

PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GRANDMOTHERS AS PRIMARY  
CAREGIVERS: INFORMALLY EDUCATING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN  
TO PROMOTE SCHOOL SUCCESS

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## DEDICATION

To my family and friends, thank you for your love, patience, understanding, and especially your encouragement.

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I want to thank my husband for being my “kickstand” and supporting me through this journey with its winding roads, hills, and slopes. It is a true blessing to have you by my side with your honest feedback and encouragement when you know I need it most. Thank you most importantly for your patience.

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## ABSTRACT

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### PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GRANDMOTHERS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS: INFORMALLY EDUCATING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN TO PROMOTE SCHOOL SUCCESS

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American primary caregiver grandmothers about informally educating their grandchildren to promote school success. Attention was focused on the role the African American primary caregiver grandmother plays in promoting the school success of her grandchild at home. The study also identifies what support systems and or resources the African American grandmother caregiver utilizes to promote the school success of her grandchildren at home and what support systems or resources may be needed to support school success at home. The sample consisted of 10 African American grandmothers that were the primary caregivers of their grandchildren between the ages of 4 and 8. The researcher conducted an open-ended interview with the participants to elicit their experiences and perceptions about informally educating their grandchild at home to promote school success. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire before the one-on-one interview and two post interview questions following the interview. The analysis of the data revealed six themes: 1) *Provide Structure*; 2) *Role Model*; 3) *Provide Educational Opportunities*; 4) *Assistance with Homework*; 5) *Utilized Services*;

6) *Needed Services*. This study found that the African American grandmother played a significant role in the lives of the grandchildren in their care by providing a consistent and safe home environment in which their grandchildren had opportunities to reinforce the skills they learned at school and by modeling morals and values. The participants utilized services provided by the school and the community, but felt there were additional services that could be provided to assist in educating their grandchild at home. The findings of the study supported that learning occurs through observation, experiences can structure the decisions made in life, and environment can aid in positive life experiences.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In many cultures, grandparents are considered the support system that keeps the family unit together (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). In order to keep families together, grandparents are providing emotional, financial, and physical support to not only their children, but their grandchildren. One major system of support is that of the primary caregiver. Children in are being raised by grandparents on a wide scale and grandparents are now assuming the role of being their grandchildren's first teacher (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). As the first teacher, grandparents are faced with considerations of how they can incorporate at home activities to promote school success for the grandchildren in their care. From early in a child's development, variables such as teaching children basic literacy skills, promoting play, and holding high expectations are linked to improving academic achievement (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996). With grandchildren in their care, grandparents have become responsible for considering how they will include these variables in their grandparenting practices.

As family structures in the United States continue to diversify, caregiver-child relationships have become increasingly complex. One such caregiver-child relationship that has grown substantially in the last 20 years is grandparents serving as primary caregivers for their grandchildren (Dolbin-MacNab & Keily, 2007). The number of grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren has steadily increased in the United States. Since 1990 the fastest growing type of grandparent-headed household is one in which the grandparents assume primary care responsibilities for their

grandchildren in the absence of the grandchild's parents (Bryson, 2001). There are 4.9 million children under the age of 18 who live in grandparent-headed households and according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) that is an increase from 4.5 million living in grandparent-headed households 10 years ago. Of that number, 2.1 million are being raised solely by grandparents, without the presence of the biological parents and thirty-eight percent are African Americans, which is a disproportionate representation (Gibson, 2005). Widespread problems associated with the parents of the grandchildren is the major reason for this increase in the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren. The increasing fragility of family arrangements is reflected in increased rates of divorce, prison, drug abuse, the decreased availability of parents for child care, and a greater demand of women in the workplace and in military deployments (Williams, 2011).

As grandparents are becoming responsible for parenting their grandchildren, they are faced with life changing circumstances. One important life activity that is often affected is the grandchildren's emotional, social and educational functioning (Edwards, 2006). In the past, grandparents generally were expected to support extracurricular activities and were seen as emergency contacts, whereas parents were viewed as the students' primary caretakers. One of the more common areas that grandparents raising grandchildren must suddenly become responsible for is supporting the school success of their grandchildren at home (Waldrop & Webber, 2001). Research over the last two decades has documented the importance of the school-home interface between parent involvement and student achievement (Epstein, 1995). With the frequency of grandparents raising their grandchildren, it is critical for there to be a school-home

interface between grandparent involvement and student achievement. The importance of navigating this system is vital, given the potential impact the school-home interface may have on grandparents as well as grandchildren (Newsome & Kelly, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2006) declared that families need positive support to promote effective parenting for their children. Parents and guardians, which may include grandparents, are children's first teachers and the promotion of effective care helps to foster the development of basic skills, healthy behavior, and moral judgment (NASP, 2006). Caregiver interactions with their children prior to school enrollment promotes school readiness and aids in future academic success (Mehaffie & Fraser, 2007). As grandparents take on the role as primary caregivers, they are playing an important role in their grandchild's education. Despite the positive advantages of having parents participate in the educational endeavors of their own children, grandparents may be ambivalent about assuming this role in school settings (Newsome & Kelly, 2004). Grandparents may not be able to assist the grandchildren with some or all of their school requirements due to being out of school for a long time and may be unaware of new techniques and computer programs that can assist the school-age child (Williams, 2011). The lack of communication between teachers and grandparent caregivers may lead to difficulties of children in grandparent-headed households (2011).

Grandparents' feelings about being placed in a parental role depend on their life circumstances, the time and effort they must spend in the caretaking process, kinds of support, and levels of responsibility and authority exercised (Kornhaber, 1996). Although

raising a grandchild full-time is time-consuming, costly, fatiguing, and often burdensome, most grandparents recognize its life-giving and energizing benefits (Burton, 1992).

Research has documented that membership in informal social support networks acts as a buffer to the myriad of challenges confronted by African American grandparents raising grandchildren during challenging times (Musil, Schrader, & Mutikani, 2000).

Grandparents may lack role models and sources of information for dealing with the school and may feel overwhelmed with the logistical details of dealing with various types of services in Pre-K -12 settings (Pelt, 2001). These new responsibilities and adversities provide grandparents raising grandchildren with an opportunity to reenact their role as parent and primary care provider (Cox, 2000) and possibly receive the needed support. More compelling is that grandparents raising grandchildren can bring practical wisdom to their new roles and they can draw on their previous life experiences as a parent the second time around (Newsome & Kelly, 2004).

### **Significance of the Problem**

As African American grandmothers increasingly become primary caregivers to their grandchildren, their experiences in parenting a “second time around” emerge as an interesting, yet underdeveloped topic (Gibson, 2005). Of particular interest is how they parent grandchildren to become productive adults (Gibson), with educational support and experiences playing an important role. When grandparents assume caregiving responsibilities, they frequently inherit significant parenting challenges, one of which is the education of their grandchildren (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). Wang and Marcotte (2007)

concluded from their research that grandmothers who raise their grandchildren are more likely to be female, poor, and African American.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the African American grandmother primary caregivers' perspective of the role she plays in promoting the school success of her grandchildren at home. The study also identifies what support systems and or resources the African American caregiver grandmother utilizes to promote the school success of her grandchildren at home and what support systems or resources may be needed based on the grandmothers' perspective to support school success at home. The support systems and resources that are used and needed by the caregivers will likely enhance school satisfaction for the grandchildren and quality of life for the grandchild and grandparent (Edwards & Ray, 2008). The African American grandmother primary caregivers' perspective is critical to understanding this increasing phenomenon. Due to the increase of African American grandmothers raising their young grandchildren in the United States, all stakeholders, including family members, educators, communities and community leaders are called to be aware of the support systems that are being used by the caregivers and what systems may need to be in place to continue to support African American grandmothers.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theories that shape this study are Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), Bengston's and Allen's Life Course Perspective (1993), and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Social Learning Theory will be the primary framework, Life



Course Perspective the secondary, and Ecological Systems Theory will be the tertiary theoretical framework. Bandura's (1969) theory is mainly concerned with how children and adults operate cognitively on their social experiences and with how these cognitive operations then come to influence their behavior and development. Bengston's and Allen's theory looks at how a person's life and experiences impact the decisions they make in life overtime (Elder, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's approach is based on empowering families through understanding their strengths and needs (Swick & Williams, 2006).

### **Social Learning Theory**

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) states that individuals learn within a social context if facilitated through modeling and observational learning. This learning theory posits that a child's environment shapes his or her learning, behavior and development. According to Bandura (1977), most human behavior is learned through modeling or imitating certain behavior, particularly when the behavior is perceived to be successful, and this type of learning is known as observational learning. The Social Learning Theory proposes that observational learning can occur in relation to three models.

- A live model is when an actual person is demonstrating the desired behavior (Bandura, 2011).
- Verbal instruction takes place when an individual describes the desired behavior in detail, and instructs the participant in how to engage in the behavior (Bandura, et al., 2011).

- Symbolic is when modeling occurs by means of the media, including movies, television, Internet, literature, and radio. This type of modeling involves a real or fictional character demonstrating the behavior (Bandura, et al., 2011).

### **Life Course Perspective**

Bengston's and Allen's Life Course Perspective (1993) emphasizes the temporal and social contexts that shape grandparents' current parenting experiences. It is a multidisciplinary paradigm for the study of people's lives, structural contexts, and social change. Aging and developmental change, therefore, are continuous processes that are experienced throughout life (Bengston & Allen, 1993). As such, the life course reflects the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography and development within which the study of family life and social change can ensue (Elder, 1998). Specifically, grandparents' second parenting experiences are likely to be shaped by their own aging, sociostructural location, previous parenting experiences, and historical influences on appropriate parenting behavior (Elder, 1998).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory looks at the child's environment in terms of its quality and context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It attempts to explain the importance of support, guidance and structure in one's society and its impact on an individual's knowledge, development and competence. The ecological theory is used to describe the development of children by looking at the environmental factors and external

influences that aid in the positive outcome of children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explicates that the world of the child consists of five systems of interaction: (1) Microsystem, (2) Mesosystem, (3) Exosystem, (4) Macrosystem, and (5) Chronosystem. Each system depends on the contextual nature of the person's life and offers an ever growing diversity of options and sources of growth (Swick & Williams, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's theoretical position is also based on the idea of empowering families through understanding their strengths and needs (Swick & Williams).

### **Research Questions**

The goal of qualitative research is to understand the experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge of people (Patton, 2002). Patton describes qualitative research as detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience. In order to gain a better understanding of the African American caregiver grandmother's perspective, the study was guided by the following two questions:

1. What roles does the African American primary caregiver grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?
2. What support does the African American primary caregiver grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?

## Definitions of Key Terms

Specific terms and their contextual meanings particular to this study are defined to accurately understand the study:

*Primary caregiver* is defined as the person who is primarily responsible for looking after someone's health, safety and comfort. Ruiz and Zhu (2004) define primary caregiver as a steady and supportive influence that is a source of strength and communicator of family values. The African-American grandmother is responsible for sharing values and patterns that are essential to the survival, growth and development of the children in her care (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004).

*Parental involvement* is defined as the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to schooling and their child's life. According to Seginer (2006), the phrase parent involvement captures an assortment of parental practices, such as parents' expectations of their children's academic success and the behaviors parents employ at home to increase their children's learning.

*Grandparenting* is defined as having a direct or clear role in relation to the rearing, care and nurturing of the children of their children. Kornhaber (2002) identifies the grandparenting role as ever changing and is determined by the circumstance or situation the grandparent finds themselves in when rearing their grandchildren. The grandparenting roles include ancestor, buddy, hero, historian, mentor, nurturer, spiritual guide, teacher, student and wizard (Kornhaber).

*Informal education* is defined as supporting the development of cognitive skills of young children through the use of appropriate activities. Alexander & Entwisle (1996) define informal education as activities where parents teach basic literacy skills, promote play and hold high expectations for their children that are linked to improving academic achievement.

*Developmentally appropriate activities* are defined as activities that develop stronger verbal skills, greater mastery of basic skills, including receptive, expressive, and written communication skills; daily living skills; interpersonal relationship and social skills; and gross and fine motor skills (NAEYC, 2009).

*School success* is defined as achievement in regards to school attitude, school behaviors, and school performance (Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007). School attitude refers to students being motivated to learn and taking responsibility for their role in the level of success. School behavior means that students are engaged in the learning process, attend school on a regular basis, and have positive study habits. School performance is successful when grades are at a high achievement level, they are mastering subject, and have high performance on assessments.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study only included African American grandmothers who were currently the primary caregivers for their grandchildren between the ages of four and eight years old. The researcher selected this criteria in order to learn more about the perspectives of African American grandmothers who are the informally supporting education of their

grandchildren between the ages of 4-8 in their care to promote school success. The second delimitation includes the recruitment of participants from the North Texas area only. The researcher lives in the same region of Texas and this allowed for more flexibility in scheduling, conducting interviews and following up with participants.

### **Summary and Research Expectations**

This chapter introduces a qualitative research study that explored African American grandmothers' perspectives of informally supporting education of the grandchildren in their care to promote school success. Theoretical frameworks that were used in this study are Social Learning Theory, Life Course Perspective, and Ecological Systems Theory. Definitions of terms used throughout the study will give a clear understanding of their context in this particular study. Two research questions guided the researcher in understanding the African American primary caregiver grandmothers perspectives' about the tools they use to promote school success at home and the support they receive and would like to receive to ensure school success for their grandchildren.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

A review of related literature containing research conducted on grandparents raising grandchildren is presented in this chapter. Research has been conducted on grandparents raising their grandchildren and the impact that it has on both the caregiver and grandchild. Silverstein (2007) maintains that the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren produces benefits to grandparents, the grandchildren they are caring for, as well as society at large. There has also been research conducted on the factors that influence the ability of grandparents to raise their grandchildren and to support their academic success through the use of informal education. According to Edwards and Ray (2008), there are conflicting study findings in regards to the academic success of students raised by their grandparents. Some investigations show children raised by grandparents function similarly in school when compared to their peers (Solomon & Marx, 1995) while other studies indicate children raised by grandparents experience high rates of problems in school (Edwards, 2006; Minkler & Roe, 1996). This literature review covers the history of grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States as well as the reasons for grandparents deciding to raise their children's children. Literature is also presented on the challenges faced by the caregivers, grandparent and grandchild relationships, and grandparent involvement in the lives of their grandchildren. This chapter concludes with the educational implications of grandparents raising grandchildren

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

Three theories that shape this study are Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Bengtson's and Allen's Life Course Perspective, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory. Social learning theory states behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. A strong sense of parental or caregiver efficacy yields dividends not only in emotional well-being and quality of caretaking but also in shaping children's developmental trajectories (Bandura, Caprara, & Barbarnelli, 2011). Life Course Perspective looks at how chronological age, relationships, common life transitions, and social change shape people's lives from birth to death (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). The characteristics of the people and the environment they live in also plays a part in the life decisions they make. The Life Course Perspective places an emphasis on intergenerational relationships and the interdependence of lives, which occurs during the phenomenon of grandparents caring for their grandchildren. The Ecological Systems Theory adds insight about the role environment plays in the overall development of grandchildren reared by their grandparents.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the primary framework for this study, states that people learn from observing the behaviors and attitudes of those around them (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. This theory explains that human behavior occurs through continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. New learning



can take place from watching others and reciprocating what was seen. Caregivers can build their children's sense of intellectual efficacy and aspirations, which, in turn, contribute to children's social relations, emotional well-being, academic development, and career choice and development (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). According to Bandura (1997), caregivers with high efficacy are strong advocates for their children in interactions with social institutions that affect their children's development during the formative period of their lives.

The social learning theory is based on three concepts of learning: learning through observation, mental states are critical to learning, and learning alone will not necessarily lead to changes in behavior (Bandura, 1977). Learning through observation occurs when children learn and imitate behaviors they have observed in other people. For observation to take place, children are in need of a live model where an individual is acting out and demonstrating the new learning, a verbal instructional model that involves a clear explanation of the new learning, and a symbolic model where real or fictional characters are representing new learning and or behaviors. The second core concept, mental states, posits that environmental reinforcement is important along with intrinsic reinforcement and having internal rewards and a sense of accomplishment. The final core concept states that individuals can learn new information but may not demonstrate new behaviors. Bandura's theory ultimately identifies that certain steps must be followed for social learning to take place. In order to learn, the individual must pay attention, retain and store the new learning for a later time, reproduce and perform the behavior, and the individual must be motivated to perform the behavior.

Grandparents model new learning on a daily basis through normal routines and behaviors. For the purpose of this qualitative study, it will be important to understand the role that Bandura's Social Learning Theory may play in the lives of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Grandparents are identified as attachment figures because they provide physical and emotional care to their grandchildren (Edwards & Sweeney, 2007). Grandparents should serve as a secure base for the grandchildren they rear (Poehlmann, 2003) and can be taught to provide relevant schooling assistance to their grandchildren. In order to provide schooling assistance, there are skills that the grandparents can model, such as cooperation and constructive competition, that may lead to the formation of social networks and social support (Hartup, 1989).

### **Life Course Perspective**

Bengston and Allen developed the life course perspective, the secondary framework for this study, in 1993 to emphasize the importance of time in the meaning on human development and family life. The life course perspective emphasizes the temporal and social contexts that shape grandparents' current parenting experiences (Bengston & Allen, 1993). The temporal and social contexts are best identified as what is occurring in the grandparent's present life, interactions within the world, and the relationships that they have developed in their lives. It is a study of people's lives and experiences, how their experiences have structured the decisions in their lives and how these life decisions have changed from one period of their life to the next (Bengston & Allen, 1993). Aging and developmental change, therefore, are continuous processes that are experienced throughout life. As such, the life course reflects the intersection of social and historical

factors with personal biography and development within which the study of family life and social change can ensue (Elder, 1998). Specifically, grandparents' second parenting experiences are likely to be shaped by their own aging, sociostructural location, previous parenting experiences, and historical influences on appropriate parenting behavior (Elder, 1998). In terms of a grandparent's sociostructural location, the society or community in which they have built relationships with others plays a role in how they parent their grandchildren.

When looking at historical time and the life course of African American grandparents, research has documented how they have developed effective internal and external coping capacities, resiliency, and adaptability to function at various ages and points in their life course and role positions (Cox, 2000). African-American grandparents have lived marginalized lives throughout their life course and have become vital resources to their families and society (Gibson, 2005). The African American grandparents raising grandchildren's psychological well-being is enhanced knowing that they are able to nurture and provide care to their grandchildren and are able to keep their families intact (Moore & Miller, 2007).

There are a number of research studies that emphasize the temporal and social contexts that shape grandparents' current parenting experiences, but do not identify the life course perspective as a framework for the study. Gibson (2005) wanted to gain insight into the intergenerational parenting of 17 African American grandmothers. The qualitative study found that grandmothers shaped their parenting experiences by

maintaining effective communication, taking a strong role in the educational process, providing socioemotional support, and recognizing the children's feelings about the absence of the biological parents. Gerard, Landry-Meyer, and Roe (2006) examined the potential moderating role of social support in the life of the grandparent caregiver in their quantitative study. In the investigation of 133 grandparents, their findings suggested the importance of professional assistance and community services to support the grandparents in regards to raising their grandchildren.

