problem, they had no hesitation in confronting the system and its officials.

*Theme Two: "It's the intent"*

*It's the intent* emerged as a theme due to the fact that many of the participants searched for schools that were intentional about creating and fostering a climate of care. There was no problem in identifying schools of excellent academic caliber; however, the majority of the participants believed that diverse school settings played an important role in their children's development. As a result, these parents utilized the school choice policy to locate embracing schools and supportive personnel. The school choice policy enabled these children to experience meaningful lessons that extended beyond the textbook. Despite the fact that some parents believed that it was important to have a more diverse staff, the intent was present in these schools in that many of the White teachers were committed to sustaining a supportive and embracing environment for their students. The following statements from the parents indicate what they believe is the essence of the *intent* theme.

The school has an inviting atmosphere, and the environment is colorful. They make you want to be there. They make you feel like this is the place where I am going to learn something. I have been to some schools, coming from where I come from, the environments are not conducive to learning. It is a drab and the kids don't want to be there. It doesn't invigorate the mind. You know you are just there. But, this school [uses hands to visualize] has a wall picture of a globe or whatever that shows where students from different places come from. They boast [about this map]. That's a very proud thing to know that they have students from all different points of the country. I thought it was nice. A lot of these kids are away from home for the first time to see something that represents their country

on the walls. They also have pictures of kids, like Turkey [children from Turkey] I think that is nice and positive. (Participant B)

I went to visit several schools and this school, I noticed, was a diverse school. The constituents come from predominately around the campus and that means that they draw in the international students. It draws a lot of people that want to focus on diversity and have their children learn about diversity. (Participant C)

I checked the statistics on the internet on the school district. I wanted to know the ...how many other African American or people of different cultures or backgrounds that are enrolled in that school because I did not like the neighborhood school. There was not a diverse faculty but I got the impression that they do a lot of work even for teachers who were raised in Kanorodo. They have sought out extra training... to get a feel for what is going on outside of Kanorodo. Fenley is rated as excellent. I thought the school was old and cluttered, that was my first impression. It was cluttered with articles and garments from different countries. I thought that was pretty neat to bring in people's cultural background into the school setting so it can be discussed. So, I liked that part about the school. They are very open. They have posted just around the school [in different languages] what the room is, so if it is the bathroom, it's written in Spanish on the door and it's written in English. I thought this was pretty good. I wanted my daughter to learn another language as well. You know, there are few schools in this area that are culturally reflective. This is also one of the schools that had the most diverse population as far as people from different cultures and I don't just mean African American, but they have students from 15 different countries in that school. (Participant D)

Participant E, in deciding the right school for his son, discusses his visit to two schools, the neighborhood school and the school of choice. He shares the following:

We were not impressed, and we had a negative experience at our neighborhood school. We went there and when we met with the principal. We wanted to know

about the staff-people of color, and they couldn't tell us. Even with the students, it's a difference when you walk into the class and the students think hey that is a new person versus a look of wow-I never seen your type before. You could see it in their eyes. Me and my wife decided that there is no way we will put our son through that. If they do that to us, what about our son? So, we immediately erased that school off our list and went to our next school to interview. This would have been his first educational experience. Going into that environment? No way!

At the school of choice, the one thing I liked was that they weren't taken back with why was he asking me? Why is he pursuing this? Why is this important? It was more like this is great could you give me more insight? If you need anything else or have any ideas, just come back. They have been great in this situation. An issue at the current school is that staff wise it is not that diverse. What is important is there is an appreciation, awareness-pictures and multiculturalism- the intent is there. She [principal] made an impact in everything. So to answer your question, yes we do feel comfortable with the school. In this school, someone is trying versus another school where it is not even a try. He would have been lost. (Participant E)

Many of the participants spoke about how intentional school officials were toward their children. The participants agreed that these individuals, despite their struggles, were receptive, caring and willing to be supportive. The participants provided the following information.

I feel that they are genuine. They want to try to make a better transition. They understand that my sons are minorities, and they are going to have a harder time. It is just the way life is. I feel they are sincere, and they try to be an advocate for my kids. They want to make my children comfortable. They set up a plan, if you have questions or problems, come to them so that they can address it immediately. (Participant E)

He was blessed enough to have excellent teachers, teachers that care about him. I respect her [teacher] for that. (Participant B)

He has a male teacher. That's intriguing because, with me being a single parent, he has a male role model to look up to, somebody to respect. He will have a respect for men. (Participant C)

Teachers are wondering if we have more kids coming to school. They know that we are involved. They ask because our kids are well respected by teachers. Academically, they are doing well. Comments like your kids are doing so well and well behaved. This is not the norm with kids. (Participants F/G)

She really likes her teachers. I think the teachers have a great impact on her. They are very encouraging with little notes, 'excellent job', and 'keep up the good work'. All these things really build her self-esteem and make her want to continue to do better and take initiative. She likes that. (Participant K)

The positive experience in public school is none. I took her out of public school because I felt that the only thing they were teaching is that the white culture [uses his hands] is here and everybody else is down here. The new school [a Christian school] teaches all kids are equal. They go through lessons [about] it's okay if someone has blue or brown skin, but we are all God's children. They have an interest in establishing [cultural] programs so after we are gone it continues, a sustaining program. That is the biggest attraction for me. I don't think it is appease and move on. I know what it looks like. Intent is there. (Participant J)

On the other hand, Participant L believes that school choice doesn't really make a difference in helping her children feel connected within their schools. Even though her children still attend a school of choice, she shares the following perspective.

We did school of choice-three times, but you're in "Denial Land." In Denial Land, no matter where you go, the ratio I don't believe is going to change. It is not even the point of changing school because Denial Land is Denial Land.

### *Summary*

Many of the schools in this school district were academically excellent; however, school choice, in this instance, was not based on academic programs. Many of these parents wanted a school that offered more than just academics. They selected schools and personnel within these selected schools that fostered an intentionally inviting climate. In return, their children were afforded the opportunity of being within diverse settings. These settings allowed for the recognition as well as the acknowledgment of cultural differences.

### *Theme Three: "At what cost"*

At what cost refers to the many parents who expressed mixed feelings regarding their children's experiences in their respective schools. On one hand, these individuals felt that their children were provided with good educational experiences. However, all of them agreed that, culturally there were some struggles or concerns that needed attention in the schools. Many of the parents expressed how teachers unintentionally struggled in trying to be culturally sensitive. Many times these struggles were unintentional; however, these struggles were evident in discipline and lesson preparation. Additionally, other parents believed that their children, particularly males, faced peer pressure and gender issues within their school settings.

This theme has two sections. The first section focuses on the positive educational opportunities. The second section deals with the struggles involving parents, students, school officials, and indirectly, the external community.

The following quotes support the section – positive experiences. These experiences include the establishment of friendships, and meaningful opportunities.

