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A Story Only We Can Tell: The Lived Experience of Black Women Teachers in White Rural Schools

Maria Tucker

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A STORY ONLY WE CAN TELL: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF BLACK WOMEN
TEACHERS IN WHITE RURAL SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Maria A. Tucker

August 2008

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Maria A. Tucker

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TEACHERS IN WHITE RURAL SCHOOLS

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Maria A. Tucker

Approved August 2008

Dr. David L. Lovett, Dissertation Committee Chair

Dr. Kurt L. Kraus, Committee Member

Dr. Joseph Padasak, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

A STORY ONLY WE CAN TELL: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS IN WHITE RURAL SCHOOLS

By

Maria A. Tucker

August 2008

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. David Lovett

A Story Only We Can Tell: The Lived Experience of Black Women Teachers in White Rural Schools captures the stories of five women including the researcher, who teach in rural White school districts. The researcher employed a rigorous, consistent heuristic method for gathering the data. The process began with the researchers' initial engagement with the research topic. The initial engagement was documented through autobiographical writing and self-dialogue. From the self-dialogue emerged the individual depiction of the researchers' story.

The four women (co-researchers) revealed their stories through autobiographies and participating in interviews with the researcher. Once all of the stories were collected, the researcher entered into an intense process of immersion and incubation with the stories. This process involves many cycles of listening to the interviews and rereading

transcriptions to gain illumination of the individual and collective experiences of the women. The stories are presented through individual depictions of each woman told in her own words.

A composite depiction describes the experience of the women as a whole and embraces the common themes of the stories. Using a poetic medium, the creative synthesis communicates in an inspired and meaningful way the voice of the experience. The major themes included 1) Maintaining Strong Family Ties and Influences, 2) Experiencing and Witnessing Prejudice, and 3) Being Proud, Strong, and Respectful Black Women. The themes emerged from the autobiographies and interviews with the co-researchers.

The stories of these women are told in their own words and the themes are presented through their voices using their words. The literature review outlines three primary experiences of Black women working in White institutions namely, racism, sexism, and biculturalism. The summary outlines the findings of this study as they relate to the literature review. Implications for informed practice in White rural school districts is also discussed. The study focuses primarily on the recruitment and retention of Black women in White rural schools. Recommendations for future research are also listed.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Sheldon M. Tucker. This work is yours just as it is mine. Your words of support, encouragement and affirmation have propelled me forward on this journey. You have seen through to the spirit of my existence and brought forward excellence. As this part of the journey comes to a close I honor you and celebrate our commitment to completing this work together as one. I love you. To my children Patience Chastity and Rivers Washington – You have shared Mommy with so many throughout this process and I am thankful for your willingness to support Mommy at such young ages. This work belongs to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I must thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for granting me the opportunity to participate in this journey on the “road to doctorate-ville”. I have grown tremendously as a person as a result of this experience.

I am eternally grateful to the women who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their stories allowed me to go on a journey of self-discovery. I am hopeful that their experiences will do the same for countless others that encounter their stories.

Dr. David Lovett, you inspire me to be press forward, to make a difference, and to be an agent of change. Your guidance, leadership, support and encouragement throughout this entire process have made me a better person. You continue to inspire me as a professional and community leader. I am blessed to have you in my life as a mentor and now as a friend.

Dr. Kurt Kraus, when I think of you I will always remember that you are the man that taught me to LOVE my work. You brought out more in me than I knew existed as a researcher. You showed me how to let the process and methodology unfold and encompass me. This was truly the success of this work and I owe that to you. You are a champion researcher, a phenomenal methodologist, a compassionate servant and a caring friend. The lessons I have learned from you will always be with me.

Dr. Joseph Padasak, your willingness to serve in the midst of one of the most hectic transitions of your life has been a blessing. You always made time for me to stop in and discuss issues, questions or concerns. I appreciate your servitude and respect your

ability to make the hard decisions. Your input into this work and commitment to impacting change in rural communities is refreshing.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Each day I walk into a building with approximately thirteen hundred students. Of those students approximately four percent represent minorities who live in rural south central Pennsylvania. These percentages are not alarming, as this is the growing trend across our nation. In the last two decades, Pennsylvania has nearly doubled the number of rural non-White residents. Census Bureau data of 2000 shows an increase in rural non-Whites from 2 percent to 4 percent (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2006). What is alarming about this scenario is I walk into my school building everyday as the only Black teacher. School days do not pass without this reality being foremost in my mind. It is brought to my attention through daily interactions with colleagues, administrators, students and parents. I am unable to ignore the certainty that I have a responsibility to my ethno-cultural heritage, my professional community, my students and myself. This responsibility embodies a phenomenon that is rare among rural schools in America – the presence of Black women educators (Harmon, 2001).

This study on the experience of Black women teachers in rural White school districts possesses a two-fold rationale. I have a personal interest in the experience, as a Black woman teacher working in a White rural school district, to realize how the experience of other Black women resonates with my own experience. I also have a professional interest, as an educator, to contribute to the educational and research community a lucid understanding of the experience of Black women working in rural White school districts.

Therefore, the study employed a qualitative analysis of first person experience as a primary source of data. Existing research into minority teachers revolves around

recruitment, retention and attrition rates. I was interested in providing an opportunity for the experience of Black women teachers to speak for themselves about the whole experience as teachers in rural White school districts. My goal is not to illuminate recruitment and retention percentages and implications, but instead to divulge an experience.

In order to delve into the experience of Black women teachers in rural White school districts in their own words, the study utilized heuristic inquiry. Similar to the goal of phenomenological research, not centered in finding causes of experiences, but rather on elucidating the structure of the experience itself, my goal was not to reach conclusions as to why Black women chose to work in rural White schools or why they remain in these positions. Rather, my interests were in following a strict methodology that allows a complex phenomenon to speak for itself. In doing so, I hoped to realize how their experience reverberates with my own experience and contributes to the understanding of the education and research community by providing a more complete understanding of the experience of being a Black woman teaching in a White rural school. In an effort to expose this phenomenon and gain insight into what it means to exist on a daily basis as a Black woman teacher in a White rural school, as a researcher I have to disclose my experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, the reflection of my experience becomes imperative to the unveiling of the experience.

The population of our nation as a whole is becoming more diverse, but our teaching pool is not (Duarte, 2000). Teachers today are encouraged and in some instances mandated to not only teach the curriculum but to prepare critical and diverse thinkers, problem solvers and cooperative workers. With the demands to diversify methods of

delivering education and the increasingly diverse cultural mix of our nation, it becomes imperative that educators from varying groups of society be present and prepared to embrace the unique worldviews of students. Reinforcing the importance of students of color receiving instruction from minority educators, Gordon (2000), suggested, “People of color are an essential source of teachers who are responsive to the needs of students of color” (p. 7). Furthermore, Weiher (2000) found that minority student achievement increases as the percentage of minority teachers increases. The performance of minority students suffers when there is not a sufficient presence of minority educators (Weiher, 2000; Meier, Stewart, and Wrinkle, 1991).

A homogenous teaching force has far reaching implications for a society whose foundation rest upon individual freedoms and depends upon public education as a primary intermediary to educate its populace (Darling-Hammond and Dilworth, 1996) As a society we have recognized that teachers play an influential role in the lives of children. We must also realize that the relationship between school and society is pertinent and that teachers possess not only influence over the lives of children but also the power of validating certain knowledge and characteristics and not others. With this authority given to educators, it is vital that the teaching force is representative of the society. Darling-Hammond and Dilworth reflected on the societal responsibility of diversifying the teaching force:

The responsibility for establishing a racially/ethnically and linguistically balanced teaching force rest with the entire society...a more inclusive teaching force does not just happen: many students of color, who are marginalized in K-12 settings must be better prepared to meet the challenges of professional training of

any type....(p. 3)

Many factors contribute to the shortage of Black women teachers. The teaching profession has undergone many changes and challenges in an increasingly opportunistic economy. While the teaching profession once ranked high on the list of professions for women, now many other opportunities exist for both women and minorities. Furthermore, the competition for exceptional professionals leaves the field of education with the challenge of competing for the best and the brightest young professionals with less than equal salaries to offer (Duarte, 2000).

In order to obtain a teaching force representative of society, efforts must be made to diversify the teaching pool. Investigation into the experience of existing Black educators is a useful tool in achieving this goal. Exploration into the motives that led these Black educators to pursue teaching, as career is purposeful in informing educational leaders, policy makers, and community members seeking to diversify learning communities. The urgent need to diversify the teaching force arises in response to the changing complexion of K-12 schools. Commenting on the future experiences of teachers in this diverse nation Garcia (1995) remarked:

In the decades to come it will be virtually impossible for a professional educator to serve in a public school setting, and probably any private school context, in which his or her students are not consequentially diverse – racially, culturally, and/or linguistically. (p.373)

While the supply of minority educators is insufficient to the increasing demand of minority students in our nation, there remains a cadre of minority educators in urban areas. Minority educators are prone to teach in schools with a large populace of minority

students (Darling Hammond and Dilworth, 1996). While this does not diminish the need across our nation for more minority educators, it produces opportunity to investigate the lived experience of minority teachers in school districts with White populations. The growing population of minority students in rural school districts further emphasizes the necessity. Darling-Hammond and Dilworth further commented on rural areas, “These communities, too, are increasing in student racial/ethnic linguistic diversity and are often less able to compete with larger school districts” (p. 15).

In phenomenological analysis, one is able to uncover the experience of Black female educators in rural White school districts. While the intent of the study is not to answer the questions but to describe experience, disclosure of the experience reveals themes and implications that inform practice.

My initial engagement with this topic came as a result of my own experiences upon being hired as the only Black teacher in my school. Coming from a southern upbringing, attending predominantly Black schools, having had many Black teachers, principals, and superintendents, I was in awe of the absence of such examples in rural White schools. Furthermore, I was in awe of the community perception of Black students, parents, and myself as an educator.

I immediately found myself in a precarious situation and was convinced that I simply was not the only one who lived this experience on a daily basis. My initial reaction was the need for change. I felt an overwhelming desire to educate my learning community about what it means to be Black in a rural White school. It was obvious to me that they did not understand the plight of the minority children or myself as a teacher. I did not want their opinions to be founded only on stereotypical images of Blacks in the

media. I found quickly that the Black students had bought into stereotypical images of themselves as underachievers and lazy students. Everyday my blood seemed to boil. Growing up in a home where being Black was something to be proud of, a rich culture unlike any other on the planet, I was appalled at the lack of pride these Black students had in themselves. I wondered daily what other Black teachers experienced. Did everyone feel like I felt? Was anyone else frustrated? If so, what were they doing about it? What could we do together?

I believed that the future of our young Black children in rural White schools was on the line. If I didn't act, they would grow up not knowing the richness of their existence. Yet I knew immediately that if they were going to learn, I could not wait for it to come from their White teachers, principals, counselors, and superintendents. For these were the same people that have allowed them to buy into the negative stereotypes and the fact of the matter was many of them held those same stereotypes about Black people.

It is this fact that made this research very complicated. There was a constant battle between the responsibility and obligation to tell the story and the fear of exposing an uncomfortable reality. This apprehension existed not only for myself, but also for the co-researchers. Those that decided to participate did so despite the apprehension. The reality remains that the story can only be told from the inside. Many people may believe they know and understand the existence of Black women in White schools, but to truly be enlightened to the experience, the women must tell their stories in their own words.

This experience led me on a journey to find others like myself. I needed to find Black women who were teaching in these rural White schools and find out if they experienced what I experienced. I wanted to know if I was the only one whose blood was

boiling. I wanted to know what we could do but before action, I needed to know what we were all experiencing. This blood boiling passion led me to this study. It also led me to a methodology that would allow these women to tell their stories in their own words.

Searching the literature of Black women in White institutions revealed three major experiences. Biculturalism, racism, and sexism are noted experiences of Black women working in White male dominant institutions. In order to reveal the experience of these women and to tell my own story I chose heuristic inquiry as a method to conduct this study. Heuristics requires the researcher to probe his or her own experience while exploring that of participants. The commonalities are revealed through the words of the participants. The methodology is intensely emotional, reflective, and requires endurance. Since my desire to tell this story was fueled by my own passion and existence as a Black woman teaching in a White rural school, this methodology resonated with me as I searched for a way to understand my own experience and learn about the experience of others.

Moustakas (1990) describes heuristic methodology as “a return to self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one’s own experience” (p.13). My understanding of this statement led me to the realization that these concepts are manufactured within my experience as a Black woman teaching in a White rural school district in south central Pennsylvania. The following heuristic study provided an opportunity for me to explore my intuitive experience and observations while providing a platform for others to share their journey as well. I, along with four other Black women followed the reflective map of heuristic methodology in order to illuminate our

experiences with being Black women teaching in White rural school districts in south central Pennsylvania.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Professional Experiences of Black Women

When seeking to understand the professional experiences of Black women, one must first recognize her experience as individual. Historically her experience has been identified as a combination of that of White women and Black men. Although the aforementioned groups represent a deviation from the norm of White man, they do not address what it means to be both Black and woman. The historical practice of defining the Black woman experience as a combination of the White woman and Black man contributes to the invisibility of the Black woman and does not recognize her existence and experience as a whole person. Observing the historical legal practices of America, as it relates to the Black woman, Scarborough (1989) commented:

The Court's [United States Supreme Court] failure to recognize and articulate the unique experiences of Black women as workers, slave breeders, and 'unrapable' [*sic*] women, whose womanhood has continuously been devalued by American society, led it to project the experiences of one class of women onto all women. (p. 1463)

The issue has not disappeared. This failure to understand and address the unique experiences of Black women in America has perpetuated into professional experiences of racism and sexism for Black women. While some theorist purport that the experience of gender and race are separate and could provide an ironic advantage for Black women (Epstein, 1973), others assert that race, gender and class are salient in the lives of women (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). Inquiry into the lives of Black women firefighters under

the assertion of the later, Yoder and Aniakudo (1997), found race and gender to be inseparable. Reflecting on this finding, Yoder and Aniakudo noted:

The inseparability and confluence of race and gender for Black women became blatantly clear in our interviews when we asked the women to indicate whether the incidents of differential treatment they had described were attributable to their race or gender. Almost universally, these women rejected our assignment, claiming instead that such a distinction is artificial. (p. 336)

Not only are professional Black women in White institutions subjected to issues of racism and sexism as a result of membership in two groups of low status, but Black women also manage the demand of biculturalism and marginality. Dill (1979) defines biculturalism, as developed by Valentine (1971), as the relationship of Blacks to White society. Dill further elaborated, “The concept assumes that blacks have been simultaneously socialized into two different cultural systems: white Euro-American and black Afro-American” (p. 547). Bell (1990) describes this bicultural existence as leading to a position of marginality. Defining a marginal person, Bell contributed:

A marginal person is one who lives on the boundaries of two distinct cultures, one being more powerful than the other, but who does not have the ancestry, belief system, or social skills to be fully a member of the dominant culture group. (p. 463)

Building from the concept of biculturalism and marginalism using methods of co-inquiry, Bell (1990) investigated the life and career experiences of Black professional women in non-traditional White organizations. The findings indicates that career oriented Black women working within White organizations have adapted to use their

bicultural existence as a strength. However, the intrinsic satisfaction of reshaping the historical perspectives of Black women does not come without the price of contending with the pressure associated with a bicultural existence. Explaining challenges such as tokenism that occur in unadaptable organizational structures, which do not accommodate people of color Bell supplied:

A token is a representational figure of her racial and gender work group...black women can be easily perceived as tokens by white colleagues since they are classified generally as a 'two for one' affirmative action hire due to their dual minority status. (p. 474)

Role stress theory contributes to the understanding of how the maintenance of a bicultural existence can result in the stress of role overload and role ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal, 1964). Role overload refers to the varying and often conflicting tasks to be accomplished within a given role. Role ambiguity implies uncertainty or confusion about the requirements for a role. As a result of negative stereotypes of Black women within the White culture and the limited access of knowledge of assumed professional roles, Bell (1990) comments, "Consequently, black women may find themselves responding to stereotypical projections, rather than being able to establish themselves as vital members in their organizations" (p. 475).

While acknowledging the existence of living in a bicultural world, the women also recognize a pull from both cultural contexts. Bell (1990) explained, "... while a woman is constantly trying to prove her competence in the dominant white community, she must also exert an equal, if not greater, amount of energy in maintaining ties to the black community" (p. 475).

Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) further investigated the experience of Black women in White institutions. As previously mentioned, this study investigated the relevance and race and gender in the social workplace of Black women in White institutions. Again ascribing to the concept of the marginalization of Black women in White male dominated groups, Collins (1986) refers to Black women as “outsiders within”.

Adopting this definition of Black women in the study, Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) uncovered recurring themes of subordination through exclusion manifested through co worker hostility, insufficient instruction, silence, close supervision, lack of support, stereotyping and differential treatment. Another recurring theme of a more encompassing definition of differences revealed similar findings to Bell (1990) of token difference as it relates not only to White males, but also Black males and White females. The final theme in her study unveiled the omni relevance, inseparability, and confluence of race and gender.

Martin (1994) investigated the Black female experience in the White male dominated police occupation. This study purposed to address the unique situation of Black women officers and the experiences and interlocking of racism and sexism. Similar to other studies documenting the experience of Black women, emergent themes suggest the interconnections of racism and sexism, ambiguities in bases of differential treatment, and a challenges to prevailing notions of the occupation.

Black women in this study referred to experiences of being marginalized not only by White men and women but also Black men. Documenting this experience as it relates to the affirmative action mandates of the promotion of one Black woman for every White woman, Martin (1994) explained, “Despite these generally disadvantageous counting

rules, the black women often have incurred the hostility of both white women and black men who feel that the black women have taken ‘their’ places” (p. 389).

Historical perspectives of black women also permeated through the treatment received on patrol. The White woman, who historically is placed on the pedestal and viewed as frail, versus the Black woman who performs heavy labor and embodies a mythical “beast of burden” (Dill, 1979), received differential treatment on patrol assignments. Describing this experience, Martin (1994) commented:

On patrol women tend to be treated according to those traditional patterns...Many white patrolmen are protective of white women...black women also are told to remain “back covers” by male partners who do not expect them to perform as equals. When they defer to white men and accept a passive role, however, they cannot count on being protected as females and may instead be viewed as “lazy”.
(p.391)

Specific consideration in this study is the historical presence of the police as oppressors within the Black community. As a result, the Black women experience a reluctance to adopt the traditional style of policing. Martin (1994) mentioned this challenge to the prevailing notion of the profession, “Black women face uncertainties related both to co-worker backup and to unpredictable response of citizens to a black woman exercising authority” (p. 391).

More recently Alfred (2001) investigated tenured Black women at a White university and the processes by which they develop competencies to meet career expectations in dominant organizational cultures. While acknowledging similar challenges to previously mentioned studies on Black women in White institutions, such

as biculturalism, racism and sexism, this study purposed to uncover what avenues Black women use to navigate White academic culture to fulfill career expectations. Using biculturalism as a framework to discover experiences contributing to success, five tenured Black women at a White research institution were interviewed. Outlining the findings that led to professional success among Black women in White academy, Alfred (2001) delineated:

1. Creating positive images of self-definition and rejecting stereotypical images of themselves as black women.
2. Finding a safe place where they could reaffirm themselves as black women.
3. Knowing the academic culture and its role expectations.
4. Becoming visible within their disciplinary and institutional cultures.
5. Maintaining a fluid life structure from which they could draw the power necessary to negotiate White dominated cultures. (p. 117)

The predominant recurrence in the literature surrounding professional Black women in dominant culture institutions emphasizes historical perceptions of Black women, the intertwining of race and sex, and a bicultural existence. All of these frameworks set the stage for acknowledging the experience of the Black woman as an individual experience not one to be compiled from that of the White woman and Black man.

Black women have been excluded as whole persons from American society. This leaves abundant space in the literature for the documentation of the experiences of Black women professionals in White institutions. While the previously mentioned studies focused on White male dominated cultures, the documentation of White female

dominated institutions, such as nursing, teaching, and social work are not included in the literature. Deciding not to include such careers in her study, Epstein (1973), commented, “We excluded nursing, social work and teaching, which are not only women’s fields but are low in prestige and considered professions almost sole by the United States census” (p. 928). The historical context is relevant to the absence of such literature on Black women in these fields.

African Americans and the Teaching Profession

Factors influencing both positive and negative images of teaching as a profession are fundamentally tied to ones historical experience with public schooling. Experiences vary among groups and comprise specific encounters throughout history with public education. Gordon (2000) premised this interpretation of schooling, based upon experiences with the public school system, helps to discourage teaching as a career option for minority groups. Gordon acknowledged:

If individuals have had negative educational experiences, and/or if they did not receive support or respect for their views while in school, they will have difficulty entertaining plans for a life-long occupation requiring their active participation and success in schooling. (p. 4)

Gordon’s study in particular refers to the historical experience of racial inequality of African Americans as a source of discouragement from teaching as a career as well as, inadequate pre-collegiate academic preparation, stagnant minority college enrollment, and certification barriers to the profession as contributing factors to the shortage of African American teachers (2000).

Contributing to the discussion of the shortage of African American teachers from a collegiate perspective, Shipp (2000) conducted a study comparing African American education majors with non-education majors. Using a 7-point Likert scale participants rated factors such as salary, advancement opportunities and contribution to society according to importance. The data revealed distinct differences between education and non-education majors. Shipp summarized, “The data gathered in this study revealed distinct differences between the African American education majors and non-education majors in both the importance placed on selected career choice factors and perceptions of the attractiveness of a career in teaching” (p. 348).

While education in America has irrefutable ties to citizenship and popular education, historically there has also been a prevalence of the politics of oppression and popular education in America. Anderson (1988) commented:

Both schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education...both were fundamental American conceptions of society and progress, occupied the same time and space, were fostered by the same governments, and usually were embraced by the same leaders. (p. 1)

Further commenting on the historical experience of oppression in America for minority groups, Omi and Winant (1994), reflected, “The U.S. has confronted each racially defined minority with a unique form of despotism and degradation. The examples are familiar [*sic*]: Native Americans faced genocide, blacks were subjected to racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized and Asians faced exclusion” (p. 1). This historical legacy as it relates to education cannot be undermined. Carter and Goodwin

(1994) emphasize the significance of identifying this history and its impact on education and racial identity. Acknowledging the importance of recognizing the role of race in the educational arena, Carter and Goodwin commented, “The prevailing interest in multiculturalism, diversity, and cross-cultural education subsumes race. When race is subsumed, the current and historical role that it has played and continues to play in the educational arena is distorted and clouded” (p. 292).

This historical and governmental framework of inequality in American education has persisted and resulted in long lasting effects for African American students in present day educational institutions. Commenting on the outcome this inequality has on minority students Darling-Hammond (1995) responded, “As a consequence of structural inequalities in access to knowledge and resources, students from racial and ethnic “minority” groups in the United States face profound barriers to educational opportunity” (p. 465).

The trend of inequality in America resulted in an exclusion of African American students from public schools. The result of this exclusion becomes evident in twentieth century statistics that reveal minority students have completed fewer years of school than their white counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 1995) Furthermore, years after *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, (1954) segregation of public schools persist predominantly in urban areas where minority students continue to attend minority schools. Reflecting on this concentrated population Darling-Hammond (1995) noted, “African American and Hispanic American students continue to be concentrated in central city public schools, many of which have become majority “minority” over the past decade” (p. 466).

Despite the overwhelming presence of minorities in central cities, Orfield and Ashkinaze (1991) found that integration of schools had positive impact on the achievement of African American students in metropolitan Atlanta. The strong correlation relationship was not found between wealth of the district and expenditures per pupil, but between the percentage of low-income students and its achievement scores. Outlining the finding regarding integrated schools as optimistic, Orfield and Ashkinaze noted:

Racially integrated suburban schools (25-75 percent black) scored much better than their black suburban counterparts, despite the fact that they had almost as many low-income students (21 versus 24 percent). These integrated schools scored slightly above the metropolitan mean and almost twelve points better on achievement test than predominantly black suburban schools. Thus, independent of student economic status, racial composition appears to help determine how well schools perform on these tests. (p. 127)

Earlier studies outline contrasting views to this research as cited in Irvine and Irvine (1983), which outlined key variables to the desegregation process that changed the way by which Black student achievement was impacted by both the school and community. Irvine and Irvine outlined the pre and post Brown era noting that prior to *Brown versus the Board of Education* (1954) the education of Black students depended on the interdependence of the school and community whereas, after Brown the impact is independent and possibly contrary to the achievement of Black students. They also cite Kroll (1980), which noted finding no “statistically significant research from 1955-77

which showed that desegregation influenced black student achievement positively” (p. 421).

More recently Weiher (2000) supported the findings of Orfield and Ashkinaze (1991) summarizing that African American achievement improves with the presence of majority students. Weiher concluded:

...the performance of minority students is heavily dependent upon the academic context of the schools. Indeed, the coefficient for the white passage rate variable indicates that for every increase of one point, there is a corresponding increase in the passage rate for black students. (p. 889)

Though contrasting in view, both perspectives on the impact of desegregation on the achievement of Black students make one issue apparent. Many years after *Brown versus the Board of Education* (1954), race continues to be a prominent issue in the education of Black students. Carter and Goodwin (1994) reinforced, “Race has and continues to operate as a barrier to educational and social mobility and change” (p. 291).

Reviewing the historical experience offers insight into the growing shortage of Black teachers. However, there are many questions yet to be answered about how to diminish the shortage. While much of the literature outlining the impact of desegregation focuses on the Black and White populace, it is pertinent that future research examines the increasing diversity of our nation to include other ethnicities, which also comprise the minority populations of public schools. Although the focus of Black education outlines issues surrounding segregation and desegregation, the education of other minority groups are unique experiences. Similar to Blacks, in order to understand the current trends of minority experiences in education, the education history of these minority groups must be

examined. Commenting on this realization, Lee and Slaughter-Defoe (1995) observed, “As we enter the 21st century, it is likely that increasing numbers of African American children will be educated with other, culturally different populations in the same school and/or same classroom at both elementary and secondary levels” (p. 364).

Recruitment and Retention of Rural Teachers

Implementing and maintaining higher standards of learning for the children of our nation requires the ability of districts to recruit and retain highly qualified educators across our nation. Rural schools and rural educators constitute more than 45 percent of the public school population and will be instrumental in the development and maintenance of higher academic achievement for students (Harmon, 2001).

The projected shortage of teachers in correspondence to the rising student enrollments leaves many rural districts with few options to diversify and increase their teaching force. Many recruitment and retention challenges exist that are unique for rural school districts. One such challenge is the great difference between rural communities. The differences between rural communities lead to varied definitions of ideal teaching candidates for every community. Harmon (2001), communicated, “Not all rural communities are the same. Each school board, superintendent, and school will likely define and articulate its perception of the ideal teaching within its unique rural context” (p. 4).

Further challenges of attracting teachers to rural school districts include adjustment to geographic isolation, difficulty with community lifestyle and expectations, and lower salaries. These difficulties have lead to a 30-50 percent teacher attrition rate in

rural schools (Lemke, 1994). Commenting further on the special challenges of rural districts Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) offered:

The circumstances of rural districts and schools create special challenges. The small populations and geographic isolation of many rural schools affect their access to resources, including the size of the pool of applicants and the ability to offer competitive salaries and teacher support programs. Rural districts face this problem both in specific grades and in specific curriculum areas. (p. 1)

While much of the research on rural schools focuses on the problem of recruiting and retaining teachers, these challenges are further complicated as the population of students in rural schools becomes more diverse. Administrators and school officials in rural districts are not only challenged to attract highly qualified teachers with fewer resources than urban and suburban districts, but are further challenged to attract minority teachers. In a study conducted by Pesek (1993) surveying rural school principals on the most effective recruiting sources, minority applicants presented a unique challenge for rural school principals. Noting this challenge, Harmon (2001) mentioned:

Because research reveals that black applicants consistently use formal recruiting sources more frequently than informal sources (e.g. referrals), more than one recruitment source should be used. Also because many colleges and universities that serve rural areas have great difficulty in attracting minority students, a school district may need to expand its recruitment efforts to institutions outside its rural area. (p. 10)

Recruitment

Sustaining high quality educators for children regardless of where they live is imperative for maintaining the democratic ideals of our society. Implications for successful practice of recruiting teachers to rural schools are vital to achieving this goal. Emphasizing the strengths of teaching in a rural school, such as few discipline problems, great chances for advancement, smaller classes, independent teaching opportunities and personal contact are key to realistic recruiting of rural teachers (Harmon, 2001).

Highlighting the need for rural school districts to become more aggressive in recruiting measures, Harmon (2001) proposed, “Small rural schools must become more aggressive, partly by identifying potential candidates early and by providing them with a thorough orientation of the school system and community” (p. 7). Strategic selling of candidates on the community is an essential component of rural teacher recruitment as adjustment to community lifestyle contributes to high attrition of rural teachers. Hammer, Hughes, McClur, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) provided, “Being strategic involves employing local data to analyze needs, develop plans, and make decisions; having appropriate collaborators at the state, district, and local levels; and leveraging available resources to maximize results” (p. 11).

Further implications for practice include the concept of “growing your own” rural teachers. These initiatives focus on the development of local individuals within the community with the potential to become teachers. These programs offer the appropriate training and education needed to become educators (Lemke, 1994, Harmon, 2001, Hammer et. al, 2005). These programs not only exist at the professional and collegiate

level, but one such program exists for students within the district called Future Teachers of America. Referring to this type of program Lemke (1994), supplied:

Other effective “grow your own” strategies are to sponsor Future Teachers of America clubs and to implement a career education program within the district to encourage students to consider teaching as a career and to think seriously about returning to their home communities once they have received credentials. (p. 12)

Hunter-Boykin (1992) outlines the concept of “growing our own” in response to the shortage of Black teachers. The Teaching Profession Program (TPP) was introduced in Washington D.C. public schools specifically for students interested in entering the field of education with the interest of addressing the impending Black teaching shortage and addressing the recruitment and attrition issues. Since its inception, the program has yielded significant results and made noteworthy contributions to the objectives addressing the Black teacher shortage. Commenting on these achievements, Hunter-Boykin exclaimed, “Most outstanding of all, of the 15 graduating TPP seniors in 1991, all 15 made the honor roll and were accepted by colleges or universities into teacher preparation programs with either full or partial scholarships” (p. 490).

Hunter-Boykin (1992) offered further recommendations for the validation of the success of “grow our own” programs, in addressing issues relating to recruiting Black students into the teaching profession. The continued development of such programs that target career interest at young ages, personal contact and guidance, collaboration with universities to ensure financial support and admission, guaranteed employment within the district, tracking through college, and mentoring are all offered as recommendations for the validated success of such programs.

Retention

Attracting highly qualified educators to rural areas necessitates comprehensive, aggressive, and well thought out strategies focusing on the positive aspects of teaching in rural communities. Rural schools report retaining teachers and high attrition as a significant challenge. Similar to retention, retaining teachers in rural schools requires strategic planning, follow-up and school and community partnership. Summarizing suggestions within the literature for retention Lemke (1994) suggested, "...suggestions for several long term strategies including reimbursement of dues for professional association memberships, opportunities for sabbatical and faculty exchange programs, reimbursement of tuition, and provision of release time to travel to professional meetings" (p. 6).

When addressing teacher retention in rural school districts, administration should continue to capitalize on the benefits of recruiting within the community. Teachers who are familiar with rural communities are more likely to remain in such areas. Addressing the issue of familiarization and family roots within the community are important in managing feelings of isolation. Referring to a study surveying rural superintendents, identifying isolation as a major source of rural teacher attrition, Hammer et. al (2005), reported, " Analysis of the survey's 896 responses (in a self-selected or voluntary sample) identified low salaries, social isolation, and geographic isolation as the top three factors responsible for difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers" (p. 12).

Retention in rural districts has been found to be directly tied to ones "rootedness" within the community. One study conducted reveals this contributing factor in participant

responses to why they decided to stay or leave rural schools. Documenting this research, Hammer et al (2005) described:

For example, one study of special education teachers in a rural state showed that “leavers” and “stayers” rated their job satisfaction about equally (none were greatly satisfied), but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community. (p. 12)

While some studies suggest focus maximizing rural familiarity in retention strategies, others offer more extrinsic methods of retaining rural teachers. Such practices maintain focus on enhancing and encouraging comfort and acquisition to rural school communities. Such suggestions focus on direct impact activities such as salary and merit increase, long-range growth activities such as inservice incentive programs, and motivational strategies such as paying professional organization dues (Harmon, 2001).

There exist similarities between the recruitment and retention strategies of rural districts and other districts. The inability of educational leaders to control the personal, family and local economic environment that causes teachers to retire or leave the profession is one such similarity. However, a recurring theme throughout the rural school district recruitment and retention literature is the urgency for aggressive, focused, and strategic recruitment strategies that lead to and enhance retention. Referred to in the literature as “growing your own,” unique to rural strategies is taking advantage of rural natives as possible candidates and developing the career paths of students within the district. Harmon (2001) reiterated, “A distinguishing characteristic of effective rural retention, it appears, is its ability to capitalize on the power of “rootedness” within the community” (p. 12).

Rural leaders have identified the major goal is getting highly qualified teachers in the classroom and keeping them there. In order to achieve this goal, Hammer et al (2005) outlined ten major themes within the literature, namely,

- Base recruitment efforts on state and local data on teacher supply and demand.
- Invest in “grow-your-own” initiatives to develop teachers.
- Include all vital partners in collaborative efforts.
- Encourage universities to customize teacher education programs.
- Offer targeted incentives.
- Institute formal induction programs.
- Offer incentives for staying.
- Improve the school culture and working conditions.
- Involve the community.
- Invest in school leadership development. (p. 13)

Having access to and understanding of the best available research and resources on the topic of teacher recruitment and retention is imperative to implementing a strategic, aggressive and sustainable program. As previously stated, the preparation of students to become productive participants in an increasingly diverse and changing society requires the acquisition and maintenance of highly qualified educators. As rural populations continue to grow in numbers and diversity, it becomes increasingly and urgently imperative that they be prepared to take their place in society.

Phenomenological Research Framework

The common focus of phenomenology is on exploring how people make sense of an experience. Patton (2002) described, “how people experience some phenomenon-how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p.104). Providing a basic philosophical definition of the original intent of phenomenology, Patton (1990) offered:

By phenomenology Husserl meant the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses. His most basic philosophical assumption was that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness. (p. 69)

Therefore, the intertwining of experience and the interpretation of experience become one. As individuals we are not separate from our experience. In contrast, it is our experience and the interpretation of that experience that develops our worldview. Patton (1990) reinforced, “There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means” (p. 69).

Phenomenology has been viewed as a philosophic tradition as well as tantamount with qualitative and naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 1990). Referring to the broad range of philosophical investigation phenomenology offers, Stewart and Mickunas (1974) offered, “...phenomenologist make no assumptions about what is or is not real; they rather begin with the content of consciousness-whatever that content may be- as valid data for investigation” (p. 4).

In the tradition that views phenomenology as synonymous with qualitative and naturalistic inquiry, phenomenological methods are viewed as not attempting to

manipulate the research setting, but to understand the phenomena being investigated as it occurs naturally for the participants. Hence, phenomenological methods employ a design of naturalistic inquiry. Referring to such a design, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “Design in the naturalistic sense, as we shall see, means planning for certain broad contingencies without however, indicating exactly will be done in relation to each” (p. 226). Furthermore, referring to the issue of naturalistic inquiry as one of design not method, Patton (1990) offered,

It is also important to understand that deciding whether to use naturalistic inquiry or an experimental approach is a design issue. This is separate from what kind of data to collect (qualitative, quantitative, or some combination), although design and data alternatives are clearly related. (p. 43)

Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the structure and essence of experience (Patton, 1990). Hence, there is a difference in applying a philosophical phenomenological perspective to qualitative inquiry and conducting study with phenomenological focus.

Patton (1990) summarized:

A phenomenological study (as opposed to phenomenological perspective) is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people’s experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience. (p. 71)

This study was phenomenological. The primary focus was on getting at the essence of the experience of Black women teaching in rural White school districts. The

focus then is not simply a philosophical underpinning to validate social science research, but one of what people actually experience. In addition, this study also employed a second phenomenological perspective of actually experiencing the phenomenon as a researcher. Outlining these options in phenomenological focused studies, Patton (1990) offered, “A phenomenological perspective can mean either or both (1) a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world ... or (2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated” (p.70).

A differentiating factor of a phenomenological focused study is the assumption of an essence of shared experience. Moustakas (1994) defined essence as “that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is” (p. 100). Individuals experiencing the phenomena contribute to describing the experience through common experiences. According to Patton (1990) core meanings are communally understood through a phenomenon of common experiences. Patton (1990) continued, “The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon” (p. 70). Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of individuals experiencing a phenomenon. This goal is accomplished through methodologically capturing and describing how people experience the phenomenon.

Heuristic Inquiry

The heuristic process of phenomenological inquiry is a personal process. The heuristic model is described by Patton (1990) as:

a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. Heuristic inquiry asks: ‘What is my

experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?” (p. 71).

The reason for selecting heuristic inquiry is the importance placed on the researcher experience, as well as, that of participants. The heuristic process allows the researcher to begin with self exploration, growing in self awareness and discovery, unveiling personal experiences and bias toward the phenomena and then detaching oneself after detailed self-exploration and delving into the stories of participants. Referring to this process of heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) described, “Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding underlying meanings of important human experiences” (p.15).

Heuristic inquiry not only recognizes the importance of participant experience with phenomena, but also acknowledges the importance and necessity of the researchers experience with the phenomena under investigation. Referring to this distinguishing facet of the larger framework of phenomenology, Moustakas (1990) offered:

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand ones’ self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal- significance. (p. 15)

Moustakas (1994) described the distinguishing segment of heuristic inquiry within the phenomenological framework. Heuristics seeks to elucidate the experience of

individuals in collaboration with phenomenological methods to describe the essence of the experience. Heuristics encourages collaboration and participants remain visible throughout as their stories are communicated in open investigation and throughout analysis.

Heuristic inquiry unfolds in six phases defined by Moustakas (1990) as initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination into creative synthesis. These six phases guide investigation and comprise the basics of the research design.

Referring to the heuristic process, Moustakas (1990) offered, “The process of discovery leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to their own experiences and lives” (p. 9). It is with this understanding that the four co-researchers and I embarked on this journey of discovering our unique yet similar experiences with being Black women teaching in White rural school districts.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The literature review has shown the historical investigation into the experience of Black women has been confounded with that of White women and Black males contributing to the invisibility of the experience of Black women. Studies examining the experience of Black women focus primarily on White male dominated institutions. Studies documenting the experience of Black women in the White female dominated profession of teaching are lacking. In order to accomplish an in-depth existential understanding of the experience of Black women teaching in White rural school districts, this study followed the process of heuristic inquiry.

The strength of this study is in revealing the essence of the experience as it is lived by the researcher and the participants who are all Black women teaching in rural school districts in south central Pennsylvania. The organizing question for all participants was as follows:

What is your experience of being a Black woman teaching in a rural White school district?

Phenomenological methods attempt to understand the phenomena being investigated as it occurs naturally for the participants. This recreation is accomplished through six stages of inquiry and analysis: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. The typical method of gathering material is through interviews. This study incorporated the six phases of heuristic inquiry outlined by Moustakas (1990) in the following approach:

- Initial engagement – researcher documentation of experience through self dialogue reflections.