Using the life course perspective for her research, Dolbin-MacNab (2006) wanted to learn how grandmothers compared parenting their grandchildren to parenting their children. The results of her qualitative analysis indicated that grandmothers perceived themselves as wiser, more relaxed, and more involved with their grandchildren. The study also concluded that it is possible to see that the meanings and feelings grandparents associate with their parenting responsibilities can have important implications for their personal well-being and parenting effectiveness

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological Systems Theory, a tertiary framework for this study, to explain how a child's environment is segmented into different layers and how each of these layers impacts their development. This theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) asserts that children influence and are influenced by the environments in which they are embedded. Of these environments, the family is particularly influential. The key to this theory is the interactions of structures within one layer and the interaction of structures

between more than one layer (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). While the child's close relationships are crucial, there are other outside factors that impact their development. The ecological systems theory holds that we encounter different environments throughout our lifespan that may influence our behavior in varying degrees. These systems include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

**The microsystem.** According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem consists of the activities and interactions in the person's immediate surroundings. The structures inside the microsystem include the family, neighborhood or community, or childcare environments. A good example of this is with parents. In this situation the child has an influence on the parents and the parents have an influence on the child (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

**The mesosystem.** The real power of mesosystems is that they help to connect two or more systems in which child, parent and family live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There must be loving adults beyond the parents who engage in caring ways with children. Mesosystems are about being in relation with each other in ever expanding circles of triads and even more expansive relations. Without strong mesosystems families tend to fall into chaos (L'Abate, 1990).

**The exosystem.** Bronfenbrenner (2005) describes the exosystem as being, "made up of social settings that do not contain the developing person but nevertheless affect experiences in their immediate settings". The exosystem is the outer shell surrounding both the mesosystem and the microsystem. Exosystems can support both formal and

informal environments. The formal surroundings include organizations such as child welfare services and the adult's workplace. The informal part of the exosystem is that children can be affected by their parents' social networks. In so many cases exosystems bring about stress in families because children may not be attended to as they should. Their absence from a system makes it no less powerful in our lives (Garbarino, 1992).

**The macrosystem.** The macrosystem is the outside level of Bronfenbrenner's structure. This level does not contain a particular subject, rather a variety of influences such as laws, customs, resources and cultural values. The macrosystems individuals live in influence what, how, when and where they carry out our relations (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The influences (e.g. child and parents) in the inner levels of the exosystem, are affected by the support of the macrosystem. Therefore, the exosystem, mesosystem and the microsystem are all affected by the macrosystem.

**The chronosystem.** The chronosystem is the layer where changes over time impact a child's development. Bronfenbrenner believes that the ecological system is an active system and is constantly developing overtime. The size of an individual's microsystem changes every time he or she obtains or lets go of life roles or surroundings. Life changes are enforced from external environments, however, these changes can also occur from inside the individual. The way in which this occurs is affected by the person's age, his or her environment prospects, behavior, and physical and logical characteristics. As a result, in the ecological systems theory, an individual's development is not determined by environmental factors or internal character. People are products and creators of their own environments.

The environment in which the grandchildren and grandparents live can impact their overall life experiences and the manner in which they approach life circumstances. As Payne (1996) suggested, our understanding of families must be broad enough to include sensitivity to cultural forces that may be hidden beneath the surface of daily life activities. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, three caring perspectives can help individuals nurture families under heavy stress (Swick, 2005): (1) gain the parent and family perspective on the nature and dynamics of the stressors; (2) partner with the family in "exploring" ways that might help them address these stressors; and (3) provide empowering early interventions that offer total family systems the tools and resources for building caring lifestyles.

The environment in which grandchildren are raised can impact their experiences, whether positive or negative. Dolbin-MacNab and Keily (2009) conducted a study to examine how adolescents raised solely by their grandparents navigated their new environments and relationships with their grandparents. Thirty-four of the forty-one described a pattern of interdependence with their grandparents. Their environment was one in which they could talk and engage in a variety of activities with their grandparents. The grandchildren also reported that the interdependence was also solely rooted in the knowledge that their lives were better because of their grandparents' efforts. These positive bonds influenced relationships they had with others around them. According to Dolbin-MacNab and Keily (2009) the characteristics of the caregiving context shaped how grandchildren experienced their family relationships and strong connections to their grandparents.

## **History of Grandparenting**

All throughout human history, grandparents have raised the young while parents supplied the basic needs for survival. Across time and cultures, grandparents have served their children and grandchildren in a variety of roles: as living ancestors, family historians, mentors, nurturers, and role models for aging (Kornhaber, 1996). For centuries grandparents have taken over when their grandchildren were orphaned by disease or war or when financial troubles split a family (Toledo & Brown, 1995). Grandparents in preindustrial cultures had clear family and social roles and were accorded high status (Kornhaber, 1996). Urbanization and the Industrial Revolution expanded the roles and functions of grandparents because parents had to go to work to provide the basic needs for their family. There is a proud tradition of intergenerational families in working class neighborhoods as well as in African American and Hispanic communities of all income levels (Toledo & Brown, 1995). Parents and grandparents serve as a family "team" supporting and nurturing the young (Kornhaber, 1996).

## **Traditional Families**

Over the last several decades, the family team has been fractured for many with the result that the numbers of children being raised by grandparents, either solely, or part-time, has been on the increase, with the grandparents frequently being the only source of stability in a tumultuous family situation (Kornhaber, 1996). According to Toledo and Brown (1995) there is nothing new about a grandparent raising a child in a crisis. But, the normal family of past decades (two parents, children, four grandparents) no longer



reflects current reality, which now includes single-parent households and blended families created by remarriage and other variations (Kornhaber, 1996). Grandparents become one of the few buffers between the children and an increasingly precarious future (Toledo & Brown, 1995). So pervasive is this situation that no grandparent can exclude the possibility that he or she might be faced with the decision to raise grandchildren, part or full time, at some time in their lives (Kornhaber, 1996).

### **Kinship Care**

Kinship care is any living arrangement in which a relative or someone else emotionally close to the child takes primary responsibility for rearing the child (Rankin, 2002). According to Rankin, for generations in the African American community, grandparents and older relatives have played a crucial role in raising the children of younger relatives when they have become unable or unwilling to raise the children themselves. Changes in family configurations coupled with family economic and social stresses have profoundly affected the role of grandparents as caregivers (Kornhaber, 1996). When parents were unable to raise their children, grandparents have stepped in, forming intergenerational households without a parent present, referred to as skipped-generation grandfamilies (Goodman, 2007). The term “grandfamily” was coined to easily identify families in which children are raised by grandparents and the children are called “grandkin” (Edwards, 2006).

Since 1990 the fastest growing type of grandparent-headed household is one in which the grandparents assume primary care responsibilities for their grandchildren in the

absence of the grandchild's parents (Bryson, 2001). The phenomenon of grandfamilies is not clearly restricted to poverty stricken areas of inner cities; they can be found in every segment of society, among all races, and socio-economic groups (Edwards, 2006). Force, Botsford, Pisano, and Holbert (2000) found that grandparents are willing and available to assume parenting responsibilities for longer periods of time when parents are unavailable to care for their children and financial status does not play a role in their decision. According to Edwards (2006), this new family relationship will certainly have a critical impact on the children, home and school.

### **Reasons for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

A national longitudinal study of 3,111 grandparents raising grandchildren found that more than one in ten grandparents were at some point responsible for rearing a grandchild for six months or more (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997). Changes in family life, related social trends, and child welfare policies appear to account for some of the increase in grandparents raising grandchildren (Smith & Beltran, 2000). Some of the reasons children are raised by their grandparents include: increased drug abuse among parents, teen pregnancy, divorce, the rapid rise of single parent households, domestic violence, mental and physical illnesses, AIDS, crime, child abuse and neglect, and incarceration (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). Earlier research suggests that many grandparents assume the responsibility unwillingly and that those who assume this responsibility view it as the only solution (Park, 2009).

## **Parenting the Second Time Around**

Because of changes in family structures and the larger sociocultural environment, grandparenting in the United States has undergone a transformation (Kornhaber, 1996). Grandparent roles have become more flexible and increasingly open to personal choice (Kornhaber). Few grandparents expect to trade the traditional model of grandparenting for a model that includes authority, responsibility, and the provision of essential items (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). Although some grandparents may anticipate reentering the parenting role (Somary & Stricker, 1998), many find themselves thrust back into parenting with little or no preparation (Dolbin-MacNab). When this happens, grandparents often need to redevelop parenting skills that they may not have used in several years (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005).

### **Challenges Faced by Grandparents**

Grandparents and relatives raising children face many challenges which include economic strains; inadequate housing; health and mental health concerns for themselves, their children, and grandchildren; obstacles to enrolling the grandchildren in school; and social isolation from peers (Smith & Beltran, 2000). Infant or younger grandchildren may require more intensive care and attention that generates ongoing strain on grandparents, while teenage or older grandchildren may be more difficult to care for, especially when rebellious. When grandparents do not know what is expected of them and are unaware of their capabilities, conditions for failure are increased (Kornhaber, 1996). Grandmothers from all backgrounds who recognize there is a link between their own self-improvement

and the well-being of grandchildren are eager to gain the insights and emotional strength required to succeed (Strom, Heeder & Strom, 2005).

McGowen and Ladd (2006) conducted a study of 124 grandmothers to compare the parenting styles of grandmothers who had legal custody of the grandchild, grandmothers who had physical custody without having received legal custody, and nonresident grandmothers who provided child care. Using the Grandparent Skills and Needs Inventory, they concluded that 11% of the custodial grandmothers regretted the loss of the traditional grandmother role and resented having to be the primary disciplinarian, caregiver, and provider. Six percent of the grandmothers stated their level of satisfaction was impacted by lack of resources from local, state, and federal agencies. At each level of care, there were participants (custodial 28%, co-resident 21%, nonresident 24%) who felt they had less time alone and sensed that they had a loss of freedom since caring for their grandchildren.

**Physical challenges.** Research has suggested that grandparents experience heightened stress that negatively affects their physical being (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001). Some grandparents may not be able to meet the physical demands of parenting due to preexisting health problems or their health deteriorates after assuming care (Bunch et al., 2007). Some grandparents may feel overwhelmed with negotiating their own physical needs in addition to the needs of their grandchildren. They likely have limited energy to assist children with schoolwork and related problems and issues (Edwards, 2006). Despite increasing research regarding these families, the literature relative to the

children's psychosocial development and school-related functioning is not well-integrated (Edwards & Ray, 2008). Dolbin-MacNab, 2006, conducted a study of 40 custodial grandmothers. The interview findings revealed that twelve of the grandmothers described how changes they associated with aging created parenting challenges they did not experience when they were raising their children. Health problems and limited energy made it difficult to keep up with their grandchildren during family outings and restricted their grandchildren's participation in activities.

**Emotional challenges.** For the caregiving grandmother, a substantial body of research on national samples has identified greater depression compared to grandparents in traditional roles (Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller, & Driver, 2000; Solomon & Marx, 1999). The experience of raising children is one that impacts various dimensions of a grandparent's life (Kropf & Kolomer, 2004). Grandparents raising grandchildren are more likely to suffer depression than grandparents who are not raising their grandchildren (Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller, & Driver, 2000). Additional characteristics of grandparents associated with stress include educational attainment and marital status (Park, 2009). There is evidence of significant association between greater levels of depression in caregiving grandmothers and lower educational backgrounds and unmarried status (Kolomer, McCallion, & Janicki, 2002). Gerard, Landry-Meyer, and Roe (2006) conducted a study with 133 grandparents with the primary responsibility for their grandchildren and looked at the caregivers' stressors. The grandparent caregivers experienced guilt and a sense of inadequacy about receiving help from family and friends in their informal support networks. They knew their support networks would assist in

times of crisis, but they did not want to ask and feel like a burden to their family and friends.

**Financial challenges.** Financial hardship is the most frequently cited stressor for grandparents (Park, 2009). The other problems faced by caregiving grandparents were often compounded by significant economic difficulties (Park). When grandparents do gain custody of their grandchildren, many of them do not have much in the way of financial resources to take on the responsibility of raising grandchildren at this late stage in their lives (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). The disproportionately higher levels of poverty and chronic financial struggles among grandparent caregivers merit attention due to their potential influence on the psychological distress of these older caregivers (Park, 2006). Grandparents raising grandchildren are severely affected by their inability to obtain adequate financial support for the children in their care (Smith & Beltran, 2000). Grandparents raising grandchildren are at greater risk of living in poverty, despite the fact that 48% work outside the home (Hagar & Scannapieco, 1995). Butler and Zakari (2005) interviewed a sample of 17 grandmothers. Fourteen of the participants were African-American grandmothers who were the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Economic resources were a common theme that continued to be expressed in all of the interviews. The grandparents were in fear of not having sufficient financial resources to adequately support their grandchildren. The participants indicated a need for child support, clothing for their grandchildren, transportation to the doctor and school, and the lack of medical benefits.

## **Grandparents in the Workforce**

The socioeconomic disadvantage associated with raising grandchildren may be due to the limited number of hours a grandparent may be able to devote to the labor market (Wang & Marcotte, 2007). Wang and Marcotte, 2007, compiled a data set from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics along with its Parent Identification File on 3,240 non-retired grandparent households. They wanted to know the effects of taking care of a grandchild on labor force participation and the number of hours worked. Study conclusions revealed that grandparents with grandchildren in their homes were more likely to work and to work longer hours. The net wealth of grandparents with grandchildren in the home is less than one third that of other grandparents. The study also concluded that because the grandchildren's parents are not present to contribute resources, grandmothers are more likely to seek work outside the home to help support the grandchild.

## **Grandparent Assistance**

For those grandparents who are unable to work, there are a number of programs that may be available to ease the financial burden (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). These include Supplemental Security Income, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Takas, 1995). Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that provides monthly cash benefits to low-income seniors and disabled or blind adults and children. The Food Stamp program provides financial assistance to

low-income persons that can be used to purchase certain foods from approved stores (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). For many grandparents it is embarrassing and difficult to seek this assistance and can be humiliating if individuals at agencies are not sensitive to the unique circumstances of grandparents at this time (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002).

Temporary assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides cash assistance to very low-income, dependent children (Glass & Huneycutt). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) has rules and regulations that have the potential to make the finances of many grandparent-headed households more unstable (Smith & Beltran, 2000). The ability of state programs to accommodate and serve grandparent-headed households may directly influence how well caregiving grandparents are able to manage their lives and the children in their charge (Silverstein, 2007).

Many grandparents who have grandchildren living with them have no legal arrangements for doing so because they begin caring for their grandchildren on a casual basis and seem to continue that way (DeToledo & Brown, 1995). As a result of the increase of grandparent-grandchildren issues coming before the courts, the various state legislatures have been forced to set standards for grandparent visitation and for custody to nonparents (Grandparents Rights Center, 1998). According to Glass and Huneycutt (2002), custody refers to the legal rights and obligations that go along with assuming the role of full-time parent to their grandchildren. In order to seek custody in most states, grandparents have to establish that they have had significant past contacts with their grandchild and they have to establish their own fitness as custodians (Glass & Huneycutt). When grandparents are considering their rights, some may seek the



assistance of lawyers. According to Takas (1995) an advantage of using a lawyer is that grandparents will not have the responsibility of the administrative details associated with getting custody of their grandchildren.

### **Grandparenting Strategies**

Grandparents may need information about current parenting practices, child development, and childhood disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), depression, conduct disorder and self-mutilation (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006). In a qualitative study, Gibson (2005) examined the parenting strategies used by 17 African American grandmothers. The grandmothers were asked to identify what parenting strategies they used with the grandchildren in their care. They reported strategies such as maintaining effective communication, taking a strong role in the educational process, providing socio-emotional support, involving extended family, involving grandchildren in selective community activities, acknowledging and working with grandchildren's vulnerabilities, and recognizing grandchildren's feelings about the absence of the biological parents (Gibson, 2005).

### **Grandparent and Grandchildren Relationships**

Most studies regarding grandparent caregiving, approach the issue from a "social problems" perspective and highlight the stresses, strains, and burdens in this population, thereby providing a somewhat unbalanced view of grandparent caregivers (Silverstein, 2007). Contemporary research studies indicate that African American grandparents who encounter a variety of challenges in raising their grandchildren are able to cope

successfully with these situations if they derive a sufficient amount of psychological rewards from raising grandchildren (Giarrusso, Silverstein, Feng & Marengo, 2000). These rewards include increased gratification, feelings of usefulness, and increasing pride in their own abilities to meet new challenges (Fuller-Thomason & Minkler, 2000). According to Gatti and Musatti (1999), engagement in caregiving has been found to provide numerous psychological benefits to grandparents including rewards that derive from maintaining a strong affective attachment towards the cared for grandchild, having a renewed sense of purpose in life and being granted a second-chance at parenting.

### **Cultural Expectations**

Grandparents from cultures, such as African Americans, with strong expectations to care for at-risk grandchildren, adapt more successfully to their custodial role (Silverstein, 2007). Additional research reports benefits experienced by the caregiving grandparents, including intimacy with grandchildren, feeling empowered to save grandchildren in crisis, and obtaining new meaning for their own lives (Minkler & Roe, 1993). A study conducted by Goodman and Silverstein (2002) comparing 54 African American, Latina, and White grandmothers found that African American grandmothers in these fractured families had the best psychological outcomes as their better adaptation reflected a tradition of extended familism and reliance on surrogate care going back to periods of slavery. During that time, grandmothers along with extended family members were responsible for caring for young children in the absence of a parent due to unforeseen circumstances.

Historically, the extended family was the primary West African family structure at the time of slavery (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). When young children were separated from their family during slavery, extended family members stepped in and took care of the immediate needs of the children (Sudarkasa, 1981). In the United States, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, poverty, oppression, racism, and the consequent lack of opportunity in the South led to a great migration of African Americans to the North in pursuit of employment (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000). Subsequently and continuing through the 1960s, urban parents often would send their children in summer to grandparents and other extended family in the South (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler). In today's society, as women are more likely to assume the caregiving role than men, grandparent caregivers are disproportionately represented by grandmothers (Park, 2009). Grandmothers account for about 77% of custodial grandparents (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). The concept that grandmothers who raise their grandchildren are more likely to be female, poor, and African American is consistent with theories of intergenerational inequality and discrimination (Wang & Marcotte, 2007).

Risk factors associated with caring for one's grandchildren include being a woman, being single, being African American, having experienced the loss of a child, and low income (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2003). Within the African American community, women may derive special meaning from their fulfillment of a cultural legacy, with grandmothers serving as caregivers who are "keeping the family together" (Minkler & Roe, 1993). Dolbin-MacNab conducted a qualitative study in 2006 to better understand the grandmother's perception of parenting a second time around. In her

analysis she found that of the 44 grandmothers interviewed, most of the grandmothers identified differences in parenting grandchildren versus children. They accounted that parenting their grandchildren was more enjoyable than parenting their children due to more wisdom and experience and having more time and attention to give to their grandchildren. With such considerations, primary caregiving for grandchildren can provide a productive, meaningful new role to many grandparents (Giarusso et al., 2000).

### **Benefits of Raising Grandchildren**

Grandchildren are clearly the primary beneficiaries of grandparent care; however, documenting benefits is complicated because assessments are sensitive to the adverse family conditions that may have triggered surrogate care arrangements initially and conclusions will vary depending on the reference group of children to whom care recipients are compared (Silverstein, 2007). People can live with difficult situations and exhibit resilience when they have some satisfactions allowing them to sustain their efforts (McGowen & Ladd, 2006). The possibilities for grandmother satisfaction are bound to increase if they are willing to learn from grandchildren as well as guide them (Strom, 2002). Dolbin-MacNab (2006) conducted a study of 52 grandmothers to understand their perceptions of parenting a second time. Twenty-three percent of the grandmothers reported having greater wisdom and experience to parent their grandchildren. Thirteen percent of the grandmothers reported being more relaxed about parenting their grandchildren. Twenty-five percent of the grandmothers reported they had more time and attention for their grandchildren.