It is so amazing. His kindergarten picture was the first time I have seen more than two African American kids in the classroom. With each child, I am seeing a more increased number of African American kids. He has a diverse amount of friends. (Participants A)

He likes his friends. In fact, he had a birthday party when he turned seven. I was just being nice by giving everyone an invitation in the class. Every last one of them must have RSVP. Every last one of them came to the party. (Participant B)

He likes school and playing with his friends. He likes engaging with the students. He looks forward to school everyday. He might not like doing the homework, but he likes school and his friends. (Participant C)

She enjoys her friends. They call her on the telephone, and of course, she is still the only African American child in her class. (Participant D)

His positive experience is that he is gaining good friends and good social skills. He is a participant as a student, not an outsider. He is apart of the parties, the social things. Lots of time, if you are from a different group, you get excluded. He has been apart of all of that. They call our house, and get together outside of the classroom to do things. (Participant E)

The high school is new and they have done well. The school has been in place for only three years and they have had the opportunity to become involved in a lot of extracurricular activities because they didn't have to get involved in the politics,

politics from the standpoint of long traditions that only certain people get involved to do certain things versus moving into a school that has been in effect for three years. For example, my son lettered in football, basketball, and track his first year. Given the fact he had never played football, he didn't understand the game. I had to explain to him what first and ten was; he never watched it on TV. Because of the size of the school, they needed to have people. He played and lettered his first year-that's [smiles] truly an opportunity. (Participants F/G)

They like school. They like their friends. They love their teachers. They say that their teachers are cool. (Participant H)

She has done well academically, and she likes school (Participant I)

He likes being with his friends. (Participant K)

She enjoys school and her friends, and for the most part, she has a normal childhood. (Participant L)

Additionally, many of the parents stated the following regarding the positive academic aspects of their children's schools:

We know the kids are in good schools and academically sound schools. If we were on the west coast, they would probably be going to private schools. (Participant A)

He loves school. He gets involved. He is excited about learning. It's [curriculum] opening up his mind to other places. He can understand that this person is from Turkey...I think it helps him open his mind up to really see what it means to be from different parts of the world. Everything is just not the US, right here centrally focused. There are other parts of the world. There are other people that come from different parts of the world, and he is apart of it. (Participant B)

It [school] draws in a lot of people that want to focus on diversity and have their children learn about diversity. It teaches them about characters, like compassion. They want students to come out with a well rounded education, not just book smarts, but also understanding how to be passionate and understanding of other people and differences. Students do art about different cultures, and they learn about them [cultures]. (Participant C)

[In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade], they are not only doing reading, writing, and math, they are doing extra social and global training that she will need to be a better student overall. This school has a world global program. She is taking French, Spanish, doing studies in geology and geography. (Participant D)

She likes school. They have a heavy emphasis on science, math and English. (Participant J)

On the other hand, parents expressed the following concerns regarding some of the disadvantages of their children being in a predominately white setting.

One particular struggle encountered by these students was overcompensation. Many times these teachers went “above and beyond” to make sure they were not labeled or seen as racist or insensitive.

Participant A reveals the following:

When Lisa was in third grade, the class did an assignment trace your ancestors back to their original country. Additionally, there is a huge number of children who are adopted in this community. Our African American relatives are harder to trace. I wanted her to be able to trace them as well. So, I went to talk to the teacher. I told the teacher it wasn't fair...So, we compromised we came up with an alternate project. When we got to the school, this woman made Lisa the queen of the heritage search. Our point wasn't to point her point her out or have special attention. [We] wanted to help the teacher recognize that not everybody can trace

their heritage back to the Mayflower or England or whatever. So, we had to go back and address that [overcompensation].

Participant B shares another example of overcompensation. She states the following:

When I went to a parent/teacher conference, I found out a lot of stuff that I didn't know was happening. She began explaining to me about his overbearing nature. I was like, ok. She expressed that she didn't want to send him to the office because she didn't want him to be labeled as a problem child or getting label. I think they [teachers] overcompensated because they didn't know how [to discipline] so they made allowances by letting him do more things than someone else.

Because Participant B thought that her son would take advantage of this nice teacher, she began to tell the teacher how to deal with him based on past experiences.

She says the following:

Honestly, coming from black schools, a lot of these things would not be handled this way. They would have gotten him in line. He is the type of person who is going to push as far as you let him push. When he sees he can push you and get around you, he will. When he was in school at home in an all black school with black teachers, they would be like no way we're not going to have that. He would have to check himself. It wouldn't be sending papers home. Sure, he's a boy. He is going to push you. [She rises out of her seat, speaking loudly.] Don't let him push you. Okay, you deal with him and tell him you stay your but here for recess or you wont do this. This is taken away from you. She asked, "Can I do that?" I had to give her permission to control her student. You let him know in the beginning. He won't do it.

After describing this incident and biting on her lip, she begins to boast on how successful she was in helping the teacher discipline her son. She states, "I haven't heard anything for her since."

Participant K makes the following remark regarding a teacher who struggles with cultural differences.

There are some [teachers] that it is just sappy because they go so far left, trying to be nice. It's just like you can't stop now. If there is anything, let me give you my telephone number. Call me at home. Okay, that is not necessary. It is a nice gesture, but you are trying too hard. Why?

Other parents expressed concerns of how teachers were “unintentionally” clueless about the behaviors and conditions faced by African American children.

We had a difficult time transitioning here. In the beginning, he would play and play a little rougher than the other children would like. One little girl got kicked, accidentally. He was punished. Several incidents like that where they [school officials] tried to label him as being violent... it was more so just rough playing with the children, and accidentally, someone is hurt, and its his fault. (Participant C)

After being told later that both kids were reprimanded, Participant C makes the states the following:

I don't know at first, I thought it was a racial thing. I don't know if it is true or not but I just dealt with it at home and left it at that. I can't change the way they think so I'm not going to worry about it. I know he's not violent.

Participant D recalls an incident of how her daughter and another student of color experienced isolation at school. She states the following:

There was an Indian girl who was about the same skin tone as about my daughter. All the other kids were Caucasian with light skin complexions. My daughter and the Indian girl could not be in their club...they didn't want to play with us [daughter] today. That made me think because they were the only dark skin people in the classroom, and the only two excluded from the little girl's club.

When confronting the teacher about how she [teacher] was going to handle this situation, Participant D said the following:

I talked to the teacher about it, and she sort of blew me off. She knew the little girl's personality and she changed the seating. I would have liked to talk to the parents of the child and see what they are teaching in that home.

Additionally, another area of concern, for parents, was simply the teacher's lack of exposure in dealing with children of color, particularly Black children. In a conversation with her daughter's teacher, Participant I seeks to find out if the teacher is aware of her daughter's struggle in trying to connect with other kids in her class.

In a teacher's conference, I asked the teacher, "What is my daughter's interaction with children in her class?" "Who does she interact with?" The teacher was stunned. She couldn't give me an answer. She couldn't tell me who. She had no idea. This was important because she never came home talking about a friend. She would say nobody likes me because I'm different. So, I wanted to find out had she [teacher] noticed. It is not the responsibility of the school to force children to be social. But, if a child is going to spend so many hours in school, if there is no relationship, that's a very empty place to be.

Participants E & F/G reveal other identity struggles faced by their children.

When he reached first grade, my son came to me and said, "Daddy, I am the only one that is brown in my classroom. There are no brown faces in my classroom. I see brown faces during the break, lunch and recess, but they are not in my classroom." He also has reflected this in his work assignments, whether it is art or anything—drawing brown on everything is his focus. (Participant E)

She [daughter] likes to be around other blacks. She says, "I like being around my people." Although she does it jokingly, she tries to imitate what the media portrays as the blacks being cool. (Participants F/G)

Participant L shares this information regarding her daughter's comment to the teacher after being called a Nigger on the school bus by another kid.

After the counselor promised her that this would never happen again, she told the counselor, "You can't promise me this won't happen, maybe not tomorrow or at this school, but it will happen."

Participant H shares his feelings or concerns regarding his children attending a predominately white school.

I have never seen anything negative come across from the staff, but I worry because I don't see any other African American kids. My kids may be the only ones that are colored. I don't know how they feel about that. They have never said anything ...I don't want to hear that obviously as a father but there is nothing I can do. My first impression, when you are a person of color like I am [he shows a facial expression of confusion] I guess you focus on yourself. It makes you feel a little out of place. (Participant H)

Before placing his daughter in a Christian academy, Participant J shares his experiences with school officials' insensitivities in the public school.

