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Perceptions of Care: Self Reflections of Women Teachers of African Descent Who Teach in Urban Settings

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PERCEPTIONS OF CARE: SELF REFLECTIONS OF WOMEN TEACHERS
OF AFRICAN DESCENT WHO TEACH IN URBAN SETTINGS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

ELIZABETH ABIORO

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2010

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ABSTRACT

Discussions and debates about the educational system in the United States continue to center on curriculum and school reform. However, many children in America's public schools suffer from existing "life hazards" including social isolation, poverty, neglect, drug abuse, violence, school failure, and the breakdown of traditional family values and nurturing. This qualitative study focused on 10 African American female teachers and their perceptions of caring in the classroom and themselves as caring teachers. It is important to collect and share the experiences of African American females and how they define and practice care in their classrooms. Understanding teachers' perceptions of care is significant because it can provide data that will begin to reveal the complex nature of care as well as provide some pathways to understanding how to care for low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. The women's narratives of their teaching experiences were analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practiced care with their students and the values imparted to them. The study was limited to the experiences of teachers working in low-SES urban schools with students of African American descent. The stories, feelings, perceptions, and experiences of these women elementary teachers of African descent have helped to understand how they view the role care can play in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. Findings indicated caring in the classroom was essential

to be an effective teacher and for students to learn, grow, and succeed in the future. Caring was thought to go hand in hand with teaching and if you did not care the participants did not think you could be an effective teacher. Teachers did not think accountability and high stakes testing affected what they did in the classroom to care for their students. Teachers thought it might be easier for females to demonstrate caring than males, but did not imply males could not be caring teachers it was just easier for females due to their mothering nurturing nature. Caring was an essential part of the make up of these teachers, they had many examples in their lives of caring adults, and wanted to pass on this sense of caring to their students so their students would also care for others when they become adults.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the United States education is still the source of huge debate and discussion, especially concerning curriculum and school reform. According to Eisner (1994), when the Soviets surpassed the United States into orbit with the launching of their spaceship Sputnik in 1957, an emphasis was placed on math and science in the American curricular. The response to this change in the 1960s was the creation of “teacher-proof” curriculums. Pinar (1995) believed that students would learn if they had teachers who followed a set curriculum, with measurable and specified objectives. A “back to basics” theme was promoted during the mid-1970s and 1980s by those who wanted to return to past ways of instruction. In the 1980s and 1990s, “assessment” and “educational accountability” were the main focus. In the 1990s a similar theme for reform was standardized testing, in which student success was determined by a comparison of test scores. Schaps (1998) stated that “we treat students like the proverbial black box,” concerned with what goes into them as far as curriculum and what comes out of them as far as test scores, but we “virtually ignore their thoughts and feelings about school” (p. 47).

Many children in America’s public school systems suffer from existing “life hazards” and “cultural evils” such as social isolation, poverty, neglect, drug abuse, violence, school failure, and breakdown of traditional family values and nurturing support systems (Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Pianta (1999)

stated that numerous children negotiate their lives in adverse “urban war zones” and consequently fail terribly in school and then, experience emotional difficulties and dysfunctions (p. 33). Research conducted by Wehlage, Rutter, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) suggest that the general perception among various at-risk students is that teachers do not care about them. Noddings (1992, 2005) claims that schools in the United States are suffering from a “crisis in caring” with “children, especially adolescents feel[ing] uncared for in our schools” (p. xii). A number of other scholars from numerous backgrounds, who have analyzed this national school crisis, suggest positive benefits for students who have caring teachers, given the increasing challenges of modern society (Greene, 1990; Noddings, 1992, 2005; Pianta, 1999, 2004; Poplin & Weeres, 1994).

Noddings (1984, 1986, 2002, 2005) felt that the decisions that teachers make in their classrooms must be grounded in what Gilligan (1982) referred to as an “ethic of caring”. While developing this “ethic of care” Gilligan wrote,

The notion of care expands from the paralyzing injunction not to hurt others to an injunction to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection. A consciousness of the dynamics of human relationships then becomes central to moral understanding joining the heart and eye in an ethic that ties the activity of thought to the activity of care. (p. 148)

Scholars such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (2005) advocate an “ethic of care” as a central part of education. Goodlad (1984) argues that the “teacher is the central figure” in realizing this ethic (p. 123). Envisioning the meaning of care can encourage

educators to recognize and accommodate students' needs by examining their own understandings, beliefs, and actions regarding students.

In short, the school has always had a caring role to play, but this role is considerably more critical today. Developing an ethic of caring and creating a community that cares is, as far as I know, on no one's list of educational priorities- but it ought to be. (Eisner, 1991, p. 16)

Noblit, Rodgers, and McCadden (1995) reported data of the significance of teachers with caring attitudes and behaviors on their students' achievement in school. Interviews and field notes with second and fourth grade teachers and students acknowledged that behaviors and academic performances were improved when students felt that their teacher was committed to them.

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on 10 women teachers of African descent and their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers. The problem this study proposed to address was the need for additional knowledge about the roles women teachers of African descent play and has played in elementary education. Etter-Lewis (1991) states, "all women must tell their own stories in their own words" (p. 44). Etter-Lewis further stated that women of African descent rarely have the chance to have their work published. If this is so, then the experiences of women teachers of African descent will be lost to us or run the risk of being misinterpreted or misunderstood. Therefore, narratives of women teachers of African descent are vital forms of information in academia.

The purpose of this study was to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent define and practice care in their classrooms. These women's narratives of their teaching experiences was analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practiced care with their students and the values they imparted to them. This study was limited to the experiences that these teachers had with low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were:

How do women elementary teachers of African descent (grades K- 8) who teach in an urban school serving predominately students of African descent, and low-SES define care and describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

- How do these women elementary teachers of African descent define care?
- How did these women elementary teachers of African descent develop their belief systems for caring?
- How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

Significance of the Study

Caring permeates the life of schools and has been part of school life long before the emergent and overdue academic interest in the subject (Eaker-Rich, & Van Galen, 1996). In education, it is essential to learn more about caring in settings and schools where relational work might be difficult (e.g., low income, urban settings, or working

with minority populations). Understanding teachers' perceptions of care is significant because it can provide data that may reveal some elements of the complex nature of care and how teachers see its role in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

It is essential that women of African descent make significant contributions to public accounts, such as collective narratives. Historically, women of African descent have been silenced, yet they are the best people to record these voices and give analysis to what has taken place (Cooper, 1988). Recent research by scholars like Michele Foster (1997), Lisa Delpit (1995, 2006), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009) have begun to address this issue of women teachers' of African descent right to be heard. These scholars have acknowledged that the voices of teachers of African descent have been nearly silenced long enough in the discourse of educational policies and practices. Lisa Delpit (1995, 2006) has focused on the skills of teachers of African descent that create success for students. Michele Foster (1997) permitted teachers of African descent to tell their personal stories about teaching. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) discussed culturally relevant teaching that has led to academic success for students of African descent.

Baker-Fletcher (1993) makes a statement about the significance of the voice of women of African descent:

Voice calls attention to pain and suffering. Voice criticizes oppression.
Voice offers and demands solutions to problems. Voice cries out in
passion, anger, and outrage. Voice motivates others to follow. Voice
shocks and touches people to respond. Voice challenges attitudes, social

customs, and practice. Voice motivates reform. Voice calls people out for radical, revolutionary action. Voice resists systems of injustice. If voice were not powerful, oppressors would not find it necessary to silence those they dominate. (p. 184)

This statement brings to light the significance of collective narratives. This can be accomplished by listening to the voices of women of African descent tell their stories, feelings, perceptions, experiences, and have them documented and validated. The majority of research on women teachers usually focuses on women teachers of European descent, and does not adequately address the realities of women teachers of African descent. Carby (1987) suggests that feminists of European descent treat people of African descent similar to how men of European descent treat them. Feminist studies are often considered as being representative of all women, but such studies are presented from a European perspective, and mostly identify with the realities of women of European descent (Etter-Lewis, 1991). This study examined the self reflections and perceptions of care of women of African descent to understand how these teachers saw the role care played in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. Since women of African descent are so diverse, they can benefit from studies that examine their perceptions in relation to care and education.

Limitations of the Study

The concept of validity is described by a broad range of terms in qualitative studies. This concept is not a universal concept, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Johnson, 1999). Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher’s perception of validity in the study and his/ her choice of paradigm assumption. Consequently, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have often generated or adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

In order to reduce risks to validity, four concerns particularly related to qualitative research were addressed. These concerns were: descriptive validity, interpretive validity/ member checking, theoretical validity, and generalizability (Maxwell, 1992). These concerns were significant to the study.

Descriptive validity focuses on the accuracy of the information that the researcher has viewed or heard (Maxwell, 1992). Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants were given the opportunity to review the interviews and make necessary changes. During the member checks, the participants were able to review the interviews to insure the authenticity of their words.

Interpretive validity/member checking refers to the interpretation of data on the basis of the community perspective of the participant. This information is typically collected from the participants’ own language (Maxwell, 1992). Interpretive validity was

addressed by having each participant check their responses to their transcribed interviews, to insure that their intended meaning when responding to questions were adequately represented. Email and telephone conversations were utilized to clarify any discrepant information. No data was changed during the member checking, only clarification of responses.

Theoretical validity focuses on how the researcher develops theory throughout the course of the study. The researcher collects the data, and determines the best way of organizing and interpreting what the data mean (Maxwell, 1992). Theoretical validity was addressed by the use of relevant literature to support the researcher's interpretation of the findings.

Generalizability is when the results of one study can be applied to other populations, locations, or times. In qualitative research, it is commonly acknowledged that different outcomes can occur even when a study is set up the same (Maxwell, 1992). The findings of this study were not generalizable.

Borg and Gall (1989) discuss the significance of mentioning limitations. Limitations can occur in the instrumentation, the gathering of data, data analysis, the research design, or the implementation of the study. Due to the scrutiny that arises with qualitative research, limitations are important to mention.

This study was limited in some ways. The sample size in this study was too small to make generalized statements about a larger population of women elementary teachers of African descent who teach in urban schools serving predominately students of African descent, and low-SES. Another limitation may be the participant selection method used

in this research. Although the purposive sample method allows for a sample to be recommended to the researcher one can argue that this selection is biased. It is essential to acknowledge that the personality attributes and emotional dimensions of the researcher can possibly produce distortions in the observed data (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955). According to Bogdan and Taylor (1990), there is a possibility that I, the researcher, may have had an influence on the participants during the data collection resulting in observer bias. In this study, the participants were limited to one in-depth interview versus a series of interviews. Lastly, the participants' responses were based on their perceptions of themselves. Since the goal of this study was to understand perceptions, their self-reports were not supported by classroom observations.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be applied:

African Descent: As stated by Lewis-Lane (2003), "the term African descent is reflective of the historical cultural connection that exists between individuals who are considered African American, Afro American, Black, Negro, or colored in the United States" (p. 3).

Care: As stated by Siddle Walker (1993), care is "the direct attention an individual gives to meet the psychological, sociological, and academic needs of another individual or individuals" (p. 65). Care promotes the well being of another, not passive or accidental, but deliberate. Care involves mutuality and connection (Noddings, 1984).

Culture: That which represents the spiritual, emotional, social, and historical ways a company of people makes sense of the world (Lanier-Seward, 1987; White, 1987).

Exceptional Students: As stated by Burton and Byrd (1994), exceptional students are “those with handicapping conditions and those demonstrating giftedness” (p. 238).

Low SES: Low socio-economic status refers to a school where over 85% of the students are on free or reduced lunch. Low SES students would be on free or reduced lunch.

Perceptions: As stated by Jackson-Minot (2002), “perceptions are cognitive events resulting from sensory awareness, such as visual, auditory, tactile, and verbal” (p. 7). Hersserl (1970) states “perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted. Intentions, united with sensations, make up the full concrete act of perception; the object achieves full-bodied presence” (pp. 608-609).

Teacher Care: Teacher care comes out of the feminist and philosophical literature delineating nurturing teacher practices (Diero, 1994, 1996; Goldstein, 1997, 1999; Leininger & Watson, 1990; Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2005), and represented those instructional and affectional teaching skills connected with the creation of positive teacher-student relationships.

Urban: Relating to or concerned with a city or densely populated area.

Voice: According to Gilligan (1982), voice is understanding oneself as a knower and the capability to express oneself by gaining a voice or finding one; that which exposes the core of a person when speaking on “the self...connecting inner and outer worlds” (p. xvi).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review research studies and literature from various subject areas in order to define, discuss and describe the construct of caring. The chapter will discuss how caring has been investigated, what specific and general findings have derived from these investigations and the needs and concerns that surround its study. This literature review will provide an outlook of the construct of caring and how it applies to education. The review will cover the following areas: defining care; ethical care; and caring and students of African descent.