## **Grandchildren's School Functioning**

Grandchildren may experience depression, anxiety, health problems, behavior problems, academic difficulties, aggression, feelings of anger, rejection, and guilt due to being raised by their grandparent (Billing, Ehrle, & Kortenkamp, 2002; Shore & Hayslip, 1994; Solomon & Marx, 1995). One important life activity that is often affected is children's school functioning (Edwards, 2006). Grandchildren who must cope with early negative life experiences, the loss of parents, the adjustment to living with grandparents, and other issues are susceptible to social-emotional distress, which will likely negatively affect their school functioning (Edwards, 2006). Whitley and Kelley (2008) conducted developmental screenings and diagnostic evaluations on 74 African American grandchildren between the ages of 5 months to 5 years raised by their grandparents. The findings revealed that 54 percent of the children who completed full development evaluations had confirmed clinical diagnoses for developmental delays. Due to the high risk of drug and alcohol exposure from parents, some of the grandchildren may have confirmed developmental delays that require specialized services, while other grandchildren may experience minimal effects but could also benefit from supportive services (Whitley & Kelley, 2008).

### **School Success**

Students' feelings about their school experiences affect their ability to function well academically, behaviorally, and socially in school (Edwards & Ray, 2008). The few empirical research studies that focus exclusively on children raised by their grandparents

reveal conflicting findings (Edwards & Ray). Some investigations show these children function similarly in school and in their social environment when compared to their peers (Solomon & Marx, 1995). Sawyer and Dubowitz (1994) conducted a quantitative study with 374 school-age children from a variety of cultures. Findings indicated that a large inner-city sample of children raised by their grandparents performed well when compared to children raised by their parents. Further data also revealed that children who entered kinship care as adolescents did better on reading and math tests than children who entered kinship care before they began first grade.

### **School Support**

The period of early childhood sets the stage for how well children view themselves, each other, and their world (Honig, 2002). Early experiences also provide a template for learning and are the true litmus test for how well children will do in school and manage the daily events in their environment (Meisels, 2001; Rosenkoetter & Barton, 2002). An integrated curriculum geared towards the whole child and reflective of his or her abilities to handle transitions, manage their emotions, and develop meaningful relationships with others is key to promoting school success (Biggar & Pizzolongo, 2004). When young children enter school without the abilities to work cooperatively with their peers, follow rules, listen to their teachers, and work independently, they are placed at greater risk for a wide range of negative outcomes including peer rejection and school failure (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). School readiness is generally thought to include children's social and emotional competence, motor development and physical

well-being, development of pre-academic skills such as emergent literacy and numeracy within the cognitive domain, and approaches to learning (NRC, 2000; Snow, 2007). Research has also begun to acknowledge the “readiness” of families and schools as they contribute to children’s early academic success as part of this construct of school readiness (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001).

Sawyer and Dubowitz (1994) concluded that it seems that high academic scores in this context are a result of the greater amount of social and academic support provided by caregivers in homes. In Edwards 2006 study of 54 African American children from a large urban school district and raised by grandparents, the teachers perceived the children raised by grandparents as experiencing more emotional and behavioral problems that impacted the school success than their peers raised by their biological parents. According to work done by Hepner and Newman in 2010, grandparents can participate in their grandchild’s education by checking homework, re-teaching concepts, and answering questions.

### **Educator Perspectives**

According to Dubowitz and Sawyer (1994), teachers of children raised by grandparents believed that the caregivers were involved at a much lower level (64%) in the children’s schooling. Based on the responses of 280 teachers in a northern urban city, Dubowitz and Sawyer reported that over 30% of the students living in kinship care were unmotivated, noncompliant with class rules, and demonstrate unacceptable school behavior (Dubowitz & Sawyer, 1994). According to the teachers in the study, more than

half of the children exhibited below average work and study habits as well as inferior attention and concentration skills (Dubowitz & Sawyer). These characteristics are integral to learning and academic achievement and children lacking these attributes frequently fail in school (Edwards, 1998). Children with grandparents as the sole caretaker are more likely to be viewed as poorer students and to repeat a grade than are children from traditional nuclear families (Marx & Solomon, 1993). Based on the research conducted by Edwards (2006) teachers perceived the children raised by their grandparents as experiencing significantly more emotional and behavioral problems than their similar schoolmates and children in these families appeared in need of school-based intervention services.

### **Grandparent Educational Support**

According to Edwards (2006) children in grandfamilies and kinship care have been found to evidence weak cognitive, reading, and math skills. In a study with younger children, low-income preschoolers who are cared for by a grandmother were found to lag behind their peers in formal child care centers in terms of their cognitive development over time, but no differences were found in socioemotional functioning (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004). Solomon and Marx (1995) utilized the 1988 National Children's Health Supplement of the National Health Interview Survey to determine how children raised in grandparent-headed families compared with children living in traditional nuclear families. Based on the evidence gathered from 17,110 participants of varied races, health and school behavior of children raised in grandparent-headed homes was comparable to



that of children from two-parent families, and only academic achievement was lagging for children raised by grandparents (Solomon & Marx, 1995). Study findings suggest that children raised by older grandmothers performed better academically than children raised by younger grandmothers (1995). Data from this study (Solomon & Marx) also suggested that the age of the custodial grandparent may influence the child's academic functioning and development and that younger grandparents have more energy to engage in typical parenting activities.

Edwards and Taub (2009) hypothesized that younger grandmothers may have experienced problems with role timing due to their early entrance into the grandparenting role and were less inclined to provide the necessary educational and emotional support to their grandchildren (Edwards & Taub, 2009). Despite the positive advantages of having parents participate in the educational endeavors of their children, grandparents may be ambivalent about assuming this role in school settings (Newsome & Kelly, 2004). They may lack role models and sources of information for dealing with the school and may feel overwhelmed with the logistical details of dealing with various types of services in Pre-K-12 settings (Pelt, 2001).

### **Grandmothers as Informal Educators**

Gibson conducted a qualitative study in 2005 with 17 African American grandmothers who were the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The purpose of the study was to determine what strengths the African American grandmother primary caregiver possessed and what challenges they confronted. After the analysis of the

interviews, one of seven themes emerged (Gibson, 2005). The grandmothers believed in taking a strong role in the educational process of their grandchildren. They also believed in the importance of getting an education as a necessary part of a productive life. The three subthemes for the grandmothers emphasized learning, the use of teachers as sources of support, and adult involvement in school activities including classroom visitations. The grandmothers wanted their grandchildren to focus on getting an education and not what their peers were doing.

Dolbin-MacNab conducted a qualitative study with 40 custodial grandmothers to determine if custodial grandmothers would benefit from parent education and training that would take into account their previous parenting experiences yet still address the unique challenges associated with parenting grandchildren of school age (2006). One of the major themes that emerged was the increase of time and relaxation. The grandmothers reported that they had more time and attention for their grandchildren and they used their times together as opportunities to talk about the events occurring in the children's lives, one of which was school performance and assistance with school assignments.

### **Summary**

There are an array of circumstances that lead grandparents to be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Studies have identified grandmothers as the individuals that take on this role of parenting a second time around, with a high percentage of the grandmothers being African-American. When grandmothers become the sole caregivers for their grandchildren they take on a lot of challenges. These challenges are not just from the financial, physical, and emotional spectrum, but from the

stance of educational support. Based on the studies that have been conducted to understand the educational implications on children raised by their grandparents, there are different findings. Some of the research findings have concluded that children raised by their grandparents are just as academically successful as children raised by their parents. In contrast to these findings, some studies have concluded that due to emotional and behavioral problems of children raised by their grandparents, they are unable to focus and perform at a high level of success.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explains the research design and methodology for the study. A discussion of the study method, research questions, sampling methods, data collection, data analysis, protection of human subjects, role of the researcher, and ethical considerations are presented. The purpose of this study was to understand African American grandmother's perspective of the role she plays in informally educating her grandchildren. The study was conducted utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological approach to find common themes among the experiences of African American grandmothers raising their young grandchildren and their roles in continuing the educational process at home. Social learning theory, life course perspective, and ecological systems theory were used in order to frame the findings. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory helped to describe how a grandchild's environment shapes who they are and how grandmothers as caregivers' life experiences shape the environment they create for their grandchildren. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains how grandmothers have to model for their grandchildren new learning before they can imitate it. The life course perspective theory allowed the researcher to use the participant experiences and insights to understand the role of social and historical factors in their lives as grandmother caregivers.

## **Research Design**

“Qualitative research is the process of gathering an indepth understanding of human behavior in its natural state through observations that consist of detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, and actions (Patton, 2002, p. 4).” Everet and Louis (1981) clarify the assumptions that ground each by distinguishing two research stances: inquiry from the outside, often implemented via quantitative studies, and inquiry from the inside via qualitative studies. In order to gain a deeper understanding of a human experience, data is collected through open interviews, direct observation, and through the use of written documents. The purpose of this type of research is to understand any social phenomenon from the perspective of those involved, rather than explaining it unsuccessfully from the outside (Ospina, 2004). The researcher becomes responsible for spending time understanding or even experiencing the phenomenon.

Qualitative research is composed of a variety of theoretical traditions, such as Creswell’s (1998) five traditions of qualitative inquiry: biography, case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Phenomenology was chosen for the study due to understanding the experiences of African American grandmothers rearing their grandchildren. It is a branch of philosophy that emphasizes the direct experience of phenomena in order to determine their essences, the things that make them what they are (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). In order to better understand the participants’ experiences, the researcher must put aside his or her biases so that he or she doesn’t filter other people’s experiences through their own cultural lens and can attempt to understand experiences as others experience them (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Purpose of Research**

The primary purpose of this research study was to understand the African American grandmother caregiver's perspective of the role she plays in promoting the school success of her grandchildren at home. The researcher wanted to identify what support systems and or resources the African American grandmother caregiver utilized to promote the school success of her grandchildren at home and what support systems or resources may be needed, based on the grandmothers' perspective, to support school success at home. This qualitative design was naturalistic to the extent that the research took place in real-world settings and the researcher did not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). Based on the theoretical frameworks for this study, which were ecological systems theory, social learning theory and life course perspective, the participants' experiences added insight to this phenomenon. The data regarding the informal education phenomenon for this study was collected and analyzed through the use of open-ended question interviews.

### **Study Procedures**

This study employed purposeful sampling methods by soliciting volunteer participants from individuals who frequent grandparent support groups, community centers, and organizations that support grandparent primary caregivers and by word of mouth. Rather than utilizing a specific agency to recruit participants, the internet was used to research organizations that provide support for grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren in the North Texas area. Email addresses of support

group coordinators or contacts were obtained from organization and/or support group websites. A scripted recruitment email along with an attached study flyer were sent electronically (Appendix A). Upon researching potential support group websites that did not provide email addresses but provided a physical mailing address, flyers (Appendix B) were mailed to the support groups along with a recruitment letter (Appendix C). Upon receiving the email or mailed letter, the organizations and/or support groups could decide whether or not to share the research study opportunity with their participants.

When contacted by potential study participants, the principal investigator used an Interested Participant Script (Appendix D) to determine if the potential participant met the study qualifications of being an African American woman who is the primary caregiver for her grandchild between the ages of 4 and 8. Upon qualifications being met, the principal investigator explained the purpose of the study and the study procedures. Upon verbal agreement of their participation in the study, the participants and researcher scheduled a date, time, and location that was convenient for the participants for the interview. The researcher was considerate of the daily responsibilities of the participants and made sure that the main priority would be the convenience and ease for the participant. The researcher also made sure that participant's written consent was given before conducting the interview.

Ten grandmothers were asked to participate in a one hour face-to-face interview, along with an optional 10-15 minute completion of a post interview questionnaire. The total time commitment for participants was 75 minutes. The interviews occurred at times

that were convenient for the participants and in locations that the participants felt comfortable in sharing their perspectives on the phenomenon. The locations consisted of the participant's homes. The researcher contacted the participants to confirm the interview time and location 24 hours before the scheduled interview. If the participant was unable to keep the scheduled appointment, another time was scheduled to conduct the interview upon the participant's request. Before beginning the interviews, the researcher greeted the participants warmly and followed the interview protocol to establish a level of comfort and set the tone for the interview.

The interview protocol (Appendix E) consisted of an introduction to the researcher and purpose of study, the interview process, examples of informal education that they might engage their grandchildren to promote school success at home, and their rights as study participants. The researcher sat across from the participants to ensure a level of comfort and to maintain eye contact. The participants were given an opportunity to read through the consent form (Appendix F) and ask the principal investigator any questions that they had. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire (Appendix G) that asked questions about age range, level of education, employment status, and the reason for being the primary caregiver. They were then asked if they had any questions and then the interview was conducted. The participants were asked ten interview questions (Appendix H) about their experience as an African American grandmother rearing their grandchildren. The researcher asked the participants if they knew of other potential participants who may be willing to share their perspectives on the phenomenon. If a participant knew of someone who was interested in the study, the researcher left a flyer



that contained information about the study and contact information. When contacted by interested participants, the Interested Participant Script was read to them containing information about the study, time commitments, potential risks, and remuneration for their participation. If they agreed to continue, the questionnaire was read to them via telephone. If the interested participant met the study qualifications, an interview date and time was scheduled and a meeting location was arranged.

At the conclusion of the interview the participants were asked to voluntarily respond to two written post interview questions (Appendix I) within 72 hours of the face-to-face interview, which took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. If they agreed to respond to the post interview questions, they received the questions and a stamped self-addressed envelope with which to mail the post interview questions to the researcher. The post interview questions were used to determine if there was anything else the participant would have liked to express about informally educating their grandchild at home to promote school success and if there was anything that she has done differently to informally educate at home to promote school success since the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were provided a list of grandparent support resources (Appendix J) that could be used to support them as caregivers of their grandchildren and to support their grandchildren. Using the “Follow-up Phone Call Script” (Appendix K), participants who agreed to complete the post interview questions and had not completed and mailed the questions within seven days following the face-to-face interview, were contacted. The participants were reminded by the researcher that the study results would be mailed to them if requested on their consent form.

After completion of the individual participant interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. In order to identify patterns, themes, or relationships from the participants' experiences, the researcher carefully coded and analyzed the content of the interviews after all participant interviews had been conducted. In order to analyze the data, the researcher used member checking to validate the findings, analytic memos to document and reflect on the coding process, and two cycles of coding to identify themes. Member checking was used to validate the findings early on in the process of analyzing data. It also provided opportunities to articulate the researcher's internal thinking process, clarify emergent ideas, and make new insights about the data (Saldana, 2009). Four participants were mailed their interview transcripts to check for validity of their statements. The four participants approved the validity of the interview transcript via telephone conversations with the researcher initiated by the participants. Six participants requested that the transcripts be emailed. Five of the participants approved the validity of the interview transcripts via email. One participant replied to the researcher's email in regards to the typed response about homework routines and wanted to make a clarification about homework support. The participant wanted to specify that there is a routine for homework, which the interview transcript did not originally include.

## **Interview Questions**

During the interview process, the participants were asked questions based on Patton's six kinds of interview questions (2002). The six kinds of interview questions are experience and behavior, opinion and value, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic (Table 1). Distinguishing types of questions forces the interviewer to be clear about what is being asked and helps the interviewee respond appropriately (Patton, 2002). Experience and behavior questions were asked to elicit information about what might be observed if the interviewer were present. The purpose of opinion and value questions were to understand how a person thinks about experiences and issues. Knowledge questions were asked to learn more about the facts while sensory questions focused on the five senses. A sensory question that was asked of each participant was what services they would like to be provided by their grandchild's school district and community. The final question type is background/ demographic questions that are focused on identifying characteristics of the interviewee. Background and demographic questions were asked during the initial questionnaire to determine if potential participants met the study qualifications.

*Table 1*  
*Interview Questions*

Type of Question	Interview Questions
Experience and behavior	What might you be seen doing if you were followed through a typical evening assisting your grandchild with his or her homework?
Opinion and value	What are your thoughts about promoting school success at home with their grandchildren?
Feelings	What motivates you to promote school success at home with your grandchildren?
Knowledge	What things do you do at home with your grandchildren to reinforce education?  What do you do to informally educate your grandchildren?  What services are provided by your grandchild's school, district and/or community to assist you in the informal education process?
Sensory	What services might you like your grandchild's school, district, and/or community to provide to assist you with informally educating their grandchild at home?
Background/demographic	What is your age range?  What is your highest level of education?  Are you currently employed?  If you are currently employed or have been employed, what is or was your profession?  Are you the primary caregiver for your grandchild/grandchildren in your home?  How long have you been the primary caregiver for

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	your grandchild/grandchildren? Which best describes the circumstances for which you are the primary caregiver of your grandchild/grandchildren?
	What are the ages of the grandchildren that you are the primary caregiver for?
	In the span of one week, approximately how many hours do you engage your grandchild in informal educational activities?

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The participants were asked questions that were aligned with the three theories that shaped this study.

1. Social Learning Theory: What behaviors or attitudes does your grandchild see you engage in that may promote his or her school success?
2. Life Course Perspective: How might your educational experiences or educational background promote the educational experiences your grandchild is engaged in?
3. Ecological Systems Theory: How might your home environment and/or the community you raise your grandchild in promote his/her school success?

To elicit further information and details in regards to the participants' responses, the researcher asked probing questions such as "Can you tell me more about that experience?", or "Is there anything else about that experience that you would like to share?" Each participant was given time to think and share their experiences about each interview question and at the conclusion of the interview were asked to comment on anything else that was important to them. Upon completion of the interview, the

participants were given a \$25 grocery store gift card as a token of appreciation for their time and participation.

### **Participants**

This study employed purposeful sampling methods by soliciting volunteer participants from targeted grandparent support groups and by word of mouth. Seidman (2006) suggests that researchers determine ahead of time the range of sites and people that they would like to sample and set a goal for a certain number of participants in the study. The target sample size for this study was 10-15 participants. The criteria for selecting the number of participants was based on sufficiency and saturation of information. After each interview was conducted, the researcher used analytic memos to make notes of observations and patterns in the grandmothers' narratives. According to Seidman (2006) the researcher must consider if there are sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded that when there is a point in the study when the researcher is no longer learning anything new and begins to hear the same information reported that it is time to conclude the data collection. The researcher knew saturation had been reached when the analytic memos began to reveal common observations and patterns during each interview.

## **Research Setting**

The researcher wanted to provide each participant with an opportunity to participate in a location that was familiar and comfortable. All ten participants selected to have the interview take place at their homes. The research setting for each participant provided flexibility for them and prevented them from seeking someone to watch their grandchild during the interview. The researcher was prepared to accommodate the participants if they did not wish to participate in the interview at their residence or if they were not able to identify a location for meeting, by suggesting a location that was in close proximity to the participant's neighborhood. Some alternate locations were libraries, community centers, and parks, all of which would provide their grandchild with activities to participate in during the interview.

## **Interview Process**

Participants were asked to participate in a one hour face-to-face interview. The interviews occurred at times that were convenient for the participants and in locations that the participants felt comfortable in sharing their perspectives on the phenomenon. The locations consisted of the participant's home. Before beginning the interviews, the researcher greeted the participants warmly and followed the interview protocol to establish a level of comfort and set the tone for the interview. The interview protocol (Appendix E) consisted of an introduction to the researcher and purpose of study, the interview process, examples of informal education in which they might engage their grandchildren to promote school success at home, and their rights as study participants.