They [school officials] don't do anything unless someone is pushing for it. They have Cinco de Mayo Day, Chinese New Year, they don't do nothing. They don't recognize any other culture or heritage except the white culture. Anything else is like we don't know anything. Also, teachers are not sensitive enough to realize that people of color have different issues than the mainstream population. How do you think Native Americans feel when you say Columbus was a hero? I think it is part of ignorance.

Finally, Participants F/G, K, and L revealed some of the struggles, particularly dating, peer pressure, and identity concerns that their sons face in their respective communities.

I think because of their ages, the two older ones [daughter and particularly the son], the dating is a grey area in terms of their same color –It is not a problem in terms of him finding a date [out of his race]; however, we talk to him about why get involved with someone if it is not going somewhere. Why waste your time in a relationship if it is not going anywhere? (Participant F/G)

He is not only struggling with his identity but also keeping up with his friends. He wants me to buy him a car, but the car is not the issue. It's the insurance for teenagers and males. It is expensive. His friends come and pick him up in Jaguars, Range Rovers, this is another pressure. He is not able to keep up economically. We are also dealing with substance abuse of pot. That is what they do it is easy. You don't have to buy it, because they [white boys] have it. They are walking around with money in their pocket, and it is assumed because he is black that he is supposed to act like the videos. If not, he is not being true to his own, because he has been told that by other black kids. He's struggling. (Participant L)

They [white girls] call all the times. My boys pose a threat to the fathers and mothers of those girls, and the Caucasian boys. They were like okay, now, these are our white girls. These are our girls. So why are you trying to talk to them. Go find your own girls. Of course there are none [black girls]. As a result, one of my son's life was threatened. (Participant L)

### *Summary*

Overall, these parents shared mixed reactions regarding their children's experiences in their respective schools, due to the negative and positive experiences of their children. Many of these parents agreed that their children were in good academic schools and they had excellent teachers; however, they were concerned with cultural struggles within the school. Also, some of the parents worried about their children facing isolation from other students. As a result, these experiences forced parents to evaluate

their children's experiences, both positive and negative, and truly ask themselves, "Is it worth it?"

*Theme Four: "The other school"*

The theme, *the other school*, focuses on the church and its educative role regarding African American children. Many of the participants mentioned the "unique" role the church plays in this particular environment. Others mentioned how the church continues to mold and challenge their children to think critically and develop skills that are essential for functioning effectively in society. The following statement supports this theme.

Participant A provides the following information regarding the "educative role" of the church.

It provided a base on several different levels. It provided a spiritual, Christian base for our family. It also provided an African American base and awareness. Also, that whole mission statement of [church] is having diversity. Also, it was nice to see the majority being African American as oppose to the city make up where there is some African American but the majority is white...Both of us [she and her husband] coming from California and the east coast, there is more to the culture than just east coast and west coast. The kids are getting an education on variety of African American perspectives. (Participant A)

Participant B describes how the church plays an important role in reinforcing her child's social and moral development:

When the adults are upstairs having their praise and worship, there is praise and worship downstairs where it is on their level. He really retains what they teach him, and it's a teaching environment. The things that are taught and prayers that are prayed are where they can understand them, and so they get like their own personal service that has been catered towards them. They have praise and

worship leaders. They have the older kids who will help with the service downstairs. I think that is excellent too because I see my child looking at this young teen person, and he might say, 'I saw 'Jack' doing this when he was a teenager- I want to get old enough so that I can lead praise and worship.'

Participant C, after talking about the school, shares her perspective regarding the church as a teaching tool. She makes the following statement regarding the church:

Well, the church is a teaching tool as well. It helps to teach him manners and how to be a young man...just by the correction that people give to you when you do something wrong and when you are not always around people are always teaching him what's right and what's wrong. So, I guess the church can also be a learning tool and a teaching experience for the child. It's just a different type of teaching experience than a book type of learning experience. More of hands on, emotional, life skills type of learning experience.

Participant D provides additional information regarding the educative or teaching role of the church. She states the following:

The church provides a religious teaching that tells her how to socialize and dictates to her right from wrong from a Biblical standpoint so that she can go out into the school and have a firm understanding of what is right and what is wrong. When things that are, I guess, confronting her that she is confused about, she has a resource that she can talk to or she can pick up her Bible and read and find out for herself and make her own decision.

Participant E shares how the church encourages his children to think critically. He shares the following comment:

They learn about the Bible through video and discussions. The teachers in Sunday school and Children's Church teach them about tithing and responsibility.

Additionally, he compares the different church and school communities. He states the following:

The school plays a different part. He is getting educated as far as writing, math, reading, and listening skills, but that is it. We have to be intentional about other extra curricular events that the school is not providing. So, we wanted to look for a church home. It fills the needs that the school district cannot do or accomplish by providing people that look like him-cultural identity. He expressed that he loves his friends at school but he wants to see people who look like him. The church served the need of identifying other people who came from the same background. It serves a spiritual need as well as a network for support for people who look like him.

Other participants expressed how the church serves multiple roles for their children. Participants F/G and H expressed how the church assists their children with identity issues.

I think culturally, the church gives them an opportunity to be around their own. They don't always have to be under this light to do it right. They don't have to deal with stereotypes. They can relax and be themselves. They can talk slang, minus subject and verb agreement, without marring their image, without being misunderstood. To be around other blacks it is their get away. It has been their haven...they don't have to explain the culture things ... all the questions and attention of little things that comes naturally for us. (Participants F/G)

Identity, they see whole groups of people that are colored and look similar to them. They are not walking in and they are the only ones standing out. The others look like them. The kids look like them. (Participant H)

Participant I and K share how the church plays an important role in the spiritual and cultural development of their children. They state the following:

They [church teachers] teach her about God, choice, right and wrong. Most of the kids look like her. The teacher, for the most part, looks like her. So, there is a different self concept than at school where she is sitting there, and she's the only one sitting there where she is the only one and the teacher looks white. Everything looks white. She is the only dark spot. She has a sense of belonging. She can be at ease. (Participant I)

Well, I am hoping and praying is that with them, with there not being a lot of diversity in their school system, that the church will balance it for them. That is what I am hoping for, a balance.

(Participant K)

Participant L shares the following perspective of how schools and churches are similar:

They help to influence. They help to mold the future. They help mold the kids.

So what these kids learn in church.

She also provides the following example regarding one of her children's teachers at church who helps the students to think critically:

He has a curriculum. They have different subjects that they learn. They do debates, different types of subjects, hip-hop, women's issues, teen pregnancy, and things that are important. He doesn't sugar coat these things because you are setting them up for failure, and I think what he does is he hits the issues right on the head. He relates them too. What do you think about this? What is this rap song saying? What do you think this mean? He breaks it down for them. So the next time they hear another song, instead of them just hearing the beat and popping their fingers and tapping their toes, now, they are analyzing the words and thinking. He said such and such or whatever and they are breaking it down. ...it is

like a school setting because they are learning in a different way and different things.

After speaking intensely, she removes her glasses, wipes her eyes, and says the following:

Eventually, you want to make sure they [children] have the right foundation so they can be successful and care about other people and help make society better...that's the ultimate goal.

#### *Summary*

It is evident that many of the parents believe the church serves an important role in educating its children. Parents spoke of the traditional role of the church, instilling values and learning about God. In general, many of the parents agreed that the church plays an integral role in providing their children with a balance. As a result, this balance enabled students to transfer the necessary “educative” skills learned and reinforced within the church community to other communities. This gift – transferability – enables students to become resilient and adapt in communities beyond the wall of the church community.

#### *Theme Five: “We care”*

*We care* emerged in reference to parents who referred to the church as an embracing and supportive network of individuals. This network provides their children with the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with their peers, church leaders, adults and individuals from other cultures within the congregation.

Participant A provides an example of how the church serves as a network of support.