Defining Care

The concept of care is not new. “As human beings we want to care and to be cared for. Caring is important in itself” (Noddings, 1984, p. 7). Caring can be developed through personality as well as through influences, through acceptance and memberships as well as through a sense of security and feelings of support (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995). We need to develop an operational definition of caring and “understand how a focus on caring behavior may affect various outcomes for young people” (p. 719). Scholars from various disciplines have recognized the struggles in conforming to a multidisciplinary construct to describe caring teacher-student encounters (Diero, 1996; Rogers & Webb, 1991). Rogers and Webb stated, “the process of definition is particularly important; caring [having] been relatively ill-defined in the context of education” (p. 177).

Edmonds (1992) saw that a multidisciplinary definition of caring is difficult to construct, because the term “caring has had no accepted place in psychological literature” (p. 10). The literature does suggest that a language limitation has blocked agreement on a definition of teacher care, even while educational and psychological scholars concur that caring and supportive relationships among teachers and their students could enhance students’ cognitive growth and school success (Goldstein, 1997; Pianta, 1999, 2004).

Educators and researchers concur that care shares a key theme, a belief in how humans should interact with one another (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2005). Students feel that caring teachers are those who extend their help, allow them to have a voice, and don’t criticize them in a negative way in front of their peers. Caring teachers create bonds with their students, stimulate them, are sincerely involved in their learning, and supply them with extra help (Nelson & Bauch, 1997). Furthermore, when teachers care for their students, they listen to their concerns, set achievable goals, have high expectations, and sincerely give of their time (Toliver, 1993). In addition, Thompson (1998) states, “Caring means bringing about justice for the next generation, and justice means creating the kinds of conditions under which all people can flourish” (p. 533).

Mayeroff (1971) views caring as helping another to evolve and actualize, “as a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship” (p. 4). Furthermore, Mayeroff insists, “Caring requires devotion and if and/or when devotion breaks down, caring breaks down” (p. 5).

Beane (1990) states,

To care about others means that we attempt to see beyond the 'desirability' of (our) particular feelings or aspirations to understand how particular people come to want what they want, to be who they are, and to behave as they do. It also means that we are concerned about their sense of well-being and our part in maintaining or improving their overall comfort and happiness. When we care about others, we do not simply act for people as objects' of our care, but with them as mutual 'subjects' in the human experience. (p. 62)

Although these explanations suggest that care has multiple meanings for different researchers, educators and students, Rogers and Webb (1991) concisely state that

The lack of a coherent definition of caring does not indicate a lack of understanding or knowledge about what caring is, or ought to be, rather it reflects our inability to describe that understanding. Our knowledge of caring is tacit; it is implicit in action. In other words, although we have difficulty defining it, we know it when we see it. (p. 177)

This conclusion may be certain since all definitions of caring share several beliefs. These beliefs include the treatment, interests, and looking out for others. For the purpose of this study, I will use the definition of care as stated by Siddle Walker (1993), "the direct attention an individual gives to meet the psychological, sociological, and academic needs of another individual or individuals" (p. 65). This definition encompasses the relationships between caring, teaching, and learning.

Ethical Care

Mayeroff (1971) emphasizes that caring allows one to feel at rest in the world, and be at peace in a particular place in society. An ethic of care causes one to be centered, and feel integrated. Mayeroff states, “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, it to help him grow and actualize himself” (p. 1). Mayeroff views care as a process, similarly to a kinship that seeks time and trust and generosity to grow.

Mayeroff states:

But in order to care I must understand the other’s needs and I must be able to respond properly to them.... To care for someone, I must know many things. I must know, for example, who the other is, what his powers and limitations are, what his needs are, and what is conducive to his growth.

(p. 19)

“Caring is not always easy; it is sometimes frustrating and rarely easy” (p. 88).

With this understanding, Mayeroff (1971) asserts, “The teacher needs the student, just as the student needs the teacher (p. 40). Mayeroff acknowledges both the consideration of caring for the other, and the possibility for self-actualization through the act of caring.

In his own words, Mayeroff states what it “feels like” to be cared for. For those who interact with students in various educational settings, his words are very appropriate.

What is “being with” like from the point of view of the one cared for when he realizes he is being cared for? When the other is with me, I feel I am not alone, I feel understood, not in some detached way but because I feel he knows what it is like to be me. I realize that he wants to see me as I

am, not in order to pass judgment on me, but to help me. I do not have to conceal myself by trying to appear better than I am. (p. 55)

Noddings (1992) states that, “the need for care in our present culture is acute” (p. xi). Noddings informs teachers that, “Students will do things for people they like and trust. They listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter” (p. 36). According to Noddings (1992, 2005), one of the most challenging tasks for educators is to help their students learn how to receive and accept care. With the change in family structure in our society, many of our children were not taught this skill at home. In order for our children to learn, grow and feel cared for, they must be helped to feel that they have a “safe place” with their teacher (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Students need to know that their teacher will not pass judgment on them for making mistakes, or being confused.

Noddings (1992) realizes that:

We live in an age troubled by social problems that force us to reconsider what we do in schools. Too many of us think that we can improve education merely by designing a better curriculum, finding and implementing a better form of instruction, or instituting a better form of classroom management. (p. 173)

These attempts have failed. Instead, Noddings (1992) suggests that teachers be cared for and empowered so that they will pass it on to their students. For Noddings, “Classrooms should be places in which students can legitimately act on a rich variety of purposes, in

which wonder and curiosity are alive, in which students and teachers live together and grow” (p. 12).

Noddings advises educational leaders that

care must be taken seriously as a major purpose of schools;... that caring for students is fundamental in teaching and that developing people with a strong capacity for care is a major objective, recognizing that the ethic of care should be powerful in guiding policy. (p. 678)

With this in mind, it is apparent that teachers have moral purpose to not only care for their students but to guide them in creating their capacity to care (Noddings, 1992).

According to Lipsitz (1995),

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the presence or absence of caring determines everything relational in schools: what, how, and whom we teach and discipline; why and how we group students and organize the school day; ... and myriad other policies. (p. 686)

Thoughtfully designed curriculum and carefully planned daily procedures support thought and conceptual development of caring. With this type of climate, students take a part in developing a caring culture in their school.

Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995) discovered that an ethic of care was central to the education of elementary school students. The authors spent a year in an urban elementary school (K-5), which served 307 students, where 65% of the students were of African descent from low-SES families and 35% of the students were of European descent from middle to upper class families. Of the 22 teachers and 8 teacher assistants

that make up the staff, two teachers were the focus of this study. The two teachers were a second grade teacher of African descent named Pam, and a fourth grade teacher of European descent named Martha.

Pam was a 25-year veteran teacher who organized her “instruction around a series of collective rituals in a style once common in segregated African-American schools” (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, p. 681). Martha was a 15-year veteran teacher who organized her classroom around learning centers and centered on individualization. Both teachers were considered the best at their school, even though their teaching styles were different.

From classroom observations the authors “learned that caring is central to education. It is the glue that binds teachers and students together and makes life in classrooms meaningful” (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, p. 681). The authors also discovered that though their teaching styles were different, both Pam and Martha shared similar characteristics of care. Both teachers accepted the responsibility for their students, did not give up on their students including the difficult ones, fostered a nurturing environment where students were able to take risks, encouraged cooperative learning through mixed-gender/race groups, and were aware that caring enhanced social skills and self-worth in students which fosters academic development. The authors concluded that “without interpersonal connections a teacher may have subject matter knowledge and the technical ability to teach, but the opportunities for real learning will be scarce, because what the teacher does not have is the student” (p. 683).

Toliver (1993) studied caring teacher behaviors and found that when students are in an environment where they are actively engaged in class projects, there is a reduction in disciplinary problems. Bulach, Brown, and Potter (1998) also studied caring teacher behaviors. The authors centered on the behaviors teachers felt developed caring learning communities in their personal classrooms, and found that the act of listening was the most important behavior that teachers can use to show that they care.

Wentzel (1997) studied students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors. The author identified the characteristics of pedagogical care in the setting of a middle school. The pedagogical care addresses "five dimensions of effective care giving as suggested by Noddings (1992, 2005) and the family socialization literature: modeling, democratic communication styles, expectations for behaviors, rule setting and nurturance." The author studied the relationship of caring teachers to adolescents' motivation to achieve academically with students' social outcomes, and how students viewed pro-social and antisocial behaviors in their peers. The two questions that led her study were: To what extent do adolescents' perceptions of caring teachers predict efforts to achieve positive social and academic outcomes at school?; and How do middle school students characterize a caring, supportive teacher?

The study was in a suburban middle school (grades 6th-8th) located in a mid-Atlantic state with a student population of 375. For three years the author shadowed 248 students, 125 boys and 123 girls who were predominately of European descent. Wentzel (1997) findings concluded that the perceptions that students had of their teachers were

definitely connected to their academic achievement, their social responsibility goals, and their pro-social behaviors.

Caring and Students of African Descent

Graham (1989) thinks “much of the chronic failure of Black and Afro- American students can be understood as reflecting problems in engagement” (p. 40). Furthermore, she states that “far too many minority children perform poorly in school not because they lack basic intellectual capacities or specific learning skills but because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, have a lack of interest, and or give up in the face of potential failure” (p. 42).

In dealing with students of African descent, just about everything a teacher does in his/her classroom affects learning- either in a positive way or a negative way (Ford, 1996). This includes the manner in which knowledge is presented, the use of various activities by teachers, the ways teachers communicate with their students, the amount of control/ choice granted to students, and the chance of students working alone or in groups (McCombs, 1998). Research indicates that students of African descent are taught best in classrooms that are suited to mitigate social alienation and have high expectations, standards, and teaching strategies that accommodate learning information and cognitive processing differences (Shade, 1994). Knowing how students of African descent collaborate and learn in the classroom is crucial in understanding how teachers care for students.

Several scholars, Delpit (1995, 2006), Irvine (2002), and Foster (1997), focused on teachers of African descent or teachers who were successful with students of African

descent and summed up that teaching practices should be reflective of the students.

Additionally, these scholars noted that the cultural relevant teaching practices of teachers of African descent and others are indications to the academic success of students of African descent.

One theoretical framework constructed from the practices of teachers who were successful with students of African descent is at times referred to as cultural responsive, cultural congruency, or culturally relevant teachings. Ladson-Billings (1994), in her influential work, *The Dreamkeepers*, instituted that “the primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a ‘relevant Black personality’” that allows students of African descent to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African- American culture (p. 17).

In Foster’s (1997) study, 20 teachers were interviewed about their experiences teaching students of African descent. Of these teachers, six of them taught in both segregated and desegregated schools and were referred to as “elders”. These teachers who were featured in her book, exemplified “some of the class, age, and geographic diversity within the Black community” (p. xxiii). These teachers observed and experienced the various types of treatment that students of African descent encountered during school desegregation.

The teachers in this study all agreed that upon entering the desegregated schools, the caring and nurturing environments that they experienced in the Black segregated schools vanished.

Irvine and Irvine (1983) assert that when schools began the process of desegregation, student- teacher relationships dramatically changed. They state that there is evidence to suggest that prior to segregation, Black teacher expectancy for successful pupil performance pivoted on the interactive effect of pupil ability and social class factors. The advent of desegregated schools introduced the element of race as a confounding variable in the learning environment. For Black children, desegregated schools and teaching staffs necessarily meant that teacher-pupil interaction relationships changed from an essential two-way interaction, i.e., pupil ability and class, toward a three-way interplay of pupil ability-social class-race relation (p. 413).

Irvine and Irvine (1983) state that an altered pupil-teacher relationship was one of the outcomes of desegregation. According to Jackson-Minot (2002), “this strong teacher-student relationship had historically been the foundation for African American students’ high academic aspirations; unfortunately, this relationship was adversely affected in the wake of school desegregation” (p. 21).

Nelson and Bauch (1997) studied the perceptions that secondary students of African descent had about caring teachers at ten Catholic and ten public high schools in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Washington, DC. The authors compared their differences in perceptions of caring in the Catholic schools to the public magnet schools. In this study, 88 high school seniors (42 males and 46 females, evenly distributed between both sets of schools) were interviewed.

Several themes of caring teacher behaviors surfaced from the data. According to Nelson and Bauch (1997), the themes include encouragement from teachers to be

successful, teachers establishing relationships with their students, teachers pushing their students to their limits academically, teachers expecting the best from their students, teachers actively involving their students in learning, teachers caring about their students' personal and academic well-being, and teachers giving their students extra help when needed. Of these themes, encouragement from teachers to be successful ranked number one among the students interviewed. Additional findings from the study suggested that the students from the Catholic schools were more used to receiving individual attention than were students from the public schools.