The researcher sat across from the participant to ensure a level of comfort and to maintain eye contact. The participants were given an opportunity to read through the consent form and ask the principal investigator any questions that they may have. By signing the consent form, the participant acknowledged their consent to participate.

### **Post Interview Process**

After completion of the interviews, the participants were given the post interview questions along with an addressed and stamped envelope. At that time they were told that the completion of the post interview questions were voluntary and if they chose to complete them they could be answered and mailed within 24 to 48 hours of the interview. The participants were given the option of mailing the final post interview questions to the researcher in a pre-stamped envelope or to schedule a time for the researcher to retrieve them. The voluntary post interview questions were utilized to determine if there was anything else the participant would have liked to express about informally educating their grandchild at home to promote school success and if there was anything that she had done differently to informally educate at home to promote school success since the interview. The participants were informed by the researcher that the study findings and recommendations would be mailed or emailed to the address provided on their consent form upon completion of the study. Upon transcribing the interviews and based upon their request, the participants were emailed or mailed the transcripts of their interviews to check for the validity of their statements. The participants that chose to have the



transcripts mailed to them were also given a stamped and addressed envelope for returning the transcript.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

After completion of the individual participant interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. In order to identify patterns, themes, or relationships from the participants' experiences, the researcher carefully coded and analyzed the content of the interviews after all participant interviews had been conducted. The researcher used member checking to validate the findings, analytic memos to document and reflect on the coding process, and two cycles of coding to identify themes.

#### **Member Checking**

In order to validate the findings early on in the process of analyzing data, the researcher used member checking. The purpose of member checking is to consult the participants themselves during the analysis of the data. It also provides opportunities to articulate the researcher's internal thinking process, clarify emergent ideas, and possibly make new insights about the data (Saldana, 2009). During the participant interviews, the conversations were audio recorded to allow for accurate transcription of their responses to the questions. Member checking was used by the researcher to validate the participants' perceptions and experiences raising their grandchildren and supporting the educational process. The participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts for accurate analysis and validate their narratives.

## **Analytic Memos**

Analytic memos were used when documenting and reflecting on the coding process and code choices immediately following the participant interview. According to Saldana (2009) analytic memos are used to determine how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in the data. Analytic memos were utilized by the researcher to interpret thoughts about the participants, phenomenon, a priori codes, and nuances that may provide thick-rich descriptions of the participant and their experiences during the coding process. Upon leaving the interview location, the researcher wrote memos of initial thoughts following the interview.

## **Coding**

Two cycles of coding allowed the researcher to identify interesting passages, common words, phrases, or statements made by the participants. Analysis of the themes were utilized to create credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. For further analysis of the content, the researcher included interview excerpts from participant interviews to highlight the common experiences of the participants.

**First cycle coding.** The first cycle of coding took place using elemental and affective methods of coding. Within the elemental method, a primary approach to qualitative data analysis (Saldana, 2009), process coding was utilized to search for ongoing action, interaction, and emotion taken in response to the situation or problem. Within the affective methods, directly acknowledging and naming experiences (Saldana),

emotion and values coding were used. Emotion coding explored the intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to label their emotions. Values coding assisted in identifying the themes amongst the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs to better understand their perspectives.

**Second cycle coding.** Second Cycle coding methods are advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods (Saldana, 2009). Pattern coding was utilized to develop major themes from data and find patterns of human relationships during the second cycle of coding. Second Cycle coding allowed the researcher to develop smaller and a more select list of broader categories, themes, and/or concepts (Saldana). Based on the codes that were generated during the first cycle, new codes were created based on similarity. Pattern codes allowed the researcher to pull together a lot of material into a more manageable unit of analysis. During second cycle coding, the data was analyzed for rules, causes, and explanations given during the interviews by the grandmothers.

### **Triangulation of the Data and Analysis**

According to Patton (2002), the point of triangulation is to test for consistency among different data sources or inquiry approaches. The data was triangulated through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and a peer reviewer. Questionnaires were used before interviews were conducted to get background knowledge on the participants such as age range, level of education, employment status, and the period of time that they have been the primary caregiver for their grandchild between the ages of four thru eight.

Participant interviews were used to better understand the perspective of the grandmothers. The interviews allowed the researcher to ask participants open-ended questions and to get the words of the participants. After the completion of the interviews, participants were given post interview questions to determine if any of their perspectives or thoughts had changed after the interview. The etic perspective (Patton, 2002) is the ability to stand far enough away from or outside a particular culture to see its separate events. A peer reviewer was used during data analysis for an etic perspective, to maintain a fresh perspective, and to talk through the data collected and the coding process. After analyzing two sources of data, the information provided in the questionnaires and interviews were consistent. The third source of data provided by the peer reviewer revealed common codes and themes from the participants' transcripts.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In the phenomenological approach, the goal was to understand the meaning people make of their experience and interviewing provides a necessary, if not always, completely sufficient avenue of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). The researcher is the research tool and his or her intuition and self-reflection is used to experience the phenomenon with the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This goal was accomplished through active listening and following up on what the participants said. Interviewers must listen to what the participants are saying, must listen for the public voice, and must listen while remaining aware of the process as well as the substance (Seidman, 2006). As the interviewer, I

remained mindful of the level of comfort I needed to create for the participants during and after the interview process by being an active listener.

In order to begin to understand this phenomenon from the African American grandmothers' perspective, face-to-face interviews were the ideal method for hearing their stories and identifying the common elements of their experiences. My primary role was that of an active listener. It was my responsibility to respect and appreciate the experiences of each participant and to better understand this phenomenon. The African American grandmothers had stories to tell and it was critical for me to portray their story in an authentic light and not trivialize their perspectives. As a researcher, another role was that of communicator. It became my responsibility to share the participant narratives and to begin to uncover areas of need and support for grandmothers rearing their grandchildren.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

According to Patton (2002), the emic perspective is when the participant observer shares as intimately as possible in life and activities of the setting under study in order to develop an insider's view of what is happening. As an educator with experience in the field of early childhood education, I know the importance of parental involvement and the role that caregivers play in extending the learning process at home with their children. I am also of the same cultural background as the study participants as an African American female. As an active listener during the interviewing process, I was able to

provide the participants with an opportunity to share their experiences and voice their concerns and hopes, along with focusing on maintaining the emic perspective.

My experience of working with young students and their caregivers allowed me to relate to some of the grandmothers' experiences. As a former teacher of African American children who were raised by their grandmothers, I wanted to understand the role that the grandmother plays in promoting academic success at home and the support systems that may be needed in order to ensure academic achievement. The interview setting opened up an avenue of communication that may not have otherwise been possible in a larger group setting. As an educator who currently works with schools and school districts to provide students with the best education possible, I am passionate about involving parents and caregivers in the educational process. They are the first teachers and will continue to be a driving force for the educational success of children. I used my experience with working with individuals on a one-on-one basis to assist the grandmothers through the interview and to guide them in understanding that their voice would be heard and their opinions and perspectives would be respected.

Throughout the process I remained aware of the emic and etic, or inside and outside, perspectives. In order to build a level of comfort and a sense of trust with the participants, I developed an insider's view, but I also kept in mind the importance of remembering how to explain the phenomenon to those who are considered outsiders. Reflexivity allowed me as the researcher to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural,

political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those interviewed (Patton, 2002).

### **Ethical Considerations of the Study**

It was the ethical responsibility of the researcher to make sure that the study participants were kept from harm due to their participation. The researcher apprised the participants of their rights and their involvement in the study before they agreed to participate. A consent form was given to each participant to outline three ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the phenomenological methodology of the study. Participant questionnaires, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions, and final follow-up questions were utilized to provide information about the grandmothers' experiences and to add insight to this phenomenon. Data collection and analysis were used to categorize participant statements and to formulate themes in regards to their experiences. Questionnaires, interviews and post interview questions, and one peer reviewer were used to triangulate, or strengthen, the data. Ethical considerations were utilized in the study by providing participants with their rights and involvement in the study before they agreed to participate, giving them information about the potential risks or discomfort that might take place as a result of taking part in the study, and making

them aware that their identities would not be revealed during or after the conclusion of the research study.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### **Introduction**

The analysis of this phenomenological study of the African American grandmother caregivers' perspective of the role she plays in promoting the school success of her grandchildren at home is presented in this chapter. The support systems and resources utilized and that are needed based on the grandmothers' perspective to support school success at home are also presented in this chapter. The data regarding the African American grandmother caregivers' perspective was gathered using a questionnaire, open-ended interviews and post interview questions. The Social Learning Theory (1977), primary theoretical framework, was used to explore the concept of modeling and observational learning. The Life Course perspective (1993), secondary theoretical framework, looked at the phenomenon through the context of the grandparents' current parenting experiences. The tertiary theoretical framework, Ecological Systems Theory (1979), explored the environmental factors and external influences that aid in a positive outcome for children. The researcher interviewed 10 African American grandmother primary caregivers for the study. A description of the research sample, the data analysis, and the findings and themes are presented.

Phenomenology emphasizes the direct experience of phenomena in order to determine their essences, the things that make them what they are (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process

(Vygotsky, 1987). The essence of this study was to make meaning of the participants' experiences in regards to the phenomenon of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren and supporting school success. Categories were formed by identifying the common experiences of the participants and themes were generated to further explain the phenomenon. The themes were also compared to the themes found in the literature on grandparents raising grandchildren in order to see if the experiences of the participants were aligned in some way to the experiences of participants in past research. The first research question that guided the analysis of the study data was "What roles does the African-American grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?". The second research questions was "What support does the African-American custodial grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to ensure school success?".

### **Analysis of Data**

Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting (Patton, 2002). At an early stage of qualitative analysis, the goal is to discover themes and patterns and to build initial models of how complex systems work (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Themes come both from data and from our prior theoretical understanding of whatever phenomenon we are studying (Bernard & Ryan). It involves initial pawing and marking of the text to identify quotes and expressions that seem somehow important. Identifying patterns consists of looking for the common elements of the participants' narratives that begin to explain the phenomenon. Once the patterns have been revealed,

the process of coding provides an opportunity to organize the list of themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). A code is a qualitative inquiry that is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). The researcher has the ability to document and reflect on their coding through the use of analytic memos (Saldana). The coding process is cyclical rather than linear by comparing data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, and category back to data (Saldana).

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was used to validate the findings from the participant interviews. Six participants requested that the transcripts be emailed to them. They each responded via email to notify the researcher of their validation. Four participants requested that the transcripts be mailed to them. Three participants read and validated their transcripts. When there was a concern about the validity of the participant's transcript, the researcher was prepared to revise the statements based on the participants' words and statements. One participant chose to contact the researcher to revise a statement about the homework routine. The participant felt her response to the question did not clearly communicate the exact routine for completing homework. The researcher was able to make the revisions based on the information provided by the participant. The researcher read the revisions back to the participant and the interview transcript was validated.

## **Analytic Memos**

The researcher's analytic memos were used to document and reflect on the coding process. Patterns, themes, and concepts were documented at the conclusion of each participant interview. The researcher began to notice clear patterns after the third interview. Some of the patterns that were documented in the analytic memos were stability, faith, reading, and homework. Themes that emerged were establishing and maintaining a routine, modeling what is right and wrong, and the limit of support services for grandmothers raising grandchildren. The researcher's analytic memos also revealed concepts that impact the ability of grandmothers raising their grandchildren. The concepts were will to sacrifice for their grandchildren, wanting their grandchildren to live better and more productive lives than them, and stressing the importance of education through activities at home and in the community. There was a clear alignment between the analytic memos and the codes identified during first and second cycle of coding.

## **Coding**

Codes are a type of qualitative inquiry that allowed the researcher to locate and name the data revealed during the collection process of this study. The researcher utilized two cycles of coding to identify the qualities of the participant's experience and to identify the patterns to understand and explain the phenomenon. The cycles of coding allowed the researcher to look at each piece of data, make sense of it, and categorize it appropriately.

**First cycle coding.** First cycle coding was used to identify the feelings of the participants and their values. The first cycle of coding took place using elemental and affective methods of coding. Within the elemental method, a primary approach to qualitative data analysis (Saldana, 2009), process coding was utilized to search for ongoing action, interaction, and emotion taken in response to the situation or problem. Some examples of process coding that were extracted from the participant interview data are action words such as reading, talking, and reciting nursery rhymes. The participants reported value in reading to their grandchildren and having their grandchildren read to them. Coding also revealed the importance of talking and participating in conversations with their grandchildren. Within the affective methods, directly acknowledging and naming experiences (Saldana), emotion and values coding were used. Emotion coding explored the intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to label their emotions. Some examples of emotion coding that the researcher extracted from the participant interview data were words that notated the grandmother's personal feelings such as anxious about parenting a second time, frightened that they would not be able to provide everything their grandchildren needed, and excited to take on the responsibility and new role of parenting their grandchildren. Values coding assisted in identifying the themes amongst the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs to better understand their perspectives. Some examples of value coding that the researcher noted were nurturer, role model, teacher, disciplinarian, and student. The coding revealed that the participants wanted to teach their grandchildren by modeling values for them.

**Second cycle coding.** Second cycle coding was used to identify the patterns in their experiences and to create categories or themes to explain the phenomenon. This involved reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2002). The themes that were created to explain the phenomenon were connected to the researcher's analytic memos and the codes that emerged during the first cycle of coding. The significant patterns revolved around the grandmother's role in the informal education were encouraging the success of their grandchildren, providing a stable living environment that consisted of routines and structure, and modeling how to treat others and be a productive citizen. Two additional significant patterns were providing educational opportunities for their children to be successful and providing support with homework. The significant patterns that emerged in regards to support utilized were involvement in school and classroom activities, participation in church activities, and utilized the support provided by family and friends. For services needed, the significant patterns were more assistance from their grandchild's school and district and their own communities.

### **Peer Review**

A peer reviewer, with knowledge of qualitative research and a fellow doctoral student completing a dissertation study, was used to triangulate the data. The peer reviewer analyzed and coded the data from the transcripts and provided an etic

perspective. The researcher and peer reviewer coded the data independently and arrived at common themes.

### **Participant Questionnaires**

The questionnaires completed before the interviews took place provided data about participant age ranges and level of education (Table 2). Four participants indicated on the questionnaire that they were between the ages of 51-60. Three of the participants indicated they were between the ages of 61-70. Three of the participants indicated they were between the ages of 71 or older. According to the participants' responses, three received their high school diploma and one completed their GED. Two of the participants received their Associates degree and three received their Bachelor's degree. One of the study participants did not complete high school.

*Table 2*  
*Participants' Age Range and Level of Education*

Participant	Age Range	Level of Education
1	51-60	GED
2	71 or older	Associates Degree
3	61-70	Associates Degree
4	71 or older	High School Diploma
5	71 or older	High School Dropout
6	61-70	Bachelor's Degree
7	51-60	High School Diploma
8	51-60	Bachelor's Degree
9	51-60	High School Diploma
10	61-70	Bachelor's Degree

The participants also reported their professions and current employment status (Table 3). After compiling the participant data in regards to professions and employment status, two of the participants were in the teaching profession, two were nurse's aides, one an energy consultant, one a cosmetologist, one a computer builder, one in food services, and one in mortgage and sales. The questionnaire revealed that one participant was never employed. In regards to employment status, seven of the participants were retired, one worked part-time, one worked full-time, and one participant had never been employed.

*Table 3*  
*Participants' Profession and Employment Status*

Participant	Profession	Employment Status
1	Energy Consultant	Part-time
2	Cosmetologist	Retired
3	Nurse's Aide	Retired
4	Never employed	NA
5	Computer builder	Retired
6	Teacher	Retired
7	Food Service	Retired
8	Mortgage and Sales	Full-time
9	Nurse's Aide	Retired
10	Teacher	Retired

The questionnaire also asked the participants about their length of time as the primary caregivers and the circumstances that led to their grandchild/grandchildren being under their care (Table 4). According to the responses on the questionnaire, five participants had been the primary caregiver for their grandchild/grandchildren between three to six years. Five of the participants had been the primary caregiver for their grandchild/grandchildren for between six to ten years. On the questionnaire, the



participants were able to select a circumstance that led to the care of their grandchild/grandchildren. One participant responded that the circumstance for care was child abuse and neglect and one participant responded that drug abuse was the circumstance for care. One participant responded that death was the circumstance for care of her grandchild and one participant responded that incarceration was the circumstance for care. Six of the participants responded “other” to the question about circumstance for care. One of the six participants that responded “other” stated that the parent worked several jobs and was not able to care for the child appropriately. Five of the six participants that responded “other” did not choose to disclose the circumstance that led to them caring for their grandchild/grandchildren.

*Table 4*  
*Participants’ Length as Primary Caregiver and Circumstance for Care*

Participant	Length as Primary Caregiver	Circumstance for Care
1	Between 3 to 6 years	Child abuse and neglect
2	Between 6 to 10 years	Drug abuse
3	Between 6 to 10 years	Other
4	Between 3 to 6 years	Incarceration
5	Between 3 to 6 years	Other
6	Between 3 to 6 years	Other
7	Between 6 to 10 years	Other
8	Between 3 to 6 years	Other
9	Between 6 to 10 years	Death
10	Between 6 to 10 years	Other

The final two questions on the questionnaire asked the participants about the age in which they became the primary caregiver for their grandchild and the number of hours per week that their grandchild was engaged in informal educational activities (Table 5).

When asked about the age of the grandchild in their care, two of the participants were caring for five year old grandchildren and three participants were caring for six year old grandchildren. Two of the participants were caring for grandchildren that were seven years old and three participants were caring for grandchildren that were eight years old. In regards to the number of hours per week that the participants' grandchildren were engaged in informal educational activities, nine of the participants responded that their grandchildren were engaged in seven or more hours of informal educational activities each week. One of the participants, who was caring for a five year old grandchild, responded that her grandchild was engaged in informal educational activities one to two hours per week.

*Table 5*  
*Participants' Grandchild Age and Hours per Week for Informal Activities*

Participant	Age of Grandchild	Hours per week for Informal Activities
1	8 years old	7 or more hours
2	7 years old	7 or more hours
3	6 years old	7 or more hours
4	7 years olds	7 or more hours
5	6 years olds	7 or more hours
6	5 years old	1 to 2 hours
7	8 years old	7 or more hours
8	6 years old	7 or more hours
9	8 years old	7 or more hours
10	5 years old	7 or more hours

## Research Questions

The research questions guided the process of data collection and analysis of the data. The two main research questions were: What role does the African American custodial grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success? What support does the African American custodial grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success? Table 6 outlines the alignment between the two research questions and the interview questions.

*Table 6*  
*Alignment of Research and Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What role does the African American custodial grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are your thoughts about promoting school success at home with your grandchild?</li><li>How do you reinforce education at home?</li><li>From your perspective, what motivates you to reinforce your grandchild's education at home?</li><li>What do you use to informally educate your grandchild?</li><li>If I followed you through a typical evening informally educating your grandchild, what would I see you doing?</li><li>How might your home environment and/or community you raise your grandchild in promote his/her school success?</li><li>What behaviors or attitudes does your grandchild see you engage in that may promote his or her school</li></ol>

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	success?
	h. How might your educational experiences or educational background promote the educational experiences your grandchild is engage in?
What support does the African American custodial grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?	i. What services are provided by your grandchild's school, district or community to assist you in the informal education process?
	j. What services might you like your grandchild's school, district or community to assist you with in the informal education process?