There was one day that the church had just been remodeled. Lin was on a ladder changing a light bulb, and all the men were holding the ladder. They were

supporting her. I thought this was all symbolic. It was so neat that everyone was concerned and made sure that it [light fixture] and Lin was okay.

When speaking about support, she proceeds to explain how church parishioners are supportive of her children.

They always feel supported with the games or whatever they have. People have asked them, "What are you doing now?" and they have supported them. Whether it's going to a musical recital or going to a basketball game or just acknowledging them.

Participant C, a single parent, reveals how individuals from the church have served as an extended family:

Well, the people in the church, like when I'm sick, they come and get him for church. They will make something to eat or call and check on me ... It is a support group where you don't have to go out and feel lost. You can ask anybody anything if they have been living here a while. They will help you. I guess that is why it is supportive.

Participant C also states the following:

He enjoys singing in the choir. He makes a big fuss when he can't go to choir or Bible study. He wakes up early or wants to pick out his clothes in advance. He wants to make a good impression. I think that shows he has an interest in it. He wants to get there and make sure I get there as well.

Participant D states how the church enables her daughter to develop meaningful relationships. She states the following:

My daughter has the opportunity to meet other black families and kids her age. She also has the opportunity to see individuals who serve as role models. There are teenagers who are looking out for [the] younger children and that's the whole village thing. It takes a village to raise a child, and the church is our village.

Others participants spoke about the church and its role of not only being supportive but also inclusive of other cultures, within its membership:

The church is supportive of helping our children with their identity struggles; however, it is also multicultural. There are people from Africa, Belize, and Jamaica. There are also whites and Latino apart of the congregation.

(Participant E)

I realize the struggle because you just can't have a black church. There are not enough of us here. I am open to the idea that church is inclusive. It is good, whether it is black, white, or anything is fine. I think the more we have is better.

(Participant H)

What I like about [the church] is the fact that there are people of different cultures, and we are all worship the same God. (Participant J)

What I like about the church is the fact that it has people of different colors. (Participant J)

When asked how the church could be so diverse and yet still remain supportive to meeting the need of the youth, Participant D replied:

The church is made up of people who want to be there. They aren't there because they want a check or they are forced to be at church. It's about being spiritually fed and establishing relationships.

Participant K shares the following incident regarding her son's enthusiasm regarding the youth programs at the church, during his time of sickness.

I can remember one specific thing. My middle son had a virus. Both kids were sick. Here I am nursing them. He couldn't get out of bed. He missed like three days of school because he was so sick. When it came to that Wednesday night, I am doctoring on them. Doping them up, and giving them medicine. After giving them medicine, I told them I was going to bible study. I will be back to check on you guys. My son and I laugh at this, I use the expression that he was on his death bed and he rose up, he was like "Mama can't we go to church too." Sick as you are with diarrhea, throwing up. He wanted to learn. He wanted to be with his friends. I'm like baby, if you going to go, get up off your deathbed. I'm going to take you.

Participant L provides the following account regarding individuals at the church and their impact on her children:

My children showed a lot of resistance at first about going to church every Sunday because they were not raised in church. They enjoy, playing on the [church] league and Wednesday night hip-hop culture. At first, they were surprised because they couldn't believe they could get that at church. They enjoy their teachers. My son has a lot of male role models that are successful black men, highly educated.

### *Summary*

Overall, the parents agreed that the church provided their children with a network of relational ties. These ties with friends, adults and individuals from other cultures fostered and cultivated meaningful and sustaining relationships. These relationships

connected their children with individuals who were committed to enriching the experiences of their children.

*Preparing for the Big Picture (Summary)*

The five main themes that emerged in this section are *in case you didn't know, it's the intent, at what cost, the other school, and we care*. These themes provide the readers with an understanding of how parents perceive their children's experiences, and collectively, these themes frame the larger scope of the study – African American children within multiple communities in predominately white communities.

In the church community, the overall focus is centered on relationships and education. These two concepts play a very important role in trying to understand what it means to be caring and supportive, and to what extent a community should go to ensure individuals of a caring environment.

In the school community, the overall focus is predicated upon the environment, expectations, and schooling, the curriculum and its academic practices. These concepts are essential in gaining an understanding of the role of the school.

By analyzing these concepts in the context of this data, the researcher is able to gain an understanding of the school and church community in the particular environment. Thus, this data becomes important when trying to gain a broader understanding of the nature and role of specific communities in the development of African American children. Additionally, the identification of key concepts such as schooling and education, interaction and relationships, and climate are essential in assisting the researcher in not only framing the discussion but also contextualizing chapter five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study was to discover as well as gain an understanding of how parents of African American children perceived their children's experiences in a church and school settings located within a predominately white community. This study, framed within the qualitative research paradigm, used the constant comparative method as the main qualitative data analysis strategy to analyze transcripts obtained from in-depth interviews. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings, implications for the study, recommendations, and concluding remarks.

#### Overview of the Findings

After careful examination and in-depth analysis of the transcripts, five major themes were identified by the researcher. These themes are believed to be accurate reflections of the participants' voices. Furthermore, these themes are interrelated and interconnected. Because of the difficulty associated with trying to further present the findings by themes without being redundant, I will instead discuss the findings relative to an assessment of the school and church communities, the role of the two communities, interactions and relationships within the two communities, and care within the two communities. This format allows for a deeper discussion of the findings.

#### Assessment of the School and Church Communities

The findings in this study regarding community are consistent with the information outlined in the literature review. Both communities originated to accomplish

tasks that individuals could not accomplish by themselves. Both entities served as support groups for the individuals within. Overall, the church, according to all the participants, provided more positive experiences in areas of deeper concern such as self esteem, recognition and appreciation of cultures, and the establishment of relationships. This was likely due to the multicultural focus and multiracial nature of the church.

Even though many of the participants agreed, for the most part, that the school provided many positive experiences as well, struggles were evident. These struggles, from the very beginning, were finding schools that were culturally diverse and intentional in their recognition of diversity. Since school was not an optional activity, parents had to continue to search for the best possible option through use of the school choice policy.

Although a volunteer activity, the choice of church was also intentional to support these children being faced with negotiating multiple communities and multiple experiences affecting their identity. The experiences of isolation, racial denial, peer pressure, and difficult teachers, needed to be balanced with the development of positive relationships, caring teachers, and positive reinforcement. While some students experienced these positive aspects in school, additional opportunities were needed for their development as people of color. For example, one of the participants indicated that her daughter's school was very welcoming and that she has caring teachers who are encouraging and supportive. However, sometimes her daughter is bothered with the fact that she is the only black student in the school and is constantly educating her peers about her differences and the isolation she faces because of the color of her skin. Yet, she still loves school. This brief comparison lends support to the findings in the literature as it relates to the dynamics of these communities as complex and multi-dimensional.

### *Schooling*

The terms schooling, education, and overlapping are very important in drawing distinctions between the two communities. Schooling, as stated in the literature, is the cultural frame by which African American students learn the school curriculum and its standard academic practices (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Through schooling, individuals are introduced to expectations through policies, rewards, and trained behavior reinforced by the dominant society's structural conditions (Shujaa, 1994). As a result of schooling, individuals are equipped with the necessary academic skills needed to function in society.

This study revealed that the majority of the parents believed that the schools did an excellent job academically. They also believed that their children would do well in society because they were exposed to quality academic programming. Many of the participants commented on the types of programs offered through the school districts. Participants B, C, and L commented on how advanced the academic programs were in comparison to the children's former schools, prior to coming to Winter Range. Interestingly, participants H & I were pleased with their children's schools; however, at times, they felt that their children's teachers were not challenging their children beyond the books. For example, when asked if the school focused on the total child, Participant I stated, "What I see is that the school's business is to teach you the curriculum because I don't see anything else." For many of the participants, the school was serving its main function – academic preparation.