In a study conducted by Van Galen (1993) in a Catholic school known for its caring environment, Van Galen found that caring for students of African descent was different from caring for students of European descent. In this Catholic school, 80% of the students were of European descent, 20% of the students were of African descent, and the majority of the teachers were of European descent. The teachers in this school were hired based on their capacity to care for children.

In an 18-month span as a participant observer, Van Galen (1993) held individual and focus group interviews with staff members, parents, and students. She also spent over 150 hours observing different classrooms, and attended most of the after school activities.

Van Galen (1993) discovered that although the staff members claimed that they cared for and supported their students; they displayed subtle racist and sexist undertones that undermined caring. Most of these undertones were unnoticed by both students and staff.

One of the most apparent indications of dissimilar treatment between students of African descent and students of European descent was tracking. Very few students of African descent were in the higher- tracked classes, and in an interview, a student of African descent stated that students of African descent were in the lower tracked classes because they did not try hard enough. A lot of the classrooms in this school exhibited sexist and racist innuendos. The higher-tracked classes received more student-teacher interaction than the lower-tracked classes, and both male and female students of African descent received less attention than females of European descent with male students of European descent receiving the most. The teachers at this school really believed that they cared for and supported all of their students equally. However, this study revealed a different picture of the interactions between teachers and students of African descent.

Beck and Newman (1996) studied aspects of care in an urban high school located in South Central, Los Angeles and found that students, teachers, and administrators felt safe and happy inside their school. Sizemore (1981) conducted a study to determine if students of African descent and students of European descent viewed teacher characteristics in similar ways and found that students of European descent preferred organized, systematic, and stimulating teacher behaviors while students of African descent preferred teachers who were warm, nice and helpful. Bosworth (1995) compared students of African descent and students of European descent perceptions of caring teachers and found that students of African descent and students of European descent viewed caring in different ways. Hayes, Ryan, and Zsellar (1994) also examined diverse views of caring teacher behaviors by students of African descent and students of

European descent and found that students of African descent centered on pedagogical issues of care while the students of European descent centered on the interpersonal dimensions of care. Dempsey and Noblit (1993) conducted a study at Rougemont Elementary School, a school where 100% of the students were of African descent, where the focus was centered on building caring environments where care was visible in the expectations parents had for their children and the teachers. Dempsey and Noblit (1993) found that caring operated on several levels at this school and in the surrounding community. Siddle Walker (1993, 1996) investigated a “good” segregated school, and that interpersonal caring had well - founded implications for influencing motivation to achieve.

This chapter reviewed research studies and literature from various subject areas in order to define, discuss and describe the construct of caring. This chapter discussed how caring has been investigated, the specific and general findings that have derived from the investigations and the needs and concerns that surround its study. This review featured articles that discussed teachers and students’ perceptions of care. The overall findings suggests that if teachers demonstrate caring behaviors, like listening to their students and setting high standards for achievement, the possibility of student development is high.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent defined and practiced care in their classrooms. These women's narratives of their teaching experiences were analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practiced care with their students and the values they imparted to them. This study was limited to the experiences that these teachers had with low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were:

How do women elementary teachers of African descent (grades K- 8) who teach in an urban school serving predominately students of African descent, and low-SES define care and describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

- How do these women elementary teachers of African descent define care?
- How did these women elementary teachers of African descent develop their belief systems for caring?
- How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

Research Methodology and Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using phenomenological approach to analyzing the interviews. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on how “people describe things and experience them through their senses” (Patton, 1990). Creswell (1998) stated the phenomenological lens “describes the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). He further adds, in phenomenology “researchers search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning” (p. 52).

A qualitative design was best suited for this research because it sufficiently addressed the guiding questions by obtaining a great deal of information via in-depth interviews. The researcher did not conduct classroom observations. The perspectives and perceptions of women teachers of African descent that surfaced from these narrations were the focal point of this study. The intent of the study was not to observe how teachers practiced ‘care’ with their students, but for teachers to define and describe in-depth how they believed they practiced care with their students. Examining teacher beliefs and thoughts about care can inform future studies focused on observing and quantifying care in the classroom. Qualitative studies are often used as a foundation for developing a methodology to use to observe or measure a phenomenon.

One of the greatest strengths of oral narratives is in the penetration of the subjective reality of the individual; it allows the individual to speak for herself (Munro,

1998). Women of African descent experience a world much different from those who are not of African descent and female. Etter-Lewis (1993) states, “The notion that African American women are an invisible group on the sidelines that easily can be combined with other groups is a convenient fiction that conceals their power and importance” (p. xvii). In the research literature conducted by researchers of European descent, women teachers of African descent often are portrayed as uncaring, strict, inadequate, and unable to relate to their working class students. Rendered invisible, the thoughts, life experiences, and practices that define the experiences of women teachers of African descent are severely limited and misrepresented (Foster, 1990). The telling of their lived experiences gives them the authority to express in public what has been expressed many times privately around the kitchen table (Collins, 1998). Etter-Lewis (1993) states:

Oral narrative, sometimes referred to as oral history is a dynamic, interactive methodology that preserves an individual’s own words and perspectives in a particular, authentic way. Oral narrative is both a process and product that mediates the boundaries between history, language, and literature. It is a collaborative transaction that reconstructs a life once lived; and it is a text that makes relevant to the present metaphors of a narrator’s past. (p. xii).

An oral narrative offers a personal prospective of a narrator’s interpretation of his or her own life and thinking. Oral narratives may provide opportunities for deeper relations with others and could serve as a springboard for ethical action. Understanding the narratives and contextual dimensions of human actors can lead to new insight,

compassionate judgment, and the creation of shared knowledge and meanings that can inform professional practice (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Michele Foster (1997) writing in the introduction of her book, *Black Teachers on Teaching* states,

Life history and the associated techniques or oral history and personal narratives are forms of analysis that can bring the experiences of Blacks, including teachers, into view in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences. Life history not only provides material about individual lives but also offers the opportunity to explore how individual lives are shaped by society. Life history research offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives of individuals to society. (pp. xx- xxi)

In their experiences as teachers, women teachers of African descent, tell only part of their story. As teachers, women teachers of African descent bring into the classroom the sum of their experiences within the larger context of society. Learning about the experiences of other women teachers of African descent is something that should be explored, because it illustrates how they understand the role of care in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. Since women of African descent are so diverse, they can benefit from studies that examine their perceptions in relation to care and education.

McLaren (1995) illustrated the importance of narratives when he states, “narratives give our lives meaning; we need to understand what those narratives are and how they have come to exert such influence on us” (p. 89). Narratives offer us hope,

motivation, and structure for insight. Narratives provide the means for transforming the burden of knowing to the act of telling. One of the most fundamental acts to human understanding is the translation of an experience into a story (McLaren, 1995). It is through the telling of their stories or “breaking silence” that these women teachers of African descent, that were interviewed in this study, were able to name their own realities, pay tribute to their lived experiences, both positive and negative, and empower themselves by giving new meaning to their own individual experiences (Collins, 1998). This could be a challenge for some women teachers of African descent to reflect on some of the mistakes or negative experiences that they have encountered as it may resurface some old ill feelings, or just remind them of something that they would rather have forgotten. For some women teachers of African descent, it may also be a challenge for them to openly discuss a time or times when they did not have a caring attitude or show care toward a student for whatever particular reason. Most people do not like admitting that they acted badly or inappropriately in certain situations especially when it is not what is expected of them, which is the case of all educators as we are expected to be caring.

Participants

The participants in this study were teachers from a Midwestern urban district. There were 10 participants in this study. The participants were females of African descent, whose ages range from 27-46. The researcher obtained permission of the school district and school principal to conduct research at this school. All of the participants in this study came from this school. The researcher worked at this school and had some familiarity with the school, and the teachers in the building; however, the researcher was

no longer a staff member of this school. The researcher recruited participants for this study by presenting the study at a teacher's meeting where the scope and details of the study was explained. The researcher met with the potential participants to explain the study and the informed consent form. The researcher explained to the potential participants that participation was voluntary. A questionnaire was given to teachers who wished to participate after the study was explained. Questionnaire packets were given to willing participants containing the informed consent form, the questionnaire, and an envelope addressed to the researcher. The teachers were asked to complete and return the consent and questionnaire the day after the meeting. The researcher was outside of the school's main office at the end of the next school day to collect each completed questionnaire personally if they had not been turned in to the school clerk in the office previously. The completed questionnaires and consent forms were separated and stored separately in the researcher's home in a locked file cabinet. There was no compensation in any way offered for subjects' participation.

Confidentiality

Every research participant in a study has a right to privacy and the expectation the data will be kept confidential at all times. The right to privacy and confidentiality should be disclosed to research participants prior to the start of a study. Research participants have a right to expect respect for autonomy, trust, scientific integrity, and fidelity. Every research participant has the right to expect there will be no chance of being identified by name at any time, before, during, or after the study. Data was reported in an aggregated format. The study was explained to potential participants at a meeting and the privacy

and ethical issues were also addressed as well as explaining that their participation was voluntary. Creswell (2007) suggested the fundamental role for ethical research is to do no harm, including physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm. At the completion of the study, all paper data was shredded in a cross cut shredder. Data was encrypted and stored electronically on a password-protected compact disc. The electronic data was kept in the secure electronic format for a period of one year and the compact disc was shredded at the end of this period of time. Participants were also informed they had the option not to complete the questionnaire; however, their participation was appreciated and made an addition to the study.

There were no personal identification information on the questionnaire forms and they were separated from the consent forms. Identification numbers were randomly assigned to each paper questionnaire. When the surveys were returned to the researcher in an envelope sealed by the participant the consent forms were separated from the surveys and stored for the duration of the study in a separate locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. When the study was completed, the consent forms were destroyed by shredding in a cross cut shredder.

Participation in any research is voluntary as was participation in this study was completely voluntary. Participants were invited to participate but no coercion occurred. Creswell (2007) noted early researchers either minimized or ignored the harm breaches of confidentiality and privacy could have on participants involved in research studies. The current study did not involve any protected classes. However, the same due diligence was applied through the study.

Setting

The setting for this study took place at a public elementary school, located in a large Midwestern city. The school had a student population of 589, with a pre-school to eighth grade instructional program. Student enrollment was 97% African descent, 2% Hispanic, 1% European descent, and 90.5% were from low-SES families. The school's current rate of attendance stood at 92.8% with a student mobility rate of 39.7%. Student graduation percentage was 90%. This public elementary school also provided services to exceptional students.

Supported by a racially mixed instructional staff of 40, and a career service staff of 15, students "reached for success" with a back to basics approach to learning. Heavy emphasis was placed on science, homogeneous grouping and grade level instruction. Programs included an IBM computer lab with Internet access, creative arts, physical education, library and science lab. Students at this public elementary school participated in a strong instructional program and extensive extra curricular activities. The school also maintained a number of partnerships with companies and institutions in the surrounding areas.

Instrumentation

Three data sources were utilized to understand the perceptions of care held by these women elementary teachers of African descent. The data was collected through a questionnaire, interviews, and various documents about the participants and the school.

Questionnaire

In order to obtain preliminary information pertaining to these women elementary teachers of African descent perception of care, a questionnaire was administered. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain a preliminary view of how teachers perceive themselves in their roles as caring teachers. Also, to learn how these teachers defined and think they practiced care in their daily interactions with students. If these teachers consented to a follow up interview, the researcher used their responses to the questionnaire as a guide for conducting each interview. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Interviews

In-depth face-to-face interviews were a crucial part of this study. With face-to-face interviews the researcher was able to collect a high volume of data (Whyte, 2007). Also, because these interviews were conducted face-to-face, the researcher had the chance to motivate the participants in order to gather more information. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to clarify questions if participants had a difficult time interpreting the questions and it allowed the researcher to observe the non-verbal actions of the participants while they were answering the questions (Gorden, 1970). A semi structured interview protocol was used to uncover how women elementary teachers of African descent who teach in urban schools serving predominately students of African descent and low-SES define and practice care in their classrooms. Semi structured interviews were “guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored,

and neither the exact wording nor the order of questions were determined ahead of time (Merriam, 1998, 2002). A copy of the interview protocol is included in the appendix.

Document Analysis

During the interviews, the participants may have referred to certain historical instances, curricular resources or educational programs that affected their teaching practices and styles. The researcher examined public documents such as periodicals, minutes from local school council meetings, and curricula when referenced by a teacher and relevant to the study.