- Immersion – Reading and rereading the transcriptions and written submissions from participants in order to gain comprehensive understanding of participant experience.
- Incubation – Retreating from collected materials for a time to gain renewed outlook on material.
- Illumination – Extracting themes and qualities of the experience through creation of individual depictions.
- Explication – Creating combined description of the experience utilizing individual descriptions of all participants.
- Creative synthesis – presentation of insight gathered throughout the entire process through creative medium.

Initial Engagement

Moustakas (1990) describes the task of initial engagement “is to discover intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal compelling implications” (p. 27). The researcher is seeking to elucidate the context from which the question is formed. For this study, my passionate concern is derived from daily interaction and experiences being the only Black woman teaching in my school. The process of initial engagement for this study involved my participation throughout as I documented these experiences. In the preliminary phase of this study I participated in and documented self-dialogue that led to the research question. Part of this documentation included a brief autobiography. This autobiography provided background information and contributes to the readers understanding of my experience.

In the initial phase of study I documented my experience of the phenomenon through writing about my experiences. These writings described what it is like for me being the only Black woman teaching in my school. Starr (2004) participated in reflective writing during the initial engagement phase of heuristic inquiry uncovering the experience of being a leader on a ropes course and at work. For this study, the writing included descriptions of interactions with staff, students and parents. The writing reflects my feelings about those interactions and experiences. These reflections serve as a written document of my experiences as a Black woman teaching in a White rural school district. Time was spent both at my place of work and away from work reflecting on my experiences. The narrative writing was prompted by memories, situations or emotions. It was visited and revisited as I painted the picture of my experience as a Black woman teaching in a predominantly White school district. I continued documenting my experience until I believed the experience was captured in the written reflections. Patton (1990) referred to the legitimizing aspect of heuristics:

The uniqueness of heuristic inquiry is the extent to which it legitimizes and places at the fore these personal experiences, reflections, and insights of the researcher.

The researcher, then, comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflection and inquiry with co-researchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question. (p.72)

It is through this initial engagement with the phenomenon that I presented my personal bias to the reader. By thoroughly reflecting on my experience of the phenomenon, I was able to participate in the research through shared reflections with the participants (co-researchers) having already explored and elucidated my own experience.

The sharing of the phenomenon was able to occur only once I as the researcher had thoroughly explored my own experience. This step is especially important in this study because as a Black woman I was able to empathize with experiences of the co-researchers. This elucidation allowed for the separation of my experience as it relates to the participants as well as for the uniqueness of experiences to be uncovered. This stage produced my personal depiction of the experience as presented in the following chapter preceding to the individual depictions of the co-researchers.

Selection of Participants (Co-researchers)

Once the initial phase of the study was completed, I had described the experiences and emotions that led to the investigation of the phenomena and explored the questions I wanted answered as one having experienced the phenomena. After I answered the questions through my initial engagement, heuristic inquiry necessitates that participants or co-researchers, as they are referred to in heuristic research, are selected through intensity sampling. Patton (1990) noted, “heuristic research uses intensity sampling...the researcher seeks a sample of sufficient intensity to elucidate the phenomenon of interest” (p. 171). The four participants of this study are self identified Black women teachers working in White rural school districts. By virtue of their race, gender, and workplace, these women are identified as an intense sample of individuals experiencing the phenomenon under investigation.

Having identified four participants working in rural White school districts, I sought permission to conduct the study from the superintendent of schools (Appendix A). Once I had received permission from the superintendent, all participants received a letter and informed consent inviting them to participate in this heuristic study that details the

requirements of the study participants. (Appendix B). The formal letters of invitation were followed up with emails to further clarify implications of participation in the study. The women who agreed to participate in the study were then contacted via emails and phones calls to establish interview times that met their schedules, to confirm receipt of autobiography requests and to further clarify the requirements of their participation in the study.

Autobiographies

After obtaining participants for the study, each one was asked to complete a written autobiographical history including a demographic profile. This prerequisite was outlined in both the formal invitation and the informed consent. This information was used to inform questions for the open-ended interview that was specifically tailored to individual participants. Responding to the helpfulness of demographic profiles, Patton (1980) commented, “Keeping these types of questions in mind can be particularly helpful when it comes to planning the comprehensiveness of the interview and ordering the questions in some sequence” (p. 209). My experience with the phenomenon under investigation was gathered and documented through a process Moustakas (1990) refers to as self-dialogue.

Interviews (Dialogue)

Referring to the process of collecting the experience of participants, Moustakas (1990) offered, “A typical way of gathering material in heuristic investigations is through extended interviews that often take the form of dialogues with oneself and one’s research participants”(p. 46). I used dialogue sessions with each participant to collect data which is the usual mode of collection in heuristic inquiry.

Patton (1980) describes informal conversational interviews as naturally flowing allowing for spontaneous questions and conversation between the researcher and the participant. Commenting on the use of informal conversational interviews in heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) suggested, "...the conversational interview or dialogue is most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of heuristic exploration and search for meaning" (p. 47). Seeking the interview style that encourages elucidation and expression, this study used informal conversational interviews. The co-researchers were given the choice of where they would like to meet for the dialogue sessions. This helped to create an atmosphere that encouraged openness and trust so the co-researchers could fully share and disclose their experiences as Black women in a White rural school districts.

Moustakas (1990) offered:

Dialogue involves cooperative sharing in which co-researchers and primary researchers open pathways to each other for explicating the phenomenon being investigated...the persons in the heuristic interview must be willing to say freely what they think and feel relevant to the research question and what emerges in their awareness when the phenomenon becomes the focus of their attention and concentration. (p.47)

The actual content of the dialogue between the researcher and the participant could not be planned or predicted in advance. Heuristic inquiry relies on the co-researcher feeling free to share what they believe to be relevant to the elucidation of the experience. The dialogue is collaboration between the researcher and the co-researcher to open the way to illumination and explication of the phenomenon. I did not place a time

limit on the dialogue session in order to encourage the co-researchers to fully share their experience without time restrictions.

In order to assure accuracy, the dialogue sessions were audio taped and later transcribed into a verbatim written format. All of the documents and the tape were then labeled with the co-researcher's pseudonym and kept in a locked case in the researcher's home.

Immersion, Incubation, Illumination

After each interview I entered into what Moustakas (1990) refers to as immersion, incubation, and illumination phases of the study. Referring to this early step of analysis, Moustakas detailed, "The researcher enters into the material in timeless immersion until it is understood. Knowledge of the individual participant's experience as a whole and in its detail is comprehensively apprehended by the researcher" (p. 51). During immersion, I spent time becoming familiar with each participants' autobiography and dialogue. I read and listened to each story until I became completely immersed in the experience of each individual. Outlining the incubation phase of the research, Moustakas delineated:

The data is set aside for awhile, encouraging an interval of rest and return to the data, procedures which facilitate the awakening of fresh energy and perspective.

Then after reviewing again all of the material derived from the individual, the researcher takes notes, identifying the qualities and themes manifested in the data.

(p. 51).

Following immersion, I retreated from the collected data. This retreat encouraged a renewed outlook on the collected material that upon return that led to illumination where the essential themes of the experience for the individuals emerged.

I followed this process of immersion, incubation and illumination after all of the interviews were completed. This phase of heuristic inquiry took longer than what I anticipated. I originally believed it would take a few weeks. This is one of the most intense phases of this methodology and it requires endurance and patience. This process took two months to complete. The process occurred between my place of work and home. During immersion, I listened to the dialogue and read autobiographies of the co-researchers multiple times until I had a comprehensive understanding of their experience. In order to fully capture the message of each participant, I focused on the materials of one co-researcher at a time. This assisted in the development of individual depictions. During incubation I completely removed myself from the material, placing all documents and tapes in a locked chest in my home and not revisiting the material until new meanings arose in my understanding of the experience. I anticipated that this illumination could take a few days to a week to occur. Again this phase was intensely emotional and required a significant amount of patience as I waited for illumination to occur. This process took one month. The combination of these three phases of the study led to individual depictions of the experience.

Individual Depictions

Moustakas (1990) referred to the individual depictions, “The individual depiction retains the language and includes examples drawn from the individual co-researcher’s experience of the phenomenon. It includes qualities and themes that encompass the research participant’s experience” (p. 51).

After immersing, retreating, returning and extracting themes and qualities of the experience from the material collected for each individual participant, I developed

individual depictions of the experience for each participant. I anticipated the emergence of similarities between the experiences of the co-researchers. These resemblances were used to define common themes of the experience. The individual depictions preserved the language of the participants. I chose individual excerpts from the interviews to present the essential themes and qualities of the experience as lived by each participant. It is worthwhile to note that this phase of the methodology is similar to the immersion stage in that the creation of the individual depictions requires multiple reads of the transcriptions and can be very emotional and time consuming. While I did not anticipate how long it would take to create individual depictions, each depiction averaged between eighteen to twenty four hours of uninterrupted time. This time commitment was a necessity to prepare an accurate and high quality product to return to the co-researchers for review.

Commenting on the return of depictions to the participants, Moustakas (1990) suggested, “The individual depiction may also be shared with the research participant for affirmation of its comprehensiveness and accuracy and for suggested deletions and additions” (p. 51). Following the creation of individual depictions for each participant, I returned the individual depiction without the transcription (made available on request) of the experience to the co-researcher for affirmation of an accurate and comprehensive depiction of their experience. This afforded the participant an opportunity to elaborate, clarify or change the depiction of their experience. The co-researcher received the typed individual depiction to read electronically.

Explication – Composite Depiction

Describing the composite depiction, Moustakas (1990) explained:

The composite depiction (a group depiction reflecting the experience of individual

participants) includes exemplary narratives, descriptive accounts, conversations, illustrations, and verbatim excerpts that accentuate the flow, spirit, and life inherent in the experience. It should be vivid, accurate, alive and clear and encompass the core qualities and themes inherent in the experience. (p. 52)

Following the collection and affirmation of individual depictions, I revisited the immersion phase of heuristic inquiry with a more intense focus on fully examining the various layers of meaning for the individual participants. This process of explication precluded the creation of a composite depiction of the experience that embraced the common themes and qualities of the experience for participants.

The process of theme explication flows naturally from the immersion, incubation and illumination phases of the methodology. Theme explication in heuristic inquiry is accomplished only once the stories are thoroughly internalized and understood by the researcher. This explication comes from the knowledge that has been incubating over months of the processes of immersion, illumination and explication of the phenomenon investigated (Moustakas, 1990).

Utilizing the transcribed interviews and individual depictions, I developed a combined description that includes all the core meanings of the phenomenon as experienced by the individual participants and by the group as a whole.

Exemplary Portraits

Moustakas (1990) described exemplary portraits as “participants who clearly exemplify the group as a whole” (p. 52). In studies with a larger sample these portraits become exemplary examples of the phenomena. In this study, with a smaller sample of five participants, this step in the heuristic process is accomplished through the creation of

individual depictions. In order to honor the individual contributions and sacrifice made by the five participants, all of the stories will be viewed as exemplary of the experience of being a Black woman teaching in a rural White school district. The individual depictions will be portraits that exemplify the experience.

Creative Synthesis

The final phase of heuristic analysis is the presentation of the experience in a creative and meaningful way. Noting the varied forms of presentation, Moustakas (1990) proposed:

In creative synthesis, there is a free reign of thought and feeling that supports the researchers knowledge, passion, and presence; this infuses the work with a personal, professional, and literary value that can be expressed through a narrative, story, poem, work of art, metaphor, analogy or tale. (p. 52)

This phase is the method for presenting new understandings and meanings of the experience. Having gone through the total process from initial engagement to explication, I presented the knowledge that developed throughout the entire process.

Using one of the aforementioned mediums of presentation, I constructed an aesthetic presentation of the essential themes and meanings of the experience of being a Black woman teaching in a White rural school district.

Summary

This chapter described the process of heuristic inquiry and analysis that was used to conduct this qualitative study. The process of initial engagement, immersion, incubation and illumination are described as the methodology used to conduct the study. Explication begins the process organizing and analyzing the collected material with

individual and composite depictions. The final phases of analysis included the construction of creative synthesis that afforded me as the researcher an opportunity to bring my original interpretation of the meanings and essence of the experience through the use a creative medium.

In the pages that follow, the journey into the world of five Black women teaching in White rural schools begins. The methodology outlined above sets the stage for these five women to tell a story of courage though apprehension loomed in the shadows, a story of responsibility in a marginalized role, a story of strong families, a story of strong proud Black women, a story that only they could tell in their own words.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This investigation uncovered and clarified what it means to be a Black woman teaching in a White rural school district. It examined the deeper meaning of the phenomenon through the spoken words of the women. This chapter tells the stories of the women through individual depictions, extracted core themes, and a creatively synthesized composite depiction.

Co-researchers' Depictions

Four individuals were involved as co-researchers in this study. One of the researchers is the only Black teacher in her school district. Each of the co-researchers spent time as the only Black teacher in their school. The years experience teaching range from three years to thirty-five years. They range in age from late twenties to mid fifties. The co-researchers were all born and raised in rural Pennsylvania. In the case of two of the researchers they currently teach in the same town in which they were raised. All of the co-researchers received education degrees and certifications from universities.

Each experience was unique, yet there were fundamental commonalities that the co-researchers shared. The following individual depictions are the co-researcher's stories of their experience being a Black woman teaching in White rural school districts in their own words. They were written in the first person, utilizing verbatim and paraphrased words and phrases of the co-researcher from audio taped dialogue sessions and written biographies. Since the dialogue sessions were unstructured and in many cases included discussion not pertinent to uncovering the experience, metaphors were a crucial part of uncovering the experience and will be noted in italics throughout the individual depictions. Quotation marks were used only where it was necessary to set apart distinct

phrases or conversations within the dialogue. Co-researchers were given the opportunity to review their depictions and revise them as needed to fully capture the story they wanted to tell.

My Story

As mentioned both in the literature review and the methodology, heuristic inquiry is autobiographic. The reason I selected heuristic inquiry was the importance placed on the researcher experience, as well as, that of participants. This heuristic process allowed me to begin with self-exploration, grow in self-awareness and discovery and unveil my personal experience before detaching myself and investigating the stories of participants. The sharing of the phenomenon was able to occur only once I had thoroughly explored my own experience. This step is especially important in this study because as a Black woman I was able to empathize with experiences of the co- researchers. This elucidation allowed for the separation of my experience as it relates to the participants as well as for the uniqueness of experiences to be uncovered. The following is my personal depiction.

Growing up Black

I grew up in Ellenwood, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. My mom was a stay at home mom for most of my childhood. I believe she started working when I was in middle school. When she started working, she was employed by the school district I attended as a substitute teacher. She eventually was hired in the technology department of the school district. She was involved in the district as a room mother and in PTA from the time my siblings and I were young. Once she started working in the school district, she didn't talk about work that much at home. She seemed to like her job and the people she worked with very much. I believe I am like my mother in many ways. She is a very caring and

gentle woman. She loves her family very much and can be a mother hen over her children. In those ways we are very similar. My mother and I differ in our display of our emotions. I am outwardly passionate. She is passionate but inwardly. My mother and I have an unspoken closeness. We seem to understand one another without always speaking about our understanding. In this way I believe we are very close. In other ways I desire a more outward display of our close relationship. However, this I believe goes beyond her comfort level. I am not certain my mom ever directly discussed being a Black woman with me. She identified more with being a wife and mother than with specifically being a Black mother or wife or woman. She did not find her identity in her race. Her messages to me were more linked to the roles she played in life.

My dad was definitely the head of the household in the traditional sense. He always worked when I was a child. He worked with computer companies like UNISYS and IBM. It was always hard for me as a child to describe exactly what my dad did for a career. I just knew he worked with computers. He worked typical workdays and rarely ever talked about work at home. I would not say he liked his job, but he did what he had to do, what he saw as his responsibility- he worked. I believe I get my drive and determination from my dad. He is a hard worker and I definitely inherited that same sense of responsibility and work ethic. I believe I have more of a balance than my dad when it comes to being driven. I have learned that people are different and everyone will not necessarily fit into my way of believing or accomplishing tasks. My dad was more strict and intolerant of others' beliefs. My dad was very race conscience. While I don't remember him specifically talking to me about being black woman either, I do remember

him saying to me very clear and upfront before I went off to college, “we don’t want any cream in our coffee”. I understood his message clearly.

I am the fourth of seven children. My parents have always expected excellence from all of us in every area of our lives but especially in our education. I only have one male sibling and I am sure I received different messages from him. My brother was the oldest of all the children and was separate from us when it came to many things. For instance, he was not expected to wash dishes or cook, but it was his duty to take out the trash and mow the lawn. As girls, we were not expected to do either of those chores. As a child my parents and siblings were very significant. We did not have any other family where we grew up. Everything we did, we did it together as a nuclear family. We lived in a middle class suburban Black neighborhood. As a child, my parents made our Blackness very apparent to us through museums, concerts, music, documentaries, and visits with grandparents. I really became aware of the difference by watching things that happened to my family out in public like my dad being pulled over by the police for no apparent reason and being called a boy by a White teenager. We were definitely taught to be aware of how White people in particular viewed us and treated us as Black people. However, I would not necessarily say I was taught to be proud of being Black. I guess we were taught to always be aware and not to buy into White America’s definition of who we were as Black people.

I went to an all Black elementary school. My principal was Black and many of my teachers were Black. Our family had so many children going through the school, we became known very quickly and my parent’s high expectations of us also became known. We were treated very well in school. We received no special treatment because of race or

gender. My high school was also an all Black high school. I participated mostly in academic clubs and social activities. My parents, guidance counselors, teachers, principals, and community were very supportive of me in high school. I always knew I would go to college. All of my siblings before me went and it was an expectation in our home. While I enjoyed education, I was not certain what I wanted to do as a career. After taking an accounting class my senior year in high school, I went to college believing I wanted to be an accountant.

I believe the greatest obstacle for me during high school was living up to the family name. My brother went to a world-class institution, my sisters graduated valedictorian and salutatorian and I simply did not fit into those categories. While I did well in school, I was definitely more social than any of my previous siblings and was not solely focused on pursuing my education. My teachers and guidance counselor always talked to me about planning for my future. I thought being an adult was about working hard and taking care of your family. As a woman, I believed I would stay home and raise my family. I believed my husband would work and provide finances. I believed we would be a close nuclear family and not necessarily need much support outside of our family.

Choosing a college for me was mostly about getting as far away from home as possible. I did not want to be close to my parents. I wanted to be away and on my own. I originally chose to major in business administration with my sights on being an accountant. I eventually changed to focus on education as I began to realize I was not a mathematician and the college of arts and sciences offered finances to support my education that the business school could not offer. I attended the University of Pittsburgh. I had a long time family friend who was in his freshman year at Pitt. I believe his

presence there influenced my choice as well as visiting the city and falling in love with the city of Pittsburgh. I had also read an article about Pittsburgh and its future as a major business hub in the Northeast. It all seemed to fit perfect for where I wanted to be and what I wanted to accomplish. Pitt is a predominantly White university. This had a profound impact on me, as it was the first time I was being educated in a multi racial setting. I loved the diversity. I immediately connected with the Black students on campus, but appreciated the presence of White students. My closest friend in college was Sheldon Tucker. He is my husband today. My closest girlfriend in college was Vania Fields. We are still friends today. She was my maid of honor.

I attended Shippensburg University for graduate studies. I went to grad school in order to obtain my teaching certificate that was not available in undergraduate studies at Pitt. Sheldon suggested Shippensburg University. I planned on attending Pitt. I chose Shippensburg.

Moving Away

I sacrificed a lot. I moved away from home, from my parents, from my brother and sisters to go to school. But deciding to move to a small, rural town ended up being a large sacrifice because the chances of my being able to be back around my family was definitely more limited. I am blessed to have my husband and his family here.

So, although it was a personal sacrifice, it did not turn out to be as large a sacrifice because I still had a support system in place with my in-laws, aunts, uncles and cousins from my husband's family. That's probably the largest sacrifice. Being in this area is not always the most comfortable.

I've been here for about six years now, so over the years it has gotten easier to

deal with it and I've learned to make this place home. It did not always feel that way. There was always a sense of being far away from many things and I always prayed for more development and more stores and shopping, just some of the conveniences that you find in larger cities. It took a while to get used to that. Today, I am at a better place with that.

Why Teach?

Growing up in my household with my parents, education was always at the forefront of everything, the most important thing in our lives. It took precedent over extracurricular activities. I always had teachers who were very much attached to my family. There were seven kids so going through school we always knew all the teachers and the teachers always knew us. My parents were very active in the schools with the PTA. There was a high expectation of our family. There was a high expectation for us to succeed in school to be academically strong, so that probably did have a large influence on my decisions to become a teacher.

Although going into college I was not thinking that I would end up being a teacher. At first I went into accounting because I had taken an accounting class in my senior year of high school and really liked dealing with the money and being successful in my ledgers. So I thought that was the way I wanted to go. But as I went through school I started to realize in college that I was more interested in learning and working with children. I had worked with children from the time I was fifteen at our YMCA.

Education just was always a part of my life so I always expected it to be a part of my life. I really think that influenced my career path. Other factors that contributed to my career selection probably had to do with what was available to me at the University

of Pittsburgh. Once I realized that I wanted to go into education, I had to change my major, my school, my course of study, so that directed me to go beyond simply getting a Bachelors degree because Pitt didn't offer education as an undergraduate degree. So, once I decided to go into education I automatically decided to get a Masters degree at Pitt. Probably the experience of having to create my own program of study definitely influenced my career selection.

Being the Only Black Teacher

I would tend to think it would be something having to deal with kids or parents, but honestly I really think one of the biggest job challenges has been finding my place of comfort and stability and confidence in the schools that I have worked within. Definitely being the only Black teacher in my school has been absolutely challenging. The expectation is high. The expectation I have of myself is high. What I want to communicate to the families, kids and faculty are high. And finding a place of comfort even within myself, outside of what others think, has been a challenge.

Racial Tension/Telling It Like It Is

I have, both as a teacher and as administration. It comes in interactions with parents, with faculty at times; the reactions that people have to you. Absolutely, I believe I have experienced discrimination. When I became aware that I might have been being treated differently because of my skin color I responded by putting it out on the table. I brought it to the forefront in a meeting with other teachers and administration and counselors present and I made it clear what I believed was happening and I made it clear that I would not stand for it and that I expected to be respected as a professional just like everyone else who worked there. That's how I handled it. I became aware of it through

a colleague letting me know that something was said about me under the breath of another colleague. I did not hear it, but I was made aware of it and I definitely responded to it in a very open and overt way.

Generally, I don't often have conflict. There has been one occasion that I can remember where I had a conflict with a female colleague. It is one that I spoke of earlier where this teacher who was also teaching on my team; during a meeting where we had all decided to serve in detention. The rule at the school at the time was ... if you're going to give detention, you have to help cover detention. As a team we had to decide whether we were going to give detention and if so how we were going to cover it (everyone would cover it) which meant that we were going to need to sign up for coverage. This particular time this individual had not signed up, although as a team we had agreed that we would cover the detention. So, during our team meeting I brought it up. I asked if we all signed up for detention. I brought it up as a friendly reminder at the meeting and the meeting went on after I said that. Later it was brought to my attention (as I was sitting at the far back of the room and had not heard the remark) by others in the room, that this female had called me a dictator under her breath.

That same day or week, we had an administrative team meeting where administrators, counselors and the whole team attended and I specifically brought up the situation at the meeting and I made it well known that I was aware of what was said and that I thought it was unprofessional and inappropriate. I do think it was a racial situation. I think this individual was used to saying what they wanted to say on a number of occasions, not just on racial situation, but on a number of occasions and never being corrected on it. Here I am one who is not willing to be silent and maybe that intimidated

the individual or maybe the individual did not like the fact that I was vocal. But I was. In my heart of hearts I do believe it was a racial situation and I'm not so certain that any other person having said the same thing would have been called that. Only this other individual knows for certain, but I feel confident that those kinds of comments might not have been said if the person speaking up about detention were of the same race as her.

Surface Collegial Relationships

I think it is important to have relationships with your colleagues. Close relationship is difficult to say. I would not be unopened to a close relationship, but developing close relationships can be difficult. Race is definitely an issue. I wouldn't say that I would consider somebody's race before I decided to have a relationship with them, but I think race plays a factor. Because in order for me to be in a close relationship one has to have an understanding of my world, the world in which I live. Not everyone is able to do so based on race at times. So while it is not an issue that I would necessarily consider when I decide to develop a relationship; I think ultimately it does play a factor in relationships.

I definitely have turned to my White women colleagues for support on both emotional and task related issues. More tasks related I think. Acknowledging their expertise and their understanding of the field of education there have been many times when they have been able to support me with curriculum, with ideas for implementing instruction, for dealing with students, for how to deal with other faculty members, for how to deal with parents, how to communicate with the community, the school board. On a number of situations I have definitely turned to my White women colleagues. When it comes to emotional support, not as much. They have been there to celebrate

with me in times of child-rearing, childbirth, birthdays. But when very difficult things have happened in my life, I generally have not shared those with my White female colleagues. That connection generally remains a surface relationship, not a deep, close emotional relationship.

I am close with two women I work with. The relationship developed because we were all teaching on the same team in the school my first year there. We talked and met together every day. We discussed students together every day. So the relationship grew from there. Again, we are close in that we celebrate many things together. They have shared deep emotional issues with me and I've been there as a confidant, as one offering advice and support. While they have shared those things with me, I have not reciprocated sharing those kinds of things with them. They have had no difficulty sharing with me. We rarely discuss cultural differences. When we talk, we talk about differences in our hair, very surface type things. I'm open to discuss those things and again very, very outward and up front about racial differences. They are not reluctant. I'm not sure that they have ever brought anything up. If they have, I'm sure that I have discussed it with them.

The relationship has changed over time as I become more comfortable and more confident in the relationship. I no longer play the political game. I am myself and they have accepted me as such and they know what to expect from me. I remain sincere in the relationship and I remain sincere in what I'm willing to share and what I'm not willing to share. I believe they know that about me. Whereas in the beginning of the relationship, I probably was seeking more to be accepted ...[thoughtful moment] now I am who I am and I am confident in who I am. They fit in my world where I allow them to fit.

Well, I don't have very many personal relationships with White people. I know a lot of White people. I've been to their homes. On spiritual levels we have been able to connect. But again, it can be difficult and this could possibly come from ... I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up in all Black schools, all black communities with many Black teachers, Black superintendents, Black principals, so there is a very strong sense of culture that follows me wherever I go. Maybe I have that barrier up myself to where I'm not able to connect with White culture at times. Maybe I don't feel as comfortable. I have these relationships but they are very surface and I think that I keep them that way. Even more so that what others would like them to be. That could definitely come from my background. My background of a strong, Black, successful family in the south. I probably keep White people at a distance and so while I go to social activities and gatherings at people's homes and dinners, the relationships remain surface and I do believe it is more on my part than theirs.

Being Different

In the context of teaching and working in schools in a White, rural area, you do often feel like an outsider looking in. On one hand ... on the job ... you feel it because you're not on the inside. While you are there you don't necessarily feel like one of the faculty, or one of the students, or one of the parents. There is always a difference or barrier there that has to first be acknowledged and then has to be broken down for you to ever overcome it. It is difficult in that sense. You do often times feel like, just within yourself ... even if no one views you that way, you can't hide. If you don't show up for the faculty meeting, everyone knows right away. You don't blend in. You always stand out. But you also feel that on the outside because in these rural areas, often times within

your own community, you're like an outsider. As a teacher you are a professional and many of the Black families in this area are not. A lot of them may be blue collar workers or unemployed or doing a number of different things. Often times it is difficult to connect on both ends. It is hard to connect with your colleagues because of your racial barrier and often times it is difficult to connect with your community because you are of a different mind set and they see differently. While you're still just as black as they are, often times they have a difficult time connecting with you because they see you in a different light ... as though you wouldn't be able to connect with them because of your position in the community.

So it is a limbo like position and it takes time to become comfortable with it and confident in that. It can happen, but it has to be acknowledged first that is where you are. So being a black woman in that context, it is a position of challenge, it is a position of growth, reflection constantly with the goal of confidence in mind. Like I said when it comes to my community, I do feel cut off. I don't put myself on a pedestal. I don't put myself outside or away from my community. But often times the more education I get, the different jobs I get, the different successes I often feel as though it's those things that cut me off and move me away from being able to connect with the community I currently live in. That is not always easy because you want to connect. Not only to be just a role model but for people to know and understand that you can relate to where they are and what they are going through just as Black people. Often I think the more success that one has the less people believe that you understand or that you can relate. And the truth is, you can relate. There are some things that we all have in common and there are times when I feel cut off and I think that is sad.

Responsibility

Definitely. I am a Black woman working in an mostly White school district as a teacher, working in an mostly White school district as an administrator. Being the first Black teacher hired in a building. Being the first Black administrator hired in a district. Constraints everywhere ... community constraints, perceptions, parents ... oh my gosh they just go on and on. There are definitely constraints. I confront them by going through with it. By accepting the job, by accepting the challenge, by going to work every day and working as hard as I possibly can to be successful and to do the best job I can possibly do to serve my community, to serve my students. You confront them by going forward ... not by backing down. And that's how I confront them. It is definitely grounded in race because to be the first in the year 2007, in the year 2003, to be the first in these areas is a big deal and you can't back down. It's not always comfortable, but you have to go forward.

I think it can be difficult to really admit some of my own holdups when it comes to these issues. And I obviously have some. They don't surprise me but it just lets me know that there may be some barriers that I just need to let down and let other people in so that relationships can grow outside of the racial factor. I also realize that I have a strong sense of responsibility when it comes to the role I play as a Black woman professional in education. While I am very proud of that, it may be the very same thing that has me keeping up barriers and I probably need to look at that.

Being A Black Woman

The most important part about my identity is my belief in God. That is who I am. That is the context from which I view every situation. There is nothing more important to me

than God. I take care of myself in prayer. I do my best not to live according to my emotions or what I feel, but according to what I believe. I cherish everything about being a Black woman. I love being a Black woman. I love my look, my spirit, confidence, my voice, my hair ... I just love everything about being a Black woman. I love what it means to walk into a room and know that for some people that's all they will ever see but for me, there is history and there is a context, that while many people will never know, never understand it ...[reflective pause] it lives and breathes with me every moment of every day in every interaction. I love the mystery of that ...[reflective pause] the mystery that it continues to be for others, but the truth that it always is for me.

Often times what bothers me is the perception the world has of black women and when they see me often times, I think, whether it's true or not, I feel like they first expect to see the stereotype that they believe Black women are and that they would never take the time to get beyond the stereotype. I can't say that I've directly seen blatant racial discrimination or sexism. I've seen black women being used as sex objects in the media and again, I detest those things. I think it contributes to a stereotype that is not true. A stereotype that when I walk into a room people see that in me and I don't like that.

Telling My Story

The process of telling my story set the stage for hearing the story of the other four women. This process allowed me to get all of my feelings out in written and verbal form. The process brought my own bias and apprehensions to my attention. Hearing any of these bias and apprehensions from the other women prior to realizing and unveiling my own would have hindered my process of self-discovery. Self-discovery remained a vital part of this journey and every time I read and listened to my own words I uncovered

another piece of my experience. Furthermore, the dialogue sessions with the other women could have been hindered if I had not completed my process of self-discovery because the discussions were very informal and my inclination would have been to participate in discussion more as a participant than as a researcher if my process of self-enlightenment was not complete.

Kai

Growing up Black

All my relatives were living in that area and they were all Black. I didn't have any doubt about who I was. But the funny thing about it is I never thought about it as a kid ... like how come we all lived in this one area. But I'll tell you what happened. I had this good friend, White Friend 1, who was White and she lived up on Catherine Street close to Main Street. But she went to school with us, you know, just a friend. One Saturday she asked me to go to the matinee down at the Capitol Theater. We went there every Saturday after we got done with our chores. It was 25¢ and you could sit all day and we were all shocked when the price went up to 50¢. But you didn't have to get out after the first movie. You could stay all afternoon. That was in the days when parents could let their kids go places all afternoon and not worry about someone snatching them. Like I have to go pick up my grandchildren because you're worried about them walking for two blocks. That's sad isn't it?

Well, we went with White Friend 1 that day and we had to sit in the balcony. Well I never noticed anything about sitting in the balcony until White Friend 1 says to me, "Hey Kai, everybody up here is black." I said, "Yeah, that's where we sit." She said, "Did you ever think about sitting down there in the ... you pay the same price ... this

is not right.” She was getting all upset. She was White. “Did you ever think about going down there and sitting? You’re all up here in the back.” I said, “Well I like it up here. All my friends are up here.” She said, “You don’t get it. You pay the same price. You should be able to sit anywhere you want.” I said, “White Friend 1, look at the movie. You wanted to come here and have fun and now you’re arguing about where you’re sitting. You can go down there and sit.” She said, “No, I don’t want to go there and sit, but I want you to see something.” I said, “What do you want me to see. That I could be sitting down there.” She said, “Yeah, you paid the same price.” She was right.

We were ten or eleven, fourth or fifth grade. So she said, “Well, what do you got in the bag?” We used to sneak food in, in these bags, because 1) our parents didn’t have money to give us something to buy and 2) we were too shy to go down there and buy. Once again ... so anyway, this one lady, Ms. Community Lady 1, she made the best sauce for the hot dogs and we had them all wrapped up in tin foil. So after we ate all that, White Friend 1 said that was good and I said yeah wasn’t it. And everyone was just sitting there, and I forget what movie was playing, some matinee, Shirley Temple or something. So she said, “This is what I think about them people sitting down stairs.” She took the bag and threw it over the balcony, down to the bottom. We were like, now we are going to get kicked out and our parents are going to beat us for two years.

You know ... folks back then didn’t “play” with the kids. Anyway, up comes the usher shining the flashlight. “I know one of you kids threw that bag down there.” We all said, “We’re looking at the movie. What bag?” Everybody started saying, “what bag? Did you see a bag?” Everybody was like, “no we didn’t see a bag.” So he said, “If something else comes over there, everyone is getting out of here.” He left and everybody

jumped White Friend 1 and said ... “you know what White Friend 1? You can be mad that’s okay. We know our place.” This is what we told her. I thought about that years later. White Friend 1 was mad where we should have been mad. But we had come to accept it! She’s a little kid trying to tell us to be mad.

Work Harder

Back then, parents always told you ... and so did your aunts and uncles and everybody ... don’t make our family embarrassed. We don’t care what you do with your life just so you’re honest, you work hard and you’re respectful. They ALL said that. You didn’t really need to go to college, didn’t have to graduate, but whatever your job was ... do the best that you can, respect other people. We heard that from the time we could listen and I mean everybody said ... there wasn’t anybody said, “don’t go treat them children like that. I think if someone would have popped up and said that, all the kids would have fell over dead. We would have been ... like, who’s that person? ... And do better than everyone else. Oh man, my dad told me that because, see, he was in the Navy... My dad told us that all the time. You have to have better manners, better speech, better everything because you’re not going to be judged on the same standard. And that used to get on my nerves, but you know what. I thank my dad for that today.

Family

My mom and dad wanted my sister and I to go to college. My sister was already at Rural Town 4 University. Because from the time we were little kids they told us how they wanted to go to college. My mother graduated in the top 5% of Rural Town 1 High School’s graduating class, but they never recognized, but they never recognized the black ... you can strike this ... they never recognized the black kids. Her parents, it was during

the depression, didn't have money. No one was giving scholarships. My mother could read a book in one night after she cooked, cleaned for other people and came home and helped us kids. We'd always see her reading. She never looked at the TV. Now my dad and us, yeah, we looked at the TV. My mother ... That's where I learned to love to read, because she would take us to the library every week.

Now my dad was always saying, "You need a college education because that's how you get ahead in the world. I don't care if you are girls. Girls need an education too." So I'm real thankful to my dad for that. He wasn't going to hold us back. My mom ...[thoughtful moment] she just, by her example, she went back to school and got some kind of business degree, worked herself up from an operator to be a supervisor at the phone company. My dad started in the Borough digging coal and by the time he retired, like 20 years before his retirement, he had moved up to a warehouseman. So that made us proud...[thoughtful moment] Because it made me have goals. I wanted to please him. Kids want to please their parents. When we brought our report cards home, my dad never gave us like, ten dollars for an "A" or anything (because he didn't have the money), but he wouldn't have done it anyway. But just to see him smile and say that's wonderful ... or my mom to say keep up the good work made you feel good. And then they would call up your aunts and uncles and on Sunday when everyone got together, boy, you got singled out.

Community

And the church, in the church, people would come up to you and ... I know you do this in your church because I've seen it ... hey keep up the good work. The preacher and his wife, up on the podium, so-and-so got the honor roll. And you're sitting there like

whoa, everybody knows. Wow, that feels great! And then the other kids were happy. Wow, we're looking up to you. You got on the honor roll. It was like okay ... like we all lived in the south end. None of us had much money, but guess what ... we were a community.

When I went to college, my friends who didn't get a chance to go to college will come up and say things like ... "What's it like? "You're so lucky." "We're proud of you." That is something that is hard to even ...[pause] you just want to do good for everybody. Because you knew you didn't make it on your own. My mother used to tell us this all the time ... "Hey don't go thinking you got there by yourself. You're in a long line of people that came before you. There's folks praying for you that you don't even know their name. So don't you dare come around with a big head." You know those old people wouldn't let you get a big head. They were some wonderful times. Now I know, I never saw a Black person working in any stores on Main Street. I saw Black people that were in charge of the janitorial services but it didn't matter. Everybody was respected within the community.

I knew that a lot of good things that were happening for me, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, was because of the civil rights movement. As a matter of fact my one cousin, Mr. Cousin 1, had started the Rural Town 1 Community Improvement Association to help people get better jobs. When my husband and I moved back here, who was the person who came and got us jobs? Cousin 1's son Cousin 2. I owe that to them to this day. We didn't have to go looking for them. They came looking for us ...[pause] heard you moved back into town. Get your name on the substitute list. We will help you get a job. Same with husband. They took him right down to SKF

because he is a welder (he learned that in the military) and got him a job. So the Black community really stuck together.

Going Away/Coming Back Home

Oh, I want to tell you how I got to Lincoln University. I was going to go somewhere else until my sister, who was going to Rural Town 4 at the time, had a lot of friends at Lincoln. She said why don't you apply to do there? That's how I got to Lincoln and I thank my older sister to this day...[pause] A lot of people in our generation thought if they could just shake Rural Town 1 ...[pause] but did you ever notice that a lot of people in our generation retire and come back here?

I had a teaching job in Neptune, NJ after graduating from Lincoln. Husband and I were going to move there because he had a job at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. But, my mother said come back here. You know, at that time, you did listen to your parents. So, I figured, my sister had left home. My mother is asking me to come back here. I'm not going to go away too, because maybe she has reasons. It was because my mother asked husband and I to come back. I guess she thought both of us being 20-21 and going to the city ...[pause] because my sister didn't go until she was about 23 or 24. She worked around here for a while. She lived with my grandmother up there. I guess my mother just thought we were too young. Although, we had a place to live. We were going to a rooming house to live with a woman who had gone to Lincoln. It was all nice people, but I guess that's how parents get about the youngest.

Why Teach?

I guess I'll have to talk about my mother again. My mother always wanted to be a teacher and she always got a kick out of helping us with our homework. Just so

happened that I was fortunate enough to be a pretty good student and teachers were always helping me to help other kids. The other kids that I usually helped were my friends and they always got a kick out of someone their own age helping them. I liked how that made them feel and me feel. I felt good about being able to explain something to someone.