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## Findings

The participants' responses to the interview questions revealed their perceptions of the role they play in informally educating their grandchildren in their care to promote school success and what support they utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in their care to promote school success. After analyzing and coding the data, several themes and subthemes were revealed to further explain the study phenomenon. This section will explain the themes and subthemes related to the study findings for both research questions.

The first research question sought to understand what role the African American custodial grandmother plays in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success (Appendix L). After analysis of the participants' narrative responses to the first research question, five themes emerged. Within the five themes emerged several sub-themes (Table 7). Five major themes were identified in

relation to the grandmother's role with several sub-themes. The grandmother's role themes included 1) encourage success, 2) provide structure, 3) role model, 4) provide educational opportunities, 5) assist with homework (Table 7).

*Table 7*  
*Research Question 1 (RQ1) Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Encouraging Success	a. Opportunities education can provide b. Communicating with school and teacher about their expectations
2. Provide Structure	a. Communicating expectations b. Supply needs c. Maintaining a positive living environment
3. Role Model	a. Teaching morals and values b. Teaching life skills
4. Provide Educational Opportunities	a. Educational Tools and Resources b. Extracurricular Activities
5. Assisting with Homework	a. Conversations about school day b. Prepare for homework assistance c. Ask and answer questions

The second research question sought to understand what support the African American custodial grandmother utilized and the services needed to be established to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success (Appendix M). Each participant was asked interview questions that were aligned to the second research question. After analysis of the participants' narratives, two themes and

several sub-themes emerged. The themes were 1) utilized services and 2) needed services (Table 8).

*Table 8*  
*Research Question 2 (RQ2) Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Utilized Services	a. School/classroom involvement b. Church c. Extended family
2. Services to be Established	a. After-school services b. Community support services

### **Presentation of Themes**

Data gathered from the participants' interviews as they relate to the themes of the research are presented. The first research question was designed to understand the African American grandmother's perception of her role in the informal education process of her grandchild. The second research question was designed to understand what services are utilized by the African American grandmother and the services that are needed.

## **Research Questions (RQ1): African American Grandmother's Perception of Role in Informal Education Process**

### **RQ1-Role-Theme 1: Encouraging Success**

The first theme that emerged from the first research question was *Encourage Success*. The participant responses to the interview questions revealed that they felt one of their roles in the informal education process was to encourage their grandchild to succeed in school. The participants stated that they encourage school success with the grandchild in their care by sharing the *opportunities education can provide* and *communicating with the school and teacher about expectations*, which are the two sub-themes (Table 7). The researcher's analytic memos noted that each participant made reference to encouraging their grandchildren and that success for their grandchild meant getting an education. Some sample participant responses were:

I encourage him to not have limitations or think that he has limitations on what he can do and achieve.

I think if you give a kid a reason to want to learn and give them examples of what learning can look like, then there is encouragement in there for them.

That is the most important thing in life, to get an education. To put everything you can into it, all of your effort. Try to learn so you can better yourself in life.

I know the more I help the better it is on them while in school.

I think education is important because if I don't encourage my grandchild to go to school, learn, listen, and be successful, then he won't do it.

I tell them to go to school and get a trade and not walk around with their pants hanging off their bottoms. I want them to be successful and not have to work hard like I did.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 1a: Opportunities education can provide.** The research data revealed that all of the participants felt it was important to share with their grandchildren why education is important and all of the opportunities that an education can afford them. The participants wanted their grandchildren to have a better life than them and they believed that education would be the only way for them to have successful lives. Eight of the ten participants stated that they felt they had lived good lives but they wanted their grandchildren to “go further than they did” in school. Throughout the interviews it became clear that the participants wanted to stress the importance of furthering their education. All of the grandmothers reported having conversations about going to college and how attending college can lead to a “good” job. One of the grandmother participants reported that she even talked about attending trade school as being one way to get a “good” job. Some sample responses were:

College is not for everybody, but you have to give them an opportunity to decide how they will further their education.

I took him to my old job with me so he could see the doctors and nurses and see what an education can do for you.



They know that if they expect to be successful in life and grow up to have nice things, nice cars, nice place to stay, nice clothes, then they must get an education. They just can't expect for a hand out. The only way they are going to have money to do things is to go to school.

#### **RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 1b: Communicating school and teacher expectations.**

The data also uncovered that the participants believed it was important to encourage success by keeping the lines of communication open with the school and to understand the school and teacher expectations. By knowing the school and teacher expectations, they could reinforce what was occurring at school at home. For instance one participant said, "I always say to her to listen to the teacher and don't act up because I don't send you to school to act up". Another participant said, "I am constantly telling my granddaughter to go to school and learn and not give the teacher any problems". Several of the grandmothers made reference to collaborating with the classroom teacher to better understand how to assist their grandchild at home and reinforce the skills being taught and school expectations in regards to behavior.

#### **RQ1-Role-Theme 2: Provide Structure**

The second theme that emerged from the first research question was *Provide Structure*. The study participants believed that providing their grandchildren with consistency would create a home environment that was structured. Two of the participants shared that before receiving custody of their grandchildren, there was not a lot of consistency in the grandchild's life. They felt that one of their primary roles was to

provide structure so that their grandchildren would feel safe and secure. One grandmother said, “I support giving them rules and guidelines. It prevents them from ending up in predicaments.” A second grandmother commented, “I support education at home by making sure he understands what is expected of him.” The researcher’s analytic memos noted that structure was evident from observing most of the participants’ homes. The homes were tidy and everything seemed to have a place. The homes evoked a sense of calm and stability. The three sub-themes that emerged from the *provide structure* theme were *communicate expectations*, *supply needs*, and *maintain a positive living environment* (Table 7).

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 2a: Communicate expectations.** The sub-theme of communicating expectations was revealed through the participant interviews. The grandmothers felt it was crucial to communicate their expectations for their grandchildren. They expected their grandchildren to attend school, behave, and listen to the teacher. At home, according to the participants, the expectation was for the grandchildren to follow the directions at home and be respectful of people they came in contact with. One of the participants’ responses was:

I truly believe that in order to have success at home you have to have some understanding of what your grandchild is supposed to be doing, what is expected of him. If he understands what is expected of him and you follow through with him and make sure he can do it.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 2b: Supply needs.** It was evident from the grandmothers' narratives, that in order to provide structure for the grandchildren in their care, the participants had to supply their grandchildren's needs, which is a sub-theme. Throughout the interviews, there was reference to making sure that the grandchildren had food to prepare them to learn, clothing so they could feel comfortable going to school, and shelter, a place where the children would have a place to relax after school and feel comfortable. Several of the participants referred to financial stability and sometimes having to do without things for themselves to make sure their grandchildren had their needs met. Some sample responses were:

I can honestly say I supply him with everything that he needs, down to the last crayon and scissors.

I feel that it is good for her to be in an environment where it is good. She is seeing good things, not negative things. She has a safe place to sleep every night, nice tops and pants to wear, and food to eat. It may not be what she wants to eat, but there is food.

My grandchildren come first in my life and I can do without a lot so they can have what they need and some things they want.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 2c: Maintain a positive living environment.**

Maintaining a positive living environment was the third sub-theme. During the participants' narratives, there were several references about making sure the participant's grandchildren were living in an environment that was positive, safe, and loving. One

grandmother said, “the thing that motivated me was the environment he came from and knowing I wanted him to see better”. According to the information shared in the interviews, some of the grandmothers received custody of their grandchildren due to unsafe living environments. They wanted to ensure that the grandchildren in their care would only see positive interactions in their home, would feel safe, and would know that they were loved and cared for. One participant said in her narrative, “I have peace in my home for my grandchild”.

### **RQ1-Role- Theme 3: Role Model**

The third theme that emerged from the data was the importance of the grandmothers being role models for their grandchildren. The participants were adamant about being their grandchild’s teacher at home and modeling good morals, values, and life skills not only for in the home and at school, but in the world they live in. The researcher’s analytic memos noted that all of the participants commented about wanting to have someone for their grandchild to look up to and to strive to be like. The sub-themes are *teaching morals and values* and *teaching life skills* (Table 7). According to one participant, she wanted her grandson to see her as role model instead of an athlete or musical artist. Some other sample responses were:

She sees me reading and studying the Bible and also sees me doing things for other seniors [citizens].

He sees me reading the newspaper and magazines. I feel like if a child sees you reading that is motivation for him.

He sees me reading and watching educational programs.

He has got to have a role model and I feel I am his role model.

I support education at home by modeling for my grandchild.

I always try to model good behavior.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 3: Teaching morals and values.** The first sub-theme was *teaching morals and values*. In order to informally educate their grandchildren, several of the participants felt it was key to teach their grandchildren the importance of saying “thank you” and “no thank you” and “yes or no ma’am or sir”. It was also crucial for their grandchildren to know the importance of treating others with kindness and fairness. Some sample responses were:

I teach him everything he needs to know to be raised up in an acceptable manner for society and respectful.

The thing that motivated me the most was remembering how I was taught and I want to make sure that my grandson is taught the same values in life.

The attitude that my grandchild sees me engage in is patience. They see me taking my time to finish things and if I don’t know the answer I look it up. They see me going to the computer to do further research. This tells them that they have to do it too.

I teach them to live a Christian life and to think confidently not negatively.

You have to teach your grandchild how to have a mind of his own.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 3b: Teaching life skills.** The second sub-theme was *teaching life skills*. As a role model, the participants felt that they needed to teach their grandchildren the skills they would need as adults. One participant said, “I teach arts and craft and sewing. They need to know how to sew a button on. I think that will help them with education at school.” Another participant said, “Having an education is important in order to take care of himself and his family financially in the future.” Based on the grandmother narratives, some of the life skills modeled were cooking, cleaning, and managing finances. The grandmothers wanted to make sure that they not only taught these skills but modeled them on a daily basis. The participants talked about their personal engagement in reading, watching educational programs, and participating in church and community activities. Several of the participants also shared that they felt it was important they model how they value education and strive to be life-long learners.

#### **RQ1-Role-Theme 4: Provide Educational Opportunities**

The fourth theme that emerged from the research question about the role the grandmother plays in informal education was *providing educational opportunities*. The participants all agreed that it was their responsibility to provide opportunities for their grandchildren to learn outside of school and in the home. Some participants said, “I make learning happen all the time, everywhere we go” and “I make sure he is learning and I make sure to include learning opportunities to see how much he knows”. One participant summed it up by saying, “I think hands-on experience is the best teacher”. According the

narratives, it was important for the grandmothers to supply *educational tools and resources*, the first sub-theme and encourage involvement in *extracurricular activities*, the second sub-theme (Table 7). The researcher's analytic memos noted that the participants were clear on wanting to provide the best possible opportunities for their grandchildren. They all commented on the importance of their grandchildren reading and being involved in activities outside of the home.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 4a: Educational tools and resources.** The sub-theme *educational tools and resources* emerged during the participant narratives. The grandmothers considered it their responsibility to provide educational tools and resources that would enhance the informal educational process. All of the participants stressed the importance of reading. Several of the grandmothers shared that they read aloud to their grandchildren and some allowed their grandchild to read aloud to them. They engaged their grandchildren in hands-on learning opportunities while in the kitchen cooking or driving in the car. Some sample responses were:

I really try to encourage her to learn how to cook and do different things like that to help with counting and measuring.

I provide educational tools for him such as a computer, books, and encourage him to study.

My grandchild has a library card and all of that.

I read books to him. I play games with him. I include him in the activities that I do in the house like higher order thinking questions when I am cooking in the kitchen.

I take my grandchild to the library. I had him get a library card to check out books and I even had him to check out novels on videos so he could sit and watch the movie.

We play games with numbers and words, flash cards.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 4b: Extracurricular activities.** Participation in *extracurricular activities* was the second sub-theme. Upon analyzing the participants' narratives, it was evident that informal education in the home also extended to activities outside of the home. One grandmother said, "they do things such as go into the community to swim with the other kids". Another participant made a similar comment by saying, "They have recreational activities such as swimming and playing ball...stuff like that". The grandmothers stated that activities in the community also assist them with the informal education process. Several of the grandmothers made reference to church and community activities that were not only beneficial for their grandchildren, but also impacted the types of activities they did at home to promote school success.

#### **RQ1-Role- Theme 5: Assistance with Homework**

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the data in regards to the first research question about the role grandmothers play in the informal education process was



*assistance with homework*. Based on the grandmothers' narratives, homework was a priority in their homes. By assisting their grandchildren with their homework, they were able to reinforce education at home, have a better understanding of the skills that were being taught, and promote school success. The three sub-themes within this theme were *conversations about the school day*, *prepare for homework assistance*, and *ask and answer questions* (Table 7). The researcher's analytic memos also noted the priority placed on their grandchildren completing their homework. During the interviews the grandmothers talked about a homework routine and they all pointed to the exact location that was used for their grandchildren to do their homework and other educational activities within their home. Some sample responses were:

You would see me encouraging her not to crumple the paper and to keep it neat. I would sit by her and listen to her read.

If he doesn't understand his homework I need to find out why he is not listening or why he does not understand the assignment.

I set aside time to do homework.

We sit at the table with all of the books open after supper for at least two hours or until it is done.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 5a: Conversations about school day.** The participants' interviews revealed the importance of dialogue between the grandmothers and the grandchildren. The grandmothers encouraged *conversations about the school day*. Before

beginning homework, eight of the ten participants stated that they ask their grandchildren about their school day. They were interested in hearing about what they learned, what they ate for lunch, and overall how their day was. This type of dialogue encouraged conversations between the grandmother and grandchild and created a positive environment for homework assistance. Some sample responses were:

I immediately ask him what he did in school today. Another question I ask is what did you eat. It is a funny thing, but they can never remember what they had to eat. Even asking a simple question you can learn something about your grandchildren from that. You can even think about comprehension skills, how well do they understand what they are doing at school.

You have to first ask how her day went before you do anything else, and how did she listen to the teacher and if they have homework.

You will see us sitting around talking about school and how we are going to continue to learn, read, and write.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 5b: Prepare for homework assistance.** Within the grandmother narratives it appeared imperative to *prepare for homework assistance*. One participant said, “First I get him ready to do his homework...he knows the routine”.

According to the interviews, preparation included providing the grandchild with a snack before beginning their homework. Several participants stated that preparing for homework assistance included making sure all resources were readily available for completing their homework. Some of the resources were paper, pencils, erasers, crayons,

dictionaries, and a computer if available. The ten participants stated that homework was completed at the table and that they were certain to make sure that the table was clear and clean so the homework would be returned to school the following day clean and neat. Several of the participants made reference to the kitchen table as being the place where homework was done and others referred to another table located in their home. One participant said, "Well, the first thing that I do in the evenings is to always give a hug. Then the next thing to do is to give a snack. I give him a little snack and I set the tone for him to do homework". All of the participants stated that homework was completed in the same place and normally around the same time each day.

**RQ1-Role-Sub-theme 5c: Ask and answer questions.** The third sub-theme is *ask and answer questions*. The analyzed data revealed that in order for the grandmothers to assist with homework, they considered it important to ask their grandchildren about their homework assignments to have a better understanding of the expectations and to also answer questions their grandchildren had about completing their homework assignments. Six of the grandmothers stated that they were hands-on during homework time. They are prepared to step in when the need presented itself and point out any mistakes that needed to be corrected. They were also there to answer questions and if they did not have the answers, were willing to assist their grandchild with additional research to find the answer. Four of the grandmothers stated that they did not necessarily know how to assist with all of the homework so they mainly played the role of support. They were there to encourage completion and reinforce the importance of the homework being neat. Some sample responses were:

He knows if he needs help he can ask me. If he does not understand a word he knows he can ask me. We look up the word or I will tell him what it means.

I always make sure to check behind him when he is doing his homework.

I will ask him to show me how the teacher taught them to do it.

If I see something on there [homework] that is wrong, I won't just say it is wrong.

I will say to look back over it to make sure you did not make a mistake. You want to encourage them to be able to go back and read over what they have and then find what is wrong, erase it, and get it right.

The second research question sought to understand what support the African American custodial grandmother utilized and/or needed to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success. Each participant was asked interview questions that were aligned to the second research question. After analysis of the participants' narratives, two themes and several sub-themes emerged from the second research question about support services utilized and needed by the grandmother caregivers.

### **Research Questions (RQ2): Services Utilized and Needed to be Established for African American Grandmothers**

#### **RQ2- Services-Theme 1: Utilized Services**

The participants were asked about the support they utilized to informally educate their grandchildren in their care at home to ensure school success. The narratives provided by

the grandmothers revealed that they *utilized services* to take advantage of the educational and extracurricular activities provided by their grandchild's school district, school, and community. Within this theme are three sub-themes, *school/classroom involvement*, *church*, and *extended family* (Table 8). They found value in the services that did not involve a financial expense on their part, but were willing to pay for services if it would ultimately impact the lives of their grandchildren. The researcher's analytic memos noted that the grandmothers were pleased that the schools provided some services to enrich their grandchildren's educational experiences. Some sample responses were:

I promote school success by having him go to afterschool tutoring. He has time to work on the computer and I take him to the library for story time. I like the idea of the community having story hour set up for the children.

They offer tutoring. I sign him up for tutoring even though he does not need it all the time to keep him sharp in math.

They have one-on-one at her school. There are even teachers that will come out into the home and work with my child one-on-one.

**RQ2-Services-Sub-theme 1a: School/classroom involvement.** It was evident from the data that the participants utilized services provided by the school district. The sub-theme *school and classroom involvement* evolved from the participants' narratives. The grandmothers stated that the schools provided afterschool programs and tutorial sessions. One participant reported that her grandchild's school district provided a homework hotline that students and parents could use to receive assistance with homework

assignments. Classroom involvement was also reported as important. Some of the services that the schools provided were opportunities to talk to the teachers about their grandchild's progress during parent teacher conferences, school open houses and family nights that allowed the grandparents to be engaged in their grandchild's learning process and to learn ways to further assist their grandchild at home. One participants' narrative included information about the school providing food services not only for breakfast and lunch, but weekend snack packages with healthy snacks for children on the days they are not in school. Some sample responses were:

The school is phenomenal. The principal is good. That is the reason we live here.

That is the only reason.

School, I beg the teachers to help me because my grade level was not up to par and I would like him to learn things that I could not learn.

The teachers encourage programs for grandparents with grandchildren.

The school told me about a tutor, a free one that would come to the house. That is why I think the schools assist.

It is important to cooperate and communicate with the teacher.

Our school district provides a homework hotline. If a child does not understand they can call the hotline.

They have tutoring and all types of programs at school. The kids can go back to school at least three times a week after school.

**RQ2-Services-Sub-theme 1b: Church.** The analyzed data revealed that the *church* provided many services to assist the grandmothers in informally educating their children. The participants shared that their local churches in their communities offered Sunday School and Vacation Bible School where the grandchildren could read and learn more about biblical stories. There were also other extracurricular activities that the church sponsored for field trips to support the educational process. The researcher's analytic memos also noted the importance of faith and church in the grandmother's lives. They each stated that they felt without God in their lives they would not have the strength to take care of their grandchildren and they wanted to keep their grandchildren involved in church activities. Some of the participant responses were:

I am a God-fearing woman and I have been all my life. My church has helped out a lot.

One thing I do know is that being a member of a congregation and your church doing the same thing, enforcing reading, writing, and arithmetic...is very helpful.

It helps for them to be involved in Sunday school, church, and choir. It helps a lot.