Data Collection/Procedure

The researcher obtained permission of the school district and school principal to conduct research at this school. The researcher was allowed to present her study at a teacher's meeting. The researcher met with the potential participants to explain the study, and the consent form. The researcher explained to the potential participants that participation was voluntary. For those who wished to participate, by signing the letter of consent, a questionnaire was given. The researcher collected the questionnaires the following day, where they were coded and stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. The questionnaires were stored separately from the consent forms. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get an in depth look at how teachers viewed themselves in their roles as caring teachers. Also, to learn how teachers defined and practiced care in their daily interactions with students. The researcher used the subjects' responses to the questionnaire as a guide for conducting each interview.

Interviews were recorded using an audio voice recorder. Field notes were taken during the interview. The researcher conducted the interviews using the attached semi-structured interview design. The interviews took approximately 45 minutes contingent upon the responses of the subjects. In order to develop trust between the researcher and the participants, the interviews were held in areas that the participants deemed comfortable, where the researcher and the participant were able to converse freely; their classrooms or another location of their choice.

The data was recorded using an audio voice recorder. Only the researcher had access to this data. Participants' identity was masked by a code. All audio-tapes from the interviews were kept in the researcher's locked file cabinet coded with a label indicating the date of the interview and a number for each participant instead of names. A professional outside transcriber was hired to transcribe the audiotapes, who secured the tapes and transcripts in order to assure confidentiality. The participants' information remained under lock and was strictly confidential with the professional transcriber. After transcription, the professional transcriber returned all data to the researcher and the researcher kept the tapes and transcripts in a locked file cabinet. Pseudonyms were used in any material generated as a result of this research. The researcher examined the transcripts and documents by categorizing the data in to themes, searching for similarities, and examining the information to find out what is meaningful to publish to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researcher will destroy the data after completing the doctoral degree.

As stated on the consent form, in the event a case of child abuse is revealed during an interview, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality.

Data Analysis/Procedure

The raw data collected was transcribed from the taped interviews. Drawing on the work of Etter-Lewis (1993) the handling of the raw data was divided into three stages. The first stage involved the transcription of as many linguistic features as possible. This included actual utterances as well as conversation filters. Written transcriptions were checked against the actual taped interviews. The second stage involved putting the transcribed text into chronological order. The last stage was reorganizing the transcribed transcripts into a coherent story with emphasis on arranging the information to effectively describe the various events in the narrator's life as clearly as possible.

The transcripts were arranged in chronological order beginning with the teacher with the most seniority in order to place the narratives in a historical, social, and political context. The stories were then analyzed according to the major themes emerging from the interview responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter provides information on each of the 10 participants interviewed for this study through brief biographies of the participants. The research questions posed for the study are presented and the data collected from interviews with participants was analyzed in relation to the guiding research questions.

Interview Participants

Each of the 10 teachers interviewed for the study on caring provided information about themselves on a personal level and the researcher's observations were also incorporated into the biographies presented here. Table 1 presents the aggregated and individual information on the participants in this study. The participating teachers were between 27 and 46 years of age ($M=38.5$) and had between one and 20 years of teaching experience ($M=10.1$ years). They had been at their current school between one and eight years ($M=5.3$ years). Of the 10 teachers, eight had earned Masters' degrees, and two had completed doctorates. There were two Kindergarten teachers and two seventh grade teachers. The only grade not represented in the group of teachers participating in the study was second. Interviews were conducted during November and December 2008 and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Table 1 presents descriptive data on the teachers.

Table 1

Interview Participants' Demographic Information

Subject*	Age	Grade Taught	Completed Education	Years of Teaching Experience	Years at School
Kyra	40	Kindergarten	Doctorate	10	6
Jasmine	45	4 th	Masters	19	8
Angel	44	6 th	Doctorate	18	7
Kendra	33	7 th	Masters (2)	12	6
Michelle	46	3 rd	Masters	20	8
Anita	46	1 st	Masters	5	5
Amber	38	7 th	Masters	10	6
Shanta	27	1 st	Masters	1	1
Melanie	36	Kindergarten	Masters	3	3
Ashley	30	5 th	Masters	3	3

*All names are pseudonyms

Teacher Biographies

Kyra. Kyra is a Kindergarten teacher. She is 40 years old and has a Doctorate in Education. Kyra has 10 years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for six years. Kyra is married with three children, one son and two daughters. Her son is in college and both of her daughters are in elementary school. She is a Christian woman, and enjoys going to church. Not only is Kyra a Kindergarten teacher, she is also a Sunday school teacher at her church. She enjoys being around children. Kyra enjoys spending time with her husband and three children. Every Friday they have “Family Night,” where they order pizza or Chinese food and play various board games. She is a firm believer that education for children starts at home.

Jasmine. Jasmine is a fourth grade teacher. She is 45 years old and has a Masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Jasmine has 19 years of teaching

experience, and has been on staff at the school for eight years. Jasmine is married with two children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter is in college out of state, and her son is in high school. Jasmine enjoys spending time with her family and cooking. She regularly hosts family gatherings at her home. Laughing, talking and eating a good meal with her family is what makes her happy.

Angel. Angel is a sixth grade teacher. She is 44 years old and has a Doctorate in Education. Angela has 18 years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for seven years. Angel is divorced with two children. She has two daughters, one in high school and the other in elementary school. Angel enjoys reading and spending time with her daughters. Her daughters are avid readers, and love going to Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstores. Angel believes that reading books “opens a child’s mind to endless possibilities.” Many of the books in Angel’s classroom library are books her children have read.

Kendra. Kendra is a seventh grade teacher. She is 33 years old and has two Masters’ degrees; one in Curriculum and Instruction and the other in Reading. Kendra has 12 years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for six years. Kendra is married with two children. She has two daughters, one in pre-school and the other in junior high school. Kendra enjoys spending time with her family and shopping.

Michelle. Michelle is a third grade teacher. She is 46 years old and has a Masters degree in Education. Michelle has 20 years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for eight years. Michelle is divorced with one child. She has a son in college, and he attends a state university. Michelle enjoys sports and spending time

with her son. She is an avid sports fan, and enjoys attending college football and basketball games with her son.

Anita. Anita is a first grade teacher. She is 35 years old and has a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education. Anita has five years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for five years. Anita is married with one child. She has an infant son, who is the joy of her life. Anita enjoys spending time with her husband watching movies and playing with her son. Anita reads to her son every night, his favorite book is *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown.

Amber. Amber is a seventh grade teacher. She is 38 years old and has a Masters of Arts in Teaching. Amber has 10 years of teaching experience, and has been on staff at the school for six years. Amber is engaged with one child. She has a daughter in a private junior high school. Amber enjoys spending time with her daughter and her soon to be husband. Amber and her daughter love to sew. Amber is teaching her daughter how to sew and both love the experience.

Shanta. Shanta is a first grade teacher. She is 27 years old and has a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education. Shanta has one year of teaching experience and has been on staff at the school for one year. Shanta is single and has no children. Shanta enjoys traveling with her friends and family. Some of the places she has traveled include Canada, Hawaii, Paris, London, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. Her favorite vacation was the family trip to Ghana. Shanta enjoys sharing her vacation pictures with her students. She wants her student s to know that they can travel the world just like their teacher.

Melanie. Melanie is a Kindergarten teacher. She is 36 years old and has a Masters Degree in Education. Melanie has three years of teaching experience and has been on the staff at the school for three years. Melanie is married and has no children. She enjoys spending time with her husband traveling and watching old movies. Melanie also has a host of nieces and nephews that always find their way to her home.

Ashley. Ashley is a fifth grade teacher. She is 30 years old and has a Masters Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Ashley has three years of teaching experience and has been on the staff at the school for three years. Ashley is single and has no children. She enjoys playing sports and shopping with her friends.

Data Analysis Process

There were three guiding research questions posed for the study on caring. They are as follows:

RQ1: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent define care?

RQ2: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent develop their belief systems for caring?

RQ3: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

The interview protocol developed for the study included eight questions and each interview question was matched to one of the guiding research questions as can be seen in Table 2. The content of each interview question was sufficiently different to make the responses to the interview questions unique and each interview question is presented separately within the research questions.

Table 2

Research Questions and Associated Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. How do these women elementary teachers of African descent define care?	1. What does it mean to care for someone?
2. How do these women elementary teachers of African descent develop their belief systems for caring?	2. Describe the person who most influenced you to be caring. 4. How does your gender affect how you express care for students? 5. Did you experience caring teachers? What impact did this have on your life?
3. How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practice care in their classrooms?	3. How is the concept of care significant to your work with students? 6. What relationship, if any, do you see between teaching and caring? 7. How important do you think care is in a school setting? 8. In the questionnaire, you mentioned _____ ways in which you demonstrate care as a teacher. Can you give me some examples that illustrate these types of care? Why do these stand out to you?

The data was collected through interviews and the content of the interviews was transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. The data was read several times prior to any

analytic coding taking place. Since the responses to the interview questions tended to be to the point and not very long, the responses were grouped into categories of responses. The categories were defined and parameters set for what other data could be placed in the category. Categories were defined and definitions revised as necessary through a process of continual constant comparison. If a new category was needed, it was developed. The data for each interview question was analyzed separately to preserve the voices of the teachers as they responded to each interview question. Each teacher was asked the same question in the same order during the interviews. The responses to the interview questions were concise and not as long as might have been expected; however the teachers did answer each question completely as it applied to them and their teaching in the classroom.

Results

Defining Care

The first research question posed by the study asked: How do African American female elementary teachers define care? Ten teachers at one school participated and responded to the question about defining care and there were similarities and differences in their definitions. Teacher's definitions were grouped into three categories including understanding, concern, and acting. Each category will be explained and described.

Understanding. The understanding category of the teachers included understanding student's physical, emotional, and academic needs in order to understand their students. Five of the teachers included understanding students in their responses. Michelle felt it was important to have "time to do it, and not saying you don't have time,

but making the time to care for them.” Understanding to her took time and she thought sympathy was important. Jasmine thought it was important in understanding to “take their situations” into account in order to understand. Kyra felt caring involved showing “genuine understanding and concern for them [students].” Angel felt it was important to show “acknowledgement for people, for others feelings.” Understanding to the teachers involved making an effort to be aware of their students’ situations and knowing their students’ awareness in order to care in a sympathetic and empathic way for the children in their classrooms.

Concern. The concern category addressed areas where four of the teachers felt they needed or exhibited concern about their students. Teachers thought it was important for children to know teachers were personally concerned about them and that teachers were supervising them and looking out for their needs. Angel defined caring as, “To show sincere concern or compassion for someone.” While Anita felt caring meant, “to be concerned about their well-being, their health, and their overall status.” Amber mentioned similar ideas stating, “just actually having concern for their well being, their present state whatever it is, their health, their mood, you know their needs, just you know being involved with their well being or having some concern about another person’s well being.” Concern was also demonstrated by teachers as not being judgmental about students in their classes.

Acting. Each of the 10 teachers included some aspect of acting in their definitions of caring. The “acting” category addressed what teachers actually do, actions they might take in caring for their students. Michelle talked about, “Whenever humanly

possible [caring] and having time to do it. And not saying that you don't have the time, but making the time to care for them." It was important not only to care for students, but to make the time in their busy lives to demonstrate caring for students. Teachers mentioned taking care of someone as their definition of caring while others mentioned being able to "steer them in the right direction" or helping students as a way of doing or demonstrating caring. Kyra talked about how, "defining care means to help that person, to meet their needs or to help the person to meet their own needs." Ashley thought caring was "basically finding out what can you do for them, what are they lacking in, what are the steps that you do to help them gain the things that they're lacking in and just looking at the overall person and how to move them from one point to then next." Amber felt caring involved "showing compassion through actions, conversation, the interaction" with students. Other teachers mentioned acknowledging students, giving of one's self, taking the student's feelings and situations into account, and realizing they are people.

Defining caring resulted in a number of different ideas about caring on the part of the teachers participating in the study. Their ideas were summarized into three categories: understanding, concern, and acting. Teachers also talked about things they did to demonstrate caring and doing for students. Jasmine said,

"I chose teaching as the fact that I care so much for the children in the neighborhood where the poverty level is 99%, students receiving free and reduced lunches. ...One of the things that drove me most was the ability to show them love and to show them that there are people other than in your

home and in society that care for you and love you.One of the things that you do to show that you care is, you know, a general smile, a hug.”

Belief Systems of Caring

The second research question posed by the study asked: How did African American female elementary teachers develop their belief system for caring? The second interview question (Describe the person who most influenced you to be caring), interview question four (How does your gender affect how you express your care for students?), and the fifth interview question (Did you experience caring teachers? What impact did this have on your life?) were analyzed separately to address the research question about how the participants had developed their belief system for caring.