When I was a kid I was not very outspoken ... shocking isn't it. I could explain things to other people and that gave me ...[pause] My sister was a very good athlete. She could do every sport. She was a cheerleader and involved in a lot of activities. I was the quiet kid that would be reading a book and if someone would ask me something, I would answer, but I just wouldn't do anything on my own. You know how teachers have a way of helping kids overcome shyness? Teachers just see that. The teachers at Elementary School 1, even Miss Elementary Teacher 1, my sixth grade teacher that everybody was afraid of, she didn't take no stuff. She was like Miss Black Teacher 1. She would even get me to explain stuff to people. Now I wasn't the safety patrol guard like my sister (you had to be a little more outgoing), but I was the person that stayed after school to help people with their homework. I figured ... that is something I can do. I like helping people.

It was a good feeling and also when the other kids came back and said I was going to fail that test and you helped me and I at least got a "C". Then I always tell them that was good and the next time you can get a "B" or an "A". It makes you feel really good. Even to this day, after 35 years of teaching, the thing that keeps me there is seeing kids who come to your class thinking they can't do something, leaving knowing that

okay, maybe it takes me a little bit longer. Maybe I'm not a straight "A" student. Maybe I can do this. That's the hook that hooked me into teaching.

Being Different

I was in eleventh grade and I was going to go to some other college. This one counselor said to me ... "You got this because you deserve it." I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but other kids should have these same opportunities. This test should be for everybody." She said, "But you got a chance to take the test because you're an outstanding student." I said, "It shouldn't be that way. The test should be for everybody, which it's not." She said, "Realize something. "You're different. You study. You want something out of life. They don't." That was the only time I felt mad at a teacher in school. I said to her, "You know what? We can't talk anymore" and she said, "why." I said, "Because you're saying to me that you basically only care about the kids that make good grades. The kids that struggle, forget them." She said, "No you're misinterpreting." I said, "No, I think I'm interpreting the correct way so she said, "Well what about your scholarship to this school (University of Pennsylvania). I said, "I don't want to go there. My sister told me about another school which I think I will feel better about going to."

That was a pivotal moment in my life and right after that Dr. Martin Luther King got assassinated. I liked that guidance counselor, but when she told me I was different and I deserved more because I worked harder...[pause] That's not what my parents told me. They said everybody in this country deserves to get a break because we all contributed ... and that's true. It doesn't matter where you come from ... how long you've had this or that ... everybody deserves an equal chance. I figured, that's the way teachers

and guidance counselors felt. Then I met this counselor and I really liked this lady until she said that. That really made me sad. I went home and asked my mother about it. She told certain things in life you just get over, you go on, you realize that certain people don't think the way you do. But you can't let that stop you. I think for me, as a sixteen year old, I thought about that for a long time. Wow, she's a guidance counselor. She's supposed to help people, that's her job. It's not like a regular teacher. You teach and you're helping, but guidance counselors ought to be really tuned in and help the folks... Yeah and I always thought about that incident.

I didn't want any child to feel like they weren't acceptable just because they didn't have the right test scores, they didn't have the right family background. Because that is something else she brought up. My family taught me to work hard but you don't know what goes on in everybody's family. It made me feel bad. I think the thing that made me saddest of all when I moved back to town ...[pause] some of my high school friends thought I didn't want to be with them because I had a college education. I had to show them through my actions that I wasn't that way. Also I try to be the same person to everybody.

Being A Role Model

Other than that, personally, it made me feel like all these kids of color here ... I have to be a good role model for them. Because I don't want them to think, we got a Black teacher, but she's not helping us or she's not a good role model or she doesn't care. Most of all I wanted the kids to know that I did care about them. It didn't matter what their color was, but especially Black kids ... I did want them to know I cared.

Racial Tension

Now, I will tell you another event that I think is pivotal in my career. About ten Years ago whenever the racial incidences started at Junior High School 1, that depressed me. I wanted so badly to have some kind of quick solution to get those kids to see eye to eye. But you know what? Life isn't like that. It took me three years to get through that. At that point I think I had about 25 years of teaching. I thought about quitting. I thought if I can't help these kids overcome their racial problems, then what good am I? But then that's not the way you do things in life. You keep working at it and bit-by-bit things come together. I think that was the only time I felt a real strain about being one of the few black teachers...[pause] That incident really ...[pause] those incidences bothered me a lot.

Yeah. Because the kids that were angry at each other, their hatred ran deep. I mean it wasn't just kids arguing. It seemed to me like they had been indoctrinated. A lot of those kids would say to me (like my guidance teacher and I think that's what the flashback was) "Mrs. Kai, we like you. We don't like them." That was a flashback. You are one of the few people I've even told this to. It just ... it was a sickening feeling. It was like... I started to wonder. Am I this invisible person that blends in with everybody? I started to wonder that. I think what really got to me ... there was this little ... and my husband said that's just Satan trying to steal your joy ... there was this little nagging feeling that maybe I had assimilated so much ... and I felt this way as a sixteen year old kid but I couldn't really express it. Maybe I had assimilated so much that people felt comfortable with me because maybe they figured I accepted them for whatever ... that I wasn't going to say that I didn't like your attitude. Maybe I was going to say let's

sit down and talk about your attitude. And there was a side of me that was feeling bad about that because I knew that the Black kids and the Hispanic kids were hurting too. They were saying so-and-so looks at me like I'm a piece of dirt. Has anybody ever looked at you like that Mrs. Kai? I'm thinking ... NO ... NO!

I know that's happened to my parents. My mother told me when she was three years old they left Virginia because someone burned a cross on their front lawn. She was three years old and saw that. Nothing like that ever happened to me. The worst that ever happened to me was the guidance counselor and White Friend 1 throwing the bag. Had anybody ever called me the "n" word? Somebody in third grade called me that, but my big sister beat them into the ground so bad, I don't think they ever called anybody the "n" word again. My older sister is like that. They may have thought about it again. I came home crying. They took my book bag and dumped the pencils and stuff out. I told you I was a little nerd ... dumped the stuff out and called me the "n" word. I came running home. My sister and her best friend Best Friend 1 ...[pause] they went after that child! My sister didn't care whether she got kicked out of the patrols or anything. You just didn't do things like that to her little sister. She could, but nobody else could...[pause].

There is a great group of teachers that work there, who've all felt personally conflicted like I did. It didn't matter what their color was. They all felt bad about it. And it didn't help anything for me, being the only African-American to start saying things like, which I did, "Do you think I'm happy being the only African-American teacher here?" I said that when I was at a low point and I regret that, but it came out. It happens. People feel stress and they say things. I said that. If I could correct anything

that I've done in my teaching career, I'd go to each one of those teachers out there and say, "I did not mean that personally against you." I just meant that I didn't have all the answers. I wanted to have all the answers for you and the kids especially and I didn't and I felt that if there were more people of color there we could have bounced issues off each other." I bounced them off of Black Teacher 4, my husband and everybody else and that definitely helped. But, I've come through that situation seeing a lot of different things.

First of all, yes it does help to have a support group. Did I have a support group at Junior High School 1? Yes I did. It's just that I was trying to answer the questions all by myself and I'll admit that. Just because you're the only African-American ... lady ... or whatever doesn't mean that you have to shoulder all the responsibilities when things go bad. I learned that. I had to swallow my pride and learn that... I did. I did. I felt like I'm a history teacher. I have some of those kids in my class. What kind of message am I sending them if I can't help them? I might talk about practicing peace and working together. Now they have some real issues and it doesn't seem like I'm getting through to them. That's where I went wrong, by thinking that I was or should be able to answer questions all by myself. I had to lean on other people probably for the first time in my teaching career, but I learned from that experience.

Spiritual Revelation

The Lord. The Lord. First of all I would come home and talk it over with my husband. My husband and I are friends. I think we're more friends now than anything and we bounce everything off of each other. Even things I don't really feel comfortable telling him, I can tell him and then he comes back with some advice. I don't know what I would do without that guy. Also, he helped me see that certain things happen to you in

this life that help you grow closer to the Lord, and I did say during that time period, “Lord ... why?” And he just said trust in Him and He will make it clear to you and He did, and He has... I’m seeing things so differently now. Then, I was seeing the worldly vision. Now I see as my mother and husband, Mr. Cousin 3 and Mr. Black Male Teacher I would say ... not through Kai’s vision, but through God’s. Before those incidents that happened at Junior High School 1, I can honestly say I thought I knew the Lord personally. I knew who He was and yes, I prayed and all that. But now I have a personal relationship. Nothing can ...[pause] wow!

I look back on that situation and I say if that’s what was needed for me to get a personal relationship with the Lord ... then so be it. I don’t feel good about the kids that I wasn’t able to help. I still don’t feel good about that. But, I know the Lord will right that ... [pause] He’ll make it right and that’s all that I can ask for.

Telling It Like It Is

People would say to me, don’t just listen to those kids’ viewpoint. Kids would come and complain that so-and-so didn’t treat them well in a class. They knew that because I worked for the STEP Program, that Miss Black Teacher 4 and I would help them out. Sometimes folks didn’t think we had the right to question them about what they did in their classroom. I’m not here to try to change the way you treat the children. I’m just trying to get you to see it from their viewpoint. Of course, because many of the kids that came to me were African American, the people automatically thought I was taking their side. I wasn’t. I was trying to get both the student and the teacher to see each other’s viewpoints and hopefully give them a chance to work it out. Some of the people, even before I could tell them what I had discussed with the student, thought that I

had given the student a “go/pass/free” ticket. It wasn’t that way. Sometimes I had to argue to get that point across. We teachers of the same color had the same conflicts with the same people.

Every once in a while I would think ... I wonder if they think because I’m Black that I’m giving this particular student an extra chance. If you think that, that’s okay. You just have to think it, because I ain’t changing that. So be it. It’s going to be what it is. Until they come and say it to me, and a couple people did, and I asked them if they wanted to talk real with me or if they just wanted me to give them an answer that will make them happy and you go on about your way. They wanted to talk real and we had a knock down, drag out talk. But you know what, the people that this has happened with have become my best friends. Because, I think when you get to that point where someone wants to be real with you and you tell them just what you think ... where can they go from there? Either they will respect you for being truthful or they’re going to hate you. In those cases it turned out that the people respected me. They weren’t going to agree with me, but they appreciated my being truthful.

Being a Black Woman

I think about all those other Black women that came before me and didn’t have the opportunities that I have. I thank them because without them I wouldn’t have the opportunities that I have. I just want to be a little part of what they were for me so that I can pass along some of that spirit and drive. The women in my mom and dad’s families were all so beautiful. Each and every one of them brings something special. Think about all these ladies and men in our past that died so we could get here. I didn’t die for anybody. I’m just thinking that if I can just have a part of their strength, I’ll be a happy

person.

The first year I taught, one of my favorite students said to me, “Ms Kai, let’s not talk about slavery. It’s embarrassing. All the white people in class are going to look at you.” I said, “Yeah, now that you brought it up like that.” We all laughed. I told them that was one of the greatest stories in history ... how our ancestors survived that. Without their strength, courage and desire to know God and get an education, we wouldn’t have anything we have today. Don’t be embarrassed because without our past, we don’t have the present and we definitely don’t have the future. You need to look back on those folks and thank them for what they did ... giving their lives, taking those beatings, being taken away from their family and their homes. I could never have lived through that. Those beautiful mansions that the slave owners lived in ... our ancestors built them from the ground up. You cannot just shove that to the side and say you are embarrassed. That is who we are.

I think it used to bother me when I looked at that crisis with the racial thing. I think people think that we’re always strong and we never break down. We do. And I learned from that. It’s okay to break down. If you keep it pent up you’re going to have a heart attack or something that isn’t good for you. I admire my ancestors, my mom, and her sisters. They were some strong ladies. Am I as strong as them? No. I came along at a different time. Do I wish I had that strength? Darn right I do. Do I cry about things? Yes. Do I let people see my emotions? Yes, I do and I think I am a better person for that. I think that has helped me. But other than that ... do I see any holdbacks. Here’s what I see. Do you remember when the guidance counselor said, “you’re different”? I think a lot of our people still get stereotyped and I don’t like that. Can I change it? I’ll

try to until the day I die. And I think that's a drawback for us. I think we still get stereotyped to a certain degree and I think that's sad. I think some people still look at our outward appearance and judge us. I try not to do that to anybody, black, white, whoever.

Hesitant Students

Here's what I would tell you in closing. The funniest thing that happened to me the first couple of years I started teaching ... I'd get these kids in my classroom for the first couple weeks of school that would just look at me and I would look back and smile. Around Christmas time, these kids that were just looking, will come up and give me a card or present. Ms. Kai we really liked you. I would tell them I liked them too even though they did stare at me. That embarrassed them and I would say it was okay because I was new. You had to get used to me. They were concerned that I thought they were prejudiced. I never thought that. I may have been the first Black person they saw or the first Black teacher they had. We talked together about our families and they soon realized that we weren't much different. We still bickered about the same things ...[pause] who took the last piece of cake.

I think that is one of the things I will miss about teaching. The interaction with kids like that. The other thing I'll miss is the interaction with the faculty members even those I don't agree with. It's a learning curve. That job is so exciting. Every day I go to work I learn something new. I don't learn it as fast as I used to ...[pause] when I was your age ... but I'm constantly learning. As far as my being a Black woman in a White, rural school district ... everybody has treated me really well. I thank the Lord for that. I go back to what my mother said ... "Kai, there are people praying for you that you don't even know their name. So you better go out there each day with this thought in

mind. Every child is like a beautiful flower. If you can't treat that child that way, you don't need to be there.

Kim

Growing Up Black

I was born in West Chester, PA in 1981. I grew up in Rural Town 6, PA a small town in Southern Chester County. The area is known for its farmlands and the Amish that are in the area. I lived with both my parents and my younger brother. I have a close relationship with both my parents, they still live in Rural Town 6. My mother and I have a lot of differences. She gets frustrated and doesn't like to try new things. I'm open to new things and changes. My mother worked off and on during my childhood. She mainly was a caregiver to other families' children. She was injured on the job when I was five and started off as a stay-at-home mom, then started watching other children to help supplement the income. Growing up, I feared doing the wrong thing with my mom. She was pretty strict and made sure we followed the rules and were respectful. She also wanted me and my brother to attend college and find a better job than the one she had before being injured. My mother wanted me to become something important in life and overcome the odds that were faced by African-Americans.

My father worked for Giant Foods for a number of years and currently works for a Quebecor, a printing company. My father is someone who doesn't like to work, but does it because he needs to support his family. He has been complaining about working for as long as I can remember. My dad wants the best for me and is supportive of my decisions. He was very proud when I graduated from college and landed a teaching job. Both my parents just have a high school education and never saw or see their selves as

furthering their education. For me to be a teacher is something that they are proud of and keep encouraging my younger brother to go to college and pursue a career. My father and I have a pretty laid back attitude on a lot of things. We both don't let too much stress us.

Growing up, we lived in a few different sections of Rural Town 6 and Lincoln University. The first neighborhood we lived in until I was 5 was a house in Lincoln University. It was the home my mom grew up in. The neighborhood was predominately Black and consisted of relatives. Then we lived in a two different apartment complexes. The first one was predominately White. The second complex was very mixed ethnically with low income families. This complex was in the center of Rural Town 6 surrounded by other neighborhoods. The main goal of most of the families with young children was to save enough money to buy a house in this complex. Since we moved out of there, there have been drug busts, domestic issues, and robberies. As a teenager we lived in an apartment that was above an auto parts store. This area was more on the outskirts of town and we had a yard.

Currently my parents rent a house and still have been unable to afford to buy their own home. I attended and graduated from Rural Town 6 Area Schools (public school). Throughout my schooling the racial composition was about 15-20%. I can recall different times when I was made fun of by White students because of my race. I had a friend who was bi-racial that also was made fun of. Most of the teachers and guidance counselors were sympathetic and the students did receive reprimands or punishments. I was in the average range in elementary and middle school. I made the honor roll most of the time. In high school I took college-prep courses and was involved with a program

called Upward Bound through Lincoln University. During high school, I also worked part-time to make money on my own. I started babysitting when I was twelve and helping out older people to make money. When I turned sixteen I decided to take on a part-time job at a nursing home working in the kitchen. I was also involved in some after school clubs, tutoring elementary students, and a mentoring program with elementary school students. I worked with the elementary school guidance counselor on the mentoring program.

Work Harder

The issue of being Black was brought up often in my family. The biggest thing was that there were certain things that I shouldn't do, because others will look down upon me. You have to work harder than others and prove that you are capable of doing things. This was expected for school and when I go into the work force.

Going Away Coming Back Home/Family

I really don't feel like I've made too many [sacrifices] ... well, yes I did. The biggest one is that I am further away from my family. I moved up here because there was a job opening and I was guaranteed the whole year and I was also guaranteed that I would be interviewed and had a good possibility of being hired full time. That's the biggest one I guess. I am further away from my family and it's about two hours away. I do live in this town and I don't have any family around here.

Basically, my mom tells me that when I get done doing the things I need to get done, that I need to look into getting closer to home. Honestly, my parents do want me closer to home because it's a lot. They come up to visit me too, but my Dad works on swing shift so his weekends ... it varies what weekends he has off. And my Mom doesn't

like to drive distances. It's a strain on them also because they would like me to be living closer to home.

Right now my plan is to finish working on my graduate work and then looking at other places that are closer to my family. I want to get one step done as far as the graduate work because I don't want to stop in the middle and then have to pick up with that. That's my plan and this has been since about last year when I decided that I had enough of being in a area where I didn't really have too many people that I could depend on and hang out with. Honestly, it does get lonely. I live by myself and it does get lonely.

[Do you feel that you could endure longer if there was even one more teacher in this building that looked like you?] I think it depends on how strong a relationship is. If it's somebody that can take away some of the times that I just feel I'm just by myself ... lonely and can fill some of that void then I would probably consider staying a little bit longer. Right now, I'm looking at maybe the next two or three years as being as far as I can really stand it. The other thing goes back to the fact that I would really like to be a little closer to my family and I think with working in a district for a couple of years and then trying to get a job in another district ... I have a better chance because hopefully they will be looking more at the resume and the experience and not just the person. No. It really doesn't have anything to do with the district. It's more the area the district is in – the rural area.

Feeling Left Out

I think for me, being single, there are not many things for me to do. For a family ...[pause] There are a lot more family oriented things. They have the parade tonight.

They're always having different things going on in the summer time that are more geared toward family. I feel left out. I'm not one to go to those things by myself. Being a single person, there are not too many opportunities for things that are okay for single people to meet other single people.

Why Teach?

After working with elementary students and realizing the lack of Black teachers I saw during my schooling, I decided to become a teacher. When I was tutoring and I was seeing improvement I just felt I could really make a difference in someone's life.

Getting Hired

The job I currently have is teaching third grade. When I first interviewed for Rural Town 4 School District in June 2004, they had around 9 permanent elementary teaching positions open. At least five of them were classroom teachers that I was qualified for. I went through two interviews which were both successful. A couple weeks after the second interview, I was offered a LTS position as a reading co-teacher for third grade. The position was only part-time, so I wouldn't work a full day unless I substituted in the afternoon. It was covering another teachers maternity leave and would be ending in mid-October.

I had moved back home to Rural Town 6 and didn't want to move back to Rural Town 4 and be unsure if I could pay my bills on what I would be making with that position. I didn't take their offer. Mid-August, Superintendent called me up with another LTS position that would last the whole school year. The position was with Extended-Day Kindergarten. At the time, Extended Day Kindergarten consisted of two half-day sessions of 12 students who needed extra help with reading, phonics, and other skills to

get them ready for first grade. Before I took the position, I was under the impression that there would be an aide working with me for part of the time. I took the position, and was informed that I had a great chance of being hired permanently. The first year in kindergarten was rocky, there were many days when I felt like giving up and I still have some days like that now after three years. During that school year I discovered that I was close to the top of having my own classroom and being hired permanently, but the former superintendent bumped me down and put someone else in my place. The news was devastating at first, that my hard work didn't pay off and that I had to prove myself twice in order to be hired.

I went through the interview process again and was hired for third grade permanently. I continued with the LTS position in kindergarten and as the year progressed things got better. The next year I started in my own classroom, I had benefits through the district and was on a salary schedule. There have been some issues with parents over the past couple of years, which probably wouldn't even be issues if I was a different color.

One was dealing with the long-term substitute position because I was placed in an extended day kindergarten, which I really did not have the experience and I was just sort of pushed in there. When I took the job I really didn't think about it. It was a job. But, then when I got in there I realized that there were things that were not happening, things that I needed that I was not being provided with to be more successful with teaching the students that I've seen in other schools that had that program. Example like ... I did have twelve students, but other school districts that I know of actually had eight with the teacher. I never had an aide. There was an aide that came in

and helped getting them ready for lunch but that was it.

There was times when I thought that maybe teaching wasn't for me and there were days when I just literally would wake up feeling sick on my stomach because I just did not want to go in there and teach. I had a lot of children that were at-risk and there were a lot of different behavior problems occurring in the classroom. I know that when I would try to discipline the kids, things weren't working. I tried lots of different solutions. I talked to the guidance counselor. I talked to the principal. I talked to other teachers. Some of the teachers said they had some of the same issues with that group of kids too. I took it a step further and went to their parents and discussed the problems. It finally started to sink in a little more around April of that year. But it was a very hard first year. I think the biggest challenge was working with the extended day classroom and not having all the resources that are needed to make that more successful. I was doing my job because when we looked back at how the kids were at the beginning of the year and how they evolved throughout the end of the year, there was a lot of growth in a lot of different areas. But it was a struggle. There were days when I just didn't want to deal with it.

[What do you attribute that to?] I'm not really sure. I know now what I see is that most of the kindergarten teachers do have aides in their room that are in there more full time. With the extended day, they did not have that a couple years ago. I think maybe some of the problems that I was having ...[excerpt] I went to the principal and I even spoke with a school board member and eventually I did have a meeting with the superintendent to discuss the problems and now I have seen some improvement from when I was there. I have moved up to a different grade and I do see that there is more

support in those classrooms, but I think it was because I complained a lot and showed them ... I can't get this done and this one because I need another body in the room with me.

[Do you think that the road to the top is different for black women in comparison to black men, white women or white men?] Yes, I do think it is. I do see more struggles. I have friends that graduated with degrees in different fields and are still trying to find that entry level position that goes with their major. I know of other people where they graduate from college they get jobs right away. I know that there are teachers that I work with right now that were hired right after they graduated ... they graduated in May. I graduated in December, but in May they were already getting full-time teaching positions. I do see a difference.

Telling It Like It Is

In the beginning I was shy and I didn't really want to express what was going on. Now I am more open. I'm more willing to talk about the issues that I'm having and go to the correct person instead of just letting it slide. I like it that I'm becoming more comfortable and talking more about different issues. Actually, I had an incident yesterday where someone wrote in the girl's bathroom ... [pause] 'Miss KIM is a bitch'. Our principal was not here yesterday afternoon so I couldn't talk to her about that, but I came in a little bit earlier today to try and catch her before we had a faculty meeting this morning. I didn't get a chance, but I did send her e-mail. I mentioned in the e-mail about ways to prevent the vandalism and to inform the students of the effects of vandalism. I did set up a meeting to meet with her Monday morning to address that issue. I was upset about the fact that it was my name, but at the same time I had to think about if it was any

other teacher's name too ... the consequences. The students need to be made aware that vandalism is wrong.

Racial Tension

It hasn't been publicly displayed where I can pinpoint it, but there have been incidents where I'm questioned by parents, and I really do think thing that if it were a white teacher, they would not be questioning. An example ... last year we had a Time for Kids. It's like time but it's made more for kids and it has a lot of current events. It also has follow-up activities that many times I copy and do with kids. There was an article in there about President Bush sending more troops to Iraq. We discussed it and then there was a follow-up telling them to write a letter to the President expressing whether you feel he needs to send more troops or not.

We started talking about it and we were getting into letter writing, which is part of our curriculum and some of the students asked my opinion. I told them what I thought ...[pause] that he needs to focus more on education and what is going on in this country. So we talked about some other issues too with that and I had them get started. After I said that, I had two parents sending me e-mails and my principal e-mails, stating that I no business expressing my opinions on Iraq and I should be ashamed being a public educational official going against what the President is doing and that if I am going to be expressing my opinion then the kids are going to be writing all of that too. The principal and I went over all the different letters, because I just kept them now because there were two angry parents. We went through them and not everyone said what I said. A lot of them came up with their own opinions. We talked about it and my principal said she didn't feel that I had done anything wrong. Basically she told me to write a note to them,

telling them that this is part of the curriculum. One of the jobs is to discuss current events and that was an event presented. I even sent home the Time for Kids magazine article and I sent home their letters telling them that I wouldn't send them. If they wanted to send one, they can send their own. I did have some other issues with the parents about things their kids weren't doing...[pause]

Yes the same parents and I really think a lot of it was the issue, they have a black teacher this year; let's just see how many things we can find out that she does wrong. That's how I felt every time something was coming back from them. That was a huge thing where they sent an e-mail to the principal instead of just contacting me first. I had another issue where ... some nights when they have a social studies test I'll tell the kids at the end of the day to take out their books that they need to take home tonight. Well, the mother wrote some letter and stated that her child is only eight years old and she forgets sometimes and she needs a reminder. I wrote back to mother and told her that 1) they write it in their agenda and 2) and I tell them to take their books out. I don't have time to go through each child's book bag and make sure they have all their books each night.

With the one child, I did talk with the child's teacher from the previous year and just ask how was the mother with things. The mother did not send her e-mails. The one parent, I was getting e-mails from them about every week about something or another. A lot of times I would talk with the child's previous teacher just to find out ... was this happening with you? The one teacher said that there was a concern about the one girl not wearing her glasses but that was about it. I just asked her that one question. She really didn't answer any further. I really don't think the other teacher's see that as an issue,

because they are the same race as most of the parents.

I really doubt that most of them can sympathize. I think in order for them to sympathize, they would have to experience actually being a minority to really understand. I can talk to them about a parent like this that is e-mailing all the time. There are a lot of other teachers that do have, I mean, there is always one or two parents that you are always going to find something wrong with the teacher. But, with those two parents, it seemed like they were just really trying to find ... because some of the things were just non-issues. The whole thing with the textbook. That goes back to your child. I even said it. I have 26 students this year and I do not have time to be making sure that each of them has their books. If they forget it, they forget it. I know this year I've had kids forget it, but I didn't have notes coming back from parents asking why. And I didn't have that in the past or from other parents. I really just took it, as they were nit picking at me specifically. I've had issues with parents and some are valid issues that I don't feel have anything to do with race. And then there are some that I wonder if this would have been an issue with another teacher because it's something that, to me, shouldn't even be an issue.

Supportive Faculty

No I haven't had any problems. Really, when I first started as a long-term sub, the faculty was very supportive. Especially with the kindergarten. I really bonded with a lot of the kindergarten teachers and they gave me a lot of tips and techniques and even gave me things that they had for years on end because I really didn't have that much supplies when I first started. So, with faculty, there are no real issues. It is a pretty friendly community. I was a little concerned ... because I first started out at one

elementary school and then I went to the elementary school I'm currently at. There was always issues between the elementary schools competing against each other and then they would say things like ... those teachers over at this school are mean and they don't like to do anything fun. I had that in the back of my head but I was going to judge for myself and overall, I'm happy with the faculty. I eat lunch with them and we talk. This summer I took class with two of my colleagues. We took some classes together. So there is a good connection there.

I think it's important because you want to be able to at least get along with the people where you work. You want to be able to talk with them if you have issues outside of school. You may have a problem with a family member or you need to talk about something that's happening if you are in a relationship. It's good to have those types of conversations too that are not related to what you do during the workday.

The first in-service day when I first started as a long-term sub, they started announcing all the new teachers and faces to the district. I wasn't one of the first teachers called but when they said my name, I stood up and everyone started clapping in the audience and I was a little shocked by everyone clapping because I wasn't the first name called. I mean they did continue clapping after every other name was called, but that is when I did start to feel a little welcomed into that district.

Hesitant Students

Each year I do see differences in them. I know the beginning of this year there was a couple student that were really hesitant and really didn't want to do things and I think a lot of it is ... this is the first time they've had a teacher that didn't look like them. I've seen that in previous years where sometimes they act like they don't have to listen to

me and I think sometimes, I think they are saying ... we've never seen her before. Another thing I've seen, there is a TSS in this building that is also African American. We started in here the same year. My first year of teaching in this building was her first year as a TSS. Everyone thought that she was my sister because they just automatically assume that because we were the same race that we were related. I had to explain to my students that I don't have any sisters. There have been times when there has been an African American student and someone will ask me ... do you know her? They just automatically assume because I'm African American that I know everyone that's African American too.

When it comes from the kids I don't feel as bad because of lot them just don't know. They just don't know. They're not being educated at home about it. Now I do know, one of the students I have right now, she is bi-racial and she's actually adopted and her parents are Caucasian and her parents do talk with her about the differences and make sure she understands both sides of her heritage. Her parents and I have talked several different times about the issue. They asked me if I would be comfortable talking about that because they want her to be aware of both sides of what makes her.

Surface Relationships

During the school day yes, but basically when I leave here this is sort of pushed aside and I'm in a different zone. Most of the teachers in my grade level are pretty close and we talk about different things. Especially during recess or when we have meetings together, we discuss things together other than just school. I don't really do anything with them outside of school unless it is school related or taking a grad class. No. There is no one that I feel I could sit and talk with them and they would understand. No. I've

never tried. But just from talking with them about other things, I doubt that they would truly understand. I don't think it's something I want. Most of the teachers that teach here grew up in this town. They've never been outside of this town. They grew up here, graduated here and got a job here. They're really not exposed to the outside world to me.

Mia

Growing Up Black

I grew up in Rural Town 2. We lived in a quiet neighborhood in the southwest part of town. There were Black and White families that lived on my street and the surrounding streets. There are 10 kids in my family. I am the 2nd child, oldest daughter. We were raised to respect all people-especially our elders-regardless of their race. We didn't look at people as Black or White, they were just people. My grandmother had a big influence on us as we were growing up. She was a religious woman and believed that you should attend Sunday school and church every week. My mom was a single mom. She always told us that we should always do the best we could at whatever we did. Well, we have different fathers. My father ... I really didn't know him. He moved back to Puerto Rico when I was just a little kid so I really don't know you know ... I wasn't really around him.

She supported us at whatever we wanted to do-sports, scouts, etc. For a time she worked at a clothing factory that made women's sleepwear and bathrobes. She had to inspect the belt seams and the turn them right side out. Later she worked cleaning houses and babysitting. I didn't know my father. He moved back to Puerto Rico when I was little. He worked in the fruit packing plants in Rural Town 2 for a time. I went to Rural Town 2 schools all 12 years. I was the only Black at my grade level until I was in

the 9th grade. Most of the teachers treated me just like all the other kids and so did my classmates. There were a few exceptions of course-both teachers and kids that were prejudiced, but I didn't let that affect me. There were more Blacks in high school than elementary but they were not in my section and only 1 year did I have another Black in my homeroom.

I played field hockey and basketball on the school team and intramural volleyball and ping pong. I was on the newspaper and yearbook staffs and president of the French Club. I was also an National Honor Society member. I never really thought about college and we didn't talk about it at home. I decided to take the SATs because my friends were and from there I applied to Rural Town 4 and got accepted. I was going to major in English but I switched to Elementary after I got there. In college I played sports so I hung around with the girls on the teams. They were mostly white, I was the only Black the first 2 years. I also had a few friends from the dorm who were in Elementary Ed who had classes with me. I went to Rural Town 4 again for my Masters just because it was close.

I started school in 1959 and they didn't have kindergarten in Rural Town 4 at that time so I started in first grade and it wasn't until I was in ninth grade that I had other Black students in my grade level. It was a boy and he was in my homeroom. But from first through sixth grade, because sixth grade was still part of the elementary then, I was always the only Black in my class. It was a small community. You know, Rural Town 2 was a really small community and you know there were other Black families. There was only one other family that had kids that were around our age. The one family had three girls ... two of them were older than I was ... one was younger and their cousin was

younger than me. So you know, I was really like the only Black for a long time in my class.

Well, we just really never looked at people being Black or White. They were just people. We were just always taught to respect people for who they were, not the color of their skin or anything. We never really ...[pause] I can't remember ever really talking about, you know, well that person's Black or that person's White you know growing up. But, I was the only Black in my class and sometimes I knew that was probably not the most beneficial situation some times, but you know, it was just how things were. The neighborhood where we lived there were White families, there were Black families and we were the only Black kids that lived on that particular street. There were kids that went to school with us that were White but lived down the street from us or up on the other end from us, but you know, that was just the way it is ...[pause] that's how we grew up ...[pause] we just didn't really look at it as Black or White you know they were just kids down the street or whatever, They would walk to school with us. We really didn't, early on, I don't remember being taunted or teased or anything by the other kids. You know, I think it was just at a period of time where people were more accepting of one another than they are today.

We never really talked about college. No one had ever gone to college in my family. Later on I had some cousins, older cousins, they were probably about 5 or 6 years older than me. One cousin lived here in Rural Town 1 and one cousin live in Philadelphia but beyond that we never really talked about the fact that we could go to college or whatever. [So what was the greatest influence that caused you to go?] I guess I would have to say my peers at school ... the kids I hung out with. The one girls

father was a mortician and another girl, her parents worked ... her father worked for some company ... not right there in Rural Town 2. But they talked about going to college and everything and when it just came down to it, we were signing up to take the SATs ... they were all signing up to take the SATs so I just signed up too. You know, I never really thought about it either until you know it was just the kids I was hanging out with were talking about and they were going to do it so...[pause]

As far as the family aspect yeah you know, we were taught to respect others and yourself and to act accordingly you know where ever you were, you acted appropriately. My grandmother lived with us when I was growing up and she had a big influence on everyone. When she was there she did the cooking and cleaning and you had to answer to her. Even my mom had to answer to her. She was the kind of woman you know ...[pause] she just commanded respect. She was just that type of person that you respected her and what she said, you do ...[pause] you did ...[pause] no questions asked. It was the same type of thing. Everyone sat down for meals all at the same time and they served your plate and put it in front of you and what was on your plate, you ate. It wasn't like ...[pause] I don't like this ... [pause] I don't want this. It was put on your plate in front of you ... [pause] you ate it. No questions asked. And you helped out then. We had little things we had to do, like set the table, clear the table, help with the dishes, run the vacuum. We had things we had to do and there was no question about it ... you did it because that was what was expected of you. There wasn't anything like, you do this, and you get an allowance. You did what you were expected to do, what you were told to do and that was the end of it.

If you needed something or you wanted something my grandmother or my

mother, they saw that you got it. But it wasn't something where they just handed out money on a weekly basis for doing this and that around the house. You had your certain little things that you were responsible for and that was all there was to it.

Racial Tension

Well the one, the first one that I remember, I had a group of boys that were particularly hard to handle and this was back in the day when you could still paddle and they just were always into something. And this one particular day we were working as a small group at a table, I was giving them an assignment and they were goofing off and I was like, we've got to get this done and then the nurse came to the door and needed to talk to me about one of my students that had a heart condition so I gave the boys an assignment, excused myself from the table and went over to the door to talk her. Well, they started throwing books and really acting up so I went back in and I said ... "Look I have to talk with the nurse, I will only be a few minutes. Please just sit here and get your work done. I don't want to see any more books flying across this table ... blah, blah, blah or else."

Of course they did continue. I think it was like four or five of them, and they continued so they got in trouble. I took them out in the hall and gave them all three whacks and sent them back in there. At the end of the day just one little boy's father came up there and was ready to rip the roof off. He came in there and was cussing and carrying on ...[pause] this and that and the other thing and he asked ...[pause] we were actually in a meeting ... [pause] and the principal was talking to him so the principal came and got me and we went back to my classroom and he started all over again. You teacher

this and this. He kept saying you teacher, but I knew he meant you Black teacher. And he just kept going on and on.

Finally he stopped and I said, “Are you finished?” And he said “Yes I am.” So I said, “Well let me explain to you what happened.” So I told him what happened and he just sat there and he didn’t say a word. When I was finished he said I am so sorry and then he started apologizing. But I didn’t have any more problems with that kid the rest of that year and I would see him on the street afterwards and he would always say ... “Hey Ms. Mia! How you doing?” And that kid was in trouble before and had gotten paddled before in other grades coming up. Just talking with the other teachers, this dad had never come to the school before if he got paddled. So I knew he was coming up there because he knew I was Black. It ended up that he realized that he made a fool out of himself because it was justified.

Well I remember the day that the father came in there and the principal was sitting there and he said absolutely nothing. He sat there and left this man just fly off the handle and did absolutely nothing. I thought he’s supposed to be the principal. He should take care of this. It shouldn’t have even got to this point. Why am I here with this irate parent? He’s supposed to diffuse that. I just kept thinking ... what is this all about? At that point, it was like within the first two or three years that I had been in that building. I just lost confidence in that principal at that point. I felt I should not have been subjected to that. I felt that he should have taken care of that situation before it got to the point where I had to sit face to face with this man, him screaming and hollering at me. I lost confidence in that principal. He was only there another five years and he got transferred

to another building. Thinking back over the years, I just have to wonder if that principal wasn't prejudiced.

And then finding out that I was placed in that building because they knew Subsidized Housing 1 was opening up and they were going to get a lot of Black kids. It was like it went from an all White school and there were going to be Black kids coming in. So I think that's how I ended up there really. But at the same time, some of the Black parents gave me problems too. I had one mother come in and she accused me of being prejudiced against Black people. Her son was in my class and he was the middle child. There were three boys and he was the middle and he was bad. He would do stuff and flat out ... "I didn't do that. That wasn't me." I saw you do it ... "that wasn't me" ... just flat out deny it. Even other teachers would catch him doing stuff and he would "that wasn't me" ... "I didn't do that". I would discipline him and then he would go home and tell his mother that he didn't do it. She came in there after me one day. "He says he didn't do it and I believe him, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." Well, he did it or I saw him do it. The one time he spit in this little girls face (just happened to be his cousin). She came up to me and she had spit going down the side of her face and she named him. When I called him over he said, "I didn't do that." The little girl said, "You did too!" So I said, well "You're going to have to miss your recess." He was always missing his recess because of his behaviors ... [pause] pushing the little kids down at recess, trying to trip kids in the hall. He was always into something. He'd go home and tell his mother he didn't do anything.

Then mother would come in there and said, "I'm sick and tired of you picking on my kid! You're supposed to be supportive of Black kids. You hate Black kids!" I was

like wait a minute. I don't care what color the kid is. If he is going to do something that is inappropriate, unacceptable, he is going to deal with the consequences. These are our rules. They don't follow the rules then they have to deal with the consequences. End of story ...[pause] doesn't matter if they're purple, green, white, red, yellow ... [pause] they do something wrong they have to pay the consequences. It's as simple as that. "No you're always picking on him. You don't pick on anybody else." Well, no one else is spitting in kid's faces, doing this, doing that. I just kind of got the impression that, in her mind, you must think you're all that because you are a teacher. And here I am living on welfare in Subsidized Housing 1.

Collegial Friendships

The kindergarten teacher has been there ... she came to Elementary School 2 the year after I started. She is actually older and she had 6-7 years of teaching experience prior to being at Elementary School 2. She had taken a maternity leave and was just coming back to the district and was hired there. She's basically been there as long as I've been there. We've become really close over the years. She teases me about things that have happened over the years in my classroom. One year, this little boy, the last day of school, he drew a picture. It was supposed to be a picture of me and he wrote at the bottom "you're the best teacher I ever had" and what was funny about the picture was he had me with a red bow in my hair and these little red pumps...[pause] yeah, you know with the skirt and I was showing the kindergarten teacher and we were laughing. I'm like ...[pause] like that would ever happen. To this day she teases me about that.