**RQ2-Services-Sub-theme 1c: Extended family.** The final sub-theme that emerged from the theme of utilized services is *extended family*. The grandmothers considered their extended family a support system they utilized and could not do without. The ten participants in the study all shared that they could not raise their grandchild by themselves. They all reported that their extended family members were actually their

support system. Several of the participants considered friends and neighbors apart of their extended families. The participant responses were:

I do not have a lot of knowledge from when I was in school. I have to seek out help from my other children.

When she is around our other family she sees us talking about college and the importance of it. I think this motivates her to do what her aunties did and it motivates her and helps me with knowing I have some support.

My other children stepped up to the plate and help when I really need help.

My niece is a teacher at my granddaughter's school and always makes sure she gets to the cafeteria to eat breakfast and makes sure I know what is happening at school. She lets me know everything.

My neighbors are always looking out for my grandchildren, making sure they stay out of trouble.

My two sisters were teachers and I always leaned on them to support us when completing homework. If there was something we do not understand, I call them for help or they come to the house to help with homework.

I get more help from other family and friends, more than my daughter. I cannot depend on her.

The other grandmothers I know also lend a helping hand when they see me tired.



I don't know what I'd do without my other family. Sometimes if I am short on money they help out or even bring left-overs over.

Good neighbors, that's what I have. If I ask, they are there. They make sure we are okay.

## **RQ2-Service-Theme 2: Services to be Established**

The final theme that emerged from the second research question in regards to what services does the custodial grandmother utilize or need is *services to be established*. The participant narratives clearly identified that there were some services that they were in need of from the school, district, and community in which they live. Within this theme are two sub-themes, *after-school programs* and *grandparent support programs* (Table 8). According to the grandmother's, they would continue to support the educational process at home and promote school success even if the services were not provided. They felt that it made their role as primary caregiver of their grandchildren less challenging if there were certain services provided. The researcher's analytic memos noted that the grandmothers appreciated the services that were provided but felt there needed to be more support, not only for their grandchildren but for them as caregivers. Some of the participant responses are below:

Really not too many services...I feel as grandparents they should provide more for grandparents because there is absolutely nothing for grandparents.

I would like to see more creative arts programs. Children need to be able to express themselves and if we can get them working more with the arts I know they can get there.

**RQ2-Services-Sub-theme 2a: After-school services.** One of the sub-themes that emerged was *after-school services*. The primary caregiver grandmothers felt that there should be more programs focused on the creative arts. Due to financial restraints within school districts, programs that addressed creative arts for children had been cut and were no longer available to children. Without these types of programs, the grandchildren did not have as many opportunities to express themselves through the arts. Another need that was communicated during the interviews was more support services for the grandmothers. Four of the participants stated that they were in need of more parenting tools and resources to better support their grandchild at school and to reinforce grade level skills, especially since this was their “second time around” as a parent of young children. They shared that it was more challenging the second time parenting and education had changed since they raised their children. The ten participants stated that they wanted to provide their grandchildren with everything that they needed to be successful in school and in life. Some sample responses were:

I would get frustrated with the work they would send home with him in first grade. It was so far advanced.

I don’t have a lot of time if I am raising my grandchild. I can’t achieve the things that I am trying to achieve if I am playing teacher and all these things.

First I would like them to put prayer back into the school. I think prayer in school would not only help my grandkid but all kids do better.

I would like for the school to have more afterschool programs and to help with their homework on things I cannot help her with.

**RQ2-Services-Sub-theme 2b: Community support services.** The final sub-theme was *community support services*. Six of the participants discussed the importance of the community providing programs for their grandchildren during the school year, in the summer, and for them as caregivers. Budget cuts had impacted services provided by local libraries, parks, and community centers. The services that were provided assisted the grandmother in reinforcing what was being taught at the school. They also provided resources and services that addressed financial concerns they were having with raising their grandchildren and meeting the emotional needs of their grandchildren. Some sample responses were:

Well, the community I live in does not provide enough assistance, but that is what I can afford.

There were certain parks we could go to for playing volleyball, soccer, and all those kind of things, but not anymore. There were even grandparents programs, but they cut those out too.

A lot of the programs were county programs. They are not doing it anymore. Those programs are not available anymore.

I feel like the community needs more resources for encouraging education, like more community center activities, after school programs, recreational activities. They are not there.

We need something for us so we can be better for our grandchildren.

### **Post Interview Questions**

At the conclusion of the interview the participants were asked to voluntarily respond to two written post interview questions within 72 hours of the face-to-face interview, which took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The two post interview questions were: 1) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about informally educating your grandchild at home to promote school success and following our interview and, 2) is there anything that you have done differently to informally educate your grandchild at home to promote school success? Eight out of ten participants completed the post interview questions and two participants did not complete the post interview questions.

The participants' responses to the first post interview questions revealed that they had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences as the primary caregiver for their grandchild. The eight participant responses were:

No help from school or community, it was a failure for me on their part.

It is hard work.

It takes dedication to raise your grandchild. Schools need to do more.

It is important to read to your grandchildren out loud.

It is important to help your grandchild read, listen, and learn because it is a step in the right direction. I enjoy what I do to help my grandchild get ahead.

I encourage my granddaughter by modeling for her.

I would like for my grandchildren to do their best and to think positively at all times.

It is important to be dedicated in all that you do for your grandchildren.

Eight out of ten participants wrote a response to the second post interview question. The second interview question asked the participants if they had done anything differently to informally educate their grandchild at home to promote school success since the interview. Two participants provided a “no” response. The remaining six participant responses were:

Have thought about home schooling my grandchild.

I took my grandchildren to the library to get a library card. I have taken them on field trips so they could have hands-on experiences.

Check to see if my grandchild really understands the work they are doing at school and talking to the teacher more.

Take my grandchild to the library more and get them more involved in cooking. It helps them solve math word problems.

I have encouraged them to think on their own and go to the library and check out books.

I have planned to take them on a vacation.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a description of the sample, an analysis of the data, and the research findings. The participants' questionnaires, interviews, post interview questions, and researcher's analytic memos were analyzed using two cycles of coding. The Social Learning Theory was used to explore the role of modeling and observational learning. The contexts that shape the grandmother's current parenting experiences were explored through the Life Course Perspective. Ecological Systems Theory offered a lens to explore the influence environmental factors can have on the outcome of children. The themes, sub-themes, and textual references were used to understand the phenomenon of African American primary caregiver grandmother's perception of her role in informally educating her grandchildren and the support that is utilized and needed to promote school success.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative phenomenological research study explored the African American primary caregiver grandmother's perception of her role in informally educating her grandchild at home to promote school success. The study further explored the services that the African American custodial grandmother utilized and needed within the school, district, and community. Two research questions guided the analysis of data. The two research questions were:

1. What roles does the African-American custodial grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?
2. What support does the African-American custodial grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?

The participants' questionnaires, interviews, post interview questions, and the researcher's analytic memos provided information about this phenomenon. A summary of the study, discussion of themes, and the researcher's perspective are presented in this chapter. Study conclusions, implications, limitations are also addressed. This chapter concludes with a proposal of recommendations for caregivers, educators, community leaders, and future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

This research utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand the African American custodial grandmother's role in informally educating her grandchildren at home and the services utilized and needed to promote school success. The African American population is seeing an increase in the number of grandmothers that are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, due to several circumstances. The primary focus of this research study was to explore their perceptions and to understand what services they utilized and needed to promote their grandchild's success in school.

A convenience sample of 10 African American grandmothers were recruited by sending study flyers to local organizations that support grandparents raising grandchildren and by word of mouth. Each participant indicated that they were African American and the primary caregiver for their grandchild between the ages of four and eight. Participant questionnaires, open-ended interviews, and post interview questions were utilized in order to get a rich, thick descriptive narrative of the grandmother's perception and experiences with the phenomenon. Audio recordings of the participants' interviews were transcribed, analyzed for data, and coded for themes. Triangulation of the data, member checking, and peer debriefing were utilized to ensure validity of the data. The participant narratives and other research data revealed seven themes and sub-themes within those themes.



## **Discussion of Themes**

Analyzing and coding the research data led to several themes and sub-themes.

The first research question about the role that the African American grandmother plays in the informal education process identified five themes: 1) encourage success, 2) provide structure, 3) role model, 4) provide educational opportunities, and 5) assist with homework. The second research question about the services the African American grandmothers utilized and needed identified two themes: 1) utilized services and 2) needed services.

### **Encourage Success**

The participants' narratives revealed that one of their roles was to encourage success. The grandmothers felt it was important to encourage their grandchildren to excel in education and to be as successful as possible. They believed they could be encouraging through their conversations and actions. Based on the narratives, their conversations symbolized a belief in their grandchildren's ability to become educated citizens. Some of the grandmothers even stated they told their grandchildren that education was the most important thing in life. Grandmothers made sure to provide the necessary tools and resources that were needed to make sure that their grandchildren made it to school on time. One participant stated, "It is on me to make sure that my grandson gets to school on time and is ready to learn. I make sure we are out of the house on time and without delay". They wanted their custodial grandchildren to live better lives and did not want them to work as hard as they had.

**Opportunities education can provide.** The participants encouraged the success of their grandchildren by sharing the opportunities a good education could provide. The narratives revealed how they wanted their grandchildren to grow up and have good jobs, nice homes, and be able to provide for their families. One participant shared that she thought it was important to expose her grandchild to how others live so they could see the direct correlation to getting an education and being successful in life. The narratives also revealed that the grandmothers did not want their grandchildren to expect “hand-outs”, but to achieve their goals on their own merits. One common element that was included in each participant’s narrative was that they wanted their grandchildren to go “further than they did in school”.

**Communicating with school and teacher about their expectations.** The custodial grandmothers felt their role in the informal education process was to reinforce the expectations put forth by the grandchild’s school and classroom. They expected their grandchild to go to school and be a model student, and the expectation was that they would listen to adults at school and follow instructions and directives set by the classroom teacher. Collaborating with their grandchild’s teacher was also a critical piece of promoting school success. The participants wanted to meet their grandchild’s teacher in order to understand what the teacher’s expectations for behavior and performance were and to communicate their own expectations for their grandchild’s education.

## **Provide Structure**

The study participants reported that providing structure was important when supporting the informal education process at home to promote school success. All of the grandmothers reported that it was critical to provide an environment for their grandchild that was structured and consistent. Before the grandmothers became primary caregivers, some of the grandchildren lived in homes that lacked structure and consistency. Providing a safe and secure environment would ultimately impact the grandchild's school performance because they knew they had a home where they felt comfortable and they were clear about what was expected of them.

**Communicate expectations.** In order for there to be structure in the grandchild's life, the grandmother's expectations had to be communicated. The grandmothers had to verbally tell their grandchildren how they expected them to behave at home and in public settings. They also felt it was important to state what the consequences would be for not meeting expectations and following through with what they said they would do.

**Supply needs.** The participants felt it was their responsibility to supply their grandchild's needs, such as providing a safe place to live and food to eat. By supplying their needs, they could engage them in the informal education process at home to promote school success. It was their duty to make sure their grandchild was well nourished and that there was always food in the home. Shelter was another non-negotiable need. Since the grandmothers wanted to provide a structured environment for their grandchild, they believed that having a safe place to "lay their heads every night"

provided consistency. The grandmothers' narratives also reported that they would go without things for themselves to make sure that their grandchildren had all of their needs met. Financial concerns were reported but they were willing to make their grandchild a priority and provide them with the necessary resources for a positive life.

**Maintain a positive living environment.** The study participants wanted their grandchildren to experience better lives so they believed that creating a positive living environment would do that. By providing a positive living environment for their grandchildren, they would know that they were loved and cared for. The grandmothers would model positive interactions with others so their grandchildren could see what it looks like to have healthy relationships with people. Based on the narratives, it was the goal of the grandmothers to provide this type of structure.

### **Role Model**

The study participants wanted to be a role model for their grandchildren. By being a role model, they could reinforce the informal education process at home to promote school success. The grandmothers considered themselves their grandchild's teacher at home. They wanted them to have someone to look up to and aspire to be. As a role model, they wanted their grandchildren to see them reading, watching educational television shows, and studying the Bible. Each of the participants' narratives included statements about their faith and wanting their grandchildren to "live Godly lives". But they first had to model these behaviors and consistently make sure they were living the type of life they wanted their grandchildren to live.

**Teaching morals and values.** As a role model, the grandmothers wanted to teach their grandchildren morals and values to live by. Each participant stated that they wanted to teach their grandchild the same lessons that they grew up with and even taught their own children. According to the grandmothers, it was important to teach and model common courtesies which could lead to living successful lives. They expected their grandchildren to treat others with kindness and respect, the same way they would want to be treated.

**Teaching life skills.** Teaching life skills would allow the grandmothers to support the informal education process at home to promote school success. The participants stated that they modeled life skills for their grandchildren on a daily basis. It was also important for them to engage their grandchild in the activities to allow them to practice these life skills. According to the participant narratives, some of the life skills were cooking, cleaning, sewing, and managing money. The skill of cooking not only prepared them for taking care of themselves as an adult, but it also reinforced reading and math skills. The skill of cleaning reinforced taking pride in themselves and their belongings. Managing money was a skill that two of the participants stated were crucial in order for their grandchild to be successful.

### **Provide Educational Opportunities**

It was imperative for the participants to provide educational opportunities to support informal education at home. These opportunities could take place inside or outside of the grandmother's home. The participant narratives revealed that educational

opportunities should occur all of the time and should include hands-on opportunities for learning. It was the grandmother's responsibility to supply the educational tools and resources and to seek out opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities.

**Educational tools and resources.** Tools and resources were needed to enhance the informal education process. The ten study participants reported that reading was important and that the library was a resource they used to reinforce reading at home. Several of the grandmothers stated they were eager to get their grandchild a library card. One participant stated that she utilized the public library for story times and to reinforce the reading skills taught at school. Cooking was a tool that was used to reinforce the informal education process at home. One of the participant's narratives revealed how she used cooking to reinforce counting and measurement. Educational games were also reported as tools and resources used by a few of the grandmothers. They played board games and used math and word flash cards for their grandchildren to practice and develop skills for school.

**Extracurricular activities.** The grandmother participants reinforced the importance of school, but that there needed to be a balance. They reported providing a balance by encouraging their grandchildren to get involved in extracurricular activities after school and on the weekends. During the spring and summer months, the grandmothers would take their grandchildren swimming at nearby community pools. They would also enroll their grandchildren in community sporting activities. They felt involvement in these types of activities helped to promote a well-rounded child.

## **Assistance with Homework**

One thing that was evident when analyzing the study data was the importance of homework. The participants' narratives revealed that completing homework was a priority that they made sure to communicate to their grandchildren. The grandmothers believed that they were reinforcing the importance of education by assisting their grandchild with their homework. Their responses to the interview questions stated they set aside time during the week for their grandchild to work on their homework and that they designated a place in the home that was suitable for completing their homework. They wanted to guarantee that their grandchildren understood and completed their homework correctly. As caregivers, they also wanted to be able to understand what their grandchildren were doing at school.

**Conversations about school day.** Before homework assistance took place, the grandmothers felt it was important to engage their grandchild in dialogue about their school day. They wanted to set a positive tone about the importance of education and know the details of their grandchild's day. Based on their narratives, the grandmothers felt this aided in creating a positive environment for doing homework.

**Prepare for homework assistance.** The grandmothers reported that structure and consistency was important to support the informal education process. In order to complete homework successfully, the grandchildren needed a routine. Some of the grandmothers reported the importance of giving their grandchild a snack before homework "so their mind would be on the homework and not being hungry". They also

stated that the location for completing their homework must be neat and clean. It was important for their grandchild to have adequate space to do their homework and they should be able to turn in homework that shows pride in their own work. When working on homework, it was also critical for the grandchildren to have the supplies that they needed. Some of the supplies reported in their narratives were paper, pencils, crayons, markers, rulers, dictionaries, and access to technology, i.e., computers, tablets, smart phones.

**Ask and answer questions.** The participants stated that they wanted to ask their grandchildren questions about their homework and wanted to be available to answer questions that their grandchildren had about their homework. Some of the grandparents reported being “hands-on” during homework time. They wanted to support their grandchildren by sitting there with them and walking them through each problem, step by step and by asking what was expected of them to complete the assignment. Some of the grandmother participants were there for support but only provided assistance if asked by their grandchild. If there were questions that could not be answered, the grandmother stated they would support their grandchild in finding the answer or seeking help from family members or even the teacher.

### **Utilized Services**

The African American primary caregiver grandmothers utilized support services provided by the school and community. Based on the participants’ narratives, they believed that it was important for them to take advantage of the services provided in



order to promote their grandchild's school success. They found value in the educational services provided by the schools. They wanted their grandchildren to participate in after school and tutorial programs. Their interviews also revealed that they encouraged their grandchildren to get involved in activities provided by their communities. The participants were willing to pay nominal fees to provide educational services for their grandchildren.

**School and classroom involvement.** Services provided by the school district before, during, and after school were appreciated by the participants. Several of the grandmothers shared that their grandchild's teachers offered tutoring before school for children that could not attend after school. According to some of the grandmothers, intervention programs were provided during the school day for their grandchildren. The intervention programs allowed their grandchild to receive additional one-on-one support during the school day outside of the classroom. The grandmothers also revealed that after school programs allowed their grandchildren to relax from the day and play with their friends, which strengthened their social skills. It also provided their grandchildren an opportunity to get a snack and begin their homework. Tutorial programs were beneficial because it allowed the grandchildren to receive additional support on skills they needed to strengthen that the grandmothers may have not been able to assist them with. The grandmothers were able to get involved in the educational process by attending events at the school such as family nights, parent teacher conferences, and school programs.

**Church.** The grandmothers' narratives also provided information about the services provided by churches in the participant's neighborhoods. The grandmothers stated that their faith and church attendance gave them the strength they needed to care for their custodial grandchildren. The grandmothers reported attending church on Sundays for the worship service and Sunday School along with their grandchildren. Along with attending church, they encouraged their grandchildren to participate in Vacation Bible School to read and learn more about biblical stories. Some of the participants also stated that their community churches provided additional educational activities and field trips for the children after school and on the weekends. According to the participants' narratives, the programs provided by the church after school and on the weekends promoted school success and continuous learning.

**Extended family.** The grandmothers identified their extended family members as support systems for informally educating their grandchildren to promote school success. Several of the participants considered individuals in their community as members of their extended families. Their narratives revealed that their family members assisted them with homework questions and that their extended family members in the community made sure that their grandchildren were safe and taking their education seriously when in their presence or care.

### **Services to be Established**

The participants reported in their narratives that the school and community provided services to promote school success, but there were some things lacking. They

were appreciative of the services provided but they felt some of the services did not meet their grandchild's immediate needs or their needs as caregivers. The grandmothers stated that it was very challenging when there were limited services provided.

**After-school services.** There were two services that the grandmothers reported needing from their grandchild's school and/or district. Their narratives revealed that more creative arts programs were needed for their grandchildren and that they were in need of support services for themselves. Some of the participants strongly believed that the programs that supported the arts assisted in developing a well-rounded student. The creative arts programs that were mentioned were dancing, painting, and music. As second time parents, the participants stated in their interviews that they wanted more tools that they could use at home to support their grandchild. Examples of the services could include how to enhance their grandchild's learning at home, beyond what they do at school and how to help their grandchild if they were not excelling at school.