Caring Mentors

The second interview question asked participants to: Describe the person who most influenced you to be caring. All of the ten teachers participating in the study mentioned at least one if not more than one person affecting their lives and helping them to develop their own system of caring. Teachers mentioned their mothers ($N=8$), fathers ($N=1$), grandfathers ($N=2$), aunts ($N=1$), grandmother ($N=1$), and a teacher ($N=1$). The teachers mentioned many reasons for why they considered particular people to be caring. These individuals provided an example of caring they have carried into their work and adult lives. Michelle talked about how,

your goal and your purpose in life is to serve those who are in need. And if you have that as your mindset, nothing else matters. ...That has always

been a part of my makeup, because of what I saw my parents do, my parents just felt that they were supposed to be around to assist people.

Caring was a part of her family's life. Having kids spend the weekend, helping kids get through school, and bringing kids to the house so they would know someone cared about them. And, her parents were not looking for thanks; they just thought it was the right thing to do. Amber felt there was no one her mother did not care about, "she cared about the world." Shanta mentioned that her mother lived by the Golden Rule but also felt in this day and age some people do not care about themselves and can not care about others or it is hard for them to care about others.

Most all of the teachers thought their mothers were very caring. Melanie stated, "She is the perfect example of a person that cared." She would talk to kids on the streets and in the neighborhood about how important education was even "if you had a gun right in your hand she would stop and talk to you." Knowing people and being willing to communicate caring with everyone was a trait Melanie's mother demonstrated, lived, and provided an example for her daughter. The teachers felt a caring person was one who was there for them, says the right thing for the moment, cared whether you had an education, or told you that you were loved and appreciated. Caring mothers let their children know how important education was, thought they needed to be prepared, and productive in school.

Ashley talked about how her grandmother was the caregiver in the family taking care of 17 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren. Even though they may not have had a lot of money, she said her grandparents gave "freely of whatever it is that they have." It

did not matter whether it was money or time. Angel talked about how giving and generous her mother was, as well as genuine and sincere. Anita mentioned a teacher from primary school that would come to your house, had no fear walking in the projects, and would knock on the door of students. She said, “he was the type of teacher that really cared about all of the students.” He would tell the young men that they were African-Americans that they could make it, and it didn’t matter where you came from.” This teacher influenced her to become a teacher but also to be really concerned about her students.

The teachers participating in the study found much to emulate in their choices of caring mentors and a number of different ways of demonstrating caring. The majority of the caring examples were family members and especially mothers. The caring mentors demonstrated care not only for their own children, but also for many children encouraging them to go to school and do well in school. Michelle noted it was important not only to show you cared and find the time to care as well as demonstrate care on a daily basis. The teachers felt it was important to give freely and generously in caring but also to learn to care for themselves as people. The examples of caring the teachers received also served to inspire many of them to be teachers and to pass this example of caring on in their classrooms as well as in life.

Gender Influence on Caring

The fourth interview question asked teachers: How does your gender affect how you express your care for students? The objective of the question was to determine whether the teachers thought being female affected their ability to care for students. All

of the teachers in the study did think being female did affect their ability or capability to care for students. Comments made by teachers were grouped into three categories: gender specific, mothering influence, and males. Each category is discussed below.

Gender Specific. When asked about being female and how this might affect how they cared for students, nearly all of the teachers ($N=9$) stated gender had a great deal to do with their ability to care. The teachers mentioned being motherly, having emotions, a nurturing mindset, and setting an example. However, one teacher did not think gender had anything to do with caring in the classroom. She talked about her father and grandfather being very caring and nurturing people. She felt it was the person and their ability to be compassionate. Michelle stated, “I think if you have a certain kind of commitment to people, and to others that makes a difference. I don’t think it is gender at all.” She did not believe caring was gender specific at all but person specific and how that person viewed life and responsibility. She also said, “And for my students, I’ve had a lot of kids who have done really great because they knew there was going to be somebody who was going to focus on them.” Michelle is the type of teacher who will be there when the child’s own mother can’t or won’t. She said she has pinned ribbons on kids, purchased uniforms but does things quietly so other children do know and do not single out students so they will not feel out of place.

Mothering Influence. Several of the teachers ($N=6$) mentioned the female’s mothering instinct as a basis for caring. Kendra just thought most women were, “that motherly nurturing type.” She also thought this was why so many primary teachers were women, “you know we hug them, we wipe their tears away, we listen to them when they

have problems. You know we just are caring like that.” Ashley thought, “as a female it’s just part of my nature.” She mentioned coming with a nurturing part and a discipline part and the fact that some students would call her “Ma” thinking this was because the students felt she was doing the same things their parents would do. Melanie felt she was like a mother to her students. “I feel like I have to put some time to get them to do what’s needed.” She thought teachers felt a motherly love of students just like they would for their own children.

Six of the teachers mentioned emotions as a facet of gender contributing to women’s ability to exhibit caring in the classroom. Amber thought being able to exhibit emotions, the way she exhibited them, and showed feelings made them more compassionate. Angel related gender and caring through nurturing but also thought this might “be a general stereotype.” She also said, “women tend to be more nurturing and loving and I think that that has a lot to do with my ability to express my care for my students.” She thought the nurturing came from being a mother and thought females have the motherly nurturing ability. It is interesting teachers associated caring in schools for children with mothering children.

Jasmine talked about how in being an “African American female” caring was just innate. She felt, “It’s in me to show others that we care about what they do, what they say, and how productive they will be in the future.” Her words pointed towards being an example and encouraging students through caring for them. It was interesting how many of the teachers talked about their gender and ethnic group as reasons for innately being able to care for children; it was just in their nature. Anita expressed her relationship to

caring as an African American female through wanting to let “the young women in my class, African American students, know that they can make it or they can survive, cause a lot of students at this particular school are in poverty stricken areas.” Anita demonstrated caring by sharing with students she had come from the same background and had been successful. She also wanted them to know it might be a struggle but she tried “to show them a path that she had to go through to get to where I am today.” Caring, gender and being an African American to her was setting an example. A different type of example than Jasmine’s but nonetheless, a path and example.

Males. Interestingly, two of the teachers also talked about how it might be more difficult for males to demonstrate caring for students and how there might be some problems in demonstrating caring for young boys. Kyra thought caring “poses some challenges though when you’re dealing with male students. Just how do you do this in this day and age, how to do you express caring in a physical way with young children that won’t be controversial or won’t come back to haunt you at a later time.” While she thought caring was just a natural part of life, there may be times when gender is a disadvantage. Shanta was just “happy to be a female ...African American teacher.” She noted students were “very affectionate. All they want to do is hug. They want to hold my hand. Some of them want to kiss me a lot.” She wondered if this would be possible if she were a male, thinking that as a male she might have to be more “standoffish.” She, like other teachers, thought being a female allowed her to really serve African American students in the community.

Did You Experience Caring Teachers?

The fifth interview question asked: Did you experience caring teachers? What impact did this have on your life? All ten of the teachers mentioned one if not more than one teacher they had met who influenced them and their lives by being caring a teacher. They also talked about how this caring teacher(s) influenced their life and their learning. The teachers mentioned elementary (N=5) and high school teachers (N=3) as well as a librarian (N=1), coach (N=1), and a professor (N=1). The responses of the participants were categorized into two categories: caring teachers and non-caring teachers.

Caring Teachers. Caring teachers were those teachers the participants felt influenced them through caring during their educational careers as students. African American teachers also made an impact on some of the participants. Anita talked about being in a school with a predominately African American staff. She said, “I noticed that those teacher they really bonded with the students and they were kind of a no-nonsense, old school type of teachers where you’re here to learn and you’re going to learn.” The teachers there would do whatever it took to get students to school and learning regardless of the student’s home situations. Amber talked about how she was the only African American in her Kindergarten and first grade classes and there was an “8th grade teacher there who made it her personal responsibility to connect with me. You know, I didn’t want to be there because I was the only Black girl. She was like if you need to see somebody Black come and see me.” This teacher was also her teacher in the 8th grade and the principal at her first teaching job. Melanie talked about her parents enrolling her in an all white school and how difficult this was for her. However, there was an African

American teacher that “took the time to make us feel you know comfortable in the school and welcome in the school. And she took time to help us in areas that we needed help in.” African American teachers provided a special link or bond with the teachers when they were students in school.

The teachers participating in the study talked about how caring teachers were good teachers, supportive, got them interested in reading, motivated them, gave them a chance to meet their potential, encouraged them, respected them, and expected them to be all they could be. Michelle talked about how a librarian introduced her to reading by finding interesting books and developing her love of reading. Michelle felt the librarian really cared about her and her academic progress. Angel talked about a coach in high school. She felt the coach respected her and took her under her wing. She got caring from this coach and thought she was looked after during her high school years. Angel, like other teachers in the study, has kept in touch with caring mentors even after they left school. Those teachers the participants considered to be caring were often considered to be “amazing teachers.” Shanta talked about a professor that treated her students like her own kids and the one thing she told us was that research showed that students who are stressed out, don’t learn. ... I can only hope that I can reach my students the way she reached me.”

The study’s participants talked of many things teachers did to demonstrate caring. Kendra spoke of a teacher “pulling me into her office and she had a talk with me because she realized I wasn’t doing my work up to potential. And, I wasn’t really paying attention to her and what not.” This teacher allowed her to make up some of the work and had her

do the work during lunch period and in her office. Ashley mentioned how one of her teachers “taught me so much just being that listening person and just giving me a different aspect than you know as a parent.” Jasmine had a teacher that just kept encouraging her, emphasizing she could do whatever she wanted to if she put her mind to it. Many of the study participants remained in contact with teachers they considered caring and how these caring teachers provided an example of the type of teacher the participants wanted to be.

Non-Caring Teachers. It was interesting to note three of the study’s teachers mentioned the effects of having a non-caring teacher and how this also contributed to their definition of caring in the classroom. The teachers felt students knew when their teachers did not care about them as people and students. Kyra mentioned, “...what impacted me more were teachers who didn’t care. Because I was used to being around teachers that cared, that they portrayed that model to us that all children, even difficult children that they cared about them.” She also talked about how difficult it was being in a classroom where you did not get any feedback, positive or negative. “They just seemed indifferent or as I was saying earlier, didn’t show any empathy and it was hard to learn in a classroom like that, because you didn’t really feel validated at all, or important.” Kyra felt these situations were more significant than being in a caring classroom. Amber also talked about uncaring teachers saying,

“I had the misfortune of having teachers who I felt did not care. Because I don’t know if it was a racial thing, I don’t know, but I felt like I had

teachers that made me feel like hey, you're not special, everybody is the same, ...whatever your personal things are it's not my problem."

These uncaring or uninterested teachers did not impact the participants or the participants did not let them impact their lives or education. But, they did provide an example of what not to do in a classroom. Shanta noted it was so "obvious when teachers don't care and I think kids know that. I really believe that they know very well when a teacher cares, and when a teacher does not care for them, so yeah, I've had teachers who cared deeply for me and some who didn't care at all."

These teachers indicated students knew when a teacher did not care about them and how this affected their education and their perception of themselves. Teachers did not let negative or uncaring teachers affect them but have taken this knowledge into their own current classrooms trying not to be the type of uncaring teachers they encountered in school.

Practicing Care

The third research question asked elementary teachers: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practiced care in their classrooms? Four of the interview questions were included under this guiding research question. They included:

3. How is the concept of care significant to your work with students?
6. What relationship, if any, do you see between teaching and caring?
7. How important do you think care is in school settings?

8. In the questionnaire, you mentioned _____ ways in which you demonstrate care as a teacher. Can you give me some examples that illustrate these types of care? Why do these stand out to you?

Each interview question is addressed separately to present the different aspects of teachers' views on the significance of caring, the relationship between caring and teaching, the importance of caring in a school setting, and individual examples of caring.

Significance of Caring in the Classroom

In talking about the significance of caring in the classroom, the teachers talked about several different aspects of caring when they were asked the interview questions: how the concept of caring was significant in their work with students. All of the teachers participating in the study indicated they thought caring was an essential aspect of teaching. Teacher responses were categorized into two categories: family and knowing students. Each category is presented in the following sections.

Family. Six of the teachers stated they felt the classroom was an extended second family and they had a strong attachment to their students. Kyra stated, "You're a second mom. And in some cases, the first mom. If, you know, you have a child who is coming from a situation that is somewhat dysfunctional, you're really in the role of a parent." She went on to comment, as a teacher of young children, caring was a significant part of the job. Angel thought students would know instinctively whether a teacher was caring or not and if students' perceived their teacher as being caring they would react differently and be more productive. Shanta said, "I think caring for, especially, African American students and making sure that they realize you care is an essential component before you

can even begin to reach or teach them.” Like a family Michelle noted, I don’t want anybody to do anything to them not even the staff and only I can fuss at them. But I always tell them, just because I fuss at you, don’t mean I don’t love you.” Michelle also said, “I have built such a bond with them and their families because I didn’t want them to think that I was just their teacher for that year.”