One year at Christmas time ... [pause] we used to put trees up in our classrooms ...[pause] there was box under the tree. I opened the box and it's a pair of little red,

glittery pumps, little girls pumps inside. I had a student teacher and her and my student teacher were in cahoots and found these little red shoes and wrapped them up and put them under my Christmas tree in my classroom. So I thought okay. I did something back to her. These shoes have been going back and forth for like years. One year, she put them in my mailbox. I think I mailed them to her over the summer for her birthday because she had a summer birthday. She put them in my mailbox stuffed with Easter grass and candy at Easter time. Then one year I took them and it was Halloween and I bought this pair of Halloween socks ...[pause] black, white and orange striped with little witches on them ... so I bought this pair of socks and I stuffed it with newspaper, put them in the shoes and I got the custodian to let me in her classroom after she went home and she had this little bookcase in the front of her room. So I lifted up the corner of the bookcase and put the socks under there and made it look like there was someone under there.

Her kids came in and they were like ... [pause] the witch ...[pause] you know from the Wizard of Oz. We just do stuff like that all the time. We had a male teacher in our building for a while. So he took the shoes. He came in over the weekend and got into her room and took the shoes and socks and rolled up construction paper and stuck down in the socks. We had these rafters at the top and he put them up there and it made it look like someone was standing there, but up through the ceiling. They ended up; they stayed up there the rest of the school year. She didn't even know. She was in the classroom. It was one of the kids in the afternoon kindergarten class that noticed it. She was in there all morning and didn't notice it and one of the afternoon kindergarten kids came in and said "What's that witch doing up there?"

Last year was my 30th year with this district so they recognized the teachers at the school board meeting. The whole faculty from Elementary School 2, because they were also recognizing our custodian and so they all said well let's make a night of it. So we all went out to dinner. We went over to Red Robin and then we went to the school board meeting. When they called out the custodian's name they all started cheering then they called out my name and when I came back they gave me this collection of cards ... they were note cards and they were all characters from the Wizard of Oz. One year, she went down to Myrtle Beach I think it was, and she was in this store and she saw these Christmas tree lights that were ruby red slippers. Well, she bought those for me. Yeah. I got earrings and all kinds of stuff that she has found along the way in her travels and she buys them for me, and it all stems back to this picture.

[Are yours working friendships or do they go beyond? Are they deeper?] I think they go deeper. The building itself is small. There's just six teachers there and it didn't matter what six teachers were there, as a faculty we were all very, very close. Ever since I've been there. Even the first year I was there and I really didn't know those teachers ...[pause] they did things, like they had a dinner different times of the year where we would all get together and go out to dinner. Some of them even brought their spouses and everything. And even then, there was one teacher who said she was leaving at the end of the year so we started getting little. We were always doing something.

I don't know how it started. I don't know if it was someone's birthday or what, but I made a card and made up a little poem and put in the card and they just all went crazy. So then anytime after that when we did something special they would say, "Can you make a card?" We had an open house last year at Elementary School 2 because they

were going to tear it down over the summer and we invited all the former teachers and secretaries back to the school. The secretary that was there the very first year I was there said to me, "I still have all those cards you made me." Her maiden name was Mouse and so she always collected mice and so I always made these little cards, you know for Christmas time and her birthday, with poems that had something to do with mice and she said she has them displayed on a stand in her house. That was like back in 1978 when I started up there.

Why Teach?

Well, I graduated in 1975 and in order to get your permanent certification, you had to go back and take 24 post graduate credits and my philosophy was ... okay if I'm going to take these credits I might as well put them toward something so I did go into a Masters degree and I got my master degree in 1979 and since then I've picked up about 36 credit hours beyond that. I never had any desire to be like a principal or administrator. I was always in line with being a teacher.

Initially I wanted to be a physical education teacher but I messed up my knees and studied to be an art teacher. In high school, I messed up my knees pretty bad and I was talking to my physical education teacher and she was saying that it was going to be kind of strenuous on my knees because you had to take a lot of physical education courses and she said it was really going to be hard on me and you will have a lot of injuries all the time. I played field hockey and basketball in high school and once I injured my knee, I was always ... I mean I could be running down the hockey field, and hit an uneven spot and I was done. And then I would be off for a couple of weeks and go back and injure myself again. You know, I was always getting hurt, but I loved playing sports so I kept

at it. She said I don't want to deter you from doing that if that's really what you want to do. She said I just want you to realize that it is going to be tough with all the problems you are having with your knees. Then when I applied to Rural Town 4, I applied as an English major because they were always telling me I was good at writing so I thought, I could be an English teacher.

Once I got there, I don't know what prompted me to switch my major to Elementary Education but I just remember going in and asking o change my major from English to Elementary. I don't remember what prompted me to do it, but I'm glad I did. I enjoy what I do and I enjoy working with this age. I see older kids and I'm thinking ...[pause] I don't think so. And I worked for 26 years. I coached basketball. I had high school age girls for a while and then for the majority of the time I had junior high and the kids there wanted to be there. It was something they enjoyed, but I could see different ones that would probably be difficult in the classroom and it was like ...[pause] yeah ...[pause] I made the right decision to go elementary.

But at the same time, I enjoyed that break from the little kids and working with the older kids. But it was like I said ...[pause] they wanted to be there. They enjoyed playing sports and so I saw a different part of them, I think, than their classroom teachers did. And at the same time I enjoyed the sports. I played sports in high school and college. It was almost like therapy for me. Being with the little kids all day and then going there and just the whole different level ... me really enjoyed that. It got to the point to where it was starting to draw on ... because when I first started coaching we probably only had 10-12 games a season but then by the time I gave it up we were up to 18-20 and we played all the schools in the Harrisburg area.

We didn't play many of the schools around here and if we had a 3:00 game we would have to leave here at 1:30 or 1:45 which meant I had to leave from school at noon time because they wouldn't bring a sub in for less than half a day. So, I was basically, by needing to have a sub to go out of town with the team, I would have to get a sub for half a day. Sometimes I was leaving three days out of the week and then it was right around the time when it was a big push for the "No Child Left Behind" and PSSA testing and January and February is crunch time and that is when I would be gone. I just felt that I was cheating my third grade students being away so often so that is when I decided to just give it up. Even though I really, really enjoyed doing it and I do miss it, I felt that my major purpose with this district was to teach these third graders. That was about four years ago that I gave it up.

Being A Role Model

Family and like a responsibility to teach in this district because there aren't that many Black teachers in this district. It's like she said, she didn't have a Black teacher until she was until she went to college. I never had a black teacher even when I went to college. I never had a Black teacher and I just think it's important to be there, to be out there and let these young kids see that ...[pause] Hey I can do that ...[pause] if she is doing that I can do that. It's almost like a sense of responsibility. I should be here for the next generation.

Being A Black Woman

I think ...[pause] to me a Black woman should be a have a strong personality. In my experience I've come from a family where the woman was the head of the house and in my eyes a Black woman needs to be a strong individual. She has to have her mind set

on what she wants to do and be independent, not be dependent on other people, but dependent that she can do what she wants to do. A lot of my coworkers and other teachers I have come in contact with have said like ...[pause] well, I don't know, I will have to ask my husband and that just floors me. And it's like, why? It's your job. Like at contract time, they present the contract to us. This is what changing in the contract blah, blah, blah and then we vote on it. And there are people sitting around saying like ...[pause] I don't know ...[pause] I'm going to have to ask my husband. Why? It's your contract, your job. It's like ...[pause] your husband is a banker. What does he know about being a teacher? I mean that just floors me that some women feel that they cannot make a decision without their husband. It's like ... [pause] get a grip. I just feel that as Black women, we need to be strong, independent women and to be able to stand on our own two feet and do what we feel we need to do, make decisions that affect us. I don't get it. I really don't get it. And when I hear that I just don't get it.

[Is there anything that bothers you about being a black woman?] Black men. Sometimes you run into different guys that just take you for advantage. They just assume things and it's like ...[pause] you don't know me. You can't make that assumption. They just assume that Black women all go out partying and drinking and smoking and all that. That's just not me. I wasn't raised around that so it's not a big deal to me. I don't hang out in the clubs and bars because that wasn't something I saw growing up and for people to just assume that because you're Black you hang out. No, you don't know me like that. But sometimes it's kind of frustrating, that people make that assumption of you because you are Black. Some will say what's this ...[pause] I don't know, I don't go in there.

[Are you comfortable with the fact that you've been confronted with it{race}more now?] I don't know. Sometimes with some people I get the impression that they think just because I'm Black that I'm not as good as the White teacher or I don't do as good a job as the White teacher would. I look at people like that and I think, oh well, that's your opinion. But, it almost always comes back ...[pause] maybe a year or so later ...[pause] that person comes back or maybe I'll hear from someone else, that this particular person was pleasantly surprised at what they saw after being in my classroom or seeing results of my students tests at the end of the year. Or maybe, a parent and were talking to this individual and this parent spoke very highly of me. That is probably the one thing that I feel strongly about. People that just assume that because I'm Black I don't have the highest quality skill or whatever and then they come to find out, that is not the case.

Lea

Growing up Black

[Were you one of the few black students during that time?] No. I went to the same school with two children, which was Elementary School 1. At the time when I went it was more ...[pause] there we were more I'd say ...[pause] I was in the majority instead of the minority. But now its more of a 30, 30, 30 thing ...[pause] Black, White, and Hispanic but back then I guess it seemed like, maybe it was more balanced then. [How would you describe the culture of your family?] Close knit. Almost to the point where, I don't know about you but for me, I have two sisters that I'm closest with in age (we're each a year apart) so there is three of us in a row and it was to the point where we were each others best friends so we didn't have a whole ...[pause] we had outside friends, but we were our friends as well as family. It's really tight. It's a Christian background.

We still attend ...[pause] we attend the church we went to as children in Rural Town 2.
And it's just real close ... real tight.

[What did Mom teach you girls about being a black woman?] For me it wasn't a "sit down" lesson. It's just what we saw. She carried herself just as a strong woman, not just as a Black woman. Race hardly ever came into play in the house. It's not that we didn't harp on it, but we weren't confronted with it. It didn't come up. I guess because we were all together ...[pause] we all knew we were Black it just didn't ... [pause] you know what I mean. We didn't talk about it. I don't even remember ...[pause] like today in school you have all the Black history stuff ...[thoughtful moment] it's available. I don't remember that being a big thing we talked about. I just remember seeing my mom ... [pause] she worked hard. She was respectful in the house. She didn't walk around swearing. She didn't smoke and drink. She raised us to respect ourselves. We didn't go outside with our hair all over our heads. We didn't go outside, you know, our clothes were washed, cleaned, folded, put away. We were fed. We sat at the dinner table together. Everyone had their seat at the dinner table.

We lived in the projects when I ...[pause] my part of growing up was in the projects. But to me that was a duplex in a really nice neighborhood. That's how it felt to me. We didn't grow up wanting stuff. But I don't ever remember asking for an allowance either or wanting anything ...[pause] or needing to ask for it. My father ...[pause] I didn't really get to know him until I was in my twenties. I didn't have, I mean, so I didn't get any influence one way or the other.

Why Teach?

Our mother ...[pause] she used to say when we were little ...[pause] she babysat

when I was little and she would always say I used to want to be a kindergarten teacher. And I would hear her say that and I knew that my sister was going to college to be a teacher and so I just kind of started to pick up that talk ...[pause] well I want to be a teacher. I would act it out you know, and play the role and all that and by third grade it kind of stuck that, yeah, I do want to be a teacher and so I guess I got my influence from her and also from being with my Mom and always having younger kids around that she was watching them and that always seemed like school to me ...[pause] you know kids all around and everything so it just kind of stuck. Never changed my mind. I remember. I still have it. I wrote a little, you know the little “What I Want to be When I Grow Up” stories in school? I wanted to be a teacher and my sister and my mom were the greatest influences on my decision.

I tend to be quiet. Not that in the school setting ...[pause] I think I’m quieter than you [Mia] would be. I’ve had students who had her (because she’s third and I’m fourth) and even though we are in different buildings, I’ve had several students that had her and they will come to me and I’ll say ... you were in my sister’s class and they’re like “you’re Ms. Mia’s sister? And sometimes they’ll say ... “she was mean”, but then over a course of time talking to them I realized they don’t mean she was mean she just held them accountable. And it comes out that they liked her a lot. But, they ... “she writes real neat” or “she did” and I would say but I’m Mrs. Lea. It’s funny having her there and there is still this part of me that wants to make her proud of me, or kind of a part of me that, not in a competitive way, but I want to achieve what I see that she’s achieved. Yes. I keep saying to myself she did it ...[pause] I should be able to do it.

Only Black Teacher/Racial Tension

[Are you the only black teacher in your building?] Right now ... [pause]except there's a student teacher this year. Prior to that there were two ...[pause] my sister-in-law at one point was a teacher's aide, my cousin's wife replaced her as a teacher's aide in that building and they're both gone, they're not there anymore. And my sister, my other sister, not Mia, another sister, the one that is an LPN, she was kindergarten aide in the same building. But that's it. Other than every now and then, there are some substitutes that come through. Well I've had the parent who comes in and says, "You're picking on them because they're White". That was quickly dismissed after I explained the situation, but there was one that I was not directly involved with.

There was a parent that called to say they were upset with something that occurred at the school and they were coming to the school. Sister 1 (my sister was the kindergarten teacher at that time) and I were the both at the school and they called the two of us into the office to talk with the principal and he let us know that this individual said they were coming to the school. It was our uncle! Yes. He had a daughter at the school at the time and she was acting up and I think they knew because my last name was the same. This was before I was married. They said they were going to lock the doors and then they brought all the teachers in and told them that because there was an irate parent the doors were going to start to be locked at the school. I just remember feeling this embarrassment that they knew it was my uncle ...[pause] or at least the principal knew and he felt that he had to call us in separately and tell us first before it was announced that the doors would be locked and we would be able to get in from this one entrance. And since then the school doors have, well, then they established a policy that

the doors would be locked. This was before it became policy. My uncle did not come in irate like that. He came in civilized when he did come in. You know how you feel? It's family and they say ...[pause] he called and do you think he would come in and.?

And then I've had where my co-teacher in fourth grade had a student that the parents weren't happy with my co-teacher so they called in and said they wanted their child moved to her room (meaning mine) and it usually wasn't a policy that they honored. If the kid was in that room, they stayed in that room. But for some reason this one-year this girl got moved and I think it was because they had a difficult time with this mother previously. She was a Black woman and when I got her things were a little smoother. It was almost like they felt like ...[pause] well she'll be able to talk to her. It happened that it did work out that way. We didn't have as many issues with that mother after her daughter was moved into my classroom. I don't think if it had been the other way around that my student would have been moved as quickly.

Being a Role Model

[In response to Mia's comment about not going out to bars in and clubs in the community.]I don't ... not just because it's just not me. I feel a sense of responsibility ...[pause] that I don't want someone to see me and then say... Yeah, I don't want that because... To carry myself in a respectful manner. I don't want my students to come back and say, "we saw you". That's not to say that if you're out there it's wrong... I don't think of it as a burden, no. I think of it as a responsibility. Because I'm thinking about back when I was younger. I never had a black teacher until I got to college and I just thought, that when I had the very first class I walked into, it was a young, Black professor. It didn't dawn on me until then. My cousin was at Junior High School 2, but I

never had her. I did see her in the halls, but I never had her. At the High School, Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 was there at the time as a teacher, but I didn't have him for anything either. My path didn't really cross these other black teachers and when I finally had a Black teacher ...[pause] this is someone who knows a little more about what ...[pause] I don't know ... someone I could relate to in a different way or when he taught things, it came from the same perspective that I had. So when I decided that I was really going to do this, be a teacher, I thought now I'm going to share that perspective with my students. I want them to see it from a good perspective. I want to inspire someone ...[pause] I would like to inspire someone.

Being Different

Some of the parents that I've had were people I went to school with and I ended up having their kids in my class. When they come in to talk like at parent/teacher conferences ... it was funny because I would want to be like hey how are you ...[pause] and they would be like hi Mrs. Lea. I was like ... what? I understood and then I started to address them in that same manner. They are seeing me not as a friend out on the street ...[pause] this is my position and I would treat my son's teachers with respect and address them that way and that's how they address me. Now of course as the conversation goes on we might loosen up and laugh about something, but there were some people that still address me as Mrs. Lea. It felt weird, but I understood it.

Surface Relationships

I'm at the building where I went as a student. The head teacher in the building was a teacher when I was there as a student. He is still teasing me because I still cannot call him by his first name. I address him as "Mister". It's not that I don't feel like an

equal I don't think. It's just that's how I remember you. We are still colleagues and we can joke and laugh at times, but still at the end of the day when I say goodbye, it's goodbye Mr. White Male Teacher. He jokes about it all the time and wants to know when I am going to call him by his first name. There are times when I walk into the secretary's office and I call her by "Miss" and some days I will call her by her first name. It depends on what I am going in there for. But I like to keep it professional.

But you[Mia] go out to dinner with your colleagues and everything. They are more like friends. Whereas I haven't ...[pause] I've gone ...[pause] like some of the teachers once or twice invited me to a jewelry party or something like that. I go...[pause] They're friends at the workplace but beyond that ...[pause] you know, I'm not inviting them over to dinner, or going out to see a movie. It's a working friendship and we laugh and we have fun, but...[pause] You're [Mia] closer in age with a lot of the women you work with whereas some of the women I work with ...[pause] when I came in; I was one of the younger people in the building. Now of course, I'm not, but I guess just coming in there as a younger.

Yeah, the building was bigger and there was a primary side and intermediate side and there was a ...[pause] when I first went into the building, there was kind of like a "riff" in the building. It was like the intermediate teachers and the primary teachers; it's kind of like...[pause] I was on the intermediate side and I don't know, I went in thinking well, I was going to go in there and work. Plus I was newly married and had a child so I didn't really have a lot of time to develop friendships with them other than work time.

Now there is new teacher, my co-teacher ... we talk a little more often, but it's still

not sharing a whole lot. We talk about things that are common between us but it's not like...[pause] Sometimes it's because of me because I tend to be a little shy and I don't open up to people as easily as other people might and sometimes I feel it's them because ...[pause] there's a group of women that ...[pause] they'll go shopping and they'll do things ... they're kind of close and I just know I don't ...[pause] outside of teaching and being a mother ...[pause] having a teenager, I don't have much in common with them.

And I just, it just hasn't developed into a real deep friendship. To an extent ...[pause] I'm okay for going into work every day. But would I like to have someone that I could work with and to really have someone I could relate to and talk too. Sometimes little things you know ...[pause] like going in one day when my hair needs a relaxer and going in the next day with it relaxed You know, it's ...[pause] or when a little girl walks in one day with short hair and the next day she has a weave and, they come to me and ...[pause] how did her hair get so long? What did she do? How did she get all that hair? She dropped this hair out ...[pause] what ...[pause] why come to me? That's when I feel different. That's when I really feel it. Or they'll see a little girl ...[pause] like one little girl at our school she wore her hair; well she wore it in an Afro. She was a little mixed girl so her hair was not really you know and my co-teacher said, "I just love her little Afro. Don't you just love her hair?" And I said "Yeah, it's cute but she could tame it down a little bit." And she said "What?" And I said, "Well if she likes that look, but I kind of like her when she has her hair done, you know, when she has it braided or combed and this little girl's instincts when it's combed. My co-teacher said, "I don't know. I just kind of like that. That's the Angela Davis look" and I said "Well if you're going for that look you know, but I still think she carries herself a little bit better

when its combed down. She walks differently and she acts differently when her hair is done. I like it better.” But hair always brings up the difference. I just don’t feel like I have that kind of closeness with anyone.

Giving Up

To be honest...[pause] last year I thought I was going to quit. Yeah. Its just feeling like I was responsible for my students’ failures more than their successes. I gave a lot of credit for their failures, but I don’t think ...[pause] the credit for their success is given to the team. But when there are failures happening, when your students aren’t proficient ...[pause] it’s ... [pause]‘what are you doing, what can you do or you need to do’. Its just gets hard when you are in a school that is at the bottom of the chart and it was just really challenging actually. Because your scores weren’t where they wanted them to be and the principal would say ...[pause] well now if you look at their IQs and compare them to Rural Town 1 ...[pause] but at the same time ...[pause] it’s like ...[pause] we’ve got to get these scores up and it’s you’ve got to do this or let’s change that and every year something new is added ...[pause] nothing is taken away. It just didn’t feel worth it by the end of last year. But then, I gave it a lot of thought and decided I would try it again. Although they say to me ‘you said you were going to quit’, I’m always back.

One year at a time. I don’t know ... something else would have to come along. [In response to Mia’s comment “I keep getting this question, when are you going to retire. I say I don’t know. I’ll know it’s time when it’s time. I don’t have the dead line in sight.”] Yeah ... it’s like ... she’s a hard act to follow. From day one of my teaching, not that she looms over me and casts the shadow, but I feel like I put myself in her shadow. And from her plan book, which is immaculate, lined up and in order. I tried the first

year. I would slave over my plan book trying to get it just like hers and it drove me nuts and I had to finally convince myself that I am not her, but I wanted to be, because everybody else always talked about Ms. Mia, Ms. Mia. And finally I had come into my own but now, 16 years and I keep thinking I want to quit but she keeps ...[pause] quit I'm going to let them down, I'm a quitter. She is not casting that shadow, she's not holding it over, but I just feel this responsibility that I can't quit, I just got you know, and people you know ... [pause] you're Mia's sister, you're Mia's little sister, you're Mia's younger sister. And Mia has a reputation of being ...[pause] so it's you know.

Going Away/Coming back home

[What has kept you here in Rural Town 1 ?] Fear ... for me fear. Yeah fear of leaving ...[pause] yeah, stepping out. If my husband wanted to I would have to leave. On my own ...[pause] it's the same. Well for a while it was driving because I don't like to drive so I was thinking if we move somewhere else then I would have to drive places and I don't know if I can do that. Fear. Sometimes of meeting people. When I went up to Rural Town 4, I felt very uncomfortable because I was quiet and people didn't approach me and then I in turn didn't approach them which made me look like I was uninterested in talking with them. I just feel comfortable I guess with my family being in the area.

Being a Black Woman

Sometimes, I really don't know what it means to be a Black woman. I know what it means to be a woman. I just know that as a woman, taking care of my family is important to me, being respectful to others, getting respect from others, carrying myself in a positive way. I look at those things. When I went away to college and I would see the other Black girls at college that had a sense of style and carried themselves

differently, I felt sometimes like a little country girl that didn't fit in and I never did fit in. I never got accepted into that group. I have my sisters and I know what they look like as a Black woman. I had my Mom and I know what she was like as a Black woman but it wasn't ... they're more just women to me. Not a separate ... [pause] I don't know. Outside of my sisters, I never had a strong friendship in high school, the girls I grew up with but we grew up the same but never had a different perspective. I don't know.

Sometimes, if I'm by myself someplace in certain situations that I stand out as being different. But then, sometimes I like that because it makes me unique and I do stand out. I don't know ... [pause] it's different because I really think I don't always see my color first and sometimes I wonder if that's wrong that I don't ...[pause] that I don't notice it first, that I don't think about it first or put it first. If you would ask me what I was, I might say I was a teacher first, or I might say I was a mother first. Identifying myself as a Black woman wouldn't be my first identification. Sometimes yeah. When I see watch TV or see programs where a Black woman comes out as very authoritative, her words come out right, she stands for something. I feel like do I stand for something? Do I represent someone? Because sometimes the Black woman has carried her culture and background ... [pause] am I doing that? Am I representing my culture then? And then sometimes I think back to ...[pause] do I have to? Why should I have to? A White woman doesn't have to represent hers. She is just a woman in society. Do I have to carry the weight?

Theme Explication

Each major theme is depicted by quotations from the researcher and co-researchers. All co-researchers depictions did not represent each theme. The major

themes were selected based on the majority of times the theme emerges in the dialogue of all co-researchers.

Theme explication in heuristic inquiry is accomplished only once the stories are thoroughly internalized and understood by the researcher. As mentioned in the methodology, this explication comes from the knowledge that has been incubating over months of the processes of immersion, illumination and explication of the phenomenon investigated (Moustakas, 1990).

In my experience with this method of theme explication, by the time I was ready to write themes on paper, the core meanings of the experience were already resonating within my existence. Consistently following the heuristic methodology produces the elucidation of the experience. Once I wrote down the core meanings that were resonating, I went back to the transcriptions with various colors of highlighters. I coded each theme a color and began to go through the transcriptions and biographies looking for substantiation of these themes through the words of the co-researchers. If the theme was represented in experience of each or the majority of the co-researchers I coded it a major theme. Some co-researchers elaborated more than others on various themes. However, if the experience was one that all or the majority of the co-researchers and myself shared, I determined it was major to the experience of being a Black woman teaching in a White rural school.

Themes

Maintaining Strong Family Ties and Influences

A majority of the co-researchers expressed a strong commitment to familial ties and history within the communities where they teach. This commitment contributed to

decisions to teach and maintain professional careers in the rural White communities. The lack of these ties also contributed to some co-researchers' desire to leave these communities.

Close knit. Almost to the point where, I don't know about you but for me, I have two sisters that I'm closest with in age (we're each a year apart) so there is three of us in a row and it was to the point where we were each others best friends so we didn't have a whole ... we had outside friends, but we were our friends as well as family. It's really tight. It's a Christian background. We still attend ... we attend the church we went to as children in Rural Town 2. And it's just real close ... real tight. (Lea)

I just feel comfortable I guess with my family being in the area. (Kim)

I guess so. Our mother ... she used to say when we were little ... she babysat when I was little and she would always say I used to want to be a kindergarten teacher. And I would hear her say that and I knew that my sister was going to college to be a teacher and so I just kind of started to pick up that talk ... well I want to be a teacher. I would act it out you know, and play the role and all that and by third grade it kind of stuck that, yeah, I do want to be a teacher and so I guess I got my influence from her and also from being with my Mom and always having younger kids around that she was watching them and that always seemed

like school to me ... you know kids all around and everything so it just kind of stuck. (Lea)

As far as the family aspect yeah you know, we were taught to respect others and yourself and to act accordingly you know where ever you were, you acted appropriately. My grandmother lived with us when I was growing up and she had a big influence on everyone. When she was there she did the cooking and cleaning and you had to answer to her. Even my mom had to answer to her. She was the kind of woman you know ... she just commanded respect. She was just that type of person that you respected her and what she said, you do ... you did ... no questions asked. It was the same type of thing. (Mia)

But, my mother said come back here. You know, at that time, you did listen to your parents. So, I figured, my sister had left home. My mother is asking me to come back here. I'm not going to go away too, because maybe she has reasons. It was because my mother asked Husband and I to come back. (Kai)

I guess I'll have to talk about my mother again. My mother always wanted to be a teacher and she always got a kick out of helping us with our homework. Just so happened that I was fortunate enough to be a pretty good student and teachers were always helping me to help other kids. The other kids that I usually helped were my friends and they always got a kick out of someone their own age helping

them. I liked how that made them feel and me feel. I felt good about being able to explain something to someone. (Kai)

Yes there is frustration with it. Right now my plan is to finish working on my graduate work and then looking at other places that are closer to my family. I want to get one step done as far as the graduate work because I don't want to stop in the middle and then have to pick up with that. That's my plan and this has been since about last year when I decided that I had enough of being in a area where I didn't really have too many people that I could depend on and hang out with. Honestly, it does get lonely. I live by myself and it does get lonely. (Kim)

Basically, my mom tells me that when I get done doing the things I need to get done, that I need to look into getting closer to home. Honestly, my parents do want me closer to home because it's a lot. They come up to visit me too, but my Dad works on swing shift so his weekends ... it varies what weekends he has. And my Mom doesn't like to drive distances. It's a strain on them also because they would like me to be living closer to home. (Kim)

I moved away from home, from my parents, from my brothers and sisters to go to school. But deciding to move to a small, rural town ended up being a large sacrifice because the chances of my being able to be back around my family is definitely more limited. I am blessed to have my husband and his side of the family here. So, although it was a personal sacrifice, it did not turn out to be as

large a sacrifice because I still had a support system in place with my in-laws, aunts, uncles and cousins from my husband's side of the family. (Researcher)

Growing up in my household with my parent's, education was always at the forefront of everything, the most important thing in our lives. It took precedent over extracurricular activities. I always had teachers who were very much attached to my family. There were seven kids so going through school we always knew all the teachers and the teachers always knew us. My parents were very active in the schools with the PTA. There was a high expectation of our family. There was a high expectation for us to succeed in school, to be academically strong, so that probably did have a large influence on my decisions to become a teacher. (Researcher)

My mother used to tell us this all the time ... "Hey don't go thinking you got there by yourself. You're in a long line of people that came before you. There's folks praying for you that you don't even know their name. So don't you dare come around with a big head." (Kai)

I owe that to them to this day. We didn't have to go looking for them. They came looking for us ... heard you moved back into town. Get your name on the substitute list. We will help you get a job. Same with husband. They took him right down to SKF because he is a welder (he learned that in the military) and got him a job. So the Black community really stuck together. (Kai)

Experiencing and Witnessing Prejudice

All of the co-researchers described experiences they attribute solely to racial prejudice.

And that kid was in trouble before and had gotten paddled before in other grades coming up. Just talking with the other teachers, this dad had never come to the school before if he got paddled. So I knew he was coming up there because he knew I was Black. It ended up that he realized that he made a fool out of himself because it was justified. (Mia)

Well I've had the parent who comes in and says, "You're picking on them because they're White". That was quickly dismissed after I explained the situation... (Lea)

But for some reason this one-year this girl got moved and I think it was because they had a difficult time with this mother previously. She was a Black woman and when I got her things were a little smoother. It was almost like they felt like ... well she'll be able to talk to her. It happened that it did work out that way. We didn't have as many issues with that mother after her daughter was moved into my classroom. I don't think if it had been the other way around that my student would have been moved as quickly. (Lea)

I felt I should not have been subjected to that. I felt that he should have taken care of that situation before it got to the point where I had to sit face to face with

this man, him screaming and hollering at me. I lost confidence in that principal....Thinking back over the years, I just have to wonder if that principal wasn't prejudiced. And then finding out that I was placed in that building because they knew Subsidized Housing 1 was opening up and they were going to get a lot of Black kids. It was like it went from an all White school and there were going to be black kids coming in. So I think that's how I ended up there really. But at the same time, some of the Black parents gave me problems too. I had one mother come in and she accused me of being prejudiced against Black people. (Mia)

He was always missing his recess because of his behaviors ... pushing the little kids down at recess, trying to trip kids in the hall. He was always into something. He'd go home and tell his mother he didn't do anything. Then mother would come in there and said, "I'm sick and tired of you picking on my kid! You're supposed to be supportive of Black kids. You hate Black kids!" I was like wait a minute. I don't care what color the kid is. If he is going to do something that is inappropriate, unacceptable, he is going to deal with the consequences. These are our rules. (Mia)

About ten years ago whenever the racial incidences started at Junior High School 1, that depressed me. I wanted so badly to have some kind of quick solution to get those kids to see eye to eye. But you know what? Life isn't like that. It took me three years to get through that. At that point I think I had about 25 years of teaching. I thought about quitting. I thought if I can't help these kids overcome

their racial problems, then what good am I? But then that's not the way you do things in life. You keep working at it and bit-by-bit things come together. I think that was the only time I felt a real strain about being one of the few Black teachers. (Kai)

Every once in a while I would think ... I wonder if they think because I'm Black that I'm giving this particular student an extra chance. If you think that, that's okay. You just have to think it, because I ain't changing that. So be it. It's going to be what it is. Until they come and say it to me, and a couple people did, and I asked them if they wanted to talk real with me or if they just wanted me to give them an answer that will make them happy and you go on about your way. They wanted to talk real and we had a knock down, drag out talk. (Kai)

People would say to me, don't just listen to those kids' viewpoint. Kids would come and complain that so-and-so didn't treat them well in a class... Sometimes folks didn't think we had the right to question them about what they did in their classroom. I'm not here to try to change the way you treat the children. I'm just trying to get you to see it from their viewpoint. Of course, because many of the kids that came to me were African American, the people automatically thought I was taking their side. I wasn't. I was trying to get both the student and the teacher to see each other's viewpoints and hopefully give them a chance to work it out. Some of the people, even before I could tell them what I had discussed with the student, thought that I had given the student a "go/pass/free" ticket. It

wasn't that way. Sometimes I had to argue to get that point across. We teachers of the same color had the same conflicts with the same people. (Kai)

Yes the same parents and I really think a lot of it was the issue, they have a Black teacher this year; let's just see how many things we can find out that she does wrong. That's how I felt every time something was coming back from them.

(Kim)

Later it was brought to my attention (as I was sitting at the far back of the room and had not heard the remark) by others in the room, that this female had called me a dictator under her breath...I specifically brought up the situation at the meeting and I made it well known that I was aware of what was said and that I thought it was unprofessional and inappropriate...In my heart of hearts I do believe it was a racial situation and I'm not so certain that any other person having said the same thing would have been called that. Only this other individual knows for certain, but I feel confident that this kind of comment might not have been said if the person speaking up about detention were of the same race as her. (Researcher)

Sometimes with some people I get the impression that they think just because I'm Black that I'm not as good as the White teacher or I don't do as good a job as the White teacher would. (Mia)

Being Proud, Strong, Respectful Black Women

I cherish everything about being a Black woman. I love being a Black woman. I love my look, my spirit, confidence, my voice, my hair ... I just love everything about being a Black woman. I love what it means to walk into a room and know that for some people that's all they will ever see but for me, there is history and there is a context, that while many people will never know, never understand it ... lives and breathes with me every moment of every day in every interaction. I love the mystery of that ... the mystery that it continues to be for others, but the truth that it always is for me. (Researcher)

To me a Black woman should be a have a strong personality. In my experience I've come from a family where the woman was the head of the house and in my eyes a Black woman needs to be a strong individual. She has to have her mind set on what she wants to do and be independent, not be dependent on other people, but dependent that she can do what she wants to do...I just feel that as Black women, we need to be strong, independent women and to be able to stand on our own two feet and do what we feel we need to do, make decisions that affect us. (Mia)

I think about all those other Black women that came before me and didn't have the opportunities that I have. I thank them because without them I wouldn't have the opportunities that I have. I just want to be a little part of what they were for me so that I can pass along some of that spirit and drive. The women in my mom and dad's families were all so beautiful. Each and every one of them brings

something special. Think about all these ladies and men in our past that died so we could get here. I didn't die for anybody. I'm just thinking that if I can just have a part of their strength, I'll be a happy person. (Kai)

I guess the most important parts are knowing my history, knowing the struggles that other people had to go through to get where they are. So for me, I struggled a little bit but not as much as other people have to get there. When I look back at the times when I did have difficulties, it's not as bad. It could have been a lot worse. (Kim)

... as Black people, we have so many layers. I love that because it is true. We are so many people rolled up into one because of our experiences, because how people have treated us. I believe African American women have a lot to offer these children in the schools. No matter what experience or problem or learning disability that child brings to you, they can overcome that problem and you can pass that success on to others. I think that is what we bring to this job. (Kai)

Composite Depiction

The composite depiction represents the molded and chiseled experience of each co-researcher into a unique, yet synthesized depiction of the experience of all five women. It is the composite that represents the common qualities and themes identified in the theme explication outlined in the previous section. The spirit and the life of each experience are collectively captured in the composite depiction below (Moustakas, 1990).

We are Black women working in rural White school districts. In many cases we are the first and only Black teacher in our buildings or districts. We are constantly aware

of our own existence not only at school but also within our community. Often times we are reminded of our existence by the prejudice of our co workers, students, parents, administrators, and community.

Just talking with the other teachers, this dad had never come to the school before if he got paddled. So I knew he was coming up there because he knew I was Black.(Mia)

Well I've had the parent who comes in and says, "You're picking on them because they're White". (Lea)

I just have to wonder if that principal wasn't prejudiced. (Mia)

I wonder if they think because I'm Black that I'm giving this particular student an extra chance. (Kai)

Yes the same parents and I really think a lot of it was the issue, they have a Black teacher this year; let's just see how many things we can find out that she does wrong. That's how I felt every time something was coming back from them. (Kim)

I feel confident that this kind of comment might not have been said if the person speaking up about detention were of the same race as her. (Researcher)

Sometimes with some people I get the impression that they think just because I'm Black that I'm not as good as the White teacher or I don't do as good a job as the White teacher would. (Mia)

He kept saying you teacher, but I knew he meant you Black teacher. (Mia)

It is sometimes a lonely existence because there is no one who can relate to our existence. Our own Black community often distances themselves from us under the assumption that we believe we "are better" than they are. We typically live in a community where there are few Black families and the ones that reside in our communities are often living in impoverished conditions.

Then mother would come in there and said, "I'm sick and tired of you picking on my kid! You're supposed to be supportive of Black kids. You hate Black kids!" (Mia)

I just kind of got the impression that, in her mind, you must think you're all that because you are a teacher. And here I am living on welfare in Subsidized Housing 1. (Mia)

We work in these same communities where we live. Many of us were raised in the communities where we teach. Even though we overcame the same obstacles as our peers and went on to higher education, we returned home. Sometimes we came home because our parents simply wanted us too. In other instances, we wanted to be home, close to family, close to our community, close to our history. For most of us leaving home was entering into a world that we didn't recognize. Learning that Blacks took pride in their

heritage, learning that Blacks took pride in their appearance, learning that being Black was something to be proud of. Coming home was safe. Staying home was secure.

When I went up to Rural Town 4, I felt very uncomfortable because I was quiet and people didn't approach me and then I in turn didn't approach them which made me look like I was uninterested in talking with them. I just feel comfortable I guess with my family being in the area. (Lea)

But, my mother said come back here. You know, at that time, you did listen to your parents. So, I figured, my sister had left home. My mother is asking me to come back here. I'm not going to go away too, because maybe she has reasons. (Kai)

Did you ever read W. E. B's, "The Voiced Souls of Black Folk? There is one part in the book where he talks about (he's very poetic) how black people come in so many beautiful shades, eyes, and hair. There were times at Lincoln where I would just sit in the cafeteria (I worked in the teacher's cafeteria) and I would just sit and watch all the people go by. I would think ... wow ... this is what he wrote about in the book. I told you I was bookworm. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. (Kai)

With this safety and security came a responsibility to the younger generation of kids experiencing many of the challenges we had faced growing up in rural White school districts. We take this responsibility seriously. We fight to teach all children but in

particular the Black children that being Black is something to be proud of and that you too can go to college and succeed in life.

I think of it as a responsibility. Because I'm thinking about back when I was younger. I never had a Black teacher until I got to college and I just thought, that when I had the very first class I walked into, it was a young, Black professor. It didn't dawn on me until then. (Lea)

...and like a responsibility to teach in this district because there aren't that many Black teachers in this district. It's like she said, she didn't have a Black teacher until she was until she went to college. I never had a Black teacher even when I went to college. I never had a Black teacher and I just think it's important to be there, to be out there and let these young kids see that ... Hey I can do that ... if she is doing that I can do that. It's almost like a sense of responsibility. I should be here for the next generation. (Mia)

A lot of times I felt like I really didn't have any role model and a teacher to look up to. Earlier in high school, I wanted to go into business. But then, I started tutoring elementary students and I saw that I was making a difference in their lives so that's why I decided to go into teaching and just for the simple fact that I grew up in an area where there really wasn't really any Black teachers. There was a couple when we got into middle school and high school and that was it. I just felt there needed to be a person that some of the kids could identify with. (Kim)

I also realize that I have a strong sense of responsibility when it comes to the role I play as a Black, female professional in education. While I am very proud of that, it may be the very same thing that has me keeping up barriers and I probably need to look at that. (Researcher)

It is a constant fight because the community and the school district are sending different messages to the same children and we are tremendously outnumbered. Nevertheless we have learned a lot of lessons in this existence. Some of us have managed to educate the adults around us about what it means to be Black in rural White towns.