## *Education*

Scholars such as Woodson (1933/1992) and Shujaa (1994) have made several attempts to address the educative process concerning schooling and education for African Americans (Kelly 2002, p.190). Education is the process of transmitting values, and beliefs. According to Shujaa (1994), education allows the individual to apply learned skills that will assist individuals in the following:

1. recognition and appreciation of uniquenesses within the community
2. access to resources for the betterment of the community
3. creation of new resources to address concerns absent from the existing community

Thus, education differs from schooling because it does more than just maintaining the existing social order; it is the process of transmitting values and beliefs.

The findings of this study indicate that the church community provided the children with numerous experiences related to their development as cultural beings. First of all, the church provided a spiritual foundation to the children. For most of the participants, the church played an influential role in instilling and fostering their children's belief system regarding morality and behavior. Unlike the school, the church extended its role in enriching the cultural experiences of the children as well as reinforcing positive identity. For children of participants A, E, F/G, and H, the church was essential to their identity development since these children were not a part of racially diverse schools. At the church, there was a large concentration of African American children as well as children from other cultural and racial backgrounds and the church purposefully created opportunities for interaction between children of similar and

different racial and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the church allowed these students to be engaged with parishioners who were knowledgeable and influential in addressing the needs of these children. For the most part, the church was the community with the largest concentration of African Americans assembled at one time in this specific community. The church served as an informal partner who provided a balance for these children. According to Participant E,

When we first came out, one of the things we wanted to look for was a church home, it fills the needs that the school district cannot do or accomplish. The church, particularly Black church, fills that need as far as social need, spiritual need, social interaction, relationship, guidance and curricular programming that they are not receiving in the school. It is paramount for a church, particularly if you're in a white environment.

It was stated among all participants that the church provided a balance for these children in a community with less than 1% of African Americans.

### *Overlapping*

The findings of this study also confirmed the literature regarding overlapping. "Education and schooling processes are not mutually exclusive, they can and do overlap" (Shujaa, 1994, p. 15). There are certain aspects of both concepts, schooling and education, which serve the common interest of all members of society (Shujaa, 1994). As a result, the presence of overlapping occurs. The three criteria for overlapping are as follows:

1. Foster the development of adequate skills in literacy, numeracy...that are necessary to negotiate economic self-sufficiency.

2. Instill citizenship skills based on a realistic and thorough understanding of the political system... foster critical thinking and teaching democratic values.
3. Provide historical openness of the nation, the continent, and the world, which accurately represent the contributions of all ethnic groups to the storehouse of human knowledge (Lee, Lometey, & Schujaa, 1990, p.15).

The findings of this study also revealed the presence of overlapping in both communities. Participants indicated that the church community's programs, with the assistance of a quality curriculum, cultivated these children's leadership, social, and cognitive skills. In addition, to provide balance for these children in the schools, the church constantly rewarded and reinforced their academic skills and academic progress by recognizing their academic accomplishments. The findings also indicated that children who attended schools of choice were exposed to overlapping. In these schools, school officials were committed to being culturally responsive through their curriculum and teaching methods. Furthermore, the school was not only involved academically, but the school was also involved in preparing individuals for recognizing and understanding differences.

#### Community Environment/Interactions

Scholars Purkey and Schmidt (1990) suggest that the success of individuals is heavily dependent on their environment. *Invitational Theory* contends that inviting climates are predicated upon feelings of care, respect and trust. The success of the climate is dependent upon how intentional individuals are about creating and maintaining meaningful relationships. As a result, the concept of care seemed to be a large focus in this study.

Clearly, the involvement of these children in both communities presented them with mixed experiences. When referring to the Oyserman study (2003), Glenn discusses findings regarding minority students and how their ethnicity shapes their self-concept. The complexity of racial self-concept can be identified by four categories. Two of these categories are important to this study – dual identity and minority identity. Dual identity is an optimistic, acculturation position in which students have positive beliefs both about their own ethnic group and about their membership in the larger society. On the other hand, minority identity combines positive beliefs about the student’s ethnic group with skepticism towards the larger society (Glenn, 2003, p.1). In this study, there was a mixture of both groups. Dual identity was identified by the students who were raised in or adjusted well to areas like Winter Range. The minority identity was more common to outsiders or children who moved into the area, particularly from an all black setting. However, the adjustment of these individuals in both communities was dependent upon the climate of the community.

Ironically, the findings of this study cause individuals to start reevaluating their definition of care. Is it possible for care to be present in struggles? In Gilligan’s (1982) work, care is based upon needs and response. Care urges individuals to not only be carers but also demonstrate the principles of care with others. Care is not solely an individual trait; it is based upon relationships (Gilligan, 1982).

Noddings (1994), in her work, bases care upon four major components. *Modeling*, the first component, enables the individual to not only care, but show others how to care through the development of relationships. *Dialogue*, the second component, allows individuals to exchange ideas through open-ended conversations. These conversations

allow individuals within the community to provide rationale for their actions and stay connected with each other. Through *Practice*, the third component, individuals are given the opportunity to develop and apply skills needed in making significant contributions to society. Finally, *Confirmation*, the fourth component, is the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. When encouragement occurs, individuals contribute to the development of others, and the presence of care is manifested within the community. The findings of the study, involving both communities, were consistent with the literature review regarding invitational theory and communities of care.

### *School*

*School choice.* School choice played a very important role in this study. Many of the participants indicated that their children's neighborhood schools were not inviting. Consequently, to ensure the success of their children in school, participants B, C, D, E, J, K, and L utilized the school choice policy. Parents indicated that if this policy was not in effect, they would have chosen private schools. Even though participant L utilized this policy, she still believed that school choice didn't make a difference since the area was still predominately white. Unlike the initial purposes for school choice – academic opportunities – these participants wanted to locate schools that were culturally sensitive. Even though these schools did not have a racially diverse faculty, participants indicated that the intent toward cultural sensitivity and care was present. Because of this intent, teachers made an attempt to plan culturally reflective lessons, acknowledge differences and genuinely care for all students. Participants frequently remarked about the world map on the wall that highlighted students' native homelands and states. These parents wanted more than academics. They wanted school settings that would help their children

become well rounded and involved; not isolated. Therefore, many of the participants believed that the utilization of the school choice policy enabled them to search for communities that resembled communities of care. For those students who were not in schools of choice, their parents established relationships with school officials and teachers. These relationships were beneficial to all, teachers, parents, students, because the intent to care was present.

To further explain, in a study released entitled, *Time to move on*, Black and White parents were asked about the role of the school. In areas of academics, morality, both groups were even on their responses. Parents, regardless of race, believed that schools should foster students' academic skills, teach values and enforce discipline. However, when asked about the role of the school and diversity, African Americans at 60% compared to White parents at 34% agreed that it was important for their children to be a part of a diverse student body (What's important for schools, 1998). The finding of the role of the school relative to diversity is consistent with what was reported by the participants in this study, regarding the school choice findings. For some parents, the school may be ideal due to location or academics. For others, it may be the philosophy and mission.

*Clarifying expectations & misconceptions.* Another important finding was that all participants, with the exception of participant H, were explicit in having teachers aware of their expectations regarding their children. These participants were very vocal about their role regarding their children's academic success. Participants B, C, K, and L agreed that they were more determined to be heard in this community since the majority of the school employees had little if any contact with African American students. These

participants agreed that they were simply erasing any misconceptions. They felt their involvement and elimination of any misconceptions was essential to their children's success. Participant J states the following: "[Involvement] is different for each parent. I say to myself, in America, if your parents are not involved in school, you [students] will fall by the wayside." The majority of the participants agreed that they would have been very vocal regardless of the demographics of the community.