Knowing Students. Four of the teachers thought you had to know your students and students needed to know someone cared for them as their lives outside of school can be difficult and hard. If students know their teacher is willing to talk to them and listen, then students will do better academically and emotionally. Kendra felt it was important to “know where they are coming from, what they’re dealing with.” Melanie indicated it was important to know kids since, “They need someone that knows that it’s hard for them.” It was important to the teacher to know where their students were coming from, what their lives were like outside school, what their lifestyle was, their struggles. Shanta stated, “Sometimes it’s really shocking, when you can find little kids who come to school angry, who are mad and I believe that many of them have a very good reason for why they are angry.” It was important to know their students and their lives before trying to teach them. Anita thought,

You have to look at the whole child. You have to look at every aspect of that child, the physical, the cognitive, social and emotional and if you just look at what that child is there to learn, you will lose everything else.

You have to care about every aspect, their family how the community influences their education. It all goes together.

Relationship Between Caring and Teaching

Interview question six asked about: What relationship, if any, do you see between teaching and caring. All of the teachers participating in this study felt there was a relationship between caring and teaching. They thought the two went “hand in hand” and were the same. Amber said,

I've tried not to care. I don't think it's possible. Sometimes I wish I didn't care, I just don't think it's possible. I don't think I could come to a place everyday and see the same faces, and the same students and the same children from whatever grade they're in and just not be involved.... It's almost like you can't put them up for adoption if you wanted to.

Shanta talked about how caring meant someone you look after, someone you supervise or keep your eye on. Angel thought when teachers cared about students the students would do better and be successful in school and life. Kyra thought effective teaching was very much about being able to care about your students so they come to trust you. She also said, “I think that aspect has probably been more important than any to show them that I care about you.” Jasmine thought caring came from the heart and was something within teachers. Students need to know they are cared for in order to leave their outside lives outside and learn in the classroom.

Anita talked about the baggage and issues students come to school with and the need for teachers to be aware of everything involved in students' lives and how this will affect their behavior, academics, and social skills. Michelle took a bit of a different look at caring and teaching. She thought, “teaching was trying to get an end result and caring

was how you got to this end result.” It was apparent from the comments of teachers they all thought caring for students was integral to the teaching process and in fact were the same term. Teachers’ comments indicated they cared very much for their students and wanted them to succeed. Jasmine said, “I see them both being the same [caring and teaching]. It comes from within. Care and love.” Caring is an integral part of teaching for these teachers and a necessary and important aspect of every classroom.

Importance of Caring in a School Setting

The seventh interview question asked: How important do you think care is in a school setting? All of the ten teachers stated caring was very important and critical aspect in a school setting. It was also important that not just teachers cared for students but all school staff and teachers needed to care about each other too. Anita said,

In a school setting from the teachers, to the custodian to the principal every person in the school has a symbiotic relationship with the students to make them successful individuals and it takes a village to raise a child, it really does take an entire school staff to let students know that you care about them.

Michelle thought if kids were comfortable they would do well and know someone cared about them. Three teachers thought if you really cared about children they would perform better and learn more because their teachers were genuine and not just at the school for the paycheck. Melanie thought caring would push students to do better and succeed and without caring you cannot reach students. Shanta stated, “With African American kids, it’s really important to show you care about them and that you’re interesting in their well-

being and their learning at the same time.” The teachers did see a relationship between caring and teaching the students in their classrooms as well as all students.

Angel also talked about school being a safe place. “Students like to feel safe when they come to school and they feel safe when they know they’re actually being cared for.” Kyra talked about the classroom becoming a second home and how students often spend more time in classroom and school than they do with their own families. She thought, “The classroom needs to resemble a home like setting, a place where kids know where things are. They’re comfortable. They know they’re important.” Amber talked about students being low-income, raised in single parent households, and children not getting the care necessary at home. She noted schools may be the only place some children can feel cared for and safe in their daily lives. She said,

I wish that we could do more. You know you can care but what can you do? You know we need a little more doing, you know. I care about everybody, but I can’t do for everybody although I would if I could.

One teacher thought caring needing to extend to teachers also. Ashley said, “I think it is important. Because it kind of brings a peace then where teachers can work together, students can work with the teachers and administration works with the teachers, and every body kind of just like clumps together like a family.” She thought when everyone cared for everyone, “everything would just seem right.”

The teachers thought caring was an essential part of school and teaching and were nearly inseparable. In a school setting it was important for students to feel safe and know

someone cares for them since their lives outside of school may not include people that care for them and their futures.

Examples of Caring in Classrooms

The last interview question asked teachers to reflect back on what they had answered on a pre interview questionnaire and provide examples of how they demonstrated caring as a teacher. The purpose of the interview question was to give teachers an opportunity to illustrate what they did as well as why these particular examples might be outstanding. While the teachers discussed a number of different ways of demonstrating caring, there was one major theme throughout their discussions. The major theme that emerged from the data on examples of caring was “creating an environment of caring.” This category addressed several ideas in the data. The environment category included ways teachers went about developing a classroom environment or climate of caring. This included purchasing supplies for students, incentives in the classroom, motivation, and attending students’ activities. The environment category also addressed how teachers communicate their caring, verbally and non-verbally, to students. Instances of verbal communication included praise, communicating with parents, and compliments. Non-verbal communication was found in through hugs, smiles, and other ways of communicating with students.

Seven of the ten teachers interviewed for the study equated caring with teaching in their responses to the examples question. Kyra said, “my whole teaching philosophy and that is, I try to treat my students at school, the same way that I treat my children at home. And that pretty much drives everything I do with my kids in terms of materials I

bring to the classroom.” Melanie felt, “I think care is important in a school setting because you need to be able to reach your students and they need to be able to know you care about them.” Amber stated, “I mean teaching is caring for me. That’s all I could say, teaching is caring.” She went on to state, “When I don’t care I won’t be a teacher any more. . . . I won’t do the kids that disservice or come in here and I don’t care.” Teachers expressed that to teach was to care. Kyra brought up another point not noted by the other teachers, “it’s easier and there’s more ease in demonstrating care with children of the same ethnic group that you belong to.” She thought there was a non-verbal way of communicating between an African-American teacher and African-American children. She thought the children would just understand and in other settings with other students, particular looks or words would have to be explained. She thought there was meaning behind looks and non-verbal communication students would understand since she looked like their “mom, their grandma, auntie, babysitter, there’s a language there, a love language if you will, that is understood by my children that I don’t have to do a whole lot of explaining and teaching things at the beginning of the semester.” There is an “ease in establishing caring, what caring looks like, what it feels like what it sounds like in a classroom with children in the same ethnic group and thing vice versa with those children.” Other teachers participating in the study noted their background was similar to many of their students and this made it easier for them to work with and care for their students.

Environment. The environment category included addressing classroom environment or climate, supplies for students, incentives, motivation, and attending

activities. All of the teachers talked about how they cared for students in their classrooms but Shanta talked about how important it was to establish or create an environment of care calling it a “culture of care” in the classroom. This culture needed to be not just caring by the teacher but everyone caring for everyone. It was important in the classroom not to use “unkind words,” the classroom “does not belong to one person,” and the classroom is “one community.” Like other teachers, she felt it was important to establish rules in the classroom and talk about how “we treat one another.” Other teachers did not specifically mention creating a climate of caring in the classroom; however, their words implied they thought their classrooms had developed this type of caring climate.

Two teachers also talked about purchasing supplies and bringing them into the classroom. Ashley talked about, “Parents being in a certain financial way may not have the money to just buy the paper when they run out.” She takes advantage of sales storing items at home to enable students to complete homework when they may have no paper at home. Ashley purchases basic supplies for students to have them available thinking if students do not have the basic supplies how are they going to be able to function in a classroom.

Ashley also talked about how she used supplies and treats in the classroom such as food of any kind as an incentive for students. She felt using incentives made students “feel like okay, she’s really trying to make that connection, and she really means she’s here for me no matter what.” She thought sometimes the food shared in class might have been a child’s dinner and she would not know this. Melanie showed caring in the classroom environment through “pushing them. You can’t stop. I know you can do this.”

Melanie was motivating her students by pushing them to do their work, learn, and excel. By pushing students she was showing them she cared about them. Amber wanted to create a classroom where she tried, “to give people an opportunity to feel good about something. Even the kid that I haven’t even seen like you hey, you are a good reader. Let me get you to read this book.” Amber wanted to create an encouraging classroom to help students learn. One thing she did was to use compliments not only on school work but also on “cute earrings, like those boots, you know whatever” it takes to encourage students to learn and to know someone notices and cares about them.

Jasmine and Amber talked about being involved in students’ activities. Jasmine would attend cheerleading competitions on weekends and thought, “They knew you cared when they saw you walk in that gym and they just light up. They know you care.” If one of Amber’s students was good at basketball, “maybe I’ll go to a game, I’ve been to churches and some of the students, they invite me to something I try to go even if I only stay for ten minutes.” She also talked about helping students find things, clean out desks, and “if there’s a problem, if they’re being bullied or if they’re you know something is going on I just try to you know stay in the loop without being a kid.”

Verbal and non-verbal communication played a big role in caring for the teachers. Non-verbal communication involved smiles, hugs, and more physical caring or looks. Jasmine used non-verbal messages with students “a simple smile.... The mere fact that you smiled at a child, it sends a non-verbal message of caring to students.” Looks, hugs, smiles, a nod all played a part in the non-verbal communication of teachers. Jasmine talked about wanting “to contribute to their life. And just letting them know that you’re

there for them.” Anita mentioned one on one eye contact was “very significant, and letting them know hey, I’m happy to see you this morning. I greet them with a smile and that’s important.” In many instances it was not necessary for teachers to say anything, they let students know they cared just through their non-verbal communication.

Teachers verbally communicated with students “a lot!” They praised students, complimented them, and verbally inspired them. They communicated with parents of the students too. Angel believed in praising students. “Giving them positive praise for good behavior is another way of showing care ... letting them know that you really do care about efforts that they put forth when trying to do better. When they do good things, or you know put forth an effort, that’s my way of showing that I do care.” Angel also believed it was necessary to pay attention to students, “Call them by their name and you get personal with them.” She also mentioned being a fair person. “I believe in being fair with all of the students. And in my opinion, that’s the way of showing care as well. Letting the students know that you know, what you do for one, you do for the other.”

Michelle liked to inspire students. She said she talked to her students and provided examples of students who overcame the odds to be successful using examples the student could relate to. Anita thought it was important to contact parents. She said,

“I want to contact the home if the child, not just for negatives, but for positives. Johnny is doing well in school today. How are you doing today? Are you having any concerns? Any questions for me? I do that with parents but also I just develop that community relationship, school community, where parents know that the school is the place where they

can come and they can make sure that their child is being taken care of properly.”

Summary

The teachers participating in the study provided example of how they cared for students; however Angel seemed to grasp the essence of the discussion in the interviews. She said,

[The] teacher who cares truly cares for their profession and their role as classroom teachers it comes out of them. And then when they also have a true caring for their students, just as human beings, as children and have that love and caring for them, I think it has a positive impact overall. This is a real true teacher, and I think it trickles down to the students and they know that the teacher cares and she’s genuine and really concerned, then they tend to return that. And it never fails; it never failed me, 18 years of teaching and education. It has never failed and I’ve never had, you know, I’ve always had very positive relationship with the students because I do show an amount of care. I care I genuinely care.

The teachers participating in the study on caring in the classroom indicated caring was a large part of themselves and how they worked in the classroom with their students. They felt it was important to care for students by working to know and understand the students. They learned caring from different sources but thought it was important for teachers to care for their students in order for students to feel safe and learn. Chapter Five will

present a discussion of the data and the findings of the study as they relate to the existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The qualitative study focused on 10 female African-American teachers and their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers and how they practiced caring in the classroom. The study addressed a need for knowledge about the role African American female teachers play and have played in elementary classrooms. Etter-Lewis (1991) stated, “all women must tell their own stories in their own words” (p. 44). Etter-Lewis further stated women of African American descent rarely have the opportunity to have their work acknowledged or published. If this is true, the experiences of female African-American teachers will be lost; their experiences may be misinterpreted, or possibly misunderstood. These narrative stories of female African-American teachers contribute to the research on the role of care in teaching.

Chapter Four provided the analysis of teacher interview data involved in the study, their teaching experiences, and their caring in a classroom. As the analysis progressed, patterns in the data surfaced and themes emerged from the data. Chapter Five presents a review of the results and conclusions developed from the data analysis. It discusses the implications from the study for practice, and suggests avenues for further study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American female elementary teachers defined and practiced care in their classrooms. The women's narratives of their teaching experiences were analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practice care with their students and the values they impart to their students. The study was limited to the experiences a group of 10 teachers have had working with low SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

RQ1: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent define care?