**Community support services.** Due to budget constraints, the grandmothers revealed that a lot of the services provided by their community had been eliminated. Some of their public libraries no longer had weekly story times and the library books were not as up to date as they would like. Public programs that would assist the grandmothers with raising their grandchildren were no longer available. The number of grandparent support groups had dwindled and a vast amount of free services had been eliminated.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

Three theories framed the research study on African American grandmothers and their perceptions of informally educating their grandchildren. Social Learning Theory is the primary framework, Life Course Perspective is the second framework, and the third framework is Ecological Systems Theory. The researcher used the theories to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and its impact on the child, caregiver, and the environment in which they live.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Three concepts make up the social learning theory: learning through observation, mental states are critical to learning, and learning alone will not necessarily lead to changes in behavior (Bandura, 1977). From the analyzed data emerged the importance of the African American grandmothers being role models and modeling new learning, encouraging the grandchildren to succeed in school, and utilizing support systems to promote school success. Learning through observation, the first theory concept, occurred when the grandmothers reported that they model morals, values, and life skills for their grandchildren. They also shared the importance of modeling life-long learning through the reading of the Bible, watching educational television and researching the answers to unknown questions. The second theory concept, mental states are critical to learning, was also evident when the grandmothers' narratives revealed the importance of verbally encouraging their grandchildren to succeed in school and by creating an environment that

was built on consistency and structure and was safe and caring. The third theory concept of learning alone will not necessarily lead to changes in behavior, was evident when the grandmothers utilized support systems to support the informal education process at home. They believed that there had to be other avenues for promoting their grandchild's success in school.

### **Life Course Perspective**

Life course perspective looks at people's lives and experiences, how their experiences have structured the decisions in their lives and how these life decisions have changed from one period of their life to the next (Bengston & Allen, 1993). The participants in this study were all African American grandmothers who had raised their own children and never imagined raising a grandchild. They believed they were at a point in their lives where they could focus more on their dreams and desires. They each made a decision to be the primary caregiver for their grandchildren and to place some of their dreams and desires on hold to provide a structured environment for them. Based on their lived experiences, they were aware of what steps they needed to take in order to care for their young grandchildren and to create an environment where getting an education was at the forefront. Their experiences had also prepared them to understand that with life comes change and that it is up to them to determine how they will react and deal with the changes.

## **Ecological Systems Theory**

The environment in which a child is raised can aid in their positive life experiences. The theory asserts that children influence and are influenced by the environments in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There are five environments or layers that influence our behavior. The study findings revealed that one main priority of the grandmothers was to provide a safe and positive environment for their grandchildren, which is referred to as the microsystem. The grandmothers wanted to build a positive relationship with their grandchildren, which can be identified as the mesosystem. They also wanted their grandchildren to enjoy and excel in school and also be involved in positive extracurricular activities at school and in the community, which is the exosystem layer. The custodial grandmothers knew the importance of teaching core values and providing the resources in order to promote school success, which is the macrosystem layer. The final layer, chronosystem, can be identified as how all of the layers impact the grandchild's development over time.

## **Literature Review Comparison**

There were several commonalities found between the current research findings and those in the literature review. The grandmothers in the study felt it was their responsibility to take a strong role in their grandchild's education, communicating the importance of an education, utilizing services provided by the school and teacher, and involving their grandchildren in extracurricular activities. These findings are directly aligned to Gibson's study in 2005 on determining the strengths of the African American

grandmother primary caregiver. Dolbin-MacNab's (2006) qualitative study sought to determine if custodial grandmothers would benefit from parent education and training. The grandmothers reported that they had more time and attention for their grandchildren and they used their times together as opportunities to talk about the events occurring in the child's life, one of which was school performance and assistance with school assignments. Research question one, theme five, revealed that African American grandmothers placed an emphasis on talking to their grandchildren about their school day and assisting them with their homework each evening.

Dolbin-MacNab and Keiley (2009) conducted a study to examine how adolescents raised solely by their grandparents navigated their new environments and relationships with their grandparents. The participants described a pattern of interdependence with their grandparents. Their environment was one which they could talk and engage in a variety of activities with their grandparents. The participants' narratives from this current study revealed that the grandmothers wanted to engage their grandchildren in activities with them to not only promote school success but to build a positive relationship with them. The grandmothers' narratives identified the importance of their grandchildren participating in extracurricular activities at the school and church in order to develop social skills.

Goodman and Silverstein (2002) conducted a study and found that African American grandmothers in fractured families had the best psychological outcomes when faced with being the primary caregiver for their grandchildren. The study also posited

that their adaptation reflected a tradition of extended familism and reliance on surrogate parenting. The participants' narratives revealed that parenting a second time around would not have been their first choice. They were willing to sacrifice their personal needs and wishes to provide a home for their grandchildren. Gerard, Landry-Meyer, and Roe (2006) conducted a study and found that the grandparent caregivers experienced guilt and a sense of inadequacy about receiving help from family and friends in their informal support network. The participants in this study reported some sense of guilt when asking for assistance from family and friends, but they knew their extended family members would step in and assist when asked. The grandmothers were willing to ask for help when it was needed.

Solomon and Marx (1995) found that grandchildren raised by younger grandmothers performed better academically and the grandparents had more energy to engage in typical parenting activities. The grandmothers in the story reported that it was more challenging, physically and mentally, to parent a second time around, but that the challenges did not keep them from supporting their grandchildren. The grandmothers' narratives revealed their eagerness to read with their grandchildren and have conversations about their school day. The narratives also revealed that the grandmothers were excited to get their grandchildren involved in extracurricular activities and attend the activities with them.



### **Implications for Grandmother Caregivers, Educators, and Communities**

The findings of the study led to having a better understanding of the phenomena of African American grandmothers and their perceptions of informally educating their grandchildren at home to promote school success. The number of African American grandmothers raising their children continues to grow in the United States. African American grandmothers are more likely to be grandparent caregivers than grandmothers of other races (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). Grandmothers could have a stronger awareness of the roles they play in reinforcing education at home and engaging their grandchildren in activities outside of the home. The study also revealed that African American grandmothers, as primary caregivers of their grandchildren, seek support from the educational system not only to educate but to support them in educating their grandchildren at home. The educational system has opportunities to continue to assist grandmothers and provide services that can impact the overall development of children through the programs and services they provide before, during and after the school day. The grandmother caregivers also seek support from the communities which they live. The communities have a responsibility to provide services and programs for the individuals for which they serve.

### **Implications for Grandmother Caregivers**

After raising their own children, many grandmothers in the United States are now faced with raising their grandchildren by providing a safe and structured living environment, encouraging success in school, and determining what services are available

and how to utilize them. There are four implications for grandmother caregivers based on the information that was collected and analyzed during this study. The first implication is that is important for the custodial grandmothers to encourage their grandchildren to excel in education by supporting the educational process at home. They can encourage success by engaging their grandchildren in conversations about their school day and the things that they learned. The second implication for grandmother caregivers is that it is important for the custodial grandmothers to model their expectations and engage their grandchildren in educational activities at home to promote school success. Grandmothers can provide opportunities to enhance the learning that takes place at school through informal activities such as reading and playing games. The third implication is that it is important for the custodial grandmother to utilize the support services provided by their grandchild's school and the community they live in. Schools and communities are invested in developing and providing services for the individuals they serve. The fourth implication is that it is important for the custodial grandmothers to communicate what they need from schools and their communities to assist them in promoting the success of their grandchildren. Schools and communities need to receive feedback on the services they provide and potential areas of improvement.

### **Implications for Educators**

The educational system is charged with providing a solid foundation for the children they serve. School systems may not be as prepared to support the emerging numbers of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Educators have to consider what

role they play in supporting grandparent caregivers through the programs and services they provide. The study results have revealed two implications for educators. The first implication is for educational institutions to provide educational services for grandparents that will support them in engaging their grandchildren in informal education at home. The second implication is to provide school/district personnel that can assist primary caregiver grandparents with promoting education at home with their grandchildren. Grandparents raising their grandchildren seek support from the school system and want to build upon what their grandchildren are learning at school at home.

### **Implications for Communities**

Individuals look to their communities to provide the services they need and to be their voice on issues that impact their daily lives. For grandparents raising their grandchildren, they may not know what services are available to them. It is critical for communities to promote the services available and to encourage participation. Three implications for communities were revealed after the analysis of the research data. The first implication for communities is to continue to provide comprehensive services for primary caregiver grandparents to take care of their grandchildren. The second implication is to continue to enhance the community programs offered for grandparents raising their grandchildren in the community to support the educational process. Developing community programs that support and promote the educational experiences of grandchildren raised by their grandparents is the third implication for communities. Grandparents caregivers are willing to utilize services that their communities provide.

### **Recommendations for Grandmother Caregivers, Educators, and Communities**

The study revealed valuable information that could impact the role that caregivers take when raising young children and promoting school success, the support services and programs provided by educators and communities, and future research on the phenomenon of grandmothers raising grandchildren. It is crucial for grandmother caregivers to know the important role they play in informally educating their grandchildren at home. In order to support the educational process at home, educators should consider what role they play in supporting the grandmother caregivers. The communities, which the grandmother caregivers live, also have a responsibility to seek out the grandmothers to better understand their needs and what services that can provide to assist them.

### **Recommendations for Grandmother Caregivers**

There has been research on the role of the African American grandmother. She is viewed as a source of strength, communicator of family values, and provider of religious orientation. It is she who stresses the importance of service to others, racial pride, educational achievement, strong family ties, commitment to children, self-respect, discipline, and hard work (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). Grandmother caregivers are encouraged to continue to engage their children in reading activities. The reading activities can include the grandmother reading aloud to the grandchild or the grandchild reading aloud to the grandmother. By developing the skill of reading, it will impact the grandchild's achievement in other content areas taught at school. It might also be important for

grandmothers to continue to engage their grandchildren in activities to promote school success such as cooking and/or playing board or card games. Engaging in rich and thought provoking conversations with their grandchildren can also enhance their school success. As far as educational opportunities, grandchildren should also continue to have exposure to extracurricular activities. This involvement will allow the grandchildren to continue to apply what they have learned in school and at home with others.

Another recommendation for grandmother caregivers is to seek out grandparent support groups for participation. Support groups can provide grandmothers with information about parenting skills for their grandchildren and programs and services that will support them in the process of parenting a second time around. It may also allow grandmother caregivers an opportunity to network with other women in their same situation and build a sense of camaraderie with others that are having the same experiences as them. The voices of grandmother caregivers have to be heard by the schools that educate their grandchildren and the communities in which they live, and their extended family members. It is recommended that grandmothers express their needs for support when communicating with the educators at their grandchild's school, community leaders, and their family and friends. Schools and communities do not know what the grandparent caregivers need if they do not stand up for what support services they need to provide positive lives for their grandchildren. Keeping the lines of communication open will not only impact the caregiver but the educational experiences of their grandchild.

## **Recommendations for Educators**

Schools are responsible for educating children. In order to effectively educate grandchildren being raised by their grandmothers, it would be crucial to consider their educational needs. The narratives discussed in this study revealed that African American grandmothers want to play a role in the educational process of their grandchildren. One way educators can help is to provide the tools and resources that grandmothers are able to use at home to promote school success. Some of the tools and resources are extension activities, such as books, flash cards, and games that would assist in further developing grade level concepts and skills. Other tools and resources could be websites that grandchildren can utilize at home or at public libraries to practice skills learned at school. A final tool or resource could be to develop programs at the school that encourage grandmothers to get more involved in the educational process at school and at home. By keeping the lines of communication open, grandmothers can feel comfortable visiting the school and even asking educators for assistance when needed. With budget cuts in place across school districts across the United States, it is imperative that educational leaders take a stand in regards to programs being cut and the impact it will have not only on students, but also students that are being raised by their grandmothers. This means that educational institutions have to ensure there are resources for after school programs, tutorial programs, and programs that engage children in creative art activities.

## **Recommendations for Communities**

Communities can provide programs for children raised by their grandmothers that reinforce the educational process and support the grandmother caregivers. It would be encouraging if communities could continue to see the value in the programs and services that they provide. One such service would be those provided by public libraries in the communities. Both the grandmother caregiver and grandchild benefit from the programs offered at libraries. Once the basic needs of these children are met, schools and public libraries have an opportunity to support grandparents in the informal and formal education of the children in their care (Watkins, 2005). Communities should also establish grandparent support groups that will assist grandparents with the responsibility of rearing their grandchildren. The support groups can provide a support system and collaborative environment that grandparents can be a part of to encourage and motivate each other while taking care of their grandchildren. It is also recommended that community leaders seek out grandmothers raising their grandchildren and have conversations about the services and programs that they utilize in their community and need in order to continue to reinforce educational skills with their grandchild. Their voices are critical because the grandmothers are raising grandchildren that will ultimately be adults that may be contributing members in the communities. It is important for the local, state, and national governments to consider the impact their decisions will have on the lives of grandparents and the grandchildren they are rearing.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The results of the study gave rise to several topics that could be examined further.

Some recommendations for further research would be:

1. Exploring the African American grandchild's perception of the informal education process at home and its impact on their school success
2. Level of support African American educators provide African American grandmothers and the impact on school and home collaboration
3. Role of homework assistance in families led by African American grandmothers and the correlation to school success
4. Research the role of the extended family support and the influence on the African American grandmother's ability to promote school success
5. African American grandmothers' attitudes about seeking assistance to informally educate their grandchildren
6. Comparison of grandmother primary caregivers from different ethnic groups' perceptions of informally educating their grandchildren at home to promote school success
7. Impact that the African American grandmother's own educational experiences and that of their adult children have on the educational support they provide their grandchildren in their custody
8. Influence of participation in grandparent support groups and promoting school success at home with their grandchildren



9. Combining quantitative and qualitative measures to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges African American grandmothers face when raising their grandchildren and its educational implications

### **Study Limitations**

There were four limitations to this study. The first limitation was narrowing the focus of the study to the North Texas area. Due to limited resources and time, the researcher was only able to interview participants who lived in the area. The second limitation of the study was the participant criteria. The participants had to be African American grandmothers who were rearing their grandchildren between the ages of four and eight years old. The third study limitation was not having access to potential participants who were involved in grandparent support groups. Emails and flyers were sent to grandparent support groups in the North Texas area. The researcher was did not receive any responses from grandparent support group participants. The fourth study limitation was that the researcher had participants from only one sub-culture of grandmothers. Each participant was caring and attuned to the needs of their grandchildren. There were not any participants in the study who had negative feelings about raising their grandchildren and sought to find an alternate caregiver for their grandchildren.

### **Study Conclusions**

The research study sought to answer two questions and gain a better understanding of the African American caregiver grandmother's perception and

experiences in regards to engaging their grandchild in the informal education process. The 10 participant's completion of the questionnaire, interview participation, and responses to the post interview questions added valuable insight into this phenomenon. Their willingness to be open and honest about their experiences raising their grandchildren and promoting school success opened a venue for further discussions about this issue that is facing all schools and communities.

The first research question explored the role that the African American grandmother plays in informally educating the grandchildren in her care to promote school success. From this single question emerged five roles that the African American grandmother plays. The first role was one of encouraging success. The participants believed that one of their responsibilities was to encourage their grandchildren by exposing them to the many life opportunities that an education can provide and to understand the teacher's expectations so they could encourage and reinforce achievement at school. The second role that emerged from the data was that of providing structure. The grandmothers felt that in order to provide structure for their grandchildren, they needed to communicate their expectations for behavior at home and school. They made it their priority to provide all of their grandchildren's needs and create a living environment that was safe and positive. The third role that the African American grandmothers played in informally educating their grandchildren was that of role model. According to the participants, in order to be a role model they had to teach their grandchildren morals, values, and life skills. These skills would not only impact their behavior and actions at home and school, but would ultimately lead them to being responsible adults and citizens.

Providing educational opportunities was the fourth role that the African American grandmothers played in the informal education process. By providing educational tools, resources, and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, their grandchildren were able to reinforce the skills they were learning at school to make connections to the real world. The fifth role was that of assisting with homework. The participants' narratives revealed that their grandchildren experienced success when there was a routine for completing their homework. The grandmothers were adamant that it was important to have dialogue with their grandchildren about their school day first. By preparing them for completing their homework with a snack and making sure they had the resources they needed, the grandchildren were mentally prepared to begin their assignments. Another crucial aspect of assisting with homework was asking and answering questions. The grandmothers wanted to ensure their grandchildren that they were there to support them and guide them in the direction so they could be successful with their homework.

The second research question explored what support was provided by the school and community to support the African American grandmother in promoting school success and what services were needed. The study concluded that the participants utilized support services provided by the school, church, and their extended family members. The grandmothers were appreciative of the after school programs and tutorial sessions provided by their grandchildren's schools. Some of the participants also stated that the food services, breakfast, lunch, and weekend snacks, were very helpful. They were also pleased that their grandchild's school encouraged their involvement by inviting them to school programs, school family nights, and parent teacher conferences.

Faith was one thing that all participants reported as something that kept them strong. The community churches were a support system that the grandmothers utilized for weekly services, Bible study, and Sunday school. The church was not only a support system for the grandmothers but for the grandchildren as well. The church provided the grandchildren opportunities to learn more about the Bible and participate in extracurricular activities sponsored by the church. Extended family members were also a support system that the grandmothers utilized to promote the school success of their grandchildren. The grandmothers considered people in their communities as extended family members. If a family member was unable to assist them in promote school success, the grandmothers looked to individuals in their community that they had built trust and relationships with to support them.

Though the school and community provided services to support the grandmothers when informally educating their grandchild, there was still room for support services. Budget cuts had taken away programs and services that the schools and communities provided that were important to the grandmothers and their grandchildren. The schools no longer have as many creative arts programs for the children during the school day and after school. The participants believed that programs such as these assisted them in informally educating their grandchild and promoting school success. These programs engaged their grandchildren and kept them focused on learning and achieving in school.

The grandmothers were proponents of the public library, however, budget cuts led to libraries being closed and services normally provided to the community being taken

away. Grandmother support groups in the community were no longer as readily available. These support groups provided the grandmothers with an opportunity to talk to others in their same position and build a sense of community. The support groups also provided them with information about new services and programs offered to them and their grandchildren that would support the informal education process at home.

The grandmothers' answers to the interview questions and written responses to the post interview questions provided a wealth of information about their roles and support utilized. The study participants all expressed that they were at peace with raising their grandchild and would make the same decision to raise their grandchild if they had to do it all over again. Their main priority was to provide a safe and loving living environment for their grandchildren so they could attend school, excel in education, and not have to worry about their home life. Each African American grandmother stated that their faith is what gives them the desire and strength to parent a second time. They find joy in seeing life through their grandchild's eyes and know that education is the one thing that can guarantee them a better life.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the research study findings on the African American grandmothers' perceptions of the informal education process at home to promote school success. Alignment of theoretical frameworks, correlation between this study's findings and that of studies in the literature review were included. The implications for the research study were also discussed. Recommendations for grandmother caregivers,

school and district educators, and community leaders and organizations were discussed.

Topics for future research were also presented in this chapter.

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Email

Hello, my name is Dedra Lee-Collins and I am a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. I am conducting research for my dissertation and am interested in learning more about how African American grandmothers, who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, informally educate their grandchild at home. I would also like to learn about what support they receive or would like to receive from their family, grandchild's school, and or community when raising their grandchild. Participation in this research study is voluntary and there is potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions for the participants.

Qualifications are participation in this research study are:

1. African American female
2. Primary caregiver for your grandchild between the ages of 4 and 8
3. Willing to participate in a 1 hour interview process and answer post interview questions.