That same day or week, we had an administrative team meeting where administrators, counselors and the whole team attended and I specifically brought up the situation at the meeting and I made it well known that I was aware of what was said and that I thought it was unprofessional and inappropriate. (Researcher)

Either they will respect you for being truthful or they're going to hate you. In those cases it turned out that the people respected me. They weren't going to agree with me, but they appreciated my being truthful. (Kai)

In the beginning I was shy and I didn't really want to express what was going on. Now I am more open. I'm more willing to talk about the issues that I'm having and go to the correct person instead of just letting it slide. I like it that I'm becoming more comfortable and talking more about different issues. (Kim)

We have managed to develop some true friendships and maintain associative relationships with our colleagues. We have acquired the support of facets of the

community and faculty and while the successes often seem few, we are certain that we are making a difference. For these reasons we have stayed year after year when more often than not, we have wanted to quit.

The support that I did get ... all the teachers in that building came to me at one point or another and said ... don't worry, we know what you are up against and hey, we're trying to help you as best we can. The Lord opened my eyes up there. You don't have to be the same color as another person to be able to help. (Kai)

The first in-service day when I first started as a long-term sub, they started announcing all the new teachers and faces to the district. I wasn't one of the first teachers called but when they said my name, I stood up and everyone started clapping in the audience and I was a little shocked by everyone clapping because I wasn't the first name called. I mean they did continue clapping after every other name was called, but that is when I did start to feel a little welcomed into that district. (Kim)

The building itself is small. There's just six teachers there and it didn't matter what six teachers were there, as a faculty we were all very, very close. Ever since I've been there. (Mia)

Although they say to me 'you said you were going to quit', I'm always back. (Lea)

I definitely have turned to my white women colleagues for support on both emotional and task related issues. More tasks related I think. Acknowledging their

expertise and their understanding of the field of education there have been many times when they have been able to support me with curriculum, with ideas for implementing instruction, for dealing with students, for how to deal with other faculty members, for how to deal with parents, how to communicate with the community, the school board. (Researcher)

Really, when I first started as a long-term sub, the faculty was very supportive. Especially with the kindergarten. I really bonded with a lot of the kindergarten teachers and they gave me a lot of tips and techniques and even gave me things that they had for years on end because I really didn't have that much supplies when I first started. So, with faculty, there are no real issues. It is a pretty friendly community. (Kim)

The funniest thing that happened to me the first couple of years I started teaching ... I'd get these kids in my classroom for the first couple weeks of school that would just look at me and I would look back and smile. Around Christmas time, these kids that were just looking, will come up and give me a card or present. Ms. Kai we really liked you. I would tell them I liked them too even though they did stare at me. That embarrassed them and I would say it was okay because I was new. You had to get used to me. They were concerned that I thought they were prejudiced. I never thought that. I may have been the first black person they saw or the first black teacher they had. We talked together about our families and they soon realized that we weren't much different. (Kai)

Many of us find the strength to go on in our relationship with God. All of us rely heavily on our strong family support systems in place within our communities. For those of us who do not have strong support systems, we plan on leaving to be closer to family even if that means trading one rural White town for another.

The Lord. The Lord. First of all I would come home and talk it over with my husband. My husband and I are friends. I think we're more friends now than anything and we bounce everything off of each other. Even things I don't really feel comfortable telling him, I can tell him and then he comes back with some advice. I don't know what I would do without that guy. Also, he helped me see that certain things happen to you in this life that help you grow closer to the Lord, and I did say during that time period, "Lord ... why?" And he just said trust in Him and He will make it clear to you and He did, and He has. (Kai)

The most important part about my identity is my belief in God. That is who I am. That is the context from which I view every situation. There is nothing more important to me than God. I take care of myself in prayer. I do my best not to live according to my emotions or what I feel, but according to what I believe. (Researcher)

[Moving back home]That's my plan and this has been since about last year when I decided that I had enough of being in a area where I didn't really have too many people that I could depend on and hang out with. Honestly, it does get lonely. I live by myself and it does get lonely. (Kim)

Some of us have a strong voice firmly founded in our Black history and are not afraid to use it, others of us have wondered if we have lost our voice and our presence and disappeared into the system.

I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up in all Black schools, all black communities with many Black teachers, Black superintendents, Black principals, so there is a very strong sense of culture that follows me wherever I go. Maybe I have that barrier up myself to where I'm not able to connect with White culture at times. (Researcher)

To me a Black woman should be a have a strong personality. In my experience I've come from a family where the woman was the head of the house and in my eyes a black woman needs to be a strong individual. She has to have her mind set on what she wants to do and be independent, not be dependent on other people, but dependent that she can do what she wants to do. (Mia)

I started to wonder. Am I this invisible person that blends in with everybody? I started to wonder that. I think what really got to me ... there was this little ... and my husband said that's just Satan trying to steal your joy ... there was this little nagging feeling that maybe I had assimilated so much ... and I felt this way as a sixteen year old kid but I couldn't really express it. Maybe I had assimilated so much that people felt comfortable with me because maybe they figured I accepted them for whatever ... that I wasn't going to say that I didn't like your attitude. Maybe I was going to say let's sit down and talk about your attitude. And there

was a side of me that was feeling bad about that because I knew that the Black kids and the Hispanic kids were hurting too. They were saying so-and-so looks at me like I'm a piece of dirt. Has anybody ever looked at you like that Mrs. Kai? I'm thinking ... NO ... NO! (Kai)

...I don't know ... it's different because I really think I don't always see my color first and sometimes I wonder if that's wrong that I don't ... that I don't notice it first, that I don't think about it first or put it first. If you would ask me what I was, I might say I was a teacher first, or I might say I was a mother first. Identifying myself as a Black woman wouldn't be my first identification. (Lea)

...I feel like do I stand for something? Do I represent someone? Because sometimes the Black woman has carried her culture and background ... am I doing that? Am I representing my culture then, and then sometimes I think back to ... do I have to? Why should I have to? A White woman doesn't have to represent hers. She is just a woman in society. Do I have to carry the weight? (Lea)

Many of us are distraught over the stereotypes that enter the room before we do and continually strive to disprove them. We strive to let others know that we are more than just Black women. We are human beings with feelings. We laugh but we also cry. We are strong but also experience times of weakness.

Often times what bothers me is the perception the world has of Black women and when they see me often times, I think, whether it's true or not, I feel like they first expect to see the stereotype that they believe Black women are and that they

would never take the time to get beyond the stereotype. (Lea)

I've seen Black women being used as sex objects in the media and again, I detest those things. I think it contributes to a stereotype that is not true. A stereotype that when I walk into a room people see that in me and I don't like that.

(Researcher)

I think a lot of our people still get stereotyped and I don't like that. Can I change it? I'll try to until the day I die. And I think that's a drawback for us. I think we still get stereotyped to a certain degree and I think that's sad. I think some people still look at our outward appearance and judge us. (Kai)

They just assume that Black women all go out partying and drinking and smoking and all that. That's just not me. I wasn't raised around that so it's not a big deal to me. I don't hang out in the clubs and bars because that wasn't something I saw growing up and for people to just assume that because you're Black you hang out. No, you don't know me like that. But sometimes it's kind of frustrating, that people make that assumption of you because you are Black. (Mia)

I think people think that we're always strong and we never break down. We do. And I learned from that. It's okay to break down. If you keep it pent up you're going to have a heart attack or something that isn't good for you. I admire my ancestors, my mom, and her sisters. They were some strong ladies. Am I as strong as them? No. I came along at a different time. Do I wish I had that

strength? Darn right I do. Do I cry about things? Yes. Do I let people see my emotions? Yes, I do and I think I am a better person for that. I think that has helped me. (Kai)

Sometimes, I really don't know what it means to be a Black woman. I know what it means to be a woman. I just know that as a woman, taking care of my family is important to me, being respectful to others, getting respect from others, carrying myself in a positive way. I look at those things. (Lea)

The most important part about me is that I am a very caring person and I am sensitive to different things. I want things to last. If I meet someone, I don't want it to be something short term. I want it to grow into something else. Like with friendships. I want it to grow. (Kim)

So who are we exactly? We are Black women always thankful for those who paved the way for us to be in positions as teachers, always aware of our surroundings, always acknowledging our responsibility, ever mindful of the generation to come, and realizing that every battle won brings us closer to winning the war.

Creative Synthesis

The final phase of heuristic analysis is the presentation of the experience in a creative and meaningful way. This was one of the most exciting phases of the process for me because as the researcher I had reached the point in the methodology where I could let my passion for the research flow freely and creatively. I was not prepared for how emotional this portion of the process would be. The experience was very therapeutic in

that it seemed like all of the information that was incubated in my existence throughout this process was finally able to come out freely without hindrance. There was a feeling of “letting it all out” and letting it all out was extremely emotional for me and produced many tears. To date it is hard to define just why I continued to cry throughout this creation. I believe this research has become a very intimate part of my existence and the responsibility I have placed on myself to tell the story of these four women and myself was larger than what I realized until I arrived at this phase of the methodology.

Creating this piece of poetry felt very supernatural. I felt the words flow from within me with little analytical thought. At its completion I was certain that these stories were a part of me and would forever resonate within my existence.

Give up!

Trust me I have thought about it.

But what would that accomplish.

No!

There is too much at stake.

The future.

How can I change the future?

No one is listening

Because there is no one to talk too!

Where exactly do I belong?

This is exhausting.

Stressful.

Sad.

Keep going.

Keep fighting.

Don't give up!

See her face.

See his smile.

Fight for them.

Someone fought for you.

Go ahead and cry.

Close your door.

Let it out.

Wipe your own tears.

Then keep fighting!

Saw Mr. Mo at the store.

He said "Thank you".

Talked to the Pastor on Sunday.

He said "Thank you".

Some of the teachers invited me to dinner.

I went.

I laughed.

My students got me a teddy bear for Christmas.

They said, "We like you".

Every moment counts.

Everyday an opportunity.

To do what I do best

TEACH!

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter summarizes the literature review in connection with the findings from the study. Limitations along with some generalizations are also discussed. Implications for rural White school districts are mentioned. This dissertation research serves as a gateway into the experiences of Black women teaching in rural White school districts. The generous offerings of these women provide a glimpse into the journey of being a Black woman.

Summary of Findings

This heuristic study captured the experience of five Black women teaching in rural White school districts. “Telling their story” is only one aspect of the study, illuminated by the depictions of each woman’s journey into her experience. The study further elicited a composite depiction of the experience for all five women. The co-researchers are all Black women ranging in age from 26 to 54 years, married, single, some with children, and teaching experience ranging from 3 to 35 years.

The literature review identified the three foundational experiences of Black women working in White male dominated professions as racism, sexism and biculturalism. While this study focused on the White female dominated profession of teaching, similar findings were prevalent in this study. All of the co-researchers reported incidents of prejudice and believed they to have experienced bicultural struggles. The overwhelming finding in this study as it relates to the concept of biculturalism is the loneliness experienced by these women. All of the women reported a feeling of isolation within their work community as well as the Black community. They all found support

primarily within their families and their own self-concept. Despite this loneliness the ownership and responsibility the women embraced for their community was strong enough for them to remain in what are often uncomfortable positions. This finding is supported by Bell (1990) who describes the bicultural existence as leading to a position of marginality living on the boundaries between two distinct cultures. While Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) found the issues of sex and race for Black women firefighters to be inseparable, none of the co-researchers described this phenomenon. This alone may be attributed to the female domination of the teaching profession.

Bell's (1990) finding that Black women often take this bicultural experience and adapted to use it as a strength is further confirmed by the co-researchers of this study who report developing relationships within both cultures and using those relationships to educate their peers and community. For these women the adaptation did not come easily. All of the women report both struggles and support within their schools and communities. Often times the adaptation and education of their peers came after having difficult interactions and words. The outcome of such interactions often ended with personal and professional growth, but did not come naturally to the co-researcher or their colleagues. In some cases those relationships have yet to develop and remain primarily "work relationships". All of the women continue to experience difficulty not only with the White community but also with the Black community. The women with more years of experience talked more about this concept of adaptation. Those with fewer years of experience continued to grasp at creating and building an adaptive lifestyle within their bicultural existence.

Martin (1994) found while investigating the experience of Black women in the police force that historical and stereotypical views of Black women often manifested on patrol. The co-researchers in this study also discussed the stereotypical views of Black women that they have endured as teachers in White rural school districts. The women in this study struggle with the stereotypical views of Black women and are faced with disproving those stereotypes on a regular basis. Some of the findings suggest that the stereotypes come not only from the White community but also the Black community. Furthermore, Alfred's (2001) findings that creating positive self images and definition contribute to the success of Black women in overcoming negative stereotypes is also reinforced in this study as the co-researchers all discussed the pride and adoration they have for themselves as Black women and of the strong Black women in their families. This finding in collaboration with the core meanings of the experience suggest the strength of self image and identity is a key factor to being a Black woman working in a rural White school. Interestingly, some of the women expressed concern in having assimilated to much to the White culture and were concerned about losing their voice as Black women.

The women in this study have connected with the disharmony in education as it relates to Black students and as a result have taken on the responsibility for igniting change for these students, the district and the community. They see themselves as role models and take their roles very seriously. Darling-Hammond (1995) reported on this inequality, "As a consequence of structural inequalities in access to knowledge and resources, students from racial and ethnic "minority" groups in the United States face profound barriers to educational opportunity" (p.465). This responsibility becomes

increasingly important for the future of Black students. The findings suggest that the sense of responsibility is strong enough within these women that they would remain in an extremely uncomfortable position in order to be an example and role model to Black students. Gordon (2000) commented, “If individuals have had negative educational experiences...they will have difficulty entertaining plans for a life-long occupation” (p. 4).

Another finding in this study that is affirmed in the literature is the recurring theme throughout rural school district recruitment and retention literature that teachers in these areas are “rooted” within the communities where they teach (Harmon, 2001). Most of the co-researchers attended school and grew up in the communities where they teach. They maintain strong family ties to the community and the district and feel a sense of ownership in remaining. The researchers in the study who were not raised in the district where they taught had other reasons for remaining also rooted in family ties. In fact, the one researcher who was missing what the literature refers to as “rootedness” has a plan on leaving the district where she is currently teaching in search of “rootedness” within another rural White community.

These research findings describe an undeniable similarity between the experiences of Black women teaching in White rural school districts. These same experiences are not unlike those of Black women in White male dominated professions. These voyages of discovery lead all five women to three core meanings that define their experience:

1. Maintaining Strong Family Ties and Influences
2. Experiencing and Witnessing Prejudice

3. Being Proud, Strong, and Respectful Black Women

Unlike other studies examining the experience of Black women, the themes in this study seem to be experienced as one. These women exist in these districts where they will undoubtedly witness and experience racial prejudice. They do so because they are strong, proud and respectful Black women with family ties within the community that they desire to maintain. Of the themes maintaining strong family ties and influences is of the greatest importance to the experience. All of the women spoke of remaining in the communities where they teach for these reasons and those without that attachment have made plans on leaving. It is their strength and the support of their family that helps them to endure the racial prejudice. Indeed these core meanings define what it is to be a Black woman teaching in a White rural school.

The stories of these women were engendered to me not just as research but also as a validation of my own experience being a Black woman teaching in a rural White school district. In harmony with heuristic methodology, I have abridged my own parallel reality within the context of this study. It is an experience that supports the same findings experienced by co-researchers. These same core meanings have been reiterated to me on several occasions, which drove me deeper into self-discovery and further fueled my purpose not only in research but also in life. Despite the horizon that I can finally see ahead as I close my dissertation, I feel mandated to continue to tell the story that only we can tell. Despite the fatigue, I feel celebration, enlightenment, and newness to continue. Like the women in this study I feel a responsibility. Going through this journey I am realizing that I have always felt it. It comes out in my self-dialogue. This excerpt highlights my thoughts and feelings during these final stages.

Definitely. I am a Black woman working in an all White school district as a teacher, working in an all White school district as an administrator. Being the first Black teacher hired in a building. Being the first Black administrator hired in a district. Constraints everywhere ... community constraints, perceptions, parents ... oh my gosh they just go on and on. There are definitely constraints. I confront them by going through with it. By accepting the job, by accepting the challenge, by going to work every day and working as hard as I possibly can to be successful and to do the best job I can possibly do to serve my community, to serve my students. You confront them by going forward ... not by backing down. And that's how I confront them. It is definitely grounded in race because to be the first in the year 2007, in the year 2003, to be the first in these areas is a big deal and you can't back down. It's not always comfortable, but you have to go forward.

Some of the women in the study expressed themselves as more than just Black women, but women, human beings with feelings. Moustakas (1990) described the passionate search for illumination as being an inherent part of heuristic research. It is this existence, this passion that has absorbed my life for the past five years of this journey. During this time I have experienced the joy of childbirth and promotion and the agony of death and loss. These experiences are not unique to me as a Black woman but I experience them as a human being. This methodology has taken me on the journey of self discovery and the women who came along for the ride contributed to telling this story that I have learned only we could tell.

Limitations and Generalizations

My initiation into the realm of heuristic inquiry is complete and “a connection has been made that will remain forever unbroken and that will serve as a reminder of a lifelong process of knowing and being” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 56). Although this relationship has been an intimate one in the birth of this dissertation, with it comes limitations. The nature of heuristic inquiry is to illuminate the experience of a few co-researchers. With that come the following limitations:

1. Co-researchers of the same descent. Other ethnic groups are not represented to discover if the same themes and experiences emerge.
2. The primary researcher accepts the validity of the co-researchers story.
3. Ages range from 23-54. Other ages and experiences are not represented.
4. Co-researchers are all of similar socio-economic status.
5. Co-researchers all lived in similar communities.
6. Men were not considered in this study. Therefore, their experiences were not considered.
7. The primary researcher had some prior interaction with the co-researchers; therefore some bias may have been present.

The goal of heuristic research is not to generalize the study. Douglas and Moustakas (1984) distinguished, “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity, with experience not behavior” (p. 42). However, this in depth, thorough analysis of the experience phenomena of being a Black woman teaching in a White rural school district a generalized essence emerged that was common to each co-researcher as outlined above in

the summary of findings. Although I am not making a generalized statement, this study provides a foundation from which to explore the experiences of other women for future studies.

With this study came a personal risk for all participants including myself as the primary researcher. Each of us took on the emotional, political, and social risks of exposing the uncomfortable reality of what it means to be Black working in predominantly White cultures. This experience is emotional because this is the unspoken reality of many Black people in America. In many cases we live the reality without ever speaking of it outside of our own community. There are definite political and social implications for the co-researchers who are in most cases alone in their existence in these predominantly White schools working among colleagues and within a community that does not comprehend their dilemma.

This apprehension was apparent to me as a researcher from the onset of this study and I worked very closely with my participants to ensure they participated at a level with which they could find comfort. For instance, some co-researchers chose to participate in their dialogue sessions together and all the co-researchers were afforded the opportunity to review and change their individual depictions. All of the participants who took part in the study did so despite discomfort and apprehension and in reading the transcriptions it is apparent that many of them had not talked about these topics prior to the interviews.

For these reasons, the research is very challenging but extremely enlightening and fulfilling. Because as the researcher I was also telling my story, I experienced the emotional, political and social apprehensions associated with this study. The methodology became very important to follow in order to control these feelings. Closely

following the heuristic methodology outlined in previous chapters allowed me to participate in the research without allowing my personal implications to hinder the stories of the co-researchers.

Implications

Insights and far reaching implications for rural school districts seeking to employ through recruitment or simply to retain the Black women already teaching in the district stemmed from this research. The study confirms the practices outlined in the literature surrounding “grow your own” programs for expanding the base of minority teachers within the district (Harmon 2001). In particular this study confirms the “rootedness’ of Black women in the community and their desire to remain connected with the community and family within the districts where they attended school. One co-researcher describes plans for leaving a district in search of this “rootedness.” Harmon (2001) further suggests offering more extrinsic methods such as enhancing the comfort and acquisition to rural school communities through merit pay. None of the women in this study suggested that such methods would increase the likelihood of them remaining in rural communities. Therefore, the development and maintenance of programs connecting students with the profession through positive interactions and opportunities throughout the district and the community would increase the likelihood of Black females returning to their district to teach.

The study also implies that once employed Black women take on the responsibility of being a role model for future generations. This responsibility increases their retention despite the sometimes-overwhelming desire to quit year after year. The majority of the women in the study have remained in their schools in excess of 15 years.

Their strength and resilience in most cases was attributed to this sense of responsibility to the Black students in their schools. Therefore, developing programs for Black students within the district that eventually lead to positions within the district may be the answer for retention for years and generations to come.

Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting this research it became apparent that there are more stories to tell that can have a direct impact on the future of education in rural White communities.

Additional studies could include:

- A Story Only We Can Tell: Black Men Teaching in Rural White School Districts
- Black Boys: Lessons Learned in Rural White School Districts
- Black Girls: Lessons Learned in Rural White School Districts
- Being a Black Administrator in Rural White School Districts
- White Teachers' Perceptions of Black Students in Rural White School Districts
- White Administrators' Perceptions of Black Students in Rural White School Districts
- The Lived Experience of Minority Professionals in White Rural School Districts

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APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR CONSENT



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Month, Day, Year

(Superintendent Title) (Superintendent Name)

(Name of School District)

(Address 1)

(City, State, Zip)

Dear (Superintendent Title) (Superintendent Name):

I am in the process of completing a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University. The focus of my study examines the lived experience of African American women.

To begin this process, I am asking for your permission to contact the human resource director and request a list of the self identified African American women teachers. This information will be used to distribute letters requesting teachers' participation in the study.

Teachers' participation in this study will include: writing an autobiography, participating in one open-ended interview, and reading individual descriptions for clarification and elaboration. The interviews will take place during a time selected by the participants and will most likely occur before school, during a planning period, or after school at a mutually agreeable place, which may include their classrooms.

The information collected from this study will be used in the following ways: 1) to elucidate and describe the experience of African American women working as teachers in White rural school districts. 2) to provide implications for recruitment and retention of African American women educators in rural majority schools, 3) to provide practical implications for developing and implementing school programming for recruitment and retention of African American women teachers.

I will need written permission from you in order to proceed with this research.

If you are willing to have your district participate, please provide written documentation declaring your permission has been granted and return it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. You may retain a copy for your records. If you have any

questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. All of my contact information is included below.

Thank you for your willingness to consider this matter.

Sincerely,

Maria A. Tucker
Principal Investigator
307 Holswart Drive
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257
H: (717) 532-5689
mapst103@hotmail.com

Dr. David Lovett
Dissertation Committee Chair
Old Main 211C
Shippensburg University
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257
O:(717) 477-1005
dllove@ship.edu

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT FORMAL LETTER OF INVITATION



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Month, Day, Year

(Participant Title) (Participant Name)
(Name of School District)
(Address 1)
(City, State, Zip)

Dear (Participant Title) (Participant Name):

I am in the process of completing a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.

The focus of my dissertation examines the lived experience of African American female teachers in dominant culture institutions. Your participation will provide valuable information that will help shed light on this phenomenon in the field of education. In addition, the information you provide can help educational leaders address the needs of the recruitment and retention of African American teachers.

I am seeking your support by inviting you to participate in this study, which will include writing an autobiography, one open ended interview and reading individual descriptions to clarify and elaborate on your experience. To ensure accuracy, your responses to the open-ended questions during the interview will be audio taped. The interview will occur during a time that is most convenient to you (i.e. before school, after school, or during a planning period). In addition, you will receive a copy of the individual depiction to verify the accuracy of your responses.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way I hope to illuminate or answer my question: What is the experience of Black women teaching in rural White school districts? This study will also describe *my* experience as an African American female teacher. Through your participation as a co-researcher or participant I hope to understand the essence of the phenomenon as it reveals itself through your experience. This study is designed to be low risk to you as a participant. You will receive pseudonyms in the organization and analysis of your story. You will be asked to recall specific episodes or events in your life as you experience the phenomenon we are investigating. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you; your thoughts, feelings, behavior, as well as, situations, events, places and people associated with your experience. You may also wish to share personal logs or journals with me or other ways in which you have recorded your experience – for example poetry, letters or artwork.

This is an opportunity to tell our story and share the essence of our experience as Black women teaching in rural White school districts. It is a story that only we can tell. If we keep silent, our experience lies dormant, and we contribute to the invisibility that Black women have been experiencing for centuries. This is an opportunity to become visible not only to yourself as you reflect upon your individual experience, but also to all those who cannot begin to comprehend what it is like to be a Black woman working in a dominant cultured institution.

I value your participation and thank you for your commitment of time, energy and effort.

If you accept this invitation to participate in the study described above, please sign the enclosed consent form. In addition, please know that you may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting the researcher via email, phone or mail as described below.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me at (717) 532-5689. As a teacher myself, I realize the importance of your time. So thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Maria A. Tucker
Principal Investigator
307 Holswart Drive
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257
H: (717) 532-5689
mapst103@hotmail.com

Dr. David Lovett
Dissertation Committee Chair
Old Main 211C
Shippensburg University
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257
O:(717) 477-1005
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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW WITH KAI

R: In your biography, I asked you to write about your early childhood experiences, your family, how you were raised, where you went to school. I want you to reflect on some of those things in the beginning because there are some things I would love for you to elaborate on there and then the actual interview questions are going to go more into your career, more into your adult life and the decisions you've made up to this point. With your interview, again I want to start out having you elaborate on some things and have you just talk through your story before I ask you any questions only because I really want you to be able to tell it like it really is.

R: In your biography you talked about growing up here in Rural Town 1. One of the questions asked about your first becoming aware that you were black or that something was different about being black and your response was ... you always knew. Could you talk a little bit more about what that means?

KAI: When I grew up, this is going to be pretty strange, but all of my cousins, aunts and uncles, they were all black; we all lived in this one area of the town. Some people lived out in this area and they were like the upper class people I guess you would say, but just the working class people like my Mom and Dad we all lived ... you know where Big Lots is?

R: Uh hum.

KAI: Okay, right between where Big Lots is up to the club, I guess it's Big Mama's, down on Hollywell. In that little area down along the railroad tracks and the old projects ... that's where I grew up, and everybody was black. There were some white storeowners and some white kids that lived around the perimeter of that. But that street, Water Street, West Washington Street, West Liberty Street and Cedar Avenue, there were a few white families there, but everybody always just treated them like they were black. I could say the names, but you know ... they were white but they were just treated like every black and they were part of that community. You know what I'm saying?

R: So how did that you contribute to you always knowing ... in the sense that you were separated you mean?

KAI: Well, I went to Elementary School 1, which was on Main Street and just about all of my classmates were black except there were some white students there. That's where the majority of the blacks kids went to school. I went to two churches actually because my Dad went to Church 1 and my mom went to Church 2. So I went to both churches and then we would go out to Church 3 because that's where my grandmother went. Those churches were all within that little area. Everybody there was black. All my relatives were living in that area and they were all black. I didn't have any doubt about who I was. But the funny thing about it is I never

thought about it as a kid ... like how come we all lived in this one area. But I'll tell you what happened. I had this good friend, White Friend 1, who was white and she lived up on Catherine Street close to Main Street. But she went to school with us, you know, just a friend. One Saturday she asked me to go to the matinee down at the Capitol Theater. We went there every Saturday after we got done with our chores. It was 25¢ and you could sit all day and we were all shocked when the price went up to 50¢. But you didn't have to get out after the first movie. You could stay all afternoon. That was in the days when parents could let their kids go places all afternoon and not worry about someone snatching them. Like I have to go pick up my grandchildren because you're worried about them walking for two blocks. That's sad isn't it? Well, we went with White Friend 1 that day and we had to sit in the balcony. Well I never noticed anything about sitting in the balcony until White Friend 1 says to me, "Hey KAI, everybody up here is black." I said, "Yeah, that's where we sit." She said, "Did you ever think about sitting down there in the ... you pay the same price ... this is not right." She was getting all upset. She was white. "Did you ever think about going down there and sitting? You're all up here in the back." I said, "Well I like it up here. All my friends are up here." She said, "You don't get it. You pay the same price. You should be able to sit anywhere you want." I said, "White Friend 1, look at the movie. You wanted to come here and have fun and now you're arguing about where you're sitting. You can go down there and sit." She said, "No, I don't want to go there and sit, but I want you to see something." I said, "What do you want me to see. That I could be sitting down there." She said, "Yeah, you paid the same price." She was right. We were ten or eleven, fourth or fifth grade. So she said, "Well, what do you got in the bag?" We used to sneak food in, in these bags, because 1) our parents didn't have money to give us something to by and 2) we were too shy to go down there and buy. Once again ... so anyway, this one lady, Ms. Community Lady 1, she made the best sauce for the hot dogs and we had them all wrapped up in tin foil. So after we at all that, White Friend 1 said that was good and I said yeah wasn't it. And everyone was just sitting there, and I forget what movie was playing, some matinee, Shirley Temple or something. So she said, "This is what I think about them people sitting down stairs." She took the bag and threw it over the balcony, down to the bottom. We were like, now we are going to get kicked out and our parents are going to beat us for two years. You know ... folks back then didn't "play" with the kids. Anyway, up comes the usher shining the flashlight. "I know one of you kids threw that bag down there." We all said, "We're looking at the movie. What bag?" Everybody started saying, "what bag? Did you see a bag?" Everybody was like, "no we didn't see a bag." So he said, "If something else comes over there, everyone is getting out of here." He left and everybody jumped White Friend 1 and said ... "you know what White Friend 1? You can be mad that's okay. We know our place." This is what we told her. I thought about that years later. White Friend 1 was mad where we should have been mad. But we had come to accept it! She's a little kid trying to tell us to be mad. All right, I'll tell you another thing. Every day when I walked to school, we would stop at these little candy stores. They had these little

“Mom and Pop” stores. The only black person that owned a store was Mr. Community Man 1. Mr. Community Man 1 and it was in the black community. Now when you got past Water Street and you got up on to Main Street or down to West Washington Street, all the stores were white “Mom and Pop” stores. On Water Street it was Mr. Community Man 1, who was Puerto Rican which you know, people consider Puerto Rican’s black, Spanish people anyway. So on Fridays, we all went to Community Man 2’s Roller Rink right down there on Hollywell Avenue. No white people were in there. There were a few. The white people that lived in the community, they were in there. But every Friday we went skating down at Community Man 2’s. Now Mr. Community Man 2 was white, who owned the roller rink. But Friday was our night to go there from 7 to 10. What else? Oh wow, this is awful. Something happened when I was between my junior and senior year. We took these tests called SATS/ PSATs to go to college. My mom and dad wanted my sister and I to go to college. My sister was already at Rural Town 4 University. Because from the time we were little kids they told us how they wanted to go to college. My mother graduated in the top 5% of Rural Town 1 High School’s graduating class, but they never recognized, but they never recognized the black ... you can strike this ... they never recognized the black kids. Her parents, it was during the depression, didn’t have money. No one was giving scholarships. My mother could read a book in one night after she cooked, cleaned for other people and came home and helped us kids. We’d always see her reading. She never looked at the TV. Now my dad and us, yeah, we looked at the TV. My mother ... That’s where I learned to love to read, because she would take us to the library every week. Now my dad was always saying, “You need a college education because that’s how you get ahead in the world. I don’t care if you are girls. Girls need an education too.” So I’m real thankful to my dad for that. He wasn’t going to hold us back. My mom ... she just, by her example, she went back to school and got some kind of business degree, worked herself up from an operator to be a supervisor at the phone company. My dad started in the Borough digging coal and by the time he retired, like 20 years before his retirement, he had moved up to a warehouseman. So that made us proud. Back then, parents always told you ... and so did your aunts and uncles and everybody ... don’t make our family embarrassed. We don’t care what you do with your life just so you’re honest, you work hard and you’re respectful. They ALL said that. You didn’t really need to go to college, didn’t have to graduate, but whatever your job was ... do the best that you can, respect other people. We heard that from the time we could listen and I mean everybody said ... there wasn’t anybody said, “don’t go treat them children like that. I think if someone would have popped up and said that, all the kids would have fell over dead. We would have been ... like, who’s that person?

R: And you said that you were told time and time again that you had to work hard and work harder ...

KAI: And do better than everyone else. Oh man, my dad told me that because, see, he was in the Navy. After high school he went to the Navy because he was hoping to go to college through the Navy, but then he and mom got married. And he thought ... not going to college now I've got to take care of my family. My dad told us that all the time. You have to have better manners, better speech, better everything because you're not going to be judged on the same standard. And that used to get on my nerves, but you know what. I thank my dad for that today.

R: Why

KAI: Because it made me have goals. I wanted to please him. Kids want to please their parents. When we brought our report cards home, my dad never gave us like, ten dollars for an "A" or anything (because he didn't have the money), but he wouldn't have done it anyway. But just to see him smile and say that's wonderful ... or my mom to say keep up the good work made you feel good. And then they would call up your aunts and uncles and on Sunday when everyone got together, boy, you got singled out. And the church, in the church, people would come up to you and ... I know you do this in your church because I've seen it ... hey keep up the good work. The preacher and his wife, up on the podium, so-and-so got the honor roll. And you're sitting there like whoa, everybody knows. Wow, that feels great! And then the other kids were happy. Wow, we're looking up to you. You got on the honor roll. It was like okay ... like we all lived in the south end. None of us had much money, but guess what ... we were a community. When I went to college, my friends who didn't get a chance to go to college will come up and say things like ... "What's it like? "You're so lucky." "We're proud of you." That is something that is hard to even ... you just want to do good for everybody. Because you knew you didn't make it on your own. My mother used to tell us this all the time ... "Hey don't go thinking you got there by yourself. You're in a long line of people that came before you. There's folks praying for you that you don't even know their name. So don't you dare come around with a big head." You know those old people wouldn't let you get a big head. They were some wonderful times. Now I know, I never saw a black person working in any stores on Main Street. I saw black people that were in charge of the janitorial services but it didn't matter. Everybody was respected within the community.

R: Did you have any black teachers?

KAI: Oh yeah ... two. They were substitutes. Miss Black Teacher 1 ... she was some kind of lady about this tall, she taught Sunday school at the Church 1 too. She didn't play. And she knew all our parents, so when she substituted for somebody, and she had to tell our parents we weren't doing right ... Miss Black Teacher 1. I liked her. The other person was Miss Black Teacher 2 and she was just a sweetheart. Her smile just made you feel like you were talking with your own mother. Miss Black Teacher 1, she was all by the rules, but that was okay. That was just her. Mrs. Black Teacher 2, she would say, "Aw sweetie. I'm going

to tell your mother how good you were in school today.” And Miss Black Teacher 1, she would say, “Good job” and you were like ... did she say good job? Or you wouldn’t do anything but say thank you Ma’am and then run out after school and tell everybody.

R: So you went to school here and you left and went to Lincoln University ...

KAI: Oh, I want to tell you how I got to Lincoln University. I was going to go somewhere else until my sister, who was going to Rural Town 4 at the time, had a lot of friends at Lincoln. She said why don’t you apply to do there? That’s how I got to Lincoln and I thank my older sister to this day. You know how you look up to your older brothers and sisters? My sister really didn’t want to go to college. My parents had to force her although she was a much better student than me. But because she wanted to go to Washington and be a business accountant’s secretary, they would allow her. Because they weren’t going to allow their 18-year-old daughter to go to the city because they didn’t know anybody that she could live with. They were really looking out for her, but her being 18 and wanting to be independent, she didn’t get it. She worked after school and she commuted back and forth to Rural Town 4. As soon as she graduated, although she did well there, she left town and moved to Philadelphia. That was her goal. To get away. A lot of people in our generation thought if they could just shake Rural Town 1 ... but did you ever notice that a lot of people in our generation retire and come back here?

R: I’m not actually from here so this is good for me to hear because I did not know this. That was my next question for you ... you went away and you came back. What is it that made you decide to do that? And now going through school, you said you had two black teachers and they were both substitutes. So there were not permanent. That’s a good transition for us to go into your early career. How did you decide to come back here to teach after having left and went to Lincoln?

KAI: I had a teaching job in Neptune, NJ after graduating from Lincoln. Husband and I were going to move there because he had a job at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. But, my mother said come back here. You know, at that time, you did listen to your parents. So, I figured, my sister had left home. My mother is asking me to come back here. I’m not going to go away too, because maybe she has reasons. It was because my mother asked Husband and I to come back. I guess she thought both of us being 20-21 and going to the city ... because my sister didn’t go until she was about 23 or 24. She worked around here for a while. She lived with my grandmother up there. I guess my mother just thought we were too young. Although, we had a place to live. We were going to a rooming house to live with a woman who had gone to Lincoln. It was all nice people, but I guess that’s how parents get about the youngest.

R: So you made the transition back home? Did you major in education in college?

KAI: Yes, with a history specialization.

R: What made you decide to go into teaching?

KAI: I guess I'll have to talk about my mother again. My mother always wanted to be a teacher and she always got a kick out of helping us with our homework. Just so happened that I was fortunate enough to be a pretty good student and teachers were always helping me to help other kids. The other kids that I usually helped were my friends and they always got a kick out of someone their own age helping them. I liked how that made them feel and me feel. I felt good about being able to explain something to someone. When I was a kid I was not very outspoken ... shocking isn't it. I could explain things to other people and that gave me ... My sister was a very good athlete. She could do every sport. She was a cheerleader and involved in a lot of activities. I was the quiet kid that would be reading a book and if someone would ask me something, I would answer, but I just wouldn't do anything on my own. You know how teachers have a way of helping kids overcome shyness? Teachers just see that. The teachers at Elementary School 1, even Miss Elementary Teacher 1, my sixth grade teacher that everybody was afraid of, she didn't take no stuff. She was like Miss Black Teacher 1. She would even get me to explain stuff to people. Now I wasn't the safety patrol guard like my sister (you had to be a little more outgoing), but I was the person that stayed after school to help people with their homework. I figured ... that is something I can do. I like helping people. It was a good feeling and also when the other kids came back and said I was going to fail that test and you helped me and I at least got a "C". Then I always tell them that was good and the next time you can get a "B" or an "A". It makes you feel really good. Even to this day, after 35 years of teaching, the thing that keeps me there is seeing kids who come to your class thinking they can't do something, leaving knowing that okay, maybe it takes me a little bit longer. Maybe I'm not a straight "A" student. Maybe I can do this. That's the hook that hooked me into teaching.

R: So what year did you graduate from Lincoln?