RQ2: How did these women elementary teachers of African descent develop their belief systems for caring?

RQ3: How do these women elementary teachers of African descent describe how they practice care in their classrooms?

The study used a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach to the analysis of the interview data. A qualitative design was appropriate for the study, addressed the guiding questions posed by the study, and utilized the information garnered through in-depth interviews to obtain the perceptions of teachers about caring in their classrooms. No classroom observations were conducted but the intent of the study was not to observe how teachers implemented caring in the classroom. The intent of the study was to ask teachers to define and describe how they defined and believed they practiced

care with their students. Examining teacher beliefs and thoughts about caring can inform future studies focused on observing and quantifying care in the classroom.

Three data sources were utilized to understand the perceptions of care held by the African American female elementary teachers participating in the study. The data was collected through a questionnaire, interviews, and documents about the participants and the school. The questionnaires were coded and stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. Interviews were recorded using an audio voice recorder. Field notes were also taken during the interview. The researcher conducted the interviews using a semi-structured interview design. All audiotapes from the interviews were kept in the researcher's locked file cabinet coded with a label indicating the date of the interview and a number for each participant instead of names. A professional outside transcriber was hired to transcribe the audiotapes and the tapes were secured in order to assure confidentiality. The researcher examined the transcripts and documents by developing codes, categorizing the data, and developing themes from the data. Similarities were noted and information examined to identify what was meaningful to the study's participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Through multiple readings, relationships began to appear and the conceptualization of codes, categories, and themes occurred. As the analysis progressed, the data was organized to address the guiding research questions posed by the study.

Summary of the Findings

The study sought answers to the questions through the use of eight interview questions and each question was matched to one of the guiding research questions. Participants in this study were teachers from a Midwestern urban district. There were 10 female African-American participants ranging in age from 27 to 45 years of age contributing to the data used for the study.

Research Question 1

The first research question posed by the study asked: How do African American female elementary teachers define care? Teachers were asked what it meant to care for someone. While participants' responses were different, the responses centered around three themes: understanding, concern, and doing. Defining care in the classroom resulted in differences and similarities in how teachers thought about caring. Teachers thought it was necessary to take the time to care about their students and be concerned about their students. Caring was considered to be multi-faceted in the eyes of the teachers but not all of the teachers defined caring the same way. For most of the teachers, caring involved understanding your students, by being empathetic to their individual situations. It was important for teachers to know what the living conditions were, what the family was like, knowing about the rest of the student's family, and really knowing the student. Teachers thought if you did not know and understand your students then you could not care for them in an empathetic way. Teachers thought it was important to be aware of and really know their students. If they did not understand and know their students it would be difficult for them to really care about them. Teachers felt it was necessary to know their

students' circumstances because this affected their education and how they grew as people. Teachers were concerned about their students and their students reflected their knowledge of this concern. Knowing and understanding their students and being concerned about their students affected how students felt about school and their teachers. This knowing, concern, and understanding was important to the students, as there were some students without caring adults in their lives. Caring for students allowed teachers not to be judgmental but to take students as they came to the classroom to learn.

Not all of the teachers had all of the same components or words in their definitions of caring, but all of the teachers indicated through their responses that caring was an important component of being an effective classroom teacher. Teachers felt students knew they cared about their health and welfare, and this caring encouraged students to do their best in the classroom. Students need to know adults care about them and what happens to them in and out of the classroom. The teachers did think caring for their students was an important component of being an effective teacher.

Research Question 2

The second research question posed by the study asked: How did African American female elementary teachers develop their belief system for caring? Three interview questions were analyzed to address the research question about how the participants developed their belief system for caring and what had influenced their conception of caring in the classroom.

Several of the sources for conceptualization of caring were evident in the teachers' responses to the questions addressing caring. Not surprisingly, many of the

teachers mentioned parents, grandparents, and other family members as providing solid examples of caring. These family members cared not only for their immediate family but also for others in the family and neighborhood. Caring had been a part of these teachers' lives and they had parents providing an example of assisting and helping others, having kids spend weekend at their homes, wanting their children to bring friends home, and not expecting to be thanked for caring about others. Family members set expectations and cared about whether children met those expectations. The teachers learned to care about their schoolwork and what they made of their futures. This set an example they carried into the classroom and how they worked with and cared about their students. For a child, knowing you are cared for brings about a sense of trust and should improve learning for students.

The teachers also mentioned teachers they had as mentors in their educational careers that affected them and their lives. It was interesting how the participants noted the teachers most influencing to them were also African Americans. They seemed to think the African American teachers they had encountered really bonded with their students, even if they were no-nonsense teachers or considered to be tough teachers. It almost seemed as though the teachers thought only an African American could really care about another African American and most of the mentors or teachers were also of the same ethnic group. While adults caring about children may be a universal trait, there may be more of an impact if the person doing the caring is someone more like you than of a different ethnic group or skin color. This may be due to stereotypical thinking that only

someone like you can understand what you need and who you are. Perhaps it seems easier to demonstrate caring and empathy for people similar to you rather than different.

The study participants had also encountered people that did not care in their lives and talked about the effects of being with non-caring teachers. These teachers certainly knew when they encountered a teacher that did not care about them. Even if it is never said in words, children and students instinctively seem to know when someone does not care for them or is not interested in their well being. Indifference, lack of empathy, and no validation, were words used to describe non-caring teachers.

The teachers' views on gender and caring were interesting. Several of the participants thought caring was innate to being an African American female and their ability to demonstrate emotions more than males. There was a sense of nurturing and mothering of students on the part of the study participants. The teachers mothered their students just as they would mother their own children. The teachers talked about how gender and ethnic group enabled them to care for their students. They were willing to hug and touch students and they wanted to set an example of what an African American can become. They did feel this would be more difficult for males but did not say males could not or did not care for their students. Young elementary school students tend to be very affectionate and trusting if they sense someone cares about them. This affection might be difficult for males to demonstrate because it may be controversial or "come back to haunt" them in the future. Males were perceived to be at a disadvantage in demonstrating caring for students at any level. Although study participants did appear to think males

could care for students, they also seemed to think there were possible constraints and females were more nurturing than males.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked teachers to describe how they practiced caring in their classrooms. Four of the interview questions addressed the idea of how the teachers described caring in their classrooms. It was interesting to find in the data how the teachers thought of the students in their classrooms as a family. They created a family or community of learners in the classroom and this was essential to working with and teaching African American students. The teachers were protective of their students. They did not want other school staff to ‘fuss at’ their students feeling this was their job. The teachers thought it was also necessary to build a bond with the student’s families and it was important for students to know someone cared for them not only in school but outside of school too. It was interesting that the teachers thought it was necessary to deal with the problems students brought to school so that they were able to learn what was presented in the classroom.

All of the teachers participating in the study thought teachers really needed to know their students and thought there was a real relationship between caring and teaching. Some of the teachers had tried not to care about the fate of their students but found they could not. When teachers spend school day hours with students five days a week, it developed a sense of trust on the part of students, trust in you as a teacher and being able to watch out for what is best for the students. This trust was important for students to be able to leave their lives outside of school there, and be able to learn in the

classroom. The teachers talked about the ‘baggage’ students bring to the classroom each day and how this affected their learning and social/emotional development. For some children, the classroom may be the only safe place they are in any day. The participants thought that this sense of trust, caring, and understanding was essential to being able to reach these students and help them overcome their lives, and convince the students they could excel and be successful. The classroom essentially became a second home for student and one that in many circumstances might be safer than the home they returned to after school.

Teachers demonstrated their ability to care in numerous ways. They thought caring for students required doing whatever was necessary to ensure students learned. Purchasing supplies for students, motivating students, setting expectations, communicating verbally and non-verbally were ways teachers demonstrated caring for their students. Several teachers did think it was easier to demonstrate care for students of the same ethnic group they belonged to. One teacher thought there was an innate non-verbal way of communicating between African American students and teachers not evident in other mixes of students and teachers. It may have also helped that many of the teachers had backgrounds similar to their students, encountered a caring teacher that inspired them, and wanted to be this same type of teacher for their students.

It was important to the teachers participating in the study to create a classroom climate of caring not only between teacher and student but also between student and student. They wanted to create an environment to inspire their students to learn and be successful by convincing students they could do the work and succeed. It was felt by

teachers that many times students did not have positive role models in their lives and they wanted to create the community where they could celebrate each and every child's successes and not dwell on the more negative aspects of the students' lives. It was important to satisfy students' needs for acceptance and belonging in the classroom as well as creating a family atmosphere in the classroom if students were ever to begin to grow and learn.

Convergence of the Findings with the Literature Review

The first research question discusses the definition of caring, the teachers in this study did not have all of the same components or words in their definitions, but all of the teachers indicated through their responses caring was an important necessary component of being an effective classroom teacher. The common thread of the responses encompassed three elements; understanding, concern and acting.

When asked about their definition of care, teachers consistently mentioned the idea of taking time to care and being concerned about their students. The notion of taking time to care about students concurs with Toliver (1993) who noted when teachers care for their students they listen to their concerns, set achievable goals, have high expectations and sincerely give of their time. Teachers also felt that if you did not know and understand your students then you could not care for them in an empathetic way. These responses correspond with Mayeroff (1971) who stated

... but in order to care I must understand the other's needs and I must be able to respond properly to them ... To care for someone, I must know many things. I must know, for example, who the other is, what his powers

and limitation are, what his needs are, and what is conducive to his growth. (p.19)

In this study, the teachers thought it was important to be aware of and really know their students. If teachers did not understand and know their students it would be difficult to really care about them. This finding concurs with the findings of Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995). The authors concluded “without interpersonal connections a teacher may have subject matter knowledge and the ability to teach but the opportunities for real learning will be scarce, because what the teacher does not have is the student” (p. 683).

For the second research question which discusses how these teachers developed their belief systems for caring, several of the sources for conceptualization of caring were evident in the teachers’ responses. The teachers discussed how family members and people within their neighborhood provided solid examples of caring. This notion of their neighborhood providing solid examples of caring concurs with a study conducted by Dempsey and Noblit (1993). Dempsey and Noblit conducted a study at an elementary school where 100% of the students were of African descent where the focus was centered on building caring environments. Dempsey and Noblit found caring operated on several levels at this school and in the surrounding community, and that caring was visible in the expectations parents had for their children and the teachers. This set an example these teachers carried into the classroom and how they worked with and cared about their students. For a child, knowing you are cared for brings about a sense of trust and should improve learning for students. This finding concurs with Wentzel (1997) whose findings concluded that the perceptions that students had of their teachers were definitely

connected to their academic achievement, their social responsibility goals, and their pro-social behaviors.

The third research question discussed how these teachers practiced caring in their classrooms. The teachers thought it was necessary to build a bond with the student's families and that it was important for students to know someone cared for them not only in school but also outside of school. All of the teachers felt that teachers really needed to know their students and that there was a real relationship between caring and teaching. The thoughts and feelings of how these teachers practiced care in their classrooms concurred with Nelson and Bauch (1997) who expressed that caring teachers create bonds with their students, stimulate them, are sincerely involved in their learning, and supply them with extra help.

Kindlon and Thompson (2000) expressed, in order for our children to learn, grow and feel cared for, they must be helped to feel that they have a "safe place" with their teacher. The teachers talked about the 'baggage' students bring to the classroom each day and how this affected their learning and social/emotional development. For some children, the classroom may be the only safe place they are in any day. The teachers thought that this sense of trust, caring, and understanding was essential to being able to reach these students and help them overcome their lives, and convince the students they could excel and be successful.

In this study, the teachers demonstrated their ability to care in numerous ways. They thought caring for students required doing whatever was necessary to ensure students learned. Purchasing supplies for students, motivating students, setting

expectations, communicating verbally and non-verbally were ways teachers demonstrated caring for their students. The thoughts of these teachers concurred with Toliver (1993) who expressed that caring teachers listen to the concerns of their students, set achievable goals, have high expectations and sincerely give of their time.

Benefits of this Research

The findings of the study will be useful for a variety groups within the educational community. Veteran teachers experiencing burnout may find it helpful to read about the ways other teachers describe how they practice care in their classrooms. Because teachers can become isolated from their colleagues, the results of the study may help them feel more connected to their profession and their students. The findings of the study may encourage other teachers of all ethnic groups to view their practices differently and to seek to forge a connection with students they had not made before or have forgotten about. The study may encourage teachers to reflect on their own practices and experiences in education.