A study flyer has been attached with more detailed information. Please consider posting or sharing this flyer with your organization participants. Thank you for taking the time to read my email and feel free to contact me at [dlcol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dlcol@sbcglobal.net) or 972-978-6182 with any questions.

## APPENDIX B

### Study Flyer

**Are you a grandmother that is the primary caregiver for your grandchild between the ages of 4-8?**



The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the African American grandmothers' perspective of her role in the informal education of her grandchild and the support that is needed.

**Study Qualifications:**

- ✓ African American female
- ✓ Primary caregiver for your grandchild
- ✓ Raising a grandchild between the ages of 4-8 years old
- ✓ Willing to participate in a 1 hour interview and complete a questionnaire and post interview questions

**Participation in this study is voluntary. If you meet the study qualifications and would be interested in participating please contact Dedra Lee-Collins at (972)978-6182 or at [dlcol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dlcol@sbcglobal.net). There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions.**

***A \$25 gift card will be given for your participation and completion of interview.***

## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Letter



Hello, my name is Dedra Lee-Collins and I am a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. I am conducting research for my dissertation and am interested in learning more about how African American grandmothers, who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, informally educate their grandchild at home. I would also like to learn about what support they receive or would like to receive from their family, grandchild's school, and or community when raising their grandchild. Participation in this research study is voluntary and there is potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions for the participants.

Qualifications are participation in this research study are:

1. African American female
2. Primary caregiver for your grandchild between the ages of 4 and 8
3. Willing to participate in a 1 hour interview process and answer post interview questions.

A study flyer has been attached with more detailed information. Please consider posting or sharing this flyer with your organization participants. Thank you for taking the time to read my email and feel free to contact me at [dlcol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dlcol@sbcglobal.net) or 972-978-6182 with any questions.

## APPENDIX D

### Interested Participant Script

Thank you for contacting me about your interest in my research study. The purpose of this research study is to learn about the African American primary caregiver grandmother's perspective of how she informally educates her grandchild at home, what support she may receive from family and or community, and what support she might like to receive.

Before I go any further with the study, I would like to ask you four questions to determine if you meet the qualifications for participation in this study.

1. Are you an African American female?
2. Are you the primary caregiver for your grandchild?
3. Is the grandchild that you are the primary caregiver for between the ages of 4 and 8?
4. Will you be willing to participate in a 1 hour interview process and answer post interview questions?

Thank you for answering those questions.

***(Choose one of the options below based on their responses to the four questions above.)***

*At this time you do not meet all of the study qualifications. I appreciate your interest in participating in this study and taking the time to contact me. If you know of anyone that meets the study qualifications, will you please give them my contact information. Thank you again and have a wonderful day.*

*At this time you do meet the study qualifications and I would like to schedule a convenient time to sit down and interview you.*

For your convenience I can meet at a location that you select and at a time that will work for you. Your name or any identifiable information will not be used in this study and you can choose to withdraw from participation at any time. For your time, you will receive a \$25 gift card for your full participation. If you would like to continue this process, what day and time would be convenient for you to complete the questionnaire and respond to the interview questions?

I really appreciate you agreeing to participate in this research study. I will see you \_\_\_\_\_. I will contact you 24 hours prior to our scheduled appointment to confirm our visit or to reschedule if you need to. Before the interview I can answer any questions you may have and you will have an opportunity to read the consent form agreeing to participate in the study. Thank you again and if you would like to contact me before we meet with any questions or concerns you can contact me at 972-978-6182.

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Protocol

Hello (participant's name), it is great to see you and I would like to thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. I am excited to hear your thoughts and experiences about how you formally educate your grandchild. The interview will take about 60 minutes. During this time I will ask you a series of questions about the role of informal education in your life and the life of your grandchild and what support you have received and would like to receive. For the purpose of this study, examples of informal education are reading picture books, singing songs, reciting rhymes, naming objects in your environment. These are just examples of informal education and are not limited to these. If there are questions that you do not feel comfortable in asking, feel free to let me know and we will go to the next question. During the interview if you feel uneasy and would like to stop the interview and your participation as a whole, we will stop immediately, no questions asked.

The information that will be gathered during this interview will only be seen by myself and will only be used for my dissertation study. Before we go any further, let's go over the consent form and feel free to stop me and ask me to explain anything that is not clear to you.

Now that you have signed the consent form agreeing to your participation, will you please complete the questionnaire. I can assist you with completing the questionnaire if you would like.

Since you have signed the consent form and agree to participating, let's begin the interview. Remember that you can stop me at any time during this process.

## APPENDIX F

### Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Perspectives of African American Grandmothers as Primary Caregivers:  
Informally Educating Their Grandchildren to Promote School Success

Investigator: Dedra Lee-Collins

Explanation and Purpose of Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Ms. Lee-Collins' dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to understand the African American primary caregiver grandmothers' perspective of informally educating her grandchild or grandchildren at home and the support that is needed to informally educate her grandchild or grandchildren at home. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an African American female and have identified yourself as the primary caregiver of your grandchild between the ages of 4 and 8.

Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend one hour of your time in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you questions about your experiences as the primary caregiver of your grandchild between the ages of 4 and 8 and the type of support that you receive or would like to receive from your family members, grandchild's school, and the community in which you live. You and the researcher will decide together on a private location where and when the interview will happen. The interview will be audio recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. At the conclusion of the interview you will be asked to respond to two written post interview questions within 72 hours of the face-to-face interview. If you agree to respond to the post interview questions, which will take about 10 to 15 minutes to answer, you will receive the questions and a stamped and addressed envelope to mail the post interview questions to the researcher.

Potential Risks

The following are potential risks to participating in this study and the steps that have been taken to minimize those risks.

Emotional Discomfort – You will be verbally told, in writing, and before the interview begins that you may decide not to answer any and all questions during the interview process and have the choice to discontinue your participation at any time. The principal investigator will work to minimize such occasions and provide a list of support resources at the time of consent and before data collection.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials



Loss of Confidentiality – Your confidentiality will be protected to the full extent that is allowed by law. The interview will take place in a setting that has been selected by you to provide privacy. You will be assigned an ID code for computer entry and analysis of the data, that will only be known by the principal investigator. The completed transcripts will be locked in the office of the principal investigator. Paper copies, computer files, any identifiable information and audio recordings will be destroyed within one year after completion of the study. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions.

Loss of Time – You were notified of the time commitment on the study flyer and before and after the interview. Anytime during the process you may choose to withdraw your participation, without questions asked. For loss of time and your willingness to participate, you will receive remuneration of a \$25 gift card.

Coercion – You will be notified of your rights to end your participation in the study at any time during the process and you will not have to justify your decision to the principal investigator. Your participation in the study is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time.

Fatigue – Anytime during the process the participant can choose to withdraw their participation, without questions asked. A break will be provided if you experience fatigue. If you would like to discontinue the interview and continue at a later date, the principal investigator will schedule a time that is convenient you.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

#### Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Following the completion of the study you will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation. If you would like to know the results of the study they will be mailed to you.\*

#### Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at [IRB@twu.edu](mailto:IRB@twu.edu).

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Signature of Participant

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Date

\*If you would like to know the results of the study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ or

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

### Questionnaire

## **Questionnaire**

**1. What is your age range?**

- a. 30-40
- b. 41-50
- c. 51-60
- d. 61-70
- e. 71 or older

**2. What is your highest level of education?**

- a. High School Diploma
- b. GED
- c. Associates degree
- d. Bachelor's degree
- e. Graduate degree
- f. Did not complete high school

**3. Are you currently employed?**

- a. Yes, I am employed.
- b. No, I am not employed

**4. If you are currently employed or have been employed, what is or was your profession?**

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**5. Are you the primary caregiver for your grandchild/grandchildren in your home?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (please explain)

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- 6. How long have you been the primary caregiver for your grandchild/grandchildren?**
- a. Less than one year
  - b. Between 1 to 3 years
  - c. Between 3 to 6 years
  - d. Between 6 to 10 years
- 7. Which best describes the circumstances for which you are the primary caregiver of your grandchild/grandchildren?**
- a. Death
  - b. Drug abuse
  - c. Teen pregnancy
  - d. Divorce
  - e. Domestic violence
  - f. Mental illness
  - g. Physical illness
  - h. Crime
  - i. Child abuse and neglect
  - j. Incarceration
  - k. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. What are the ages of the grandchildren that you are the primary caregiver for?**
- Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- Child 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Child 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. In the span of one week, approximately how many hours do you engage your grandchild in informal educational activities?**
- a. 1 to 2 hours
  - b. 3 to 4 hours
  - c. 5 to 6 hours
  - d. 7 or more hours

## APPENDIX H

### Alignment of Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>1. What roles does the African-American grandmother play in informally educating the grandchildren in her care at home to promote school success?</p>	<p>a. What are your thoughts about promoting school success at home with your grandchild?</p> <p>b. How do you reinforce education at home?</p> <p>c. From your perspective, what motivates you to reinforce your grandchild's education at home?</p> <p>d. What do you use to informally educate your grandchild?</p> <p>e. If I followed you through a typical evening informally educating your grandchild, what would I see you doing?</p> <p>f. How might your home environment and/or community you raise your grandchild in promote his/her school success?</p> <p>g. What behaviors or attitudes does your grandchild see you engage in that may promote his or her school success?</p> <p>h. How might your educational experiences or educational background promote the educational experiences your grandchild is engaged in?</p>
<p>2. What support does the African-American custodial grandmother utilize and/or need to informally educate the grandchildren in her care at home to ensure school success?</p>	<p>i. What services are provided by your grandchild's school, district or community to assist you in the informal education process?</p> <p>j. What services might you like your grandchild's school, district or community to assist you in the informal education process?</p>

## APPENDIX I

### Post Interview Questions



Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 1:**

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about informally educating your grandchild at home to promote school success?

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**Question 2:**

Following our interview, is there anything that you have done differently to informally educate your grandchild at home to promote school success?

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## APPENDIX J

### Grandparent Support Resources

## Organizations

<p>Community Council of Greater Dallas Dallas Area Agency on Aging 1349 Empire Central, Ste. 400 Dallas, TX 75247 214.871.5065</p>	<p>A Family Affair Supervised Visitation and Education Services 1624 Dent St. Garland, TX 75042 214.206.1855 <a href="http://www.afamilyaffairoftexas.com">www.afamilyaffairoftexas.com</a></p>	<p>Dallas County Kin Care Network Grandparent Caregiver Warm-line 214.670.1866 <a href="http://Dallaslibrary2.org/kincare/resources.html">Dallaslibrary2.org/kincare/resources.html</a></p>
<p>Resilient Grandparent Caregiver Project – University of North Texas Bert Hayslip <a href="mailto:hayslipb@unt.edu">hayslipb@unt.edu</a> 940.565.2675</p>	<p>Tarrant County Kinship Network One Church-One Child Kinship Program <a href="mailto:Newbegin11@sbcglobal.net">Newbegin11@sbcglobal.net</a> 214.755.2008</p>	

## Websites

<p>Grands Place <a href="http://www.grandsplace.org/gp4/tx.html">www.grandsplace.org/gp4/tx.html</a></p>
<p>Grandparents Raising Grandchildren <a href="http://www.raisingyourgrandchildren.com/States/Texas.htm">www.raisingyourgrandchildren.com/States/Texas.htm</a></p>
<p>American Psychological Association <a href="http://www.locator.apa.org">www.locator.apa.org</a></p>

## APPENDIX K

### Follow-up Phone Call Script

Hello (*participant's name*). I want to thank you again for your time during the interview.

At the conclusion of your interview, you volunteered to complete the written post interview questions and I just wanted to follow-up with you to see if you were able to complete them or if you would like for me to assist you in any way with completing them. If you have decided that you would not like to answer the questions I definitely understand and appreciate the time that you have committed with assisting me with my research.

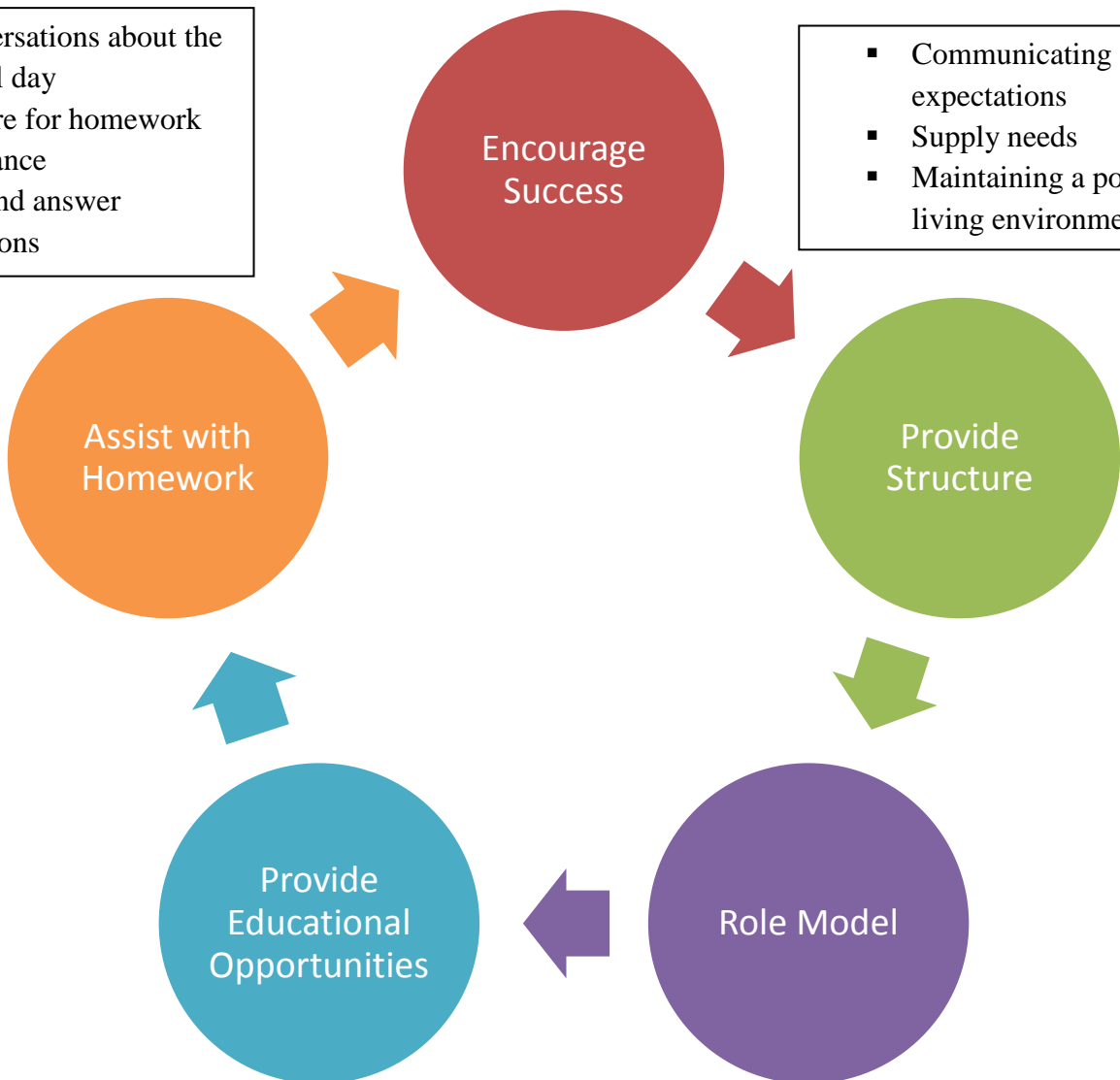
## APPENDIX L

Findings/Themes for Research Question One: Roles

- Opportunities education can provide
- Communicating with school and teacher about their expectations

- Conversations about the school day
- Prepare for homework assistance
- Ask and answer questions

- Communicating expectations
- Supply needs
- Maintaining a positive living environment



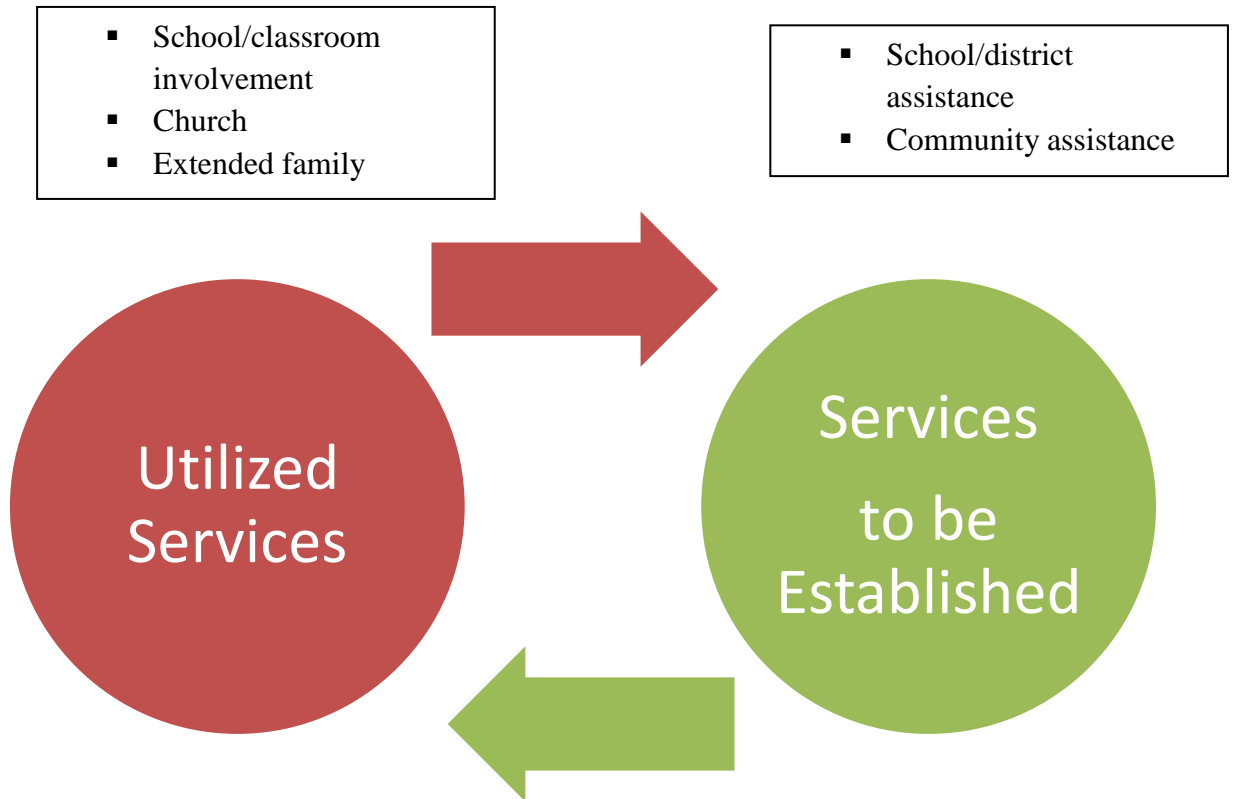
- Educational tools and resources
- Extracurricular activities

- Teaching morals and values
- Teaching life skills

## APPENDIX M

Findings/Themes for Research Question Two: Services to be Established





## APPENDIX N

### IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416  
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

December 11, 2012

Dear Ms. Lee-Collins:

Re: *Perspectives of African American Grandmothers as Primary Caregivers: Informally Educating Their Grandchildren to Promote School Success (Protocol #: 17170)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from December 11, 2012. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair  
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. Karen Petty, Department of Family Sciences  
Graduate School