KAI: 1972. When I graduated from high school, Dr. Martin Luther King got assassinated. That really shocked me. I remember when I was in the eighth grade. I wanted to go to the "March on Washington". I wanted my parents to give me a bus ticket. I thought they were going to let me do this. They said no ... there might be violence there. You can look at it on TV. So I thought, he is so awesome. He can just get people's attention and speak. He's a hero. When I was a senior and we woke up that morning in April. I found out that he had been killed. We didn't take part in the sit-ins or anything like that, but you saw it all on TV. You saw what was happening. I knew that a lot of good things that were happening for me, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, was because of the civil rights movement. As a matter of fact my one cousin, Mr. Cousin 1, had started the Rural Town 1 Community Improvement Association to help people get better

jobs. When Husband and I moved back here, who was the person who came and got us jobs? Cousin 1' son Cousin 2. I owe that to them to this day. We didn't have to go looking for them. They came looking for us ... heard you moved back into town. Get your name on the substitute list. We will help you get a job. Same with Husband. They took him right down to SKF because he is a welder (he learned that in the military) and got him a job. So the black community really stuck together.

R: How did you come to be hired by the school district?

KAI: It was pretty interesting for me because ...

R: Because you graduated with your teacher's certificate ...

KAI: Yes.

R: Okay, so start there...

KAI: One of the things that really made me feel really happy when I got the job at Central ... my cousin Mr. Cousin 3, he was the head custodian, he helped me out tremendously. I wouldn't have lasted for half a year without that man.

R: Now where is Central? What is..?

KAI: Right on Third and Queen Street.

R: That used to be...

KAI: Central Junior High School from seventh to ninth grade. And when I started they were transitioning so they had tenth grade there too. They hadn't built all of Junior High School 1 so they had some tenth graders there and some went to the high school. I taught eighth grade American History and tenth grade World Cultures.

R: Okay. And were you the only...

KAI: the only black teacher there? At that time yes.

R: Were there any other black teachers ever hired before you in this district?

KAI: Yes. In this district (she graduated in 1964) she had a man, Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 had hired up at the high school, he taught Spanish, and I'll think of his name. I never had him, but my sister really liked him. I can't really think of anybody else.

R: So you were only the second one?

KAI: Oh wait a minute. I can't forget Miss Black Teacher 3. She was teaching at the Middle School ... Miss Black Teacher 3 who taught Science. Yes she was full time and what a nice lady. Her and this guy named Black Male Teacher 2 ... he taught Spanish but he didn't last here long because I guess there weren't a lot of young people here his age. They were the only two.

R: So you were potentially the third black teacher hired by this district?

KAI: I'm trying to think if there were any more. The thing that really struck me was I got the teacher room #14, which had been my favorite history teacher's room... Mr. White Male Teacher. He was working for the state and he went and got a job as a lobbyist in Harrisburg. And then I got to work with a lot of teachers that I had in junior high and I was still calling them Miss and Mister. They would just laugh but that was how I was raised. Finally got to know them. They all helped me. Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 ... what a mentor and Mr. Cousin 3 was not college educated, but you couldn't beat that man when it came to handling kids. If you had Mr. Cousin 3 and Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 on your side, those kids weren't gonna make a move. They knew that those two men didn't play.

R: And Mr. Cousin 3 was the head...

KAI: the head custodian. Teachers would call Mr. Cousin 3 up ... you can ask any teacher who taught at Central between 1972 and when it closed in the 1980s ... and they'll tell you that nobody could beat Mr. Cousin 3 when it came to discipline and management of kids. He was awesome. As a matter of fact, one of my friends over at Junior High School 1 started the Mr. Cousin 3 that is given out every year to a deserving kid when Mr. Cousin 3 passed away. Her name is White Female Teacher 1 and she works with the hip-hop group now. She started it because when she was a home economics teacher up at Central her first couple years, she told me (and I agree) Mr. Cousin 3 would come by her room, you know pushing the broom, he'd hear some kid getting smart and that broom would plop up against the wall and he'd be in there ... hey you come here to that kid and Mrs. White Female Teacher 1 said he saved her so many times. Same with me. He would come to me and say don't give so-and-so a pass to the lavatory. They're going to use you.

R: And this was a black man?

KAI: Black man through and through and everybody respected him. He should have been a teacher, but you know what, he was not a principal.

R: So what was it like being the only black teacher in that first school in 1972?

KAI: The funny thing about it was, since I had most of those people for teachers, I just felt like a rookie. I'm teaching with teachers who were my teachers. Other than that, personally, it made me feel like all these kids of color here ... I have to be a good role model for them. Because I don't want them to think, we got a black teacher, but she's not helping us or she's not a good role model or she doesn't care. Most of all I wanted the kids to know that I did care about them. It didn't matter what their color was, but especially black kids ... I did want them to know I cared. That I was different. I was in eleventh grade and I was going to go to some other college. This one counselor said to me ... "You got this because you deserve it." I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but other kids should have these same opportunities. This test should be for everybody." She said, "But you got a chance to take the test because you're an outstanding student." I said, "It shouldn't be that way. The test should be for everybody, which it's not." She said, "Realize something. "You're different. You study. You want something out of life. They don't." That was the only time I felt mad at a teacher in school. I said to her, "You know what? We can't talk anymore" and she said, "why." I said, "Because you're saying to me that you basically only care about the kids that make good grades. The kids that struggle, forget them." She said, "No you're misinterpreting." I said, "No, I think I'm interpreting the correct way so she said, "Well what about your scholarship to this school (University of Pennsylvania). I said, "I don't want to go there. My sister told me about another school which I think I will feel better about going to." That was a pivotal moment in my life and right after that Dr. Martin Luther King got assassinated. I liked that guidance counselor, but when she told me I was different and I deserved more because I worked harder...

R: That didn't sit well?

KAI: That's not what my parents told me. They said everybody in this country deserves to get a break because we all contributed ... and that's true. It doesn't matter where you come from ... how long you've had this or that ... everybody deserves an equal chance. I figured, that's the way teachers and guidance counselors felt. Then I met this counselor and I really liked this lady until she said that. That really made me sad. I went home and asked my mother about it. She told certain things in life you just get over, you go on, you realize that certain people don't think the way you do. But you can't let that stop you. I think for me, as a sixteen year old, I thought about that for a long time. Wow, she's a guidance counselor. She's supposed to help people, that's her job. It's not like a regular teacher. You teach and you're helping, but guidance counselors ought to be really tuned in and help the folks.

R: So you felt you had to be a role model...

KAI: Yeah and I always thought about that incident. I didn't want any child to feel like they weren't acceptable just because they didn't have the right test scores, they

didn't have the right family background. Because that is something else she brought up. My family taught me to work hard but you don't know what goes on in everybody's family. It made me feel bad.

R: Your story is interesting because you now have 35 years teaching in the same town that you grew up in and at times being the only black teacher in a building. Did you ever have times where you personally experienced some type of discrimination?

KAI: I think what really helped me was because I was from this area, everybody bent over backwards to make me feel at home. Now, I will tell you another event that I think is pivotal in my career. About ten years ago whenever the racial incidences started at Junior High School 1, that depressed me. I wanted so badly to have some kind of quick solution to get those kids to see eye to eye. But you know what? Life isn't like that. It took me three years to get through that. At that point I think I had about 25 years of teaching. I thought about quitting. I thought if I can't help these kids overcome their racial problems, then what good am I? But then that's not the way you do things in life. You keep working at it and bit-by-bit things come together. I think that was the only time I felt a real strain about being one of the few black teachers.

R: Now how many black teachers are in your building?

KAI: Right now ... there is Mr. Black Male Teacher 3 that teaches science, myself ... there's Black Male Teacher 4 from Carlise that comes and teaches the hip-hop group. There was Mr. Hispanic Male Teacher 1, who is Hispanic, but his wife is sick so he hasn't been there for two months.

R: So when all the racial stuff started, were you the only one at that time?

KAI: Off and on. There were people that came and went.

R: But you were the only one who was placed there?

KAI: There was Mrs. Black Teacher 4 with the STEP program. God bless her. I know you know Black Teacher 4.

R: Yes I know Black Teacher 4. She was...

KAI: She was with the STEP program and she was in there a lot.

R: So how ... let me try to get focused on some of these points that I really want to make sure that I will pull out...

KAI: That incident really ... those incidences bothered me a lot.

R: Did it bother you because you said you couldn't help them or...

KAI: Yeah. Because the kids that were angry at each other, their hatred ran deep. I mean it wasn't just kids arguing. It seemed to me like they had been indoctrinated. A lot of those kids would say to me (like my guidance teacher and I think that's what the flashback was) "Mrs. KAI, we like you. We don't like them." That was a flashback. You are one of the few people I've even told this to. It just ... it was a sickening feeling. It was like...

R: The black kids came and said that to you?

KAI: No ... the white kids said that to me.

R: So it was like ... you were okay with them.

KAI: But, they didn't like the black kids. They weren't okay.

R: Why do you think that was ... that they were able to say that to you?

KAI: I started to wonder. Am I this invisible person that blends in with everybody? I started to wonder that. I think what really got to me ... there was this little ... and my husband said that's just Satan trying to steal your joy ... there was this little nagging feeling that maybe I had assimilated so much ... and I felt this way as a sixteen year old kid but I couldn't really express it. Maybe I had assimilated so much that people felt comfortable with me because maybe they figured I accepted them for whatever ... that I wasn't going to say that I didn't like your attitude. Maybe I was going to say let's sit down and talk about your attitude. And there was a side of me that was feeling bad about that because I knew that the black kids and the Hispanic kids were hurting too. They were saying so-and-so looks at me like I'm a piece of dirt. Has anybody ever looked at you like that Mrs. KAI? I'm thinking ... NO ... NO! I know that's happened to my parents. My mother told me when she was three years old they left Virginia because someone burned a cross on their front lawn. She was three years old and saw that. Nothing like that ever happened to me. The worst that ever happened to me was the guidance counselor and White Friend 1 throwing the bag. Had anybody ever called me the "n" word? Somebody in third grade called me that, but my big sister beat them into the ground so bad, I don't think they ever called anybody the "n" word again. My older sister is like that. They may have thought about it again. I came home crying. They took my book bag and dumped the pencils and stuff out. I told you I was a little nerd ... dumped the stuff out and called me the "n" word. I came running home. My sister and her best friend Best Friend 1 ... they went after that child! My sister didn't care whether she got kicked out of the patrols or anything. You just didn't do things like that to her little sister. She could, but nobody else could.

R: So how did you ... you didn't ... I mean you're still there? How did you make it through that feeling?

KAI: The Lord. The Lord. First of all I would come home and talk it over with my husband. My husband and I are friends. I think we're more friends now than anything and we bounce everything off of each other. Even things I don't really feel comfortable telling him, I can tell him and then he comes back with some advice. I don't know what I would do without that guy. Also, he helped me see that certain things happen to you in this life that help you grow closer to the Lord, and I did say during that time period, "Lord ... why?" And he just said trust in Him and He will make it clear to you and He did, and He has. I think Junior High School 1 has really come a long way. There is a great group of teachers that work there, who've all felt personally conflicted like I did. It didn't matter what their color was. They all felt bad about it. And it didn't help anything for me, being the only African-American to start saying things like, which I did, "Do you think I'm happy being the only African-American teacher here?" I said that when I was at a low point and I regret that, but it came out. It happens. People feel stress and they say things. I said that. If I could correct anything that I've done in my teaching career, I'd go to each one of those teachers out there and say, "I did not mean that personally against you." I just meant that I didn't have all the answers. I wanted to have all the answers for you and the kids especially and I didn't and I felt that if there were more people of color there we could have bounced issues off each other." I bounced them off of Black Teacher 4, my husband and everybody else and that definitely helped. But, I've come through that situation seeing a lot of different things. First of all, yes it does help to have a support group. Did I have a support group at Junior High School 1? Yes I did. It's just that I was trying to answer the questions all by myself and I'll admit that. Just because you're the only African-American ... lady ... or whatever doesn't mean that you have to shoulder all the responsibilities when things go bad. I learned that. I had to swallow my pride and learn that.

R: Did you feel like you had to when you were going through it ... like it was all yours?

KAI: I did. I did. I felt like I'm a history teacher. I have some of those kids in my class. What kind of message am I sending them if I can't help them? I might talk about practicing peace and working together. Now they have some real issues and it doesn't seem like I'm getting through to them. That's where I went wrong, by thinking that I was or should be able to answer questions all by myself. I had to lean on other people probably for the first time in my teaching career, but I learned from that experience.

R: Was the experience ten years ago ... it's 2007 ... we're talking around 1997...

KAI: It went on from 1997 and kept revisiting Junior High School 1.

R: Was it more difficult dealing with that situation in the millennium in the late 90s than it was being the only black teacher in the 70s ... or growing up here in the 60s and the 50s? How do they compare?

KAI: That's a good question. Whenever it was the 60s and 50s, I always ran home and asked my parents. They were always there. Whenever it was the 70s, I was in college so it was all kinds of people that I knew at Lincoln ... we would just sit down and ... Oh man, when Kent State happened I was in college. We had student sit-ins for co-ed dorms and all that. I went through all that. But the thing was at college; I went through it with a group of people. I wasn't alone. When I graduated from college and went up to Central, Mr. Cousin 3, Mr. Black Male Teacher 1, Mrs. White Female Teacher 2, Mrs. White Female Teacher 3 ... they were like my parent's age and you could bounce things off of them and it was like talking to my parents.

R: So all of a sudden in the 90s...

KAI: I was the person that people should have been able to come to, but I didn't have the answers. And I felt personally sad about that. I wanted to have the answers like my parents, like my former teachers, like Mr. Cousin 3. My former teacher Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 came up to me and said, "You're really hurting aren't you?" I said yes. He said, "I knew by some of the things that you said that weren't characteristic of you." I said thanks. He said, "Don't worry. People will forgive you." One can only hope.

R: I want to look down through these and make sure I'm capturing as much as possible. You talked about critical turning points, what influenced you to select your career. Would you say that racial thing was the biggest job challenge you've ever had?

KAI: Oh yes.

R: It was?

KAI: Oh yes.

R: What support do you get from your district and what support would you have liked to had from you district, not just with that situation, but overall?

KAI: The support that I did get ... all the teachers in that building came to me at one point or another and said ... don't worry, we know what you are up against and hey, we're trying to help you as best we can. The Lord opened my eyes up there. You don't have to be the same color as another person to be able to help. Like the

lady who started the hip-hop club ... Mrs. White Female Teacher 4. She did that from her heart to help all the kids. I'm seeing things so differently now. Then, I was seeing the worldly vision. Now I see as my mother and Husband, Mr. Cousin 3 and Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 would say ... not through KAI's vision, but through God's. Before those incidents that happened at Junior High School 1, I can honestly say I thought I knew the Lord personally. I knew who He was and yes, I prayed and all that. But now I have a personal relationship. Nothing can ... wow! I look back on that situation and I say if that's what was needed for me to get a personal relationship with the Lord ... then so be it. I don't feel good about the kids that I wasn't able to help. I still don't feel good about that. But, I know the Lord will right that ... He'll make it right and that's all that I can ask for.

R: How do you assess your career at this point?

KAI: Do you know I'm getting ready to retire?

R: You are?

KAI: Yes.

R: Is this your last year?

KAI: Yes and, just between me and you, I am going to miss coming in there every day and looking at those kids and saying "we're going to learn about this" ... their ninth graders ... and their going ... "you think? We don't know nothing about that." I'd say, "just wait, we'll get to it and you'll like it." That is the part I will miss the most. The interaction with the kids. The other part that I will miss is the interaction with the faculty there. The young faculty who have all the dreams and hopes. I just look at them and smile and they give you inspiration. The older faculty, like myself, we sit and talk and I try not to feel like ... let them young people do it, they'll see. I try not to take that attitude, but every once and a while you talk with the older faculty members and you reminisce about how things were when you first started teaching and you just laugh. And you say things like ... I really pity these young teachers because they have all these workshops to go through which really don't help them. I think the interaction between the different faculty members as well as the interaction you have with the kids ... you can't beat that in a job. When you sit in the faculty rooms ... I like to just sit there at the computer so everybody thinks I'm busy ... but you listen to what people talk about. Wow! How can you not go out of that room feeling like ... why I just learned how so-and-so does this with such-and-such kid? Those people are masters at their job. It's a joy.

R: What are your relationships like with your faculty? Do you have close relationships with...?

KAI: Yes I do. I have real close relationships with a couple of people. They go all age groups.

R: Are they white?

KAI: Yes and also Mr. Black Male Teacher 3. I remember when he was a student and now he's a teacher ... an awesome teacher and I like to just smile at him. One day I TBA'd for him and I was very happy to write on the TBA form ... this was so easy but then again knowing you, I knew you'd have these kids under your thumb. Today, Black Teacher 5 came in and substituted and she came over to say hello to me. I think that's awesome. Ms. Black Teacher 4 that comes in for the STEP program. There is no comparison. She runs from building to building doing all this stuff and keeps it together. Mrs. Black Teacher 6, you, Miss Black Teacher 7, Mr. Black Male Teacher 5, who is sick now, but the Lord will bring him through it. There isn't that many African American teachers in this school district but wow, the ones that are here ... Black Teacher 8 down at Elementary School 1 School, Black Teacher 9, everybody brings something special. And then you have the teachers that aren't of color. They bring special joys and talents too. Anybody who thinks we get bored after 35 years of teaching ... no. You just don't

R: What about conflicts? Did you ever have any conflicts outside of the racial realm?

KAI: Like philosophical differences with teachers?

R: or just any conflicts at all...

KAI: Sometimes you had philosophical differences like you might share a group of students and this teacher might think you handle them this way, this teacher might think you handle them that way, but you work on that until you become a family. Like Mr. White Male Teacher 2 likes to say, "We're family. We all have differences. We all get to point B in a different way, but we work together to get to point B. I like that about him. Mr. Black Teacher 1 was like that too. There are people that I have differences with but never to the point where I hate seeing that person.

R: Did you ever feel the conflicts were attributed to racial issues or just philosophical?

KAI: I figured it was just philosophical. Every once in a while I would think ... I wonder if they think because I'm black that I'm giving this particular student an extra chance. If you think that, that's okay. You just have to think it, because I ain't changing that. So be it. It's going to be what it is. Until they come and say it to me, and a couple people did, and I asked them if they wanted to talk real with

me or if they just wanted me to give them an answer that will make them happy and you go on about your way. They wanted to talk real and we had a knock down, drag out talk. But you know what, the people that this has happened with have become my best friends. Because, I think when you get to that point where someone wants to be real with you and you tell them just what you think ... where can they go from there? Either they will respect you for being truthful or they're going to hate you. In those cases it turned out that the people respected me. They weren't going to agree with me, but they appreciated my being truthful.

R: Were those hard conversations to have?

KAI: At the time yes. Because I'm the type of person that really doesn't like folks' feelings, but when it comes to kids ... yeah, I'll hurt your feelings. That's what we're there for.

R: What were those hard conversations about?

KAI: People would say to me, don't just listen to those kids' viewpoint. Kids would come and complain that so-and-so didn't treat them well in a class. They knew that because I worked for the STEP Program, that Miss Black Teacher 4 and I would help them out. Sometimes folks didn't think we had the right to question them about what they did in their classroom. I'm not here to try to change the way you treat the children. I'm just trying to get you to see it from their viewpoint. Of course, because many of the kids that came to me were African American, the people automatically thought I was taking their side. I wasn't. I was trying to get both the student and the teacher to see each other's viewpoints and hopefully give them a chance to work it out. Some of the people, even before I could tell them what I had discussed with the student, thought that I had given the student a "go/pass/free" ticket. It wasn't that way. Sometimes I had to argue to get that point across. We teachers of the same color had the same conflicts with the same people.

R: What does it mean to be a black woman?

KAI: I think about all those other black women that came before me and didn't have the opportunities that I have. I thank them because without them I wouldn't have the opportunities that I have. I just want to be a little part of what they were for me so that I can pass along some of that spirit and drive. The women in my mom and dad's families were all so beautiful. Each and every one of them brings something special. Think about all these ladies and men in our past that died so we could get here. I didn't die for anybody. I'm just thinking that if I can just have a part of their strength, I'll be a happy person. The first year I taught, one of my favorite students said to me, "Ms Kai, let's not talk about slavery. It's embarrassing. All the white people in class are going to look at you." I said, "Yeah, now that you brought it up like that." We all laughed. I told them that

was one of the greatest stories in history ... how our ancestors survived that. Without their strength, courage and desire to know God and get an education, we wouldn't have anything we have today. Don't be embarrassed because without our past, we don't have the present and we definitely don't have the future. You need to look back on those folks and thank them for what they did ... giving their lives, taking those beatings, being taken away from their family and their homes. I could never have lived through that. Those beautiful mansions that the slave owners lived in ... our ancestors built them from the ground up. You cannot just shove that to the side and say you are embarrassed. That is who we are.

R: You went to a predominantly black university after having gone to a school here...

KAI: And the kids called me "farm girl". They asked me if I milked cows down there. I explained that people are farmers in Rural Town 1, but I wasn't. They said they knew by my accent that I was a farm girl. I brought my friends here and my friends would say how clean the streets were ... no graffiti. Of course we have it now. This was back in the early 70s, late 60s.

R: Was it different being in a place where you said they were proud...

KAI: I thought that was awesome! I was a little country girl, but I had enough sense from my family and teachers like Mrs. Black Teacher 2, Mr. Black Male Teacher 1, etc., to know that I was in a special place. I thank my sister to this day. She broke up with that guy she was going with up there, but I thank her every time for her telling me to branch out from the family a little bit and try Lincoln. I still keep in touch with my friends from Lincoln to this day. It seemed like another family. It was like I died and went to heaven when I went to Lincoln.

R: Because of all the black people there?

KAI: Did you ever read W. E. B's, "The Voiced Souls of Black Folk? There is one part in the book where he talks about (he's very poetic) how black people come in so many beautiful shades, eyes, and hair. There were times at Lincoln where I would just sit in the cafeteria (I worked in the teacher's cafeteria) and I would just sit and watch all the people go by. I would think ... wow ... this is what he wrote about in the book. I told you I was bookworm. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I had my first African American history course (although my mother had told me a lot of our history) and guess what ... the professor was white! But you would have thought he was one of us. That's what it was like going to Lincoln. It was a family. Every Sunday, the lady that ran the cafeteria, would have mix-it-up monotony breakers. What a nice lady. One of my other professors got blacklisted during the McCarthy time period because he was a Marxist. He's written several books on Black history with another man who was a Marxist-Socialist thinker. Lincoln was the only college that would hire that man. He's a brilliant guy. He was a professor at Columbia University. Once McCarthy blacklisted him,

Lincoln was the only university that would give him a new start. He was really in his element. I another professor for Russian history. Now I'm just a little country kid and I never had any course in Russian history. The kids I met! I just thought how could a little country girl like me end up here? Every one of my friends lived in a situation where they wanted to go back wherever they were from ... Newark, Philadelphia, New York City. Most of the kids I went to school with at Lincoln were the first kid in their family to go to college. They wanted to do well and that can be "catching". A lot of people say that at a black university all they want to do is party. Some of that did go on, but it was like any other university. There were people in the fraternities, sororities who did that and I don't mean to stereotype them. That really is a myth. It's just like any other university. There are people that go there to have a good time, there are people that were there whose great-grandfather went there so it was family tradition that sent them there. They didn't really want to be there but they went. Then there were people like most of those I ran around with who were the first in their family to go to college and all they wanted to do was do well and make their families proud.

R: Often times, people talk about professional black people, like yourself, being in limbo?

KAI: In between...

R: Yes when you're with your community versus your professional community. Have you had any experiences like that being a professional?

KAI: I think the thing that made me saddest of all when I moved back to town ... some of my high school friends thought I didn't want to be with them because I had a college education. I had to show them through my actions that I wasn't that way. Also I try to be the same person to everybody. Now you know when black folks get together, we do have our own way of talking.

R: Yes we do...

KAI: When I come in contact with someone in the black community, I talk to them easily as I always have. That is what is really decent about the black community ... our ties to each other. I know that's something that friends of mine, who happen to be white, say they notice and they like that and would I treat them like that. I say sure!

R: Do you ever feel tied-off from your culture at times being the only black?

KAI: Sometimes I feel bad that ... here's what I see now. I'm getting into the time period of my life where I'm thinking things like ... well that parent shouldn't allow that child to do that. Or, why did the parents come up and yell at the people before they sat down and talked to them. I'm starting to think those kinds of

thoughts, which I know it happens in every racial group. It's not just black, but because there are so few of us and because it was ingrained in my head that we all have to do better ... I always think we shouldn't react. We should think things through, but we're human beings too. We're going to get made with we think our kids aren't being treated fairly. I'm getting at that stage and I'm trying not to get to the point where I can't see anything good. Because I think when you get to that point ... all the older teachers told me that I would know when it's my time to retire. Can I keep up with the younger teachers like I used to? No. Can I correct a set of papers as quick as I used to? Does my mind still think? Yes. Do I still like the question and answer with the kids? Yes. Do I think it's time for me to move on? Yes, I do. I think its time for me to stay home with my grandchildren, help them.

R: Is there anything about being a black woman that bothers you?

KAI: No. I think it used to bother me when I looked at that crisis with the racial thing. I think people think that we're always strong and we never break down. We do. And I learned from that. It's okay to break down. If you keep it pent up you're going to have a heart attack or something that isn't good for you. I admire my ancestors, my mom, and her sisters. They were some strong ladies. Am I as strong as them? No. I came along at a different time. Do I wish I had that strength? Darn right I do. Do I cry about things? Yes. Do I let people see my emotions? Yes, I do and I think I am a better person for that. I think that has helped me. But other than that ... do I see any holdbacks. Here's what I see. Do you remember when the guidance counselor said, "you're different"? I think a lot of our people still get stereotyped and I don't like that. Can I change it? I'll try to until the day I die. And I think that's a drawback for us. I think we still get stereotyped to a certain degree and I think that's sad. I think some people still look at our outward appearance and judge us. I try not to do that to anybody, black, white, whoever.

R: So my goal here is to tell the story of black women working as teachers in a white, rural school district. Is there anything else that you need to share or would like to share to better capture this story?

KAI: Here's what I would tell you in closing. The funniest thing that happened to me the first couple of years I started teaching ... I'd get these kids in my classroom for the first couple weeks of school that would just look at me and I would look back and smile. Around Christmas time, these kids that were just looking, will come up and give me a card or present. Ms. KAI we really liked you. I would tell them I liked them too even though they did stare at me. That embarrassed them and I would say it was okay because I was new. You had to get used to me. They were concerned that I thought they were prejudiced. I never thought that. I may have been the first black person they saw or the first black teacher they had. We talked together about our families and they soon realized that we weren't much different.

We still bickered about the same things ... who took the last piece of cake. I think that is one of the things I will miss about teaching. The interaction with kids like that. The other thing I'll miss is the interaction with the faculty members even those I don't agree with. It's a learning curve. That job is so exciting. Every day I go to work I learn something new. I don't learn it as fast as I used to ... when I was your age ... but I'm constantly learning. As far as my being a black woman in a white, rural school district ... everybody has treated me really well. I thank the Lord for that. I go back to what my mother said ... "KAI, there are people praying for you that you don't even know their name. So you better go out there each day with this thought in mind. Every child is like a beautiful flower. If you can't treat that child that way, you don't need to be there."

R: What is the best piece of advice that you can give a young, black, woman teacher?

KAI: Just be who you are because you have so much to offer these children. You just don't realize how much you have to offer. My husband told me ... as black people, we have so many layers. I love that because it is true. We are so many people rolled up into one because of our experiences, because how people have treated us. I believe African American women have a lot to offer these children in the schools. No matter what experience or problem or learning disability that child brings to you, they can overcome that problem and you can pass that success on to others. I think that is what we bring to this job. It's an honor to be sitting here with you answering these questions because I think you are one of the best teachers I've ever run into and I'm not just saying that. You can tell that by the way the kids talk about you and the way that you talk about the kids.

R: Everyone's story is different and I am anxious to get through all the layers. We all look at things differently and see the differences in where and how we grew up. There are differences, but there are many similarities.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW WITH KIM

- R: These interview questions will focus primarily on your career and on your early adult life. The biography dealt mostly with your early life, your childhood, you parents and your early education, so this will go more into your career.
- KIM: Okay
- R: How did your career and life plans evolve from your early life influences, such as you family and your schooling experiences?
- KIM: I grew up on Rural Town 6, PA and there weren't that many black teachers around, but there were black students and Hispanic students. A lot of times I felt like I really didn't have any role model and a teacher to look up to. Earlier in high school, I wanted to go into business. But then, I started tutoring elementary students and I saw that I was making a difference in their lives so that's why I decided to go into teaching and just for the simple fact that I grew up in an area where there really wasn't really any black teachers. There was a couple when we got into middle school and high school and that was it. I just felt there needed to be a person that some of the kids could identify with.
- R: Was there any other factors that contributed to you selecting teaching as a career?
- KIM: When I was tutoring and I was seeing improvement I just felt I could really make a difference in someone's life.
- R: You've been teaching now for three years. Have you experienced any crucial turning points in your career? In your biography you talked a little bit about the long-term sub position. Were they any crucial turning points in your career?
- KIM: One was dealing with the long-term substitute position because I was placed in an extended day kindergarten, which I really did not have the experience and I was just sort of pushed in there. When I took the job I really didn't think about it. It was a job. But, then when I got in there I realized that there were things that were not happening, things that I needed that I was not being provided with to be more successful with teaching the students that I've seen in other schools that had that program.
- R: Can you give an example? You said...
- KIM: Example like ... I did have twelve students, but other school districts that I know of actually had eight with the teacher. I never had an aide. There was an aide that came in and helped getting them ready for lunch but that was it.
- R: How did that affect your career decisions from that point?

KIM: There was times when I thought that maybe teaching wasn't for me and there were days when I just literally would wake up feeling sick on my stomach because I just did not want to go in there and teach. I had a lot of children that were at-risk and there were a lot of different behavior problems occurring in the classroom. I know that when I would try to discipline the kids, things weren't working. I tried lots of different solutions. I talked to the guidance counselor. I talked to the principal. I talked to other teachers. Some of the teachers said they had some of the same issues with that group of kids too. I took it a step further and went to their parents and discussed the problems. It finally started to sink in a little more around April of that year. But it was a very hard first year.

R: What would you say is the biggest challenge you had on this job?

KIM: I think the biggest challenge was working with the extended day classroom and not having all the resources that are needed to make that more successful. I was doing my job because when we looked back at how the kids were at the beginning of the year and how they evolved throughout the end of the year, there was a lot of growth in a lot of different areas. But it was a struggle. There were days when I just didn't want to deal with it.

R: What do you attribute that to? In your biography you talk about when you took the job you were not aware that you would not have an aide. Is that typical or is that atypical?

KIM: I'm not really sure. I know now what I see is that most of the kindergarten teachers do have aides in their room that are in there more full time. With the extended day, they did not have that a couple years ago. I think maybe some of the problems that I was having ... I went to the principal and I even spoke with a school board member and eventually I did have a meeting with the superintendent to discuss the problems and now I have seen some improvement from when I was there. I have moved up to a different grade and I do see that there is more support in those classrooms, but I think it was because I complained a lot and showed them ... I can't get this done and this done because I need another body in the room with me.

R: What kind of personal sacrifices have you had to make to get to where you are today?

KIM: I really don't feel like I've made too many ... well, yes I did. The biggest one is that I am further away from my family. I moved up here because there was a job opening and I was guaranteed the whole year and I was also guaranteed that I would be interviewed and had a good possibility of being hired full time. That's the biggest one I guess. I am further away from my family and it's about two hours away. I do live in this town and I don't have any family around here.

R: You said in your biography about believing that there were more black families moving into this area as far as families are concerned. But you talked about being single and so that communicates to me that you were saying there was a difference between living here in a family and living here being single. Can you talk about that?

KIM: I think for me, being single, there are not many things for me to do. For a family ... there are a lot more family oriented things. They have the parade tonight. They're always having different things going on in the summer time that are more geared toward family. I feel left out. I'm not one to go to those things by myself. Being a single person, there are not too many opportunities for things that are okay for single people to meet other single people.

R: How has your district helped you to achieve your success?

KIM: They do provide training. I know when I was struggling in the kindergarten position, they gave me some opportunities to observe other teachers and sometimes it was beneficial, sometimes it wasn't. I think it was more beneficial when I had a break from the kids and I got a chance just to see other kids. That was a break and I did pick up some good teaching techniques and good ways to use classroom management better. They do provided training when we are introduced to new curriculum and that's been beneficial. There is no other way I see that the district as beneficial other than, they do provide the training we need.

R: What other support would you have liked?

KIM: The biggest thing would be incentive of extra pay or something if we're doing something. I know just a simple ... this is just something we do as teachers. We will order lunch from someplace. It would be nice if the district decided that every other Friday we're going to buy lunches for you. Things like that ... just things to show that they actually appreciate the teachers.

R: How have you change significantly as a person over the course of your career?

KIM: In the beginning I was shy and I didn't really want to express what was going on. Now I am more open. I'm more willing to talk about the issues that I'm having and go to the correct person instead of just letting it slide.

R: Of those changes, which ones do you like and which ones don't you like?

KIM: I like it that I'm becoming more comfortable and talking more about different issues. Actually, I had an incident yesterday where someone wrote in the girl's bathroom ... 'Miss KIM is a bitch'. Our principal was not here yesterday afternoon so I couldn't talk to her about that, but I came in a little bit earlier today to try and catch her before we had a faculty meeting this morning. I didn't get a

chance, but I did send her e-mail. I mentioned in the e-mail about ways to prevent the vandalism and to inform the students of the effects of vandalism. I did set up a meeting to meet with her Monday morning to address that issue. I was upset about the fact that it was my name, but at the same time I had to think about if it was any other teacher's name too ... the consequences. The students need to be made aware that vandalism is wrong.

R: Have you changed in any ways that you don't like?

KIM: There are sometimes ... this is with the students ... I have to be really tough on them or they will walk all over me. And that's something, at first I was pretty soft and I realize now that if I am tougher it makes a bigger difference with the students. But there are not too many changes that I don't like. I think all of them worked out for the best.

R: In thinking about assessing your career right now, are you where you thought you want to be, are you ahead of where you thought you would be or are you behind?

KIM: With my career I think I'm where I want to be.

R: Where do you see your career going? What's next for you?

KIM: Currently I am doing some grad classes and I keep debating whether I want to go into a reading specialist or even maybe to a librarian. I would still like to continue in the teaching profession. But, currently the grad program that I am in is just educational strategies and I think eventually I will work on another Masters degree with a specialist area and maybe move into that area. I don't know how many years that I could handle being an actual classroom teacher with all the demands that are made of classroom teachers right now.

R: Do you think that the road to the top is different for black women in comparison to black men, white women or white men?

KIM: Yes, I do think it is. I do see more struggles. I have friends that graduated with degrees in different fields and are still trying to find that entry level position that goes with their major. I know of other people where they graduate from college they get jobs right away. I know that there are teachers that I work with right now that right after they graduated ... they graduated in May. I graduated in December, but in May they were already getting full-time teaching positions. I do see a difference.

R: Comparing the experience of some of the people you talked about with what you went through with the long-term sub. Can you talk a little bit about that long-term sub position? The one you turned down and then the one you took in comparison to some of these other people who you say got full-teaching positions right away

- KIM: I had interview for Rural Town 4 and the first interview went well. They called me back in for a second interview. I didn't hear back from them for a while and then one day the Director of Curriculum and Instruction called me and said, we did not pick you up for one of our permanent positions, but we do have a long-term sub position we have opening up.
- R: And when you interviewed how many positions were open?
- KIM: There was like eleven elementary positions.
- R: So eleven positions that you were qualified to teach?
- KIM: Yes. Well actually, some of them were specialist positions, but I do remember it was like eleven. Three of them were specialist positions and the other eight were classroom, teaching positions. When I went through that round there was some people who were hired that had just graduated in May and did not have the substituting experience that I had. I didn't substitute in this district, but I was substituting. I was really looking at getting a job back in the Chester County area. I didn't have any luck in that area, which that too I attribute to race. Because I was always getting called to sub in and I got teachers who were recommending me and asking for me. But the fact that I was not hired just told me that they weren't...
- R: So you did interview in Chester County?
- KIM: Yes, I did interview in Chester County and I even ... the one school I interviewed for there, I graduated from the school. I also taught summer school there that summer and when I interviewed and the principal had called me after she interviewed me. She said that she had picked someone with more experience, which to me didn't sound right because I graduated from the school. I had seventeen years of experience in the school plus I tutored fro the school district before I even graduated. So, I was really insulted with that one. When Rural Town 4 called me in June about the one position but it was only for about two months and it was only a half-day position. I really was in the mood to look for an apartment and what if I couldn't find something else for the rest of the year. I had to really think about that financially too. But then when they contacted me later in August ... that was when another superintendent took over ... I was contacted again.
- R: So there was a change in leadership in between the first time you turned down the 2-month short-term and then you were offered a long-term for a full year and that was the kindergarten position?

KIM: Yes. And before I took the position, I talked to the principal at the building and from what he told me he had a mentor set up with me who had taught kindergarten and was currently teaching first grade. He was telling me that I could get all these ideas from my mentor. So I did consider the options before I took that position and I did talk to the principal before I decided to take the position. But I just ... part of me was just excited to have a job, so I took it. That's how I got the long-term position.

R: Do you believe that some parts of the district are more likely to produce top black women in leadership than others?

KIM: I have not seen that as of right now. I'm the only African American that is teaching in the district and there is no one in administration.

R: Do you see that as ever being a possibility here?

KIM: I honestly don't know. I don't know they recruit anymore. I know for a fact that there are a couple of teachers that were hired this year that this is their first experience. A lot of them are fresh out of college, but there are no minorities that they are bringing in. Last year there was a minority teacher that was brought in to the high school, but because of circumstances that person did, had to be released from their position.

R: Which leaves you as the only one?

KIM: Yes.

R: And there are no black women in leadership here at all?

KIM: No. There is no one as far as when we look at guidance counselors or administration. There are no minorities.

R: Do you see any differences between black and white women's teaching styles in your district?

KIM: Not really. My style is pretty similar to most of the other teachers and a lot of that does depend upon our curriculum work. We are on a very strict curriculum right now and things have to be done at certain times.

R: So you don't see any real differences?

KIM: Most of us are pretty consistent with what we're doing. I know some teachers do get into more of the arts & crafts. But when it comes to different holidays everyone pretty much celebrates the holiday. They do their own thing but they do acknowledge the different holidays and do activities with that. Basically our

curriculum is so scripted that you really have no choice anymore. You have to be doing the same thing.

R: Have you ever experienced discrimination as a black woman in this district?

KIM: It hasn't been publicly displayed where I can pinpoint it, but there have been incidents where I'm questioned by parents, and I really do things that if it were a white teacher, they would not be questioning.

R: Can you tell me a little bit more about these experiences?

KIM: An example ... last year we had a Time for Kids. It's like time but it's made more for kids and it has a lot of current events. It also has follow-up activities that many times I copy and do with kids. There was an article in there about President Bush sending more troops to Iraq. We discussed it and then there was a follow-up telling them to write a letter to the President expressing whether you feel he needs to send more troops or not. We started talking about it and we were getting into letter writing, which is part of our curriculum and some of the students asked my opinion. I told them what I thought ... that he needs to focus more on education and what is going on in this country. So we talked about some other issues too with that and I had them get started. After I said that, I had two parents sending me e-mails and my principal e-mails, stating that I no business expressing my opinions on Iraq and I should be ashamed being a public educational official going against what the President is doing and that if I am going to be expressing my opinion then the kids are going to be writing all of that too. The principal and I went over all the different letters, because I just kept them now because there were two angry parents. We went through them and not everyone said what I said. A lot of them came up with their own opinions. We talked about it and my principal said she didn't feel that I had done anything wrong. Basically she told me to write a note to them, telling them that this is part of the curriculum. One of the jobs is to discuss current events and that was an event presented. I even sent home the Time for Kids magazine article and I sent home their letters telling them that I wouldn't send them. If they wanted to send one, they can send their own. I did have some other issues with the parents about things their kids weren't doing...