Several participants spoke about teachers forming misconceptions about their children. Conversely, two participants spoke about not wanting to be identified or labeled like the other minorities [Hispanics]. One participant states, "One of the challenges we face is that the minority population is Hispanic, and we have to be careful in making sure that our kids aren't treated like them." Another participant states, "African Americans are not a threat. It's the Latino or the Hispanic community that's the majority. . . We are only one percent." It is very ironic and worth mentioning that these parents did not want individuals to form opinions, especially stereotypical generalizations, about African Americans, yet, they made generalizations about other groups, particularly the Hispanic population.

The participants had mixed feelings regarding their children's contact with their teachers. The majority of the participants agreed that their children, for the most part, had good and caring teachers. Participants A, F/G, H and I, those participants who chose not to or couldn't utilize the school choice policy, seem to have faced more struggles since those teachers were not exposed to racially diverse populations. Participants H and I spoke of the struggles simply because they felt helpless. They came from international backgrounds where school officials were not to be questioned. In their culture, school

officials had the best interest of the children in mind. Their parents never questioned the judgment of school officials resulting in a predicament for these participants because they did not know how to address problems in the American school system. Participant H states, "I worry about my kids. For me, I grew up in a country where everything was Black. They have never said anything negative...I don't want to hear that, obviously as a father, but, there is nothing I can do." Nevertheless, all of the participants spoke of struggles within the schools.

*Negative experiences.* According to the participants who enrolled their children in schools of choice, many of the negative experiences that occurred at the school were influenced by factors outside of the school building. Even though many of the parents believed that their children enjoyed establishing friendships at school, many times the bonds of friendship were "loose." Many of the participants felt that lifestyles and beliefs at the homes of their children's peers were inconsistent with the philosophy of the school. That is, negative interactions occurring for the children of color at school, were often the result of values and beliefs expressed in the homes of white peers. However, school officials constantly defended white parents by saying, "I don't think they are like that." These participants strongly believed that these children, especially at the elementary level, were too young to form negative opinions and attitudes about race and cultural differences. The findings indicate that schools of choice tried to be intentionally and embracing; however, according to the participants who enrolled their children in schools of choice, many of the negative experiences came from outside the school. This revelation is crucial in understanding all of the dynamics involving the culture of a

school. One of the paradoxes is that schools work hard to improve the mission, but schools are not always able change the attitudes of the parents or other stakeholders.

This revelation leads the researcher to ponder how well the school educated parents and other community members about the mission/philosophy of the school. Was the outside community, specifically home, familiar with the philosophy of the school? Were schools strictly academic? Or did schools take for granted the expectations/understandings of other parents? Questions such as these warrant further exploration and discussion as to the impact on creating a truly diverse community.

*Overcompensation.* Overcompensation was another problem. Some parents had a difficult time in understanding how teachers were not as assertive with their children in their classes. Many of these parents believed that the teacher had to be firm and strict because they were use to authoritative leaders. “Many people of color expect authority to be earned...the authoritative person gets to become the teacher because she is an authoritarian, and she is in authority because she is the teacher” (Delpit, 1997, p. 35) As a result, many times, when disciplining or correcting these children, teachers would allow these students to have more chances than the rest of the students. Although these teachers were intentionally trying to be helpful, many of the participants felt the teachers were too lenient and their children were getting away with too much.

*Black males in predominately white settings.* Another important piece to reflect on is Black males in these predominately white settings. This study showed that male youth had more difficulty adapting than their female counterparts. Participants B and C expressed how their sons, in elementary schools, came from environments where they were more aggressive. Yet, in this area, their son’s behavior was viewed by some

teachers as violent. Also, their teachers were hesitant in disciplining these young students since they could have been labeled as potential behavior problems. High school males faced similar struggles as indicated by participants F/G, K, and L.

Dating was extremely difficult since there were few black females in the dating pool. These black males faced resentment by white male students and white parents of the females they attempted to date. Moreover, these young men were constantly battling the stereotypical roles of thugs, rappers, drug dealers, and athletes typically portrayed in the media. Consequently, they struggled with the dichotomy of demonstrating their true nature or identity through positive interactions and the tearing down of the typical negative stereotypes when the expectation was for them to live up to the “tough guy” image.

#### *Church*

Regarding the literature on religious communities, community theories, and racial identity development, the findings of this section were found to be consistent with the literature review.

*Network.* The church, according to the participants, served as an informal network for the students. First of all, the church, as expressed by one of the participants, was a place where “students could hang out and be themselves.” The church was the only place in this community where these students could be understood. There was no need to be constantly explaining expressions, cultural fashions and fads because everyone understood. The church seemed to understand and fill in the missing needs of the students in this area. For that reason, the church filled in the gap and provided a balance for these students.

*Meaningful experiences.* The church reinforced expectations and provided meaningful experiences. Participants B, C, and D, single mothers, and participant E expressed how individuals in the church were eager to assist families in need. Individuals within the church usually stepped in by helping with babysitting, counseling, and visiting when participants were missed from the church. Other participants, K and L, stated how the church had many parishioners who were educated and successful. In return, these parishioners supported programs and activities that would reinforce the positive expectations of the parents. Participant A states, “There were certain things that were going to be expected of him...Unlike the school, he was dealing with people who knew how to deal with him and understand him better.” Other participants commented on how members of the church, adults and children, served as positive role models and mentors for their children. Participants D and I cited examples of how older children provided assistance. When speaking of her daughter, participant D states, “She has an opportunity to find African American role models, besides her mom. She can talk to them about things. There are teenagers who look out for her, that’s the village approach. It takes the whole village, and the church is our village.” As a result, meaningful relationships were established throughout the church. These relationships, unlike relationships established at school, were sustaining. These relationships, for both participants and children, would extend beyond this area. Even after leaving the area, as indicated by some participants, there was still an interest in maintaining friendships established within the church.

*Celebrations.* The church recognized and celebrated cultural differences. The church served as a cultural haven for these students because they were able to interact with children of the same ethnicity. Yet, the church seemed to attract children from other

races, nationalities, and ethnicity. Participants H, I, and J expressed how this phenomenon served as a meaningful tool in broadening their children's experiences. When asked how the church could be so successful in becoming culturally diverse, one participant stated, "It is because they want to be there; they are not forced."

#### Care and the Community

Finally, the findings reveal that the sustainability of a caring community is heavily dependent upon the involvement of all – parents, teachers, parishioners, and students. In both communities, these children were engaged with individuals who wanted to make a difference. The most note-worthy difference between the two communities was that the church actively absorbed the total community into its mission/philosophy. Despite the differences between the two communities, their influences were monumental in the development of these children, socially and academically. Individuals, within both communities and within varying degrees, attempted to provide these students with environments that were nurturing and enriching. In return, these students were afforded the opportunity to succeed and become productive.

#### Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to share the parental perceptions regarding African American children experiences in church and school settings, located within predominately white communities. From these narratives, the researcher was able to develop recommendations. These recommendations are beneficial to all stakeholders involved in "educating" African American children in predominately white communities.

1. Schools should establish relationships with entities that are committed to working with diverse populations. Establish groups that would encourage

individuals to become culturally reflective. Becoming involved leads to the creation of new ideas and programs that highlight cultural diversity.

2. School officials and educators need to be aware of issues faced by parents with international backgrounds. Many of these parents have a different understanding of their role regarding parent-school relationships.
3. Form partnerships with entities who work with diverse settings. Businesses need to establish a working relationship with schools and community organizations that work with culturally diverse populations. With the expansion of big businesses into territories that may not be culturally reflective, it would be profitable for these businesses to invest in finding ways to help families make their transitions. As indicated in the interviews, the findings reveal that employees may not be willing to sacrifice financial and economic gains for the overall well being of their families.
4. A panel of individuals from both communities should be formed to discuss ways in which both communities can provide meaningful experiences for students of color in predominately white communities.
5. Churches should develop programs that that will meet the needs of males, particularly African Americans.
6. Individuals from churches, particular in areas like Winter Range, should become more involved in mentoring and volunteering programs in schools. These exchanges are helpful in developing meaningful relationships as well as discrediting stereotypes.