Novice and preservice teachers always want to know how teachers work effectively with students of African descent in low SES urban schools. New teachers and preservice teachers will benefit from reading the experiences of these teachers but then any teacher might benefit from being exposed to this group of very caring elementary teachers and learning how important caring and a sense of trust are in the classroom. The voices of these 10 African American female teachers and how they practiced care in their classrooms can add an aspect to the educational experiences not regularly addressed in teacher education programs. This study also adds the voices of these teachers that

support much of the literature about the importance of caring. Novice and preservice teachers need to develop the insight and a feel for what they may be facing in the classroom and this gives them a way to approach teaching they may not have read about or encountered in teacher education courses. Reading this research may also encourage open dialogue between teachers who have experience working with students of African descent in low SES, urban schools and those who will be teaching in those settings in the future.

Future Research

This study also raises several questions for future research. These questions include the following:

1. How do men elementary teachers of African descent (grades K-8) teaching in an urban school serving predominately students of African descent, and low SES define care and describe how they practice care in their classrooms?
2. Is there consistency between male and female teachers of African descent classroom behaviors and their self-reported views of care?
3. How do school administrators (principals and assistant principals) in urban schools serving predominately students of African descent, and low-SES define care and describe how they practice care in their daily interactions with students?
4. Are there specific “caring” traits or qualities a teacher must have in order to successfully teach in an urban school serving predominately students of African descent and low-SES?

5. How do teachers of other ethnic groups demonstrate caring building trust in their classrooms?

It would also be interesting to explore the perceptions on caring of teacher beyond the elementary level. Does caring on the part of teachers increase or decrease as students get older? An additional line of future research might include the effects of high stakes testing and accountability demands on the ability of teachers to demonstrate caring for students to ensure students can and will learn. Another additional line of research might include replicating this study using multiple demographic groups of both teachers and students, including ethnic groups and gender for teachers, and SES and ethnic groups for students.

These studies may require the inclusion of observation data and, in some cases, longitudinal data collection and analysis. Surveys may also be implemented at a later point to determine the degree to which findings are generalizable to a larger population of teachers or administrators of African descent who work in urban schools serving predominately students of African descent and low-SES.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sought to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent define and practice care in their classrooms. This was accomplished by listening to the voices of 10 women elementary teachers of African descent shared their stories, feelings, perceptions, and experiences. The stories, feelings, perceptions, and

experiences of these women elementary teachers of African descent has helped to understand how they view the role care can play in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings. Caring in the classroom was essential to these teachers to be an effective teacher in order for their students to learn, grow, and succeed in the future. The teachers considered caring to go hand in hand with teaching. If you were not a caring person they did not really see how you might be able to be an effective teacher. There may be other factors affecting teachers' ability to care for the students in their classrooms including demands for accountability, ensuring students were of grade level, and high stakes testing. However, it was apparent from the remarks of these teachers these factors would not get in the way of their ability to care for their students. They felt it was far too important to know and understand your students in order to teach them to not let outside factors affect what they did in the classroom. At the elementary level they thought it might be easier for females to demonstrate caring than males, but they did not imply males could not be caring teachers it was just easier for females due to their mothering nurturing nature. Caring was an essential part of the make up of these teachers, they had many examples in their lives of caring adults, and wanted to pass on this sense of caring to their students so their students would also care for others when they become adults.

APPENDIX A
PERCEPTIONS OF CARE QUESTIONNAIRE

Perceptions of Care Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent define and report how they think they practice care in their classrooms. The narratives collected in this questionnaire will be analyzed to learn your perceptions of yourself as a caring teacher, as well as your perceptions of how you practice care with your students and the values you impart to them. This study will be limited to the experiences that you have had with low-SES, urban students of African descent in educational settings. Please do not put your name on the questionnaire. The questionnaire and consent will be separated and assigned a random identification number so you will not be identifiable by name at any time.

The packet you have received contains a consent form, the questionnaire, and an envelope to return the consent and questionnaire. I will be outside the main office after school on (date will be inserted) to collect questionnaires and consent forms and will be able to answer any additional questions about the study. Please sign the consent form, complete the questionnaire, put them in the envelope, and seal the envelope. You can leave the sealed envelope in the main office with the clerk or hand them to me after school on (date will be inserted).

1. What does it mean to care for someone?

2. What relationship, if any, do you see between teaching and caring?

3. List three specific things you might do or say to indicate or demonstrate you care about students in your classroom?

4. Do you have any additional thoughts about teaching and caring that would help me understand your perspective on this topic?

APPENDIX B
PERCEPTIONS OF CARE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Perceptions of Care Interview Protocol

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to care for someone?
2. Describe the person who most influenced you to be caring.
3. How is the concept of care significant to your work with students?
4. How does your gender affect how you express your care for students?
5. Did you experience caring teachers? What impact did this have on your life?
6. What relationship, if any, do you see between teaching and caring?
7. How important do you think care is in school settings?
8. In the questionnaire, you mentioned _____ ways in which you demonstrate care as a teacher. Can you give me some examples that illustrate these types of care? Why do these stand out to you?

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Informed Consent Letter for Questionnaire

Project Title: Perceptions of Care: Self Reflections of Women Teachers of African Descent Who Teach In Urban Settings

Researcher: Elizabeth A. Abioro

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ann Marie Ryan

Introduction:

Women teachers of African descent at Jensen Scholastic Academy are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Elizabeth A. Abioro for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ann Marie Ryan in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions of concern before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent define and practice care in their classrooms. These women's narratives of their teaching experiences will be analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they think they practice care in their classrooms with students and the values they impart to students about caring. This study will be limited to the reported experiences the teachers have had with low-SES, urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Procedures:

If the participant agrees to be in the study, she will be asked to respond to a written questionnaire that should take 15-20 minutes to complete. The participant will also be invited to take part in a follow-up interview. The purpose of this questionnaire is to get an in-depth look at how women teachers of African descent view themselves in their roles as caring teachers and to learn how these teachers define and practice care in their daily interactions with students. The results of this questionnaire will be published in a dissertation.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research, no more than those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to the participant from her involvement however; it is essential to learn more about caring in settings and schools where relational work might be difficult (e.g. low income, urban settings, or working with minority populations). Understanding teachers' perceptions of care is significant because it can provide data that may reveal some elements of the complex nature of care and how teachers see its role in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Confidentiality:

In the event that a case of child abuse is revealed, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality. Pseudonyms or identification numbers will be used in any aggregated written material generated as a result of this research. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Participants' identities will be protected by the use of a code name or number.

Questionnaires will be stored at the researchers home in a locked cabinet. The questionnaires will be stored separately from the consent forms. After completing the doctoral degree, the researcher will destroy the data from these questionnaires.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If the participant does not want to be in this study, she does not have to participate. Even if the participant decides to participate, she is free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If there are any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Elizabeth A. Abioro at eaabioro@cps.k12.il.us or at (708)638-9531 or the faculty sponsor Dr. Ann Marie Ryan at aryan3@luc.edu or at (312)915-6232. If there are any questions concerning rights as a research participant, please contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773)505-2689.

Statement of Consent:

The participant's signature below indicates that she has read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. The participant will be given a copy of this form to keep for their records.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Would you be willing to be interviewed on the subject of care? **Yes** _____ **No** _____

If you are willing to be interviewed, please record your name and email address below:

Name _____ **Email Address** _____

Phone _____

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR INTERVIEW

Informed Consent Letter for Interview

Project Title: Perceptions of Care: Self Reflections of Women Teachers of African Descent Who Teach In Urban Settings

Researcher: Elizabeth A. Abioro

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ann Marie Ryan

Introduction:

Women teachers of African descent at Jensen Scholastic Academy are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Elizabeth A. Abioro for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Ann Marie Ryan in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions of concern before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine how women elementary teachers of African descent define and practice care in their classrooms. These women's narratives of their teaching experiences will be analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practice care with their students and the values they impart to them. This study will be limited to the experiences that these teachers have had with low-SES, urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Procedures:

The interview will be approximately 45 minutes and will take place at a location of the participant's choice. During the interview the participant will be asked questions about how she defines and practices care with her students. The purpose of this interview is to get an in-depth look at how women teachers of African descent view themselves in their roles as caring teachers and to learn how these teachers define and practice care in their daily interactions with students. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. The results of this interview will be published in a dissertation.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research, no more than those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to the participant from her involvement however; it is essential to learn more about caring in settings and schools where relational work might be difficult (e.g. low income, urban settings, or working with minority populations). Understanding teachers' perceptions of care is significant because it can provide data that may reveal some elements of the complex nature of care and how teachers see its role in serving the educational needs of low- SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

Confidentiality:

In the event a case of child abuse is revealed during an interview, as a mandated reporter, the researcher cannot promise confidentiality. Mandated reporting of child abuse always takes precedence over a promise of confidentiality. The participant's name will not be referenced in the transcript of the audiotape. Pseudonyms will be used in any material generated as a result of this research. The tape recording of the participant's interview will be confidential. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to this data. The transcriber has signed a confidentiality agreement. Participants' identities will be protected by a numerical or pseudonym code. All audio-tapes from the interviews will be kept in the researcher's home in a locked file cabinet coded with a label indicating the date of the interview and a number or pseudonym for each participant. A professional outside transcriber will be hired to transcribe the audio-tapes, who will also secure the tapes and transcripts in order to assure confidentiality. Participants' information will remain under lock and strictly confidential with the professional transcriber. After transcription, the professional transcriber will return all data to the researcher. The researcher will keep the tapes and transcripts in a locked file cabinet separate from the consent forms. After completing the doctoral degree, the researcher will destroy both the audio-tapes and transcripts. Audio-tapes will be destroyed by magnetizing and shredding them. The transcripts will be shredded.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this interview is voluntary. Even if the participant decides to participate, she may withdraw from the interview without penalty at any point during the interview. The participant may also choose not to answer specific questions or discuss certain subjects during the interview or to ask that portions of the discussion or her responses not be recorded on tape.

Contacts and Questions:

If there are any questions about this research project or interview, please feel free to contact Elizabeth A. Abioro at eaabioro@cps.k12.il.us or at (708)638-9531 or the faculty sponsor Dr. Ann Marie Ryan at aryan3@luc.edu or at (312)915-6232. If there are any questions concerning rights as a research participant, please contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773)505-2689.

Statement of Consent:

The participant's signature below indicates that they have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. The participant will be given a copy of this form to keep for their records.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX E
VERBAL SCRIPT

Verbal Script

Participants will be informed of their role in the study using the following script:

Hello Everyone,

My name is Elizabeth Abioro and I am currently working on my dissertation at Loyola University Chicago. The focus of my dissertation research is perceptions of care and caring practices in school classrooms by women of African American descent.

The purpose of my research is to investigate how women elementary teachers of African descent define and practice care in their classrooms. These women's narratives of their teaching experiences will be analyzed to learn about their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers as well as their perceptions of how they practice care with their students. This study will be limited to the experiences that these teachers have had with low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

The study calls for eight to ten willing participants. What I would need from those individuals who are willing to be participants in the study is to complete a questionnaire and then if interested, participate in a 45-minute interview at a time and place convenient for you.

Your district and principal have agreed to the implementation of this study, but participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Risks and Benefits: There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research, no more than those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to the participant from her involvement however; it is essential to learn more about caring in settings and schools where relational work might be difficult (e.g. low income, urban settings, or working with minority populations). Understanding teachers' perceptions of care is significant because it can provide data that may reveal some elements of the complex nature of care and how teachers see its role in serving the educational needs of low-SES urban students of African descent in educational settings.

I would like to take a few minutes to open the floor to any questions or concerns you have at this time.

Please take a few minutes to read the consent form, sign it, and return it with the completed questionnaire tomorrow to the school clerk in the office or to myself outside the office after school if you are interested in participating.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I am looking forward to your input and involvement.

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VITA

Upon completing a Bachelor of Arts degree at University of Illinois-Urbana and a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Concordia University, Elizabeth A. Abioro became associated with the Chicago Public Schools. She is certified in school administration and elementary education by the Illinois State Board of Education and has endorsements in language arts, social science, special education, and Portuguese. Elizabeth has been a certified teacher with the Chicago Public schools since 1993. She has served as a special education coach, assistive technology evaluator, special education teacher, curriculum coordinator, parent resource teacher, language arts teacher and ESEA teacher. She has specialized knowledge in parent/community involvement and has participated in parent involvement programs and promoting programs to foster parent and community involvement in the schools. Her special education involvement includes modeling and coaching teachers in effective instructional practices, modification of curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities, and differentiating instruction for students. Her background in assistive technology includes identifying appropriate technology for students, evaluating the effectiveness of selected technology, and providing support to teachers and parents in how to use assistive technology. Elizabeth has worked extensively in curriculum and school improvement implementation and monitoring. She is completing a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

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