R: These same parents?

KIM: Yes the same parents and I really think a lot of it was the issue, they have a black teacher this year; let's just see how many things we can find out that she does wrong. That's how I felt every time something was coming back from them. That was a huge thing where they sent an e-mail to the principal instead of just contacting me first. I had another issue where ... some nights when they have a social studies test I'll tell the kids at the end of the day to take out their books that they need to take

home tonight. Well, the mother wrote some letter and stated that her child is only eight years old and she forgets sometimes and she needs a reminder. I wrote back to mother and told her that 1) they write it in their agenda and 2) and I tell them to take their books out. I don't have time to go through each child's book bag and make sure they have all their books each night.

R: What was it in these experiences that cause you to feel as though this is discrimination; this is happening because I am black?

KIM: With the one child, I did talk with the child's teacher from the previous year and just ask how was the mother with things. The mother did not send her e-mails. The one parent, I was getting e-mails from them about every week about something or another. A lot of times I would talk with the child's previous teacher just to find out ... was this happening with you? The one teacher said that there was a concern about the one girl not wearing her glasses but that was about it.

R: What was her response when you told her?

KIM: I just asked her that one question. She really didn't answer any further. I really don't think the other teacher's see that as an issue, because they are the same race as most of the parents.

R: So you don't believe that the teachers are even able to ... I know they can empathize ... sympathize with this?

KIM: I really doubt that most of them can sympathize. I think in order for them to sympathize, they would have to experience actually being a minority to really understand.

R: So are you able to connect with the faculty on these issues when they arise? Is there anyone that you can...?

KIM: I can talk to them about a parent like this that is e-mailing all the time. There are a lot of other teachers that do have, I mean, there is always one or two parents that you are always going to find something wrong with the teacher. But, with those two parents, it seemed like they were just really trying to find ... because some of the things were just non-issues. The whole thing with the textbook. That goes back to your child. I even said it. I have 26 students this year and I do not have time to be making sure that each of them has their books. If they forget it, they forget it. I know this year I've had kids forget it, but I didn't have notes coming back from parents asking why. And I didn't have that in the past or from other parents. I really just took it, as they were nit picking at me specifically.

- R: Are there any other experiences of discrimination ... gender discrimination, any other experiences of racial discrimination, sexual harassment or anything of that sort?
- KIM: No. I've had issues with parents and some are valid issues that I don't feel have anything to do with race. And then there are some that I wonder if this would have been an issue with another teacher because it's something that, to me, shouldn't even be an issue.
- R: What about faculty?
- KIM: No I haven't had any problems. Really, when I first started as a long-term sub, the faculty was very supportive. Especially with the kindergarten. I really bonded with a lot of the kindergarten teachers and they gave me a lot of tips and techniques and even gave me things that they had for years on end because I really didn't have that much supplies when I first started. So, with faculty, there are no real issues. It is a pretty friendly community. I was a little concerned ... because I first started out at one elementary school and then I went to the elementary school I'm currently at. There was always issues between the elementary schools competing against each other and then they would say things like ... those teachers over at this school are mean and they don't like to do anything fun. I had that in the back of my head but I was going to judge for myself and overall, I happy with the faculty. I eat lunch with them and we talk. This summer I took class with two of my colleagues. We took some classes together. So there is a good connection there.
- R: How important is it that you develop close relationships with other women at work? And there is a second part to this question. Is race an issue you consider in the development of those relationships?
- KIM: I think it's important because you want to be able to at least get along with the people where you work. You want to be able to talk with them if you have issues outside of school. You may have a problem with a family member or you need to talk about something that's happening if you are in a relationship. It's good to have those types of conversations too that are not related to what you do during the workday.
- R: Do you consider race in the development of those relationships?
- KIM: No I don't. I have friends of all different races so I don't consider race at all. I consider more of kindness that and you can talk to them.
- R: So I'm going to ask you the same question as it relates to students as far as developing relationships with students. Is race a factor?

KIM: I don't consider race with my students. Most of my students are white. I have one student that is bi-racial and I have two that are of Asian descent also. I just look at them as a student. I don't look at them as a white student or a black student or an Asian student. I look at them as a student. My relationship changes with them depending on if they're following the directions I am giving them. I base it more on that.

R: How do you believe your students perceive you? Do they consider race? What is your perception?

KIM: Each year I do see differences in them. I know the beginning of this year there was a couple student that were really hesitant and really didn't want to do things and I think a lot of it is ... this is the first time they've had a teacher that didn't look like them. I've seen that in previous years where sometimes they act like they don't have to listen to me and I think sometimes, I think they are saying ... we've never seen her before. Another thing I've seen, there is a TSS in this building that is also African American. We started in here the same year. My first year of teaching in this building was her first year as a TSS. Everyone thought that she was my sister because they just automatically assume that because we were the same race that we were related. I had to explain to my students that I don't have any sisters. There have been times when there has been an African American student and someone will ask me ... do you know her? They just automatically assume because I'm African American that I know everyone that's African American too.

R: How does that make you feel?

KIM: When it comes from the kids I don't feel as bad because of lot them just don't know. They just don't know. They're not being educated at home about it. Now I do know, one of the students I have right now, she is bi-racial and she's actually adopted and her parents are Caucasian and her parents do talk with her about the differences and make sure she understands both sides of her heritage. Her parents and I have talked several different times about the issue. They asked me if I would be comfortable talking about that because they want her to be aware of both sides of what makes her.

R: Are there white women in your district that you turn to for support, either emotional or task related, and in what kind of situations do you turn to white women?

KIM: When I'm having an issue with a parent or student, I will talk to one of my colleagues to get some ideas. I've also talked to a teacher about a situation that happened yesterday, because I was upset about that and I was talking to her just to get it out.

R: Can you elaborate on that situation?

KIM: There was a message written in the girl's bathroom ... do you need me to add more?

R: Well, you did mention that earlier. So you were able to turn to one of your white colleagues for that?

KIM: Yes. I did talk to my colleague and they followed up with me later and asked if I had talked to my principal yet. I even bounced off some of the ideas that I think need to be addressed to all the students.

R: Would you say that you are particularly close to any of the white women colleagues in your district?

KIM: During the school day yes, but basically when I leave here this is sort of pushed aside and I'm in a different zone. Most of the teachers in my grade level are pretty close and we talk about different things. Especially during recess or when we have meetings together, we discuss things together other than just school. I don't really do anything with them outside of school unless it is school related or taking a grad class.

R: Do you ever discuss cultural differences or has race ever been an issue in those close relationships you have at school?

KIM: No not really. As far as culture, we may discuss some television shows that we watch or movies, but race really never comes up in discussion.

R: Are there many similarities?

KIM: There are similarities in some things we that watch or movies that we've seen and even some music.

R: Are there white female colleagues that you have had conflicts with and if so, can you talk about them and tell me how you handled it?

KIM: I don't really consider this too much of a conflict. Last year we had a walking trail for the students and the teachers had to pass out tickets for the student as they walked the lap. I was on the committee that started that and I know a couple of teachers came to me complaining about having to count the tickets on Fridays and that it was overwhelming with the work and when the kids are coming up. I don't know that you would consider that a really big conflict. It was something we did resolve by talking through it, but there were a lot of teachers complaining about it when it first started happening. My being one of the committee members, I was getting a lot heat from that and complaints.

R: So it wasn't necessarily between you and one other teacher?

KIM: No

R: It was more a group of teachers?

KIM: Yes, it was more a group of teachers and just doing something.

R: Did you feel like race was a part of that at all?

KIM: No. I didn't feel race was a part of it. I just think a lot of it was their not understanding the real concepts of giving the tickets, which was to encourage the kids to walk. They just didn't want to do it. That was the bottom line and they just wanted to go complain to the first person they saw. Other than that, I haven't had any conflicts that were heated between teachers. For the most part, we are pretty much on the same page as far as consequences for students when they misbehave. There are no real problems with that. For example if I have two classes out at the playground and someone from another teacher's class does something wrong and I correct them on it or have them go stand by the wall? I will explain to the teacher and they don't get upset or anything.

R: This final set of questions concentrates on what it means to be a black woman in broader society. Some people describe blacks as being in a limbo-like position in this society. That is, neither being in or out and often feeling like an outsider looking in. Considering this statement, what does it mean to be a black woman?

KIM: I was dating someone and things were not going the way I wanted them to go and he wasn't trying to make accommodations, so I broke up with him and I do sometimes feel like I am on the outside looking in at other people's lives. It is harder for a lot of black women who do start with a career path and then later when they are trying to settle down and find someone and get into the family path: I do see it is harder. Because a lot of men, for some reason, don't want to deal with a woman who's got the career already. I really do see that and I had that experience already.

R: What are the most important parts of your identity?

KIM: When you say identity, do you mean being an African American? I guess the most important parts are knowing my history, knowing the struggles that other people had to go through to get where they are. So for me, I struggled a little bit but not as much as other people have to get there. When I look back at the times when I did have difficulties, it's not as bad. It could have been a lot worse.

R: So when I talk about your identity, about who you are, what is the most important about you? If you could share with somebody ... this is what you need to know about me.

KIM: The most important part about me is that I am a very caring person and I am sensitive to different things. I want things to last. If I meet someone, I don't want it to be something short term. I want it to grow into something else. Like with friendships. I want it to grow. I don't want it to be for a year or two and then I don't hear from the person.

R: How do you take care of yourself emotionally?

KIM: A lot of times, I cry. Sometimes if I am feeling down I try to watch a comedy or something to boost my spirits or I listen to music.

R: What are some of the things you cherish about being a black woman?

KIM: One thing I do cherish is my hair because I can easily change it from one stage to another without always having to go through some of the things other people have to go through. The other thing is just having the support of my mother. I talk to my mother practically every night. Even though she lives two hours away, we do have a close bond.

R: Is there anything about being a black woman that bothers you?

KIM: No. This is who I am.

R: Are there parts of yourself you feel are cut off from with regards to your culture, your race or your gender?

KIM: Like just in general?

R: Yes in general. Is there anything you feel cut off from?

KIM: Right now no. There is nothing that stands out that I feel cut off from. When I talk about living up here versus where most of my family is, I do

feel cut off from my family because I did choose to move up here for the career. I don't see them as often and phone calls are different than seeing and spending time with them.

R: That brings me to the end of my questions. There a couple of things I want to make sure that I have gone into that I would like you to elaborate on from your biography. In part of your biography you talk about your closest friend being in Shippensburg and teaching in Big Springs and you said that she is a white teacher. Could you talk about that relationship ... how it developed?

KIM: My friend Best Friend 1 and I, we graduated from Rural Town 4 University together and we also had several different classes together. After graduation, she stayed up here and she substituted for Rural Town 4 School District and she substituted in a couple of other districts in the area and I had gone back home to substitute. We still kept in touch when I went back home and then when I had interviewed for the position in Rural Town 4 School District I had stayed at her house one of the times. She also had some frustrations as far as hiring. I think a lot of it too is with personality. She is the type of person that has to get everything done before she leaves. She asks fifty million questions because she wants to know. We get along fine. She started off at Rural Town 7 School District as a long-term sub for part of the year, but her situation was a little bit different because she had decided to say up in this area. She didn't want to go home.

R: Is she originally from Rural Town 4?

KIM: No she's not from Rural Town 4. She grew up outside of Philadelphia so she's a long way from home and she was pretty much open. She hung out with anybody. She was pretty much open to hanging out with different ethnic groups, different races.

R: So that relationship developed from college and has carried on through your professional careers. As it relates to Best Friend 1, was her race a consideration at all with regard to the development of your relationship with Best Friend 1?

KIM: No, not at all. The first time we met we just started talking about something that happened in class and it just never became an issue. If there are things with parents and I say I wonder if it's anything to do with race. She may say, well maybe it could be. She is probably the only one that I feel comfortable enough to talk with about race. She's a redhead and she feels she gets discriminated against for being a redhead.

R: So you feel comfortable talking to her about racial issues. Is there anyone within your district that you feel comfortable talking to about racial issues?

KIM: No. There is no one that I feel I could sit and talk with them and they would understand.

R: Have you ever tried?

KIM: No. I've never tried. But just from talking with them about other things, I doubt that they would truly understand.

R: What are the qualities that you would look for to feel comfortable talking to a person about race? What would they have to do or say? Or, is that even something that you even want?

KIM: I don't think it's something I want. Most of the teachers that teach here grew up in this town. They've never been outside of this town. They grew up here, graduated here and got a job here. They're really not exposed to the outside world to me. With Best Friend 1, I know for a fact that she ... I mean ... she grew up outside of Philadelphia so I knew she was around a lot of different cultures. The fact that she decided to stay here because she wanted to get into another area, it's easier for me to talk to her. She's kind of in the same situation as me. She's two hours away from her family too.

R: So, I'm hearing a few things and I'm trying to connect your story to mine, because there are some similarities there, but also to try to pull out some things. One of the things that we keep coming back to is 1) that you're very career oriented. Enough so that you would choose to be far away from home to a point where you said you feel isolated here. And yet, with that isolation and that career orientation, I have to wonder how long ... 1) is there any frustration with being in that situation and if there is, how long do you think you will be able to endure that?

KIM: Yes there is frustration with it. Right now my plan is to finish working on my graduate work and then looking at other places that are closer to my family. I want to get one step done as far as the graduate work because I don't want to stop in the middle and then have to pick up with that. That's my plan and this has been since about last year when I decided that I had enough of being in a area where I didn't really have too many people that I could depend on and hang out with. Honestly, it does get lonely. I live by myself and it does get lonely. I do talk to Best Friend 1 but she has a

career going on too and she is also in grad school so we really can't hang out every day.

R: Do you feel that you could endure longer if there was even one more teacher in this building that looked like you? You talked about being single and it being a family oriented community. If there was even one person here that you had that kind of connection that you have with Best Friend 1 as a friend or racially, would that make a difference?

KIM: I think it depends on how strong a relationship is. If it's somebody that can take away some of the times that I just feel I'm just by myself ... lonely and can fill some of that void then I would probably consider staying a little bit longer. Right now, I'm looking at maybe the next two or three years as being as far as I can really stand it. The other thing goes back to the fact that I would really like to be a little closer to my family and I think with working in a district for a couple of years and then trying to get a job in another district ... I have a better chance because hopefully they will be looking more at the resume and the experience and not just the person.

R: Is there anything that this district could do to change that?

KIM: No. It really doesn't have anything to do with the district. It's more the area the district is in – the rural area.

R: This district happens to have a university community within it. Does that have any impact on your experience here?

KIM: No. I did attend the university and was active in it. My first year of teaching I still did stuff with the university but I moved away from that because after a while I didn't know any of the students. By then, most of the people I knew were graduated. I pulled myself away from that and really; working with college students isn't my thing.

R: You mentioned that you were really close with your mom. I read your biography about your relationship growing up with your parents? You said they were proud of that. How do they respond to these feelings of your feeling alone and dealing with these parents and some of the challenges you've experienced?

KIM: Basically, my mom tells me that when I get done doing the things I need to get done, that I need to look into getting closer to home. Honestly, my parents do want me closer to home because it's a lot. They come up to visit me too, but my Dad works on swing shift so his weekends ... it varies

what weekends he has. And my Mom doesn't like to drive distances. It's a strain on them also because they would like me to be living closer to home.

R: Is there anything that you wanted to share that you feel we have not captured or gone over?

KIM: I really think we have covered everything.

R: We do have an addition to this interview and we would like to discuss this experience now.

KIM: The first in-service day when I first started as a long-term sub, they started announcing all the new teachers and faces to the district. I wasn't one of the first teachers called but when they said my name, I stood up and everyone started clapping in the audience and I was a little shocked by everyone clapping because I wasn't the first name called. I mean they did continue clapping after every other name was called, but that is when I did start to feel a little welcomed into that district.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW WITH KIA AND LEA

This interview was scheduled to take place with Mia at a time and agreed upon location. Upon arriving I learned that Lea was also present and asked to participate in the interview with Mia as they were sisters. I was not aware that they were sisters prior to the interview. As the interview progressed it was apparent that Mia was the older more outspoken sister. Lea seemed to be very comfortable with Mia in this role and appreciated her presence there. I was not familiar with the co-researchers and I believe that they both became more comfortable as the interview proceeded. However, I believe their desire to interview together was prompted by the apprehension of participating in the study (as outlined in the letter and informed consent), myself as an unknown, and sheer convenience. At the beginning of the dialogue Mia definitely took the lead as Lea by her own admission is shy. However, as we proceeded both ladies jumped in with remarks and comments. Often times the ladies could finish one another's sentences and exchanged many non-verbal gestures. Their relationship was obviously a close one and Lea openly expressed for admiration for her older sister as an educator.

R: I want to start with you (since I have your biography), MIA correct?

MIA: Yes

R: You grew up in Rural Town 2 and you said that you were the oldest daughter of how many children?

MIA: Ten

R: Of ten children. And you talked about going through school being the only black person at your grade level. Can you give me a picture of what time period this was and what that was like for you?

MIA: I started school in 1959 and they didn't have kindergarten in Rural Town 2 at that time so I started in first grade and it wasn't until I was in ninth grade that I had other black students in my grade level. It was a boy and he was in my homeroom. But from first through sixth grade, because sixth grade was still part of the elementary then, I was always the only black in my class.

R: And what was that like?

MIA: Well, we just really never looked at people being black or white. They were just people. We were just always taught to respect people for who they were, not the color of their skin or anything. We never really ... I can't remember ever really talking about, you know, well that person's black or that person's white you know growing up. But, I was the only black in my class and sometimes I knew that was probably not the most beneficial situation some times, but you know, it was just

how things were. The neighborhood where we lived there were white families, there were black families and we were the only black kids that lived on that particular street. There were kids that went to school with us that were white but lived down the street from us or up on the other end from us, but you know, that was just the way it is ... that's how we grew up ... we just didn't really look at it as black or white you know they were just kids down the street or whatever, They would walk to school with us. We really didn't, early on, I don't remember being taunted or teased or anything by the other kids. You know, I think it was just at a period of time where people were more accepting of one another than they are today.

R: Wow. So it was...

MIA: It was a small community. You know, Rural Town 2 was a really small community and you know there were other black families. There was only one other family that had kids that were around our age. The one family had three girls ... two of them were older than I was ... one was younger and their cousin was younger than me. So you know, I was really like the only black for a long time in my class.

R: You talk about your participation in the extra-curricular activities. One of the things in particular that stood out ... National Honor Society. Was there a culture of excellence that your parents brought you up in? When you talked about your parents you talked about that they really didn't talk about college and things like that all that much, yet you were very well involved in school.

MIA: We never really talked about college. No one had ever gone to college in my family. Later on I had some cousins, older cousins, they were probably about 5 or 6 years older than me. One cousin lived here in Rural Town 1 and one cousin live in Philadelphia but beyond that we never really talked about the fact that we could go to college or whatever.

R: So what was the greatest influence that caused you to go?

MIA: I guess I would have to say my peers at school ... the kids I hung out with. The one girls father was a mortician and another girl, her parents worked ... her father worked for some company ... not right there in Rural Town 2. But they talked about going to college and everything and when it just came down to it, we were signing up to take the SATs ... they were all signing up to take the SATs so I just signed up too. You know, I never really thought about it either until you know it was just the kids I was hanging out with were talking about and they were going to do it so...

R: What was your parent's reaction?

MIA: You know, it was like, well if that's what you want to do go ahead.

R: So she grew up in Rural Town 2. You (LEA) grew up in Rural Town 1. So did you go through the Rural Town 1 School District?

LEA: Yes.

R: Okay and were you one of the few black students during that time or...?

LEA: No. I went to the same school with two children, which was Elementary School 1. At the time when I went it was more ... there we were more I'd say ... I was in the majority instead of the minority. But now its more of a 30, 30, 30 thing ... Black, White, and Hispanic but back then I guess it seemed like, maybe it was more balanced then.

R: And what time period was this?

LEA: The seventies.

R: Okay so you were in Elementary School 1 in the seventies and you were in Rural Town 2 in the fifties. So tell me a little bit about ... you (MIA) talked about your parents. You guys have a big span in age here. The same ... when you (MIA) were growing up there wasn't much talk about college and things of that sort. Coming after her (MIA) having gone to college and graduated and in her first year of teaching ... you (LEA) were still in elementary school. Was there an influence? Was the atmosphere you grew up in a little bit different having had siblings and cousins that had gone to college?

LEA: I guess so. Our mother ... she used to say when we were little ... she babysat when I was little and she would always say I used to want to be a kindergarten teacher. And I would hear her say that and I knew that my sister was going to college to be a teacher and so I just kind of started to pick up that talk ... well I want to be a teacher. I would act it out you know, and play the role and all that and by third grade it kind of stuck that, yeah, I do want to be a teacher and so I guess I got my influence from her and also from being with my Mom and always having younger kids around that she was watching them and that always seemed like school to me ... you know kids all around and everything so it just kind of stuck.

R: And you never changed your mind?

LEA: Never changed my mind. I remember. I still have it. I wrote a little, you know the little "What I Want to be When I Grow Up" stories in school? I wanted to be a teacher and my sister and my mom were the greatest influences on my decision.

R: Now what about your other siblings ... there are ten. So I am sitting with two of the ten. What are the other eight doing?

MIA: My oldest brother is working for the state and then...

LEA: Actually there are two of them working for the state.

MIA: Yeah ... the oldest boy works for the state and he works, I don't know exactly what the department is, but it has something to do with licensing for like nurses and that kind of thing. He works there and then the brother right behind me is retired out of the Air Force and he lives in Arizona and right now he's working ... he was working like in an investment firm and then he was going back to school. He had taken some courses when he was in the Air Force. He had gone to Drexell for I think two years and joined the Reserves and then went to Maryland after he left the Air Force. And he pretty much ended up making a career out of it and then when he retired he worked in an investment firm and he decided he wanted to continue taking classes but he was trying to open up his own business, but in the meantime his wife was teaching in a middle school and he ended up teaching at this middle school for a while. And then, my youngest brother has a degree in psychology and he also has his Master Degree in the ministry so he preaches but then he works in the school districts. He doesn't have a permanent job. He does counseling but he doesn't have like a permanent job.

LEA: He does that in Delaware...

MIA: He does that in Delaware ... in a small community in Delaware. You know they'll ask him to come in for like six weeks and do a certain program with a group of kids or something like that. And then the other brother works in Harrisburg. He works for the Department of Environmental Protection.

R: So are you the only two girls?

LEA: No ...

MIA: No, my youngest sister is a phlebotomist and then we have another sister than is an LPN and then one sister works at TB Woods here in Rural Town 1 and another sister works for an inventory company (RGIS) and they get contracted out to different stores to check out their inventory accounts. She was a military wife. For years when she was still living here in town, she worked at the phone company and then her husband got stationed in Texas and she moved down there. She just took this job just for something to do I guess.

R: So would you ... how would you classify ... how would you describe, and either one of you can answer this, the culture of your family?

LEA: Close knit

MIA: Very close knit

LEA: Almost to the point where, I don't know about you but for me, I have two sisters that I'm closest with in age (we're each a year apart) so there is three of us in a row and it was to the point where we were each others best friends so we didn't have a whole ... we had outside friends, but we were our friends as well as family. It's really tight. It's a Christian background. We still attend ... we attend the church we went to as children in Rural Town 2. And it's just real close ... real tight.

R: There are six girls okay ... what did Mom teach you girls about being a black woman?

LEA: For me it wasn't a "sit down" lesson. It's just what we saw. She carried herself just as a strong woman, not just as a black woman. Race hardly ever came into play in the house. I guess because we were all together ... we all knew we were black it just didn't ... you know what I mean. We didn't talk about it. I don't even remember ... like today in school you have all the black history stuff ... it's available. I don't remember that being a big thing we talked about. I just remember seeing my mom ... she worked hard. She was respectful in the house. She didn't walk around swearing. She didn't smoke and drink. She raised us to respect ourselves. We didn't go outside with our hair all over our heads. We didn't go outside, you know, our clothes were washed, cleaned, folded, put away. We were fed. We sat at the dinner table together. Everyone had their seat at the dinner table. We lived in the projects when I ... my part of growing up was in the projects. But to me that was a duplex in a really nice neighborhood. That's how it felt to me. We didn't grow up wanting stuff.

R: And growing up for you ... was it similar to how she grew up?

MIA: As far as the family aspect yeah you know, we were taught to respect others and yourself and to act accordingly you know where ever you were, you acted appropriately. My grandmother lived with us when I was growing up and she had a big influence on everyone. When she was there she did the cooking and cleaning and you had to answer to her. Even my mom had to answer to her. She was the kind of woman you know ... she just commanded respect. She was just that type of person that you respected her and what she said, you do ... you did ... no questions asked. It was the same type of thing. Everyone sat down for meals all at the same time and they served your plate and put it in front of you and what

was on your plate, you ate. It wasn't like ... I don't like this ... I don't want this. It was put on your plate in front of you ... you ate it. No questions asked. And you helped out then. We had little things we had to do, like set the table, clear the table, help with the dishes, run the vacuum. We had things we had to do and there was no question about it ... you did it because that was what was expected of you. There wasn't anything like, you do this, and you get an allowance. You did what you were expected to do, what you were told to do and that was the end of it.

LEA: But I don't ever remember asking for an allowance either or wanting anything ... or needing to ask for it.

MIA: No because if you needed something or you wanted something ... my grandmother or my mother, they saw that you got it. But it wasn't something where they just handed out money on a weekly basis for doing this and that around the house. You had your certain little things that you were responsible for and that was all there was to it.

R: Now what about your father? What messages did he communicate to you?

MIA: Well, we have different fathers. My father ... I really didn't know him. He moved back to Puerto Rico when I was just a little kid so I really don't know you know ... I wasn't really around him.

LEA: My father ... I didn't really get to know him until I was in my twenties. I didn't have, I mean, so I didn't get any influence one way or the other.

R: So the messages that you guys had and that your family had, they came from your Grandmom and Mom?

LEA: Yes

R: I wanted to get a little background on you (LEA) since I didn't have your biography. The interview really is more about your young adulthood that got you into your career and then we go pretty in depth into your careers. I need more background. How many years have you been teaching?

MIA: This is 32

R: And LEA?

LEA: This is 16

R: Always in the same district?

MIA: Same building, same classroom. Well actually I subbed for a year. I was in Rural Town 2, Rural Town 1 and a couple times up in Rural Town 5. But then I taught for a year in Rural Town 2 and then came down here.

LEA: My only other teaching experience, well it wasn't, it was before the district hired me, and I worked in a day care. I was a supervisor there.

R: So 16 years ... 32 years ... you've (LEA) been in the same place the entire time. You (MIA) moved around a bit and you settled ... are the majority of your years here in this district?

MIA: Yes

R: Do the experiences in Rural Town 1 differ from some of the other districts?

MIA: Not really

R: So it's pretty much ...

MIA: Yeah

R: When ... in your building, are you (LEA) the only black teacher in your building?

LEA: Right now ... except there's a student teacher this year.

R: Prior to that have you been the only...

LEA: Prior to that there were two ... my sister-in-law at one point was a teacher's aide, my cousin's wife replaced her as a teacher's aide in that building and they're both gone, they're not there anymore. And my sister, my other sister, not MIA, another sister, the one that is an LPN, she was kindergarten aide in the same building. But that's it. Other than every now and then, there are some substitutes that come through.

R: You are the permanent...

LEA: Permanently teacher

R: And what building are you (MIA) in?

MIA: I'm at Elementary School 2 but right now temporarily we are out at Elementary School 3 because they are building a new Elementary School 2.

R: Have you been the only...

MIA: Up until about seven years ago, I was and then they hired another teacher. She was actually hired as the head teacher, but a lot of people didn't realize she was black because she looks like she's white. A lot of people when they first meet her think she's white, but once you get to talk to her you realize that she's black.

R: How did that affect you? How did you feel about that?

MIA: It didn't bother me in the least.

R: Okay, but you knew she was black from day one?

MIA: Yeah, well, not really.

R: You didn't?

MIA: I mean the very first time I met her it was like ... is she black ... is she white. I wasn't sure. But after talking with her then I realized she's black.

R: Did you feel that she carried herself ... I really want to try to capture how her presence there changed your experience although we haven't talked about the years prior to her getting there. Once she showed up, how did that change ... or did that change what your experience was?

MIA: Not really. I had very few experiences in that building because after I started working for the district I was at Elementary School 3 for a half a year. I finished up a year out there. The next year I started at Elementary School 2 and I've been there ever since and over the years there were a few incidents where I felt the parent was prejudiced, but nothing major.

R: So overall, there haven't been many experiences that you felt were racially motivated?

MIA: Just like I said ... probably could count them on one hand.

R: Can you talk about any of the ones that you can count?

MIA: Well the one, the first one that I remember, I had a group of boys that were particularly hard to handle and this was back in the day when you could still paddle and they just were always into something. And this one particular day we were working as a small group at a table, I was giving them an assignment and they were goofing off and I was like, we've got to get this done and then the nurse came to the door and needed to talk to me about one of my students that had a heart condition so I gave the boys an assignment, excused myself from the table

and went over to the door to talk her. Well, they started throwing books and really acting up so I went back in and I said ... “Look I have to talk with the nurse, I will only be a few minutes. Please just sit here and get your work done. I don’t want to see any more books flying across this table ... blah, blah, blah or else.” Of course they did continue. I think it was like four or five of them, and they continued so they got in trouble. I took them out in the hall and gave them all three whacks and sent them back in there. At the end of the day just one little boy’s father came up there and was ready to rip the roof off. He came in there and was cussing and carrying on ... this and that and the other thing and he asked ... we were actually in a meeting ... and the principal was talking to him so the principal came and got me and we went back to my classroom and he started all over again. You teacher this and this. He kept saying you teacher, but I knew he meant you black teacher. And he just kept going on and on. Finally he stopped and I said, “Are you finished?” And he said “Yes I am.” So I said, “Well let me explain to you what happened.” So I told him what happened and he just sat there and he didn’t say a word. When I was finished he said I am so sorry and then he started apologizing. But I didn’t have any more problems with that kid the rest of that year and I would see him on the street afterwards and he would always say ... “Hey Ms. MIA! How you doing?” And that kid was in trouble before and had gotten paddled before in other grades coming up. Just talking with the other teachers, this dad had never come to the school before if he got paddled. So I knew he was coming up there because he knew I was black. It ended up that he realized that he made a fool out of himself because it was justified.

R: Sixteen years. Is your story similar to hers? Can you only count on one-hand incidents you feel were racially motivated?

LEA: I could count on two hands actually. Our schools have a little slight difference in the dynamics.

R: In what ways? You said your school was 30-30-30. Is Elementary School 2 similar to that?

MIA: No. I would say for most of my years at Elementary School 2 it was more like 75% white, 25% black.

LEA: Hers is a school where your PTO functioned for a while. Mine is a school where the PTO consisted of one teacher in the building.

R: So you have a lot of parent involvement?

MIA: We did early on. It was 75:25 and then they opened up Subsidized Housing 1 and in the beginning it was like an influx of black families into the Subsidized Housing 1. We had a lot of the middle class white moving out so you had the

low-income blacks and low-income whites. For a while it seemed like the majority of the blacks coming into the school were coming from Subsidized Housing 1. Well, that has been turned around. The majority of kids we get from Subsidized Housing 1 now are white and the blacks are in the minority. In a class of about 25, you may have 4 maybe 5 blacks, if that.

R: Now what is Subsidized Housing 1?

MIA: It is a federally subsidized housing project on the west end of town.

R: So can you talk about some of your experiences?

LEA: Well I've had the parent who comes in and says, "You're picking on them because they're white". That was quickly dismissed after I explained the situation, but there was one that I was not directly involved with. There was a parent that called to say they were upset with something that occurred at the school and they were coming to the school. Sister 1 (my sister was the kindergarten teacher at that time) and I were the both at the school and they called the two of us into the office to talk with the principal and he let us know that this individual said they were coming to the school. It was our uncle!

R: It was your uncle?

LEA: Yes. He had a daughter at the school at the time and she was acting up and I think they knew because my last name was the same. This was before I was married. They said they were going to lock the doors and then they brought all the teachers in and told them that because there was an irate parent the doors were going to start to be locked at the school. I just remember feeling this embarrassment that they knew it was my uncle ... or at least the principal knew and he felt that he had to call us in separately and tell us first before it was announced that the doors would be locked and we would be able to get in from this one entrance. And since then the school doors have, well, then they established a policy that the doors would be locked. This was before it became policy. My uncle did not come in irate like that. He came in civilized when he did come in. You know how you feel? It's family and they say ... he called and do you think he would come in and.? And then I've had where my co-teacher in fourth grade had a student that the parents weren't happy with my co-teacher so they called in and said they wanted their child moved to her room (meaning mine) and it usually wasn't a policy that they honored. If the kid was in that room, they stayed in that room. But for some reason this one-year this girl got moved and I think it was because they had a difficult time with this mother previously. She was a black woman and when I got her things were a little smoother. It was almost like they felt like ... well she'll be able to talk to her. It happened that it did work out that way. We didn't have as many issues with that mother after her daughter was

moved into my classroom. I don't think if it had been the other way around that my student would have been moved as quickly.

R: Now how did that make you feel? Both of you specifically ... Your story just kind of jumps into my following questions about interactions with other faculty members and how did that make you feel? The uncle situation, the whole moving the student out of the ordinary, parents coming up irate. What kinds of feelings did those produce for you?

MIA: Well I remember the day that the father came in there and the principal was sitting there and he said absolutely nothing. He sat there and left this man just fly off the handle and did absolutely nothing. I thought he's supposed to be the principal. He should take care of this. It shouldn't have even got to this point. Why am I here with this irate parent? He's supposed to diffuse that. I just kept thinking ... what is this all about? At that point, it was like within the first two or three years that I had been in that building. I just lost confidence in that principal at that point. I felt I should not have been subjected to that. I felt that he should have taken care of that situation before it got to the point where I had to sit face to face with this man, him screaming and hollering at me. I lost confidence in that principal. He was only there another five years and he got transferred to another building. Thinking back over the years, I just have to wonder if that principal wasn't prejudiced. And then finding out that I was placed in that building because they knew Subsidized Housing 1 was opening up and they were going to get a lot of black kids. It was like it went from an all white school and there were going to be black kids coming in. So I think that's how I ended up there really. But at the same time, some of the black parents gave me problems too. I had one mother come in and she accused me of being prejudiced against black people.

LEA: Yeah I've had that...

R: Well, let's share ... so that jumps to another question later...

MIA: Her son was in my class and he was the middle child. There were three boys and he was the middle and he was bad. He would do stuff and flat out ... "I didn't do that. That wasn't me." I saw you do it ... "that wasn't me" ... just flat out deny it. Even other teachers would catch him doing stuff and he would "that wasn't me" ... "I didn't do that". I would discipline him and then he would go home and tell his mother that he didn't do it. She came in there after me one day. "He says he didn't do it and I believe him, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." Well, he did it or I saw him do it. The one time he spit in this little girls face (just happened to be his cousin). She came up to me and she had spit going down the side of her face and she named him. When I called him over he said, "I didn't do that." The little girl said, "You did too!" So I said, well "You're going to have to miss your recess." He was always missing his recess because of his behaviors ... pushing the little

kids down at recess, trying to trip kids in the hall. He was always into something. He'd go home and tell his mother he didn't do anything. Then mother would come in there and said, "I'm sick and tired of you picking on my kid! You're supposed to be supportive of black kids. You hate black kids!" I was like wait a minute. I don't care what color the kid is. If he is going to do something that is inappropriate, unacceptable, he is going to deal with the consequences. These are our rules. They don't follow the rules then they have to deal with the consequences. End of story ... doesn't matter if they're purple, green, white, red, yellow ... they do something wrong they have to pay the consequences. It's as simple as that. "No you're always picking on him. You don't pick on anybody else." Well, no one else is spitting in kid's faces, doing this, doing that.

R: That is one of the areas I am interested in. In a rural area like this you are black professionals. How does this black community receive that? This is very rural, very blue collar and here you are. How is it received? How do you handle it? Do you feel a part of the community? You obviously feel a part of your family, but do you feel a part of the community?

MIA: Yeah. Up until about six years ago, we attended church here and then we started going to church in Rural Town 2. It's just a real small little church and it got to the point where they were down to like two to three members and they were thinking of closing down the church. My aunt who was still active at the time didn't want to see that happen. That's when we started going to the church in Rural Town 2 ... to keep them from closing it. The church has been there from 1875. My grandmother was real active in the church. Growing up, she saw to it that we went to Sunday School every Sunday and went to church every Sunday.

LEA: Within this community though...

MIA: Within the community ... I don't go out and socialize in the bars and the clubs because that's just not me.

LEA: I don't ... not just because it's just not me. I feel a sense of responsibility ... that I don't want someone to see me and then say...

MIA: My Mom saw you in a bar last night!

LEA: Yeah, I don't want that because...

R: Role models...

LEA: Yeah...

R: And you talk about a sense of responsibility. What is that responsibility that you feel?

LEA: To carry myself in a respectful manner. I don't want my students to come back and say, "we saw you". That's not to say that if you're out there it's wrong...

R: Would you use the word "burden" to describe how it feels?

LEA: I wouldn't.

MIA: No

LEA: I don't think of it as a burden, no. I think of it as a responsibility. Because I'm thinking about back when I was younger. I never had a black teacher until I got to college and I just thought, that when I had the very first class I walked into, it was a young, black professor. It didn't dawn on me until then. My cousin was at Junior High School 2, but I never had her. I did see her in the halls, but I never had her. At the High School, Mr. Black Male Teacher 1 was there at the time as a teacher, but I didn't have him for anything either. My path didn't really cross these other black teachers and when I finally had a black teacher ... this is someone who knows a little more about what ... I don't know ... someone I could relate to in a different way or when he taught things, it came from the same perspective that I had. So when I decided that I was really going to do this, be a teacher, I thought now I'm going to share that perspective with my students. I want them to see it from a good perspective. I want to inspire someone ... I would like to inspire someone.

R: Why do you think the black parent who accused you of not liking black people approached you the way she did?

MIA: I just kind of got the impression that, in her mind, you must think you're all that because you are a teacher. And here I am living on welfare in Subsidized Housing 1.

R: Do you think other people in the community see you that way as teachers?

MIA: I wouldn't think. Most of the minority parents that I've come in contact with have been very respectful and even today if I see them on the street they will stop and hold a big conversation and act like we're best buds.

LEA: Some of the parents that I've had were people I went to school with and I ended up having their kids in my class. When they come in to talk like at parent/teacher conferences ... it was funny because I would want to be like hey how are you ... and they would be like hi Mrs. LEA. I was like ... what? I understood and then I

started to address them in that same manner. They are seeing me not as a friend out on the street ... this is my position and I would treat my son's teachers with respect and address them that way and that's how they address me. Now of course as the conversation goes on we might loosen up and laugh about something, but there were some people that still address me as Mrs. LEA. It felt weird, but I understood it.

MIA: So now you know how Mr. White Male Teacher 1 feels.

LEA: Yeah, yeah

R: Talk to me a little bit about relationships with faculty members being the only black teacher in your building for years.