7. School districts should recruit a diverse teacher workforce. School districts should also help teachers to become more sensitive to the needs of all children by providing more outreach programs and in-services.
8. Schools should embrace differences and find ways to make a difference for diversity that exists within its student population.

#### Considerations for Future Research

As a result of this study, several recommendations are made regarding future research about students of color in predominately white communities. The following recommendations are suggested for future research.

1. This study revealed that African American males face difficulty in predominately white communities. A quantitative study should be conducted to understand the experiences of African American children in predominately white communities.
2. This study dealt with parental perceptions regarding their children's experiences in school and church settings located within predominately white communities. A study should examine the perceptions of teachers in predominately white communities regarding their teaching experiences with African American children.
3. This study dealt with parents. A similar study should be conducted to explore the perceptions of children regarding their experiences in various settings located within predominately white communities.

4. This study dealt with parents of African American students. A similar study should be conducted with other parents of color to determine if they found their children's school to be intentional and inviting.

#### Lessons to the Community

At the close of one interview, a participant asked, "What are you going to do with this information?" I thought for a brief minute, and I immediately took out the recorder, and asked her, "What would you like to happen?" From then on, all of the participants, because of her insight, began to leave messages to either or both of the communities. Hence, the following paragraphs are messages to school and church communities regarding efforts on diversity and child development.

#### *Participant A*

You know, I think Winter Range and its school district are kind of in the infancy. They can choose to carry on and grow and expand. I don't think they will have a choice because more and more people of color are starting to come in.

#### *Participant B*

It [city] is a wonderful community to raise a family but there are some shortcomings in the community when it comes to cultural awareness. The schools are the same. They need to do more cultural awareness trainings. The teachers in the community need to understand that when black kids come into the school they are going to be different. I think as a whole that schools need to be aware of things that are probably going on within their confines that are not so positive. They need to do some type of piece about racism. Its meanings and harms-just like you teach everything else. These kids need to know. They are coming to school and they are saying things that are not so nice that maybe they heard their parents say. They can't understand that's damaging. That hurts. Talking about racism and bringing it into a part of the fabric of the school.

The church has been a beacon while we're here. This was the one constant that we had that reminded us of home. It was one welcoming factor. I don't know what else the church could do anymore than what it's doing to make people feel welcome or make people feel at home. I have had a great experience with the church.

*Participant C*

I guess to both of them try to reach out to the community. Try to draw people in so that they can have a good experience. For the school, maybe reach out to people that aren't from the area. For the church, continue to reach out to people that aren't in the area so that they can help their population, not only grow but help to have people learn and have a good experience while they are in Winter Range.

*Participant D*

I would say for an African American child raised in a predominately white area or a predominately white school district, I would say to that parent get your child involved in something that is culturally based. Become involved.

*Participant E*

The message would be that the church plays a significant role in the overall development not only children, but teenagers, adults in any community. But, it plays an even higher role when it comes to African American children in predominately white areas. The church, particularly black church, fills that need as far as social need, spiritual need, social interaction, relationship, guidance and programming that they are not receiving in the school. It is paramount for a church, particularly if you're in a white environment.

*Participants F/G*

The most important thing for many of us is not what happens to us but how we react to what happens. What I mean by that is, as African Americans, I'm not expecting to go anywhere and be prejudice free, that's unrealistic. They [children] need to understand that is not going to happen. When they leave here and go to college, there is going to be a whole group of people. They need to be aware that they are black, and be proud of who they are. They need to understand that everybody is not going to accept that. Don't be turned off by that. Don't let that stop them from accomplishing their dream. Be well balanced –spiritually and academically.

I would agree with everything 'John' said. Just to add to that people operate out of what they know. I'd like to believe if people knew better they would do better. Knowledge is power. It is our responsibility to let our kids know regardless of what anybody tells them, you can do, and you can be whatever you want to be. It is not about how smart you are but how determined you are. Just beat the odds.

*Participant H*

Be there for your kids. Talk to your kids, and see if they can tell you something. Find a church like I did, and other groups that they can feel apart of.

*Participant I*

When you have children in the minority, it doesn't matter, if its color, physical ability, level or language, they need to pay careful attention to these children, especially young children. They may not have the skills to break these barriers to enter into the majority. So I would say, they [teachers] should look and see what is happening and talk to them, to the class, about acceptance and embracing differences. Do some of that bridging. Watch what is happening with that child, and if that child is being isolated. I know, academically, my child is doing well. Unfortunately, she is experiencing a poor social environment. It kills me and hurts me like a knife to my stomach to hear her talk about it.

[To the church], I would say great job with the children, and providing that environment for them. Explore what is happening with them at the schools and see how they can help them.

*Participant J*

My message would be for teachers to open your eyes and recognize the contributions of other cultures in America. Teach the truth and the whole truth to the students.

*Participant K*

Even though the school is an institution, each child is an individual. They should be treated individually. The school should serve as mentors and guides to help mold the child, not just on a school level, but also on a personal level.

Even though you [church] are teaching, you are teaching the kids about God and the word and the message that God wants us too know, and how we should live our lives according to God's word. I think in doing this you still have to be personable. You have to care about that person. Deep inside you want them to change who they are inside. You have to mold that person into the person into the person you want them to be. You telling me I should be a certain way okay, well give me this information, now what. You should help mold this person into who they should be.

*Participant L*

My message would for schools would be that although we live in a community with very little diversity that as a teacher or as a leader they need to realize they have a large impact on every child's life. They need to be open minded and understanding to different cultures. They have to be sensitive to diversity. I do not believe they have that. I just hope, I can't even say, that they can even read a book that lives them that. They have to open up their minds and hearts and be willing to accept each child for who they are regardless of their race.

[For the church], my message would be that our children are struggling to survive in this community. I would hope as Christians we would embrace them and help them, from our experiences, to be able to form. It's a love hate situation, of course. I hope we can teach them [school] to be multicultural and accepting. But in the same token, use the church family for strength to combat some of the problems in the school. Maybe we can even get to a point where we [church] can do panels and assemblies because a lot of people are ignorant just because they don't know any different.

### Conclusion

Clearly, it is safe to say that these communities influenced the beliefs and values of each individual. Instead of totally contradicting each other, these communities informally made a fit. In areas where the schools struggled, the church provided reinforcement, encouragement and resiliency. Despite their differences in terms of operation, individuals must never underestimate the influence these communities have on the development of African American children. "When schools become ineffective in communication and insensitive to cultural understanding, other communities function parallel to rather than in collaboration with the school" (Nevarez-LaTorre, 1997, p. 69). This should never happen because schools and churches, especially for African Americans, are influential in the developmental process. These institutions provide students with goals and assist students in the development of character. These institutions play a significant part in shaping the way decisions are made by introducing alternative thought that will influence behavior practices (Huett, 1998). They have a significant influence on the social as well as the academic success of students (Bowen & Richmond, 2002). As a result, one entity or individual cannot take full credit for

students' academic success (Truab, 2000). It is imperative that these communities foster an environment that embraces and encourages community connections.

Even in areas where African American students appear to "have it all," these children cannot survive without a supportive and caring culture. James Comer, the author who gave popularity to the phrase "It takes a village to raise a child," believes that individuals cannot wait for schools to solve all of society's problems (Comer, 1997). When speaking of his success, he stated, "The entire community was locked into a conspiracy to make certain that I grew up to be a responsible, contributing citizen" (Comer, 1997, p. 56).

Like Comer, these children were also locked into a conspiracy. Their survival was predicated upon the climate of the community. Despite their struggles and circumstances, these children were able to excel, survive, and learn because they had contact with individuals and communities who were intentional, attentive, inviting, and supportive. These traits were critical for developing and maintaining a community of care.

## Epilogue

As this chapter in my life comes to a close, I begin to reflect back on this dissertation, and its rich data. Throughout the process, there has been a mixture of emotions regarding the participants and the experiences of their children. These recorded experiences include many questions to be answered and lessons to be learned regarding Blacks in predominately white communities, communities, and care. As a result, I find myself, more than ever before, seeking additional answers to a study which I thought was completed after the dissertation defense.

Interestingly enough, I embarked upon this dissertation thinking that the survival of these children would be based upon their ability to connect, be affirmed and supported by individuals who were like them, Black. Furthermore, the data from this study revealed to me, from the participants' standpoint, that having a "black face" was okay; however, in this specific area, the participants believed that their children needed more than just blackness. They felt that their presence, within this community, was a learning experience. They wanted their children well rounded and a part of a caring environment. Thus, I was forced to re-frame my thinking from this research focusing specifically on "blackness" to understanding care.

Throughout this study, overwhelmingly, care and intent were the essence of their survival and my themes. Frequently, I wrestled with defining care and questioning the presence of care in struggles. Eventually, I realized that I had to re-define my definition of care. Only then, was I able to understand that these participants were more concerned about their children being a part of a setting where their children would be "cared" for as

well as care for others. Thus, care in this study was more than a feeling. Care was responsive and present in both communities.

In those schools where care was present, I commend the teachers and school officials. Despite their struggles, these individuals were appreciated by the participants because they were intentional. Not only were they not afraid to show their struggles, but they also asked for help from the participants. They demonstrated the essence of care throughout their lessons, their classes, and the school.

As I think about the church, I think about the uniqueness of its role. This study allows us to see the religious community deal with a different type of at-riskness. Unlike the other studies involving the religious community, these children are not on drugs, pregnant, and disorderly. Here, we see children of educated middle-class families who, for the most part, face isolation because of their color. Thus, the church helped these individuals by uniting them with other individuals of the same race as well as introducing these individuals to a plethora of cultures.

Also, I leave this study thinking about the third theme, *At What Cost?* Throughout my time in this region, I frequently heard individuals of the dominant culture refer to this area as the “area of choice.” Even many participants indicated that this specific area was safe, academically excellent, and family-oriented. Yet, since the completion of this study, five of the twelve participants have relocated to other communities. These participants have left due to graduation or for jobs in more diverse areas. Others, throughout the study, expressed concerns about relocating to more diverse areas when their children get older. These actions leave me with mixed emotions, and I ask, “Choice for whom?” It is interesting that so many individuals of color will come to this area, become invested with

a good education and meaningful experiences; yet, once these same individuals receive what they need, they leave the community for communities with more diversity. This puzzles me because how will the community become a better place if everyone retreats. I wonder if areas, like this specific one, can understand the effects of retreat, in the long run. When individuals retreat, despite the instant and spontaneous growth now, ideas, dialogue, and meaningful experiences are lost, and eventually the area suffers due to a homogeneous system of ideas and beliefs.

Finally, I commend those who stay and those who show interest in investing in a community of care. These individuals must be willing to reexamine the culture of these communities. I am aware of the difficulties involved in “defining” community. This process is so complex because everyone has their own idea and concept about the definition and the goals of the community. However, in today’s society, it is imperative that all communities are involved in the success and development of our children. Through dialogue and re-examination, all constituents (parents, school officials, parishioners, and children) are able to play an important role in developing and shaping existing beliefs of the community. When this occurs, there is a sense of buy-in and the benefits are enormous.

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## APPENDIXES



School of Education  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588

500 West Prospect Rd.  
Apt. 13-L  
Fort Collins, Co 80526

February 17, 2003

Dear Potential Participant,

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research project entitled "Parental Perceptions regarding the experiences of African American children in a community of choice (church) and communities of policy (schools)." The focus of this study is to explore the perceptions of parents of African American children, living within predominately white communities, regarding their children's experiences in local schools and a specific religious community. Data will be collected through open-ended interviews. If more information is needed, if necessary, a brief telephone follow-up interview will be scheduled.

If you chose to participate in this study, I will conduct an audiotape interview with you for no more than an hour to an hour and a half. These interviews can be scheduled, at your convenience, in your home, at work or a place where you will feel comfortable discussing this project. After the interview, you will be given a summary to verify that I have captured the essence of your thoughts. A brief follow-up interview may be scheduled if questions arise. As a participant you are providing a significant contribution to research in the area of black families in predominately white communities. Also, your participation in this study helps to supply additional information regarding parental perceptions and community.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. Your name and specific locations will be given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect your identity.

If you are interested in participating, please sign the enclosed form.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at (970) 491-0959 or [kcoleman@lamar.colostate.edu](mailto:kcoleman@lamar.colostate.edu) or Ann Foster, Ed.D at (970) 491-3168 or [annf@psd.k12.co.us](mailto:annf@psd.k12.co.us).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

  
Kieran D. Coleman

Doctoral candidate, Colorado State University

## **INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

You are being invited to participate in a research project entitled: Parental Perceptions regarding the experiences of African American children in a community of choice (church) and communities of policy (schools). This project is being conducted by Kieran D. Coleman, a graduate student at Colorado State University's School of Education, Fort Collins, Colorado, telephone (970) 491-0959. This project is being conducted under the direction of Ann Foster, Ed.D., School of Education, Colorado State University, telephone (970) 491-3168. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of parents of African American children in predominately white communities regarding their children's experiences in two important communities, church and school.

The primary source of data for this research will be participant interviews. These audio-taped interviews will be structured and last approximately from one hour to one hour and a half. These interviews can be scheduled, at your convenience, in your home, at work or a place where you will feel comfortable discussing this project. After the interview, you may be contacted for a brief interview, approximately thirty minutes, for follow-up questions. These questions will assist in clarifying previous questions or statements. The formal interviews will be transcribed and recorded by the researcher. The researcher will allow you the opportunity to review and make changes to the transcriptions. These transcriptions will be kept in the principal investigator's possession, in a locked filing cabinet.

The only known risk involved with this study is that there are a small percentage of black families located within the Northern Front Range Area. However, the researcher will take reasonable safeguards to minimize the participant's confidentiality as well as minimize any unknown potential risks. There are no known immediate benefits for you for participating in this study, except perhaps having the opportunity to reflect on your experiences through a structured interview.

A list may be developed for managing data during data collection. However, your identity and specific locations will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. At the completion of this study, this list will be destroyed by the researcher. Your identity as well as your child/children's school and church will not be used in the write up of this study.

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about your rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at (970) 491-1563.

Page 1 of 2 Subjects initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing   2   pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness to signature (project staff)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Page   2   of   2   Subject initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

May 23, 2003

Dear Participants,

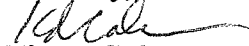
Thank you so much for your participation in my study. This memo is just to confirm the objectives of the interview.

- Child/children experiences in school and church
- Your (parent) experiences as a child in either or both environments as a child
- Your (parents) interactions with the school/ church community
- Your lessons to the community

Recently, I have received the transcripts and I am (qualitative) analyzing the data. If you are interested in the findings from the data process, you may contact me through email, and I would be happy to share the themes with you.

Again, thank you so much for your contributions to this study.

Sincerely,



Kieran Coleman

[kcoleman@lamar.colostate.edu](mailto:kcoleman@lamar.colostate.edu)