LEA: I'm at the building where I went as a student. The head teacher in the building was a teacher when I was there as a student. He is still teasing me because I still cannot call him by his first name. I address him as "Mister". It's not that I don't feel like an equal I don't think. It's just that's how I remember you. We are still colleagues and we can joke and laugh at times, but still at the end of the day when I say goodbye, it's goodbye Mr. White Male Teacher 1. He jokes about it all the time and wants to know when I am going to call him by his first name. There are times when I walk into the secretary's office and I call her by "Miss" and some days I will call her by her first name. It depends on what I am going in there for. But I like to keep it professional.

R: Do you have any close relationships with your white colleagues?

MIA: Yes. The kindergarten teacher has been there ... she came to Elementary School 2 the year after I started. She is actually older and she had 6-7 years of teaching experience prior to being at Elementary School 2. She had taken a maternity leave and was just coming back to the district and was hired there. She's basically been there as long as I've been there. We've become really close over the years. She teases me about things that have happened over the years in my classroom. One year, this little boy, the last day of school, he drew a picture. It was supposed to be a picture of me and he wrote at the bottom "you're the best teacher I ever had" and what was funny about the picture was he had me with a red bow in my hair and these little red pumps...

LEA: Totally out of character...

MIA Yeah, you know with the skirt and I was showing the kindergarten teacher and we were laughing. I'm like ... like that would ever happen. To this day she teases me about that. One year at Christmas time ... we used to put trees up in our classrooms ... there was box under the tree. I opened the box and it's a pair of

little red, glittery pumps, little girls pumps inside. I had a student teacher and her and my student teacher were in cahoots and found these little red shoes and wrapped them up and put them under my Christmas tree in my classroom. So I thought okay. I did something back to her. These shoes have been going back and forth for like years. One year, she put them in my mailbox. I think I mailed them to her over the summer for her birthday because she had a summer birthday. She put them in my mailbox stuffed with Easter grass and candy at Easter time. Then one year I took them and it was Halloween and I bought this pair of Halloween socks ... black, white and orange striped with little witches on them ... so I bought this pair of socks and I stuffed it with newspaper, put them in the shoes and I got the custodian to let me in her classroom after she went home and she had this little bookcase in the front of her room. So I lifted up the corner of the bookcase and put the socks under there and made it look like there was someone under there. Her kids came in and they were like ... the witch ... you know from the Wizard of Oz. We just do stuff like that all the time. We had a male teacher in our building for a while. So he took the shoes. He came in over the weekend and got into her room and took the shoes and socks and rolled up construction paper and stuck down in the socks. We had these rafters at the top and he put them up there and it made it look like someone was standing there, but up through the ceiling. They ended up; they stayed up there the rest of the school year. She didn't even know. She was in the classroom. It was one of the kids in the afternoon kindergarten class that noticed it. She was in there all morning and didn't notice it and one of the afternoon kindergarten kids came in and said "What's that witch doing up there?"

Last year was my 30th year with this district so they recognized the teachers at the school board meeting. The whole faculty from Elementary School 2, because they were also recognizing our custodian ... and so they all said well let's make a night of it. So we all went out to dinner. We went over to Red Robin and then we went to the school board meeting. When they called out the custodian's name they all started cheering then they called out my name and when I came back they gave me this collection of cards ... they were note cards and they were all characters from the Wizard of Oz. One year, she went down to Myrtle Beach I think it was, and she was in this store and she saw these Christmas tree lights that were ruby red slippers. Well, she bought those for me.

R: On and on...

MIA: Yeah. I got earrings and all kinds of stuff that she has found along the way in her travels and she buys them for me, and it all stems back to this picture...

LEA: But you go out to dinner with your colleagues and everything. They are more like friends. Whereas I haven't ... I've gone ... like some of the teachers once or twice invited me to a jewelry party or something like that. I go...

R: You wouldn't consider them friends?

LEA: They're friends at the workplace but beyond that ... you know, I'm not inviting them over to dinner, or going out to see a movie. It's a working friendship and we laugh and we have fun, but...

R: So that kind of leads to the next question. Are these relationships surface friendships or are they ... would you talk to that individual about a deep emotion, feeling hurt, joy? Or is that something that ... like you said ... they're working friendships. Are yours working friendships or do they go beyond? Are they deeper?

MIA: I think they go deeper. The building itself is small. There's just six teachers there and it didn't matter what six teachers were there, as a faculty we were all very, very close. Ever since I've been there. Even the first year I was there and I really didn't know those teachers ... they did things, like they had a dinner different times of the year where we would all get together and go out to dinner. Some of them even brought their spouses and everything. And even then, there was one teacher who said she was leaving at the end of the year so we started getting little...

We were always doing something. I don't know how it started. I don't know if it was someone's birthday or what, but I made a card and made up a little poem and put in the card and they just all went crazy. So then anytime after that when we did something special they would say, "Can you make a card?" We had an open house last year at Elementary School 2 because they were going to tear it down over the summer and we invited all the former teachers and secretaries back to the school. The secretary that was there the very first year I was there said to me, "I still have all those cards you made me." Her maiden name was Mouse and so she always collected mice and so I always made these little cards, you know for Christmas time and her birthday, with poems that had something to do with mice and she said she has them displayed on a stand in her house. That was like back in 1978 when I started up there.

R: So what's the difference do you think?

LEA: You're closer in age with a lot of the women you work with whereas some of the women I work with ... when I came in; I was one of the younger people in the building. Now of course, I'm not, but I guess just coming in there as a younger...

MIA: And then too, your building is bigger

LEA: Yeah, the building was bigger and there was a primary side and intermediate side and there was a ... when I first went into the building, there was kind of like a

“riff” in the building. It was like the intermediate teachers and the primary teachers; it’s kind of like...

R: So then, what side were you on?

LEA: I was on the intermediate side and I don’t know, I went in thinking well, I was going to go in there and work. Plus I was newly married and had a child so I didn’t really have a lot of time to develop friendships with them other than work time. No there is new teacher, my co-teacher ... we talk a little more often, but it’s still not sharing a whole lot.

R: Do you think that is?

LEA: We talk about things that are common between us but it’s not like...

R: Do you think that is because of you or do you think it is because of them?

LEA: Sometimes it’s because of me because I tend to be a little shy and I don’t open up to people as easily as other people might and sometimes I feel it’s them because ... there’s a group of woman that ... they’ll go shopping and they’ll do things ... they’re kind of close and I just know I don’t ... outside of teaching and being a mother ... having a teenager, I don’t have much in common with them. And I just, it just hasn’t developed into a real deep friendship.

R: And are you okay with that?

LEA: To an extent ... I’m okay for going into work every day. But would I like to have someone that I could work with and to really have ... yeah ... someone I could relate to and talk too. Sometimes little things you know ... like going in one day when my hair needs a relaxer and going in the next day with it relaxed

R: I know where you’re going.

LEA: You know, it’s ... or when a little girl walks in one day with short hair and the next day she has a weave and, they come to me and ... how did her hair get so long? What did she do? How did she get all that hair? She dropped this hair out ... what ... why come to me? That’s when I feel different. That’s when I really feel it.

R: The hair discussions bring it out a lot. I’ve been there.

LEA: Or they’ll see a little girl ... like one little girl at our school she wore her hair; well she wore it in an Afro. She was a little mixed girl so her hair was not really you know and my co-teacher said, “I just love her little Afro. Don’t you just love her

hair?" And I said "Yeah, it's cute but she could tame it down a little bit." And she said "What?" And I said, "Well if she likes that look, but I kind of like her when she has her hair done, you know, when she has it braided or combed and this little girl's instincts when it's combed. My co-teacher said, "I don't know. I just kind of like that. That's the Angela Davis look" and I said "Well if you're going for that look you know, but I still think she carries herself a little bit better when its combed down. She walks differently and she acts differently when her hair is done. I like it better." But hair always brings up the difference. I just don't feel like I have that kind of closeness with anyone.

R: So, interesting. Where are you ladies in your career? Are you right where you thought you would be, are you behind where you thought you'd be or are you way ahead?

LEA: Behind

R: You feel like you're behind. Where did you think ... now let me get ages here before we go any further.

LEA: I just turned 40.

R: No you didn't? I'm going to mess up the tape. What? Wow, I thought you were like 28. Okay,

MIA: I turned 54 in May.

R: I am done. What? Okay, I was way off on ages. So wow, congratulations by the way to both of you because I had no ... I would never have placed either one of you there. You're (LEA) behind you think?

LEA: Yeah ... I don't have my Masters yet. I don't have any credits toward a Masters or anything and I thought when I got out that I would go straight to a Masters program but I didn't because I got married and had children and I just decided I was going to put that off. So, sometimes I think I could have been farther ahead academically. It's not that I want ... I don't think I would want to be in administration or anything like that ... see that has been my area or whatever. I think a classroom teacher is probably the highest of where I would want to be, but a classroom teacher with more of a degree behind them.

R: And?

MIA: Well, I graduated in 1975 and in order to get your permanent certification, you had to go back and take 24 post graduate credits and my philosophy was ... okay if I'm going to take these credits I might as well put them toward something so I

did go into a Masters degree and I got my master degree in 1979 and since then I've picked up about 36 credit hours beyond that. I never had any desire to be like a principal or administrator. I was always in line with being a teacher. Initially I wanted to be a physical education teacher but I messed up my knees and studied to be an art teacher. In high school, I messed up my knees pretty bad and I was talking to my physical education teacher and she was saying that it was going to be kind of strenuous on my knees because you had to take a lot of physical education courses and she said it was really going to be hard on me and you will have a lot of injuries all the time. I played field hockey and basketball in high school and once I injured my knee, I was always ... I mean I could be running down the hockey field, and hit an uneven spot and I was done. And then I would be off for a couple of weeks and go back and injure myself again. You know, I was always getting hurt, but I loved playing sports so I kept at it. She said I don't want to deter you from doing that if that's really what you want to do. She said I just want you to realize that it is going to be tough with all the problems you are having with your knees. Then when I applied to Rural Town 4, I applied as an English major because they were always telling me I was good at writing so I thought, I could be an English teacher. Once I got there, I don't know what prompted me to switch my major to Elementary Education but I just remember going in and asking o change my major from English to Elementary. I don't remember what prompted me to do it, but I'm glad I did. I enjoy what I do and I enjoy working with this age. I see older kids and I'm thinking ... I don't think so. And I worked for 26 years. I coached basketball. I had high school age girls for a while and then for the majority of the time I had junior high and the kids there wanted to be there. It was something they enjoyed, but I could see different ones that would probably be difficult in the classroom and it was like ... yeah ... I made the right decision to go elementary. But at the same time, I enjoyed that break from the little kids and working with the older kids. But it was like I said ... they wanted to be there. They enjoyed playing sports and so I saw a different part of them, I think, than their classroom teachers did. And at the same time I enjoyed the sports. I played sports in high school and college. It was almost like therapy for me. Being with the little kids all day and then going there and just the whole different level ... me really enjoyed that. It got to the point to where it was starting to draw on ... because when I first started coaching we probably only had 10-12 games a season but then by the time I gave it up we were up to 18-20 and we played all the schools in the Harrisburg area. We didn't play many of the schools around here and if we had a 3:00 game we would have to leave here at 1:30 or 1:45 which meant I had to leave from school at noon time because they wouldn't bring a sub in for less than half a day. So, I was basically, by needing to have a sub to go out of town with the team, I would have to get a sub for half a day. Sometimes I was leaving three days out of the week and then it was right around the time when it was a big push for the "No Child Left Behind" and PSSA testing and January and February is crunch time and that is when I would be gone. I just felt that I was cheating my third grade students being away so often so that

is when I decided to just give it up. Even though I really, really enjoyed doing it and I do miss it, I felt that my major purpose with this district was to teach these third graders. That was about four years ago that I gave it up.

R: So where do you go from here? What's next?

LEA: To be honest...

R: Yes, to be honest...

LEA: Last year I thought I was going to quit.

R: Really?

LEA: Yeah.

R: What gave you those feelings?

LEA: Not the first time I've heard that. Its just feeling like I was responsible for my students' failures more than their successes. I gave a lot of credit for their failures, but I don't think ... the credit for their success is given to the team. But when there are failures happening, when your students aren't proficient ... it's ... 'what are you doing, what can you do or you need to do'. Its just gets hard when you are in a school that is at the bottom of the chart and it was just really challenging actually. Because your scores weren't where they wanted them to be and the principal would say ... well now if you look at their IQs and compare them to Rural Town 1 ... but at the same time ... it's like ... we've got to get these scores up and it's you've got to do this or let's change that and every year something new is added ... nothing is taken away. It just didn't feel worth it by the end of last year. But then, I gave it a lot of thought and decided I would try it again.

R: So how many more years do you think you will stay?

LEA: Although they say to me 'you said you were going to quit', I'm always back.

R: One year at a time?

LEA: One year at a time. I don't know ... something else would have to come along.

R: And?

MIA: I don't know. I keep getting this question, when are you going to retire. I say I don't know. I'll know it's time when it's time. I don't have the dead line in sight.

LEA: Yeah ... it's like ... she's a hard act to follow. From day one of my teaching, not that she looms over me and casts the shadow, but I feel like I put myself in her shadow. And from her plan book, which is immaculate ... lined up and in order ... I tried the first year. I would slave over my plan book trying to get it just like hers and it drove me nuts and I had to finally convince myself that I am not her, but I wanted to be, because everybody else always talked about Ms. MIA, Ms. MIA. And finally I had come into my own but now, 16 years and I keep thinking I want to quit but she keeps ... if I quit I'm going to let them down, I'm a quitter. She is not casting that shadow, she's not holding it over, but I just feel this responsibility that I can't quit, I just got you know, and people you knowoh you're MIA's sister, you're MIA's little sister, you're MIA's younger sister. And MIA has a reputation of being ... so it's you know.'

R: How does it make you (MIA) feel to hear her say that?

MIA: I don't know. I knew ... she told me about the lesson plans. Maybe not right then, but maybe a couple of years later she said she used to try. I told her she had to establish her own way of doing things. Me, I'm highly organized when it comes to stuff like that and I actually plan out, I can actually plan out to the minute what I'm going to do each day and things when they get ... something comes along it's like Ah. It gets to me because I am so highly organized. I haven't heard her say that in a while. It's like wow ... but people do say, "Oh LEA's your sister, I didn't know that. You two are so different." That's what I hear and it's like well duh, yeah we are different. We're not the same person.

LEA: I don't know. I tend to be quiet. Not that in the school setting ... I think I'm quieter than you would be. I've had students who had her (because she's third and I'm fourth) and even though we are in different buildings, I've had several students that had her and they will come to me and I'll say ... you were in my sisters class and they're like "you're Ms. MIA's sister? And sometimes they'll say ... "she was mean", but then over a course of time talking to them I realized they don't mean she was mean she just held them accountable. And it comes out that they liked her a lot. But, they ... "she writes real neat" or "she did" and I would say but I'm Mrs. LEA. It's funny having her there and there is still this part of me that wants to make her proud of me, or kind of a part of me that, not in a competitive way, but I want to achieve what I see that she's achieved.

R: And does that keep you going?

LEA: Yes. I keep saying to myself she did it ... I should be able to do it

R: What has kept you here in Rural Town 1 ... Rural Town 2?

LEA: Fear ... for me fear.

R: Fear of leaving?

LEA: Yeah fear of leaving ... yeah, stepping out.

R: Do you think you would ever leave?

LEA: If my husband wanted to I would have to leave.

R: But on your own?

LEA: On my own ... it's the same.

R: So what are you afraid of?

LEA: Well for a while it was driving because I don't like to drive so I was thinking if we move somewhere else then I would have to drive places and I don't know if I can do that. Fear. Sometimes of meeting people. When I went up to Rural Town 4, I felt very uncomfortable because I was quiet and people didn't approach me and then I in turn didn't approach them which made me look like I was uninterested in talking with them. I just feel comfortable I guess with my family being in the area.

R: Is that what keeps you (MIA) here?

MIA: Family and like a responsibility to teach in this district because there aren't that many black teachers in this district. It's like she said, she didn't have a black teacher until she was until she went to college. I never had a black teacher even when I went to college. I never had a black teacher and I just think it's important to be there, to be out there and let these young kids see that ... Hey I can do that ... if she is doing that I can do that. It's almost like a sense of responsibility. I should be here for the next generation.

R: There is one final set of questions. The final set really has to do, not so much with your being a teacher, but being a black woman. What does it mean to be a black woman?

MIA: I think ... to me a black woman should be a have a strong personality. In my experience I've come from a family where the woman was the head of the house and in my eyes a black woman needs to be a strong individual. She has to have her mind set on what she wants to do and be independent, not be dependent on other people, but dependent that she can do what she wants to do. A lot of my coworkers and other teachers I have come in contact with have said like ... well, I don't know, I will have to ask my husband and that just floors me. And it's like,

why? It's your job. Like at contract time, they present the contract to us. This is what changing in the contract blah, blah, and then we vote on it. And there are people sitting around saying like ... I don't know ... I'm going to have to ask my husband. Why? It's your contract, your job. It's like ... your husband is a banker. What does he know about being a teacher? I mean that just floors me that some women feel that they cannot make a decision without their husband. It's like ... get a grip. I just feel that as black women, we need to be strong, independent women and to be able to stand on our own two feet and do what we feel we need to do, make decisions that affect us. I don't get it. I really don't get it. And when I hear that I just don't get it.

LEA: Sometimes, I really don't know what it means to be a black woman. I know what it means to be a woman. I just know that as a woman, taking care of my family is important to me, being respectful to others, getting respect from others, carrying myself in a positive way. I look at those things. When I went away to college and I would see the other black girls at college that had a sense of style and carried themselves differently, I felt sometimes like a little country girl that didn't fit in and I never did fit in. I never got accepted into that group. I have my sisters and I know what they look like as a black woman. I had my Mom and I know what she was like as a black woman but it wasn't ... they're more just women to me. Not a separate ... I don't know. Outside of my sisters, I never had a strong friendship ... in high school, the girls I grew up with but we grew up the same but never had a different perspective.

R: Is there anything that bothers you about being a black woman?

MIA: Black men. Sometimes you run into different guys that just take you for advantage. They just assume things and it's like ... you don't know me. You can't make that assumption.

R: Some things ... like what?

MIA: They just assume that black women all go out partying and drinking and smoking and all that. That's just not me. I wasn't raised around that so it's not a big deal to me. I don't hang out in the clubs and bars because that wasn't something I saw growing up and for people to just assume that because you're black you hang out. No, you don't know me like that. But sometimes it's kind of frustrating, that people make that assumption of you because you are black. Some will say what's this ... I don't know, I don't go in there.

R: Same question ... is there anything that bothers you about being a black woman?

LEA: I don't know. Sometimes, if I'm by myself someplace in certain situations that I stand out as being different. But then, sometimes I like that because it makes me

unique and I do stand out. I don't know ... it's different because I really think I don't always see my color first and sometimes I wonder if that's wrong that I don't ... that I don't notice it first, that I don't think about it first or put it first. If you would ask me what I was, I might say I was a teacher first, or I might say I was a mother first. Identifying myself as a black woman wouldn't be my first identification.

R: You said you wonder if that's wrong sometimes?

LEA: Sometimes, yeah. When I see watch TV or see programs where a black woman comes out as very authoritative, her words come out right, she stands for something. I feel like do I stand for something? Do I represent someone? Because sometimes the black woman has carried her culture and background ... am I doing that? Am I representing my culture then, and then sometimes I think back to ... do I have to? Why should I have to? A white woman doesn't have to represent hers. She is just a woman in society. Do I have to carry the weight?

R: Of all the things we've talked about and we've talked about a lot. What, if any, have been the most challenging to discuss?

LEA: That was ... right there.

MIA: Because see growing up race wasn't part of something we talked about or dwelt on. I mean we knew we were blacks/minorities but we didn't harp on it.

LEA: It's not that we didn't harp on it, but we weren't confronted with it. It didn't come up.

R: As you've grown professionally and personally, have you been confronted with it now? Even though your Mom and your Grandmom didn't make that an issue?

LEA: It does come up sometimes.

R: And are you comfortable with the fact that you've been confronted with it more now ... and you didn't answer that one.

MIA: I don't know. Sometimes with some people I get the impression that they think just because I'm black that I'm not as good as the white teacher or I don't do as good a job as the white teacher would. I look at people like that and I think, oh well, that's your opinion. But, it almost always comes back ... maybe a year or so later ... that person comes back or maybe I'll hear from someone else, that this particular person was pleasantly surprised at what they saw after being in my classroom or seeing results of my students tests at the end of the year. Or maybe, a parent and were talking to this individual and this parent spoke very highly of

me. That is probably the one thing that I feel strongly about. People that just assume that because I'm black I don't have the highest quality skill or whatever and then they come to find out, that is not the case.

R: So my goal is to tell the story of black women who teach in white, rural school districts. And it is the individual and a group story because there are not many of us, but all of us come from a different context. That being said ... is there anything, any part of your story that you have not had an opportunity to share here that you think is pertinent to your story? You have to this in here because this is a part of who I am and my story as a black women teaching in a white, rural school district.

MIA: I can't think of anything.

LEA: I would say your questions made me think a lot because I read it over and over and I thought about it. I just never looked at it this way. I never had that perspective. Never saw it from that angle.

R: A couple of things happen from here. One of the things that will happen is that I will have to soak myself in all of this ... in everyone's story. I'll try to pull out different things that are similar for all of us which are already roaming through my head. You're reaction is not unlike other women I've talked to and I think there are reasons for that. I'm finding myself more isolated at this point. My context is very different. I grew up in Atlanta and I grew up in all black schools with many black teachers and principals and superintendents and community. So coming here was very different. When I went to college that was the first I had been in classes with white people. The context is different, but the black people I grew up with were they were black professionals and bankers. It wasn't a blue-collar society that I grew up in so I was used to affluent black people. And then I came here it was like ... why don't you go to work with your hair done? Where I grew up that was never an issue and you knew you better be done or we were going to let you know. My context is very different from everyone else's story yet there are still many similarities once you get into the experiences. That is why some of my questions are worded the way they are because I think I have thought about these things from a completely difference context and part of my theory is just that ... people who are here and have been here and have stayed here, there are very distinct reasons why. It will be interesting.

APPENDIX F: RESEARCHER SELF-DIALOGUE

Question: How did your career and life plans evolve from your early life experiences such as your family and school experiences?

Researcher: Growing up in my household with my parent's, education was always at the forefront of everything, the most important thing in our lives. It took precedent over extracurricular activities. I always had teachers who were very much attached to my family. There were seven kids so going through school we always knew all the teachers and the teachers always knew us. My parents were very active in the schools with the PTA. There was a high expectation of our family. There was a high expectation for us to succeed in school . . . to be academically strong, so that probably did have a large influence on my decisions to become a teacher. Although going into college I was not thinking that I would end up being a teacher. At first I went into accounting because I had taken an accounting class in my senior year of high school and really liked dealing with the money and being successful in my ledgers. So I thought that was the way I wanted to go. But as I went through school I started to realize in college that I was more interested in learning and working with children. I had worked with children from the time I was fifteen at our YMCA. Education just was always a part of my life so I always expected it to be a part of my life. So I really think that really influenced my career path. Other factors that contributed to my career selection probably had to do with what was available to me at the college I went to at the University of Pittsburgh. Once I realized that I wanted to go into education, I had to change my major, my school, my course of study, so that directed me to go beyond simply getting a Bachelors degree because Pitt didn't offer education as an undergraduate degree. So, once I decided to go into education I automatically decided to get a Masters degree at Pitt. Probably the experience of having to create my own program of study definitely influenced my career selection.

Question: What do you see as critical turning points in your career?

Researcher: Spending time working in alternative education was definitely a turning point. While I was pursuing my Master's degree, I worked in alternative education. It was a life changing experience. I got a chance to experience and see children from a different world than what I had grown up in and learned that I was able to communicate with those children and get through to them and to help them. It definitely increased my passion toward what the educational system should be and could be to children outside of just academia. That was definitely a turning point. Then receiving my Masters degree was another turning point. Making a decision to leave alternative education and go into public education was definitely a big decision and one of the best decisions I've made to this point. I'm currently experiencing another turning point in making a decision to leave the

classroom and cross over into administration after spending five years in alternative education and three years in public education. This has been a huge change and one that is turning out to be a good change at this point.

Question: What is the biggest job challenge you have ever faced?

Researcher: I would tend to think it would be something having to deal with kids or parents, but honestly I really think one of the biggest job challenges has been finding my place of comfort and stability and confidence in the schools that I have worked within. Definitely being the only black teacher in my school has been absolutely challenging. The expectation is high. The expectation I have of myself is high. What I want to communicate to the families, kids and faculty are high. And finding a place of comfort even within myself, outside of what others think, has been a challenge.

Question: What kinds of personal sacrifices have you had to make to get where you are today?

Researcher: I sacrificed a lot. I moved away from home, from my parents, from my brothers and sisters to go to school. But deciding to move to a small, rural town ended up being a large sacrifice because the chances of my being able to be back around my family is definitely more limited. I am blessed to have my husband and his side of the family here. So, although it was a personal sacrifice, it did not turn out to be as large a sacrifice because I still had a support system in place with my in-laws, aunts, uncles and cousins from my husband's side of the family. That's probably the largest sacrifice. Being in this area is not always the most comfortable. I've been here for about six years now, so over the years it has gotten easier to deal with it and I've learned to make this place home. It did not always feel that way. There was always a sense of being far away from many things and I always prayed for more development and more stores and shopping, just some of the conveniences that you find in larger cities. It took a while to get used to that. Today, I am at a better place with that.

Question: How has your district helped you in achieving your success and what other supports would you have liked?

Researcher: My district has been instrumental in providing opportunities for me to grow and excel in providing training and new technology and materials. I would have appreciated more financial support and definitely more opportunities to further my education without concerns of debt to the school district or university.

Question: How have you changed significantly as a person over the course of your career? What changes do you like and what changes don't you like?

Researcher: I have changed a lot. I am definitely a more confident educator as I have continued my education and learned more about the issues of education. I definitely have formed an opinion and am able to speak my opinion with confidence and passion. I've definitely grown in those areas. I like those changes. When I think about changes that I don't like, it's really hard to think of any. I've learned the politics of education and I've learned how to work within the politics of education. I don't necessarily like that I have to, but the reality is that I do and while I don't like having to work within those changes, I like the fact that I am able to do so.

Question: How would you assess your career at this time? Are you behind or ahead of where you expected to be in your career.

Researcher: Definitely ahead. I did not perceive myself moving into administration at this point in my career, but I am glad the opportunity made itself available to me and that I was accepted into a new position. I would definitely say that I am ahead of where I had planned to be and I am grateful for that.

Question: Where do you see your career moving? What is next for you?

Researcher: I'll probably stay in administration for some years to come and grow. I would like to grow in confidence just as I have grown in confidence as a teacher and what it takes to communicate with kids and learning both through my alternative education experience and through my public education experience. I would like to grow in those ways in administration to a place of confidence and a place of knowledge and to advance my skills in administration. That will take some time. So I will probably remain in administration for some time. After that, I would like to go back into the classroom maybe at a higher education level and teach administrators and teachers.

Question: Do you think the road to the top is different for black women in comparison to black men, white women or white men?

Researcher: It is obviously different for black women by comparison to any of those other categories. Black women are seen differently than any of the others. Often times we are not seen so our struggles are unique and different. So I think the road to the top is definitely different and will have different obstacles within them.

Question: Do you believe some parts of the district are more likely to produce top black women executives than others?

Researcher: That's hard to say in a school district. Currently, I am the only black administrator in my school district. I definitely think the potential is there for

growth but there are only so many executive positions within a district and currently they are all possessed by white men. I think the potential is there but where I currently work at, that is yet to ever happen. I am the first black administrator there.

Question: Do you see any differences in the teaching styles of black women and white women. What are they and when are you most likely to be aware of those differences? Can you tell a story that illustrates those differences?

Researcher: When it comes to dealing with kids, I think my style is different than other women in the district. I'm not so sure I attribute that to race as much as my relationship and my background with kids. My teaching style ... I definitely communicate. I focus on building relationships with kids. When it comes to curriculum, I teach the curriculum that is in line with the school district but the way I communicate it would probably be different based on my emphasis on relationship. Again I'm not certain that has anything to do with race as much as just my background in working with children.

Question: As a black woman have you ever experienced discrimination in your district and how did you become aware of it?

Researcher: I have, both as a teacher and as administration. It becomes in interactions with parents, with faculty at times; the reactions that people have to you. Absolutely, I believe I have experienced discrimination. When I became aware that I might have been being treated differently because of my skin color I responded by putting it out on the table. I brought it to the forefront in a meeting with other teachers and administration and counselors present and I made it clear what I believed was happening and I made it clear that I would not stand for it and that I expected to be respected as a professional just like everyone else who worked there. That's how I handled it. I became aware of it through a colleague letting me know that something was said about me under the breath of another colleague. I did not hear it, but I was made aware of it and I definitely responded to it in a very open and overt way.

Question: How important is it to you that you develop close relationships with other women at work? Is race an issue you consider in the development of these relationships?

Researcher: I think it is important to have relationships with your colleagues. Close relationship is difficult to say. I would not be unopen to a close relationship, but developing close relationships can be difficult. Race is definitely an issue. I wouldn't say that I would consider somebody's race before I decided to have a relationship with them, but I think race plays a factor. Because in order for me to be in a close relationship one has to have an understanding of my world, the world

in which I live. Not everyone is able to do so based on race at times. So while it is not an issue that I would necessarily consider when I decide to develop a relationship; I think ultimately it does play a factor in relationships.

Question: How important is it that you develop relationships with students at work and is race something you consider in those relationships?

Researcher: As a teacher it is of the utmost importance to develop relationships with my students. I am there to help kids, to influence kids, to be a role model for kids. I do not consider race but similar to the previous question, race is a factor. Because relationships are two-way streets and as children attempt to develop relationships with me as their teacher my race is not something I can hide and most of my students, 95% of mu students, would be white students. That being, the case in a lot of cases, I'm the first black woman they have ever had to develop a relationship with. So while, again, race is not something that is considered when I decide whether or not to build a relationship with a student, it is a factor. Because that barrier has to be broken or torn down or addressed often times before students will even open up to you as a person. So how do you address it? Not always directly but by being yourself and allowing them to see that you are more than the color of your skin. You know that is something I that consider every time I start a new school year; every time I interact with new students. I realize what they see and I realize that they have feelings about what they see and I don't hide who I am and I don't hide how I feel about who I am. I have found that the reaction has been extremely positive and a learning experience for me and for them.

Question: Are there white women in your district that you turn to for support either emotional or task related? What kind of situations do you turn to white women for support and can you talk about those times?

Researcher: I definitely have turned to my white women colleagues for support on both emotional and task related issues. More task related I think. Acknowledging their expertise and their understanding of the field of education there have been many times when they have been able to support me with curriculum, with ideas for implementing instruction, for dealing with students, for how to deal with other faculty members, for how to deal with parents, how to communicate with the community, the school board. On a number of situations I have definitely turned to my white women colleagues. When it comes to emotional support, not as much. They have been there to celebrate with me in times of child-rearing, childbirth, birthdays. But when very difficult things have happened in my life, I have not shared those generally with my white female colleagues. That connection generally remains a surface relationship, not a deep, close emotional relationship.

Question: Would you say that you are particularly close to any of the white women colleagues in your district? Can you talk about the relationship? In what ways are you close and how did the relationship develop?

Researcher: I am close with two women I work with. The relationship developed because we were all teaching on the same team in the school my first year there. We talked and met together every day. We discussed students together every day. So the relationship grew from there. Again, we are close in that we celebrate many things together. They have shared deep emotional issues with me and I've been there as a confidant, as one offering advice and support. While they have shared those things with me, I have not reciprocated. Sharing those kinds of things with them ... they have had no difficulty sharing with me. We rarely discuss cultural differences. When we talk, we talk about differences in our hair, very surface type things. I'm open to discuss those things and again very, very outward and up front about racial differences. They are not reluctant. I'm not sure that they have ever brought anything up. If they have, I'm sure that I have discussed it with them. The relationship has changed over time as I become more comfortable and more confident in the relationship. I no longer play the political game. I am myself and they have accepted me as such and they know what to expect from me. I remain sincere in the relationship and I remain sincere in what I'm willing to share and what I'm not willing to share. I believe they know that about me. Whereas in the beginning of the relationship, I probably was seeking more to be accepted ... now I am who I am and I am confident in who I am. They fit in my world where I allow them to fit.

Question: Are there white female colleagues that you find you have conflicts with? Can you tell me about a time you had a conflict with a colleague, how you handled it at the time and was it a racial issue?

Researcher: Not generally. I don't often have conflict. There has been one occasion that I can remember where I had a conflict with a female colleague. It is one that I spoke of earlier where this teacher who was also teaching on my team; during a meeting where we had all decided to serve in detention. The rule at the school at the time was ... if your going to give detention, you have to help cover detention. As a team we had to decide whether we were going to give detention and if so how we were going to cover it (everyone would cover it) which meant that we were going to need to sign up for coverage. This particular time this individual had not signed up, although as a team we had agreed that we would cover the detention. So, during our team meeting I brought it up. I asked if we all signed up for detention. I brought it up as a friendly reminder at the meeting and the meeting went on after I said that. Later it was brought to my attention (as I was sitting at the far back of the room and had not heard the remark) by others in the room, that this female had called me a dictator under her breath. That same day or week, we had an administrative team meeting where administrators, counselors

and the whole team attended and I specifically brought up the situation at the meeting and I made it well known that I was aware of what was said and that I thought it was unprofessional and inappropriate. I do think it was a racial situation. I think this individual was used to say what they wanted to say on a number of occasions, not just on racial situation, but on a number of occasions and never being corrected on it. Here I am, one who is not willing to be silent and maybe the individual was intimidated by that or maybe the individual did not like the fact that I was vocal. But I was. In my heart of hearts I do believe it was a racial situation and I'm not so certain that any other person having said the same thing would have been called that. Only this other individual knows for certain, but I feel confident that those kind of comments might not have been said if the person speaking up about detention were of a similar race to her.

Question: The final set of questions concentrates on what it means to be a black woman in broader society. Some people describe blacks as being in limbo, neither in nor out and often feeling like an outsider looking in. Considering this statement, what does it mean to be a black woman?

Researcher: In the context of teaching and working in schools in a white, rural area, you do often feel like an outsider looking in. On one hand ... on the job ... you feel it because you're not on the inside. While you are there you don't necessarily feel like one of the faculty, or one of the students, or one of the parents. There is always a difference or barrier there that has to first be acknowledged and then has to be broken down for you to ever overcome it. It is difficult in that sense. You do often times feel like, just within yourself ... even if no one views you that way, you can't hide. If you don't show up for the faculty meeting, everyone knows right away. You don't blend in. You always stand out. But you also feel that on the outside because in these rural areas, often times within your own community, you like an outsider. As a teacher you are a professional and many of the black families in this area are not. A lot of them may be blue collar workers or unemployed or doing a number of different things. Often times it is difficult to connect on both ends. It is hard to connect with your colleagues because of your racial barrier and often times it is difficult to connect with your community because you are of a different mind set and they see differently. While you're are still just as black as they are, often times they have a difficult time connecting with you because they see you in a different light ... as though you wouldn't be able to connect with them because of your position in the community. So it is a limbo like position and it takes time to become comfortable with it and confident in that. It can happen, but it has to be acknowledged first that is where you are. So being a black woman in that context, it is a position of challenge, it is a position of growth, reflection constantly with the goal of confidence in mind.

Question: What are the most important parts about your identity? How do you take care of yourself emotionally and what do I cherish about being a black woman?

Researcher: The most important part about my identity is my belief in God. That is who I am. That is the context from which I view every situation. There is nothing more important to me than God. I take care of myself in prayer. I do my best not to live according to my emotions or what I feel, but according to what I believe. I cherish everything about being a black woman. I love being a black woman. I love my look, my spirit, confidence, my voice, my hair ... I just love everything about being a black woman. I love what it means to walk into a room and know that for some people that's all they will ever see but for me, there is history and there is a context, that while many people will never know, never understand it ... lives and breathes with me every moment of every day in every interaction. I love the mystery of that ... the mystery that it continues to be for others, but the truth that it always is for me.

Question: Is there anything about being a black woman that bothers you?

Researcher: Often times what bothers me is the perception the world has of black women and when they see me often times, I think, whether it's true or not, I feel like they first expect to see the stereotype that they believe black women are and that they would never take the time to get beyond the stereotype.

Question: Are there parts of you that you feel cut off from with regard to your culture, your race or your gender?

Researcher: Like I said when it comes to my community, I do feel cut off. I don't put myself on a pedestal. I don't put myself outside or away from my community. But often times the more education I get, the different jobs I get, the different successes I often feel as though it's those things that cut me off and move me away from being able to connect with the community I currently live in. That is not always easy because you want to connect. Not only to be just a role model but for people to know and understand that you can relate to where they are and what they are going through just as black people. Often I think the more success that one has the less people believe that you understand or that you can relate. And the truth is, you can relate. There are some things that we all have in common and there are times when I feel cut and I think that is sad.

Question: Are there experiences of subtle and well as blatant racial discrimination or sexism that have affected your life? Have you seen this happen to black women? How do you feel about such experiences?

Researcher: I can't say that I've directly seen blatant racial discrimination or sexism. I've seen black women being used as sex objects in the media and again, I detest those things. I think it contributes to a stereotype that is not true. A stereotype that when I walk into a room people see that in me and I don't like that.

Question: Do you see any constraints in your life success that are grounded in issues of race or gender? How are you confronting such restraints?

Researcher: Definitely. I am a black woman working in an all white school district as a teacher, working in an all white school district as an administrator. Being the first black teacher hired in a building. Being the first black administrator hired in a district. Constraints everywhere ... community constraints, perceptions, parents ... oh my gosh they just go on and on. There are definitely constraints. I confront them by going through with it. By accepting the job, by accepting the challenge, by going to work every day and working as hard as I possibly can to be successful and to do the best job I can possibly do to serve my community, to serve my students. You confront them by going forward ... not by backing down. And that's how I confront them. It is definitely grounded in race because to be the first in the year 2007, in the year 2003, to be the first in these areas is a big deal and you can't back down. It's not always comfortable, but you have to go forward.

Question: How would you characterize your relationship with whites in your personal life? Do you have a close relationship with a white person? How was that relationship developed? Are there tensions in your relationship?

Researcher: Well, I don't have very many personal relationships with white people. I know a lot of white people. I've been to their homes. On spiritual levels we have been able to connect. But again, it can be difficult and this could possibly come from ... I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up in all black schools, all black communities with many black teachers, black superintendents, black principals, so there is a very strong sense of culture that follows me where ever I go. Maybe I have that barrier up myself to where I'm not able to connect with white culture at times. Maybe I don't feel as comfortable. I have these relationships but they are very surface and I think that I keep them that way. Even more so that what others would like them to be. That could definitely come from my background. My background of a strong, black, successful family in the south. I probably keep white people at a distance and so while I go to social activities and gatherings at people's homes and dinners, the relationships remain surface and I do believe it is more on my part than theirs.

Question: How have you been feeling about what we talked about? What was the easiest to talk about? What was the hardest?

Researcher: I feel good about what we talked about. I think it can be difficult to really admit some of my own holdups when it comes to these issues. And I obviously have some. They don't surprise me but it just lets me know that there may be some barriers that I just need to let down and let other people in so that relationships can grow outside of the racial factor. I also realize that I have a

strong sense of responsibility when it comes to the role I play as a black, female professional in education. While I am very proud of that, it may be the very same thing that has me keeping up barriers and I probably need to look at that.