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**BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS LEADING FOR SOCIAL  
JUSTICE**

**By**

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**AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION**

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## ABSTRACT

### BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS: LEADING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

By

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This dissertation examines how the personal and professional lives of Black women school superintendents appear to define their passion and compassion, commitment and dreams, and work and action in creating socially just and equitable learning environments. This study is grounded in critical Black feminist postmodern theory, and places Black women's experiences at the center of analysis. The study asks the Black women school superintendents to reflect on their formal and informal educational experiences in an effort to discover how these experiences have defined and influenced their work for social justice in learning environments. The researcher wanted to explore how the life experiences of Black women school superintendents influence their navigating successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of leadership from the alternative perspective of the Black women school superintendent. Because of the limited amount of research about the superintendency there is a need for continued examination of the woman superintendent, the Black superintendent and

specifically the Black woman superintendent. “One of the areas in school leadership most obviously neglected is minority women’s leadership” (Ortiz 1998). This study provides an opportunity for the voices of Black women school superintendents, the often-ignored minority school leaders, to be heard. It also offers valuable insight into the larger role played by Black women as school superintendents in the struggle for social justice within their learning environments.

The study uses narrative inquiry and phenomenological methods to collect data from four Black women school superintendents. The participants were asked to respond to a brief biographical questionnaire prior to three one to two hour audio taped interviews. Additionally, there was a one-day shadowing session, a group dialogue and document analysis.

Four major themes emerged from the study: 1) the influence and centrality of family, extended family and community relations; 2) the anchor of spirituality; 3) the disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy; and 4) the passion to create social change in schools to impact students, their families, the school community, as well as the broader community.



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April 25, 2001

**This dissertation is dedicated to strong Black women, who against all odds continue the struggle for social justice... for all! Women like my late mother, Ida Smith Sanders. To strong Black men who support these women, men like my late father, Nathaniel Sanders, Sr.**

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In many discussions regarding race and gender in the United States one commonality exists: when the discussion centers around race the focus is usually on the black male. When the issue is gender the focus is usually on the white female. The black female is often neglected or non-existent in these discussions. A case in point is the public school superintendency (Alston, 1995). Women constitute a majority of the teachers in American schools while occupying a much smaller number of decision-making administrative positions. In the area of school administration, white males have traditionally dominated the superintendency. Women, Blacks and other racial minorities have slowly joined their ranks, but not at a level representative of the population or at a level that is proportional to their numbers in the teaching profession.

The woman public school superintendent is somewhat an anomaly. The Black woman public school superintendent is even more of a rarity. In spite of the recent interest in feminist scholarship, there is still a paucity of studies on women in educational leadership. An even more disturbing fact remains; there is a lack of research on Black women and other underrepresented groups in administrative positions. Despite their increasing visibility, their voices and experiences literally do not exist in the theory and literature about school leadership. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore how race and gender affected the practice of Black women school superintendents as they create socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/institutional culture. Additionally, the study probed the constructs



(organizational/institutional, historical, cultural/social, economic, and political) that involve black women in the work of social change in an effort to expand both the literature and the practice of school leadership. It should be noted that the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

The study included the participation of four Black women superintendents leading urban school systems. Each professional story was unique as it illustrated individual experiences of addressing the pressing issues of racism, sexism, and oppression. Each story provided me with rich data, contrast, and informative themes that will expand understanding of the meaning of Black women's work in the superintendency. The study shared viewpoints of educational leadership based on the experiences of Black women.

By examining their life stories I hoped to find out how race and gender affect the practice of Black women school superintendents as they seek to create socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/institutional culture. Following from the above-stated issue, the central research question was: How do the lived experiences of Black women school superintendents influence their navigating successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable learning environments?

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite several decades of official equality, the representation of women and racial minorities in local schools' administration still remains low (Montenegro, 1993). Banks (1995) states, "Unlike people of color, women are not a numerical minority.

Women are the majority in the U.S. population. They are considered a minority group because, like people of color, they lack access to power. However, even though White women lack social, political, and economic power, they enjoy a privileged status in U.S. society based on their race” (p.67). Black women, on the other hand, are often not afforded the privileged status because of racist and sexist attitudes and practices. Related to this gross under representation of women and racial minorities in educational administration is yet another issue: that is the little to no research that exists about this problem.

In spite of the fact that research on and conducted by women and people of color in educational leadership is growing, there continues to be a paucity of research on both groups. There are several reasons for the lack of analyses that informs the research on women and minorities in the superintendency. First, there is little data collected about the woman superintendent as compared to others in the same position. Tyack and Hansot (1982) refer to the lack of information as a “conspiracy of silence”(p.21). Additionally, women have conducted most of the research that has been conducted. This is alarming in that it suggests that women are the only researchers and scholars concerned with the problem. According to Patricia Schmuck (1999) women have just become visible during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Schmuck states that gender is the mediating force in superintendents’ selection, effectiveness, and retention. Even if males’ and females’ behaviors are identical they are often perceived differently. Schmuck goes on to say that we need to understand women’s experiences. This is problematic in that what has been written has been written based on men’s experiences (Schmuck, 1999).

Secondly, there is an obvious misconception that this issue is not worthy of study. Brunner (1999) asserts that half of the leadership classes and courses for the superintendency are filled with women and yet men have articulated the discourse. Obviously, women are interested in the superintendency and this area of research has to be explored further.

The third reason of concern regarding this gap in the literature is the omission of Black women in the educational administration profession. Tallerico (1999) argues that women of color are at a distinct disadvantage for the superintendency for three general reasons. First, women of color are not afforded the ideal career path opportunity that “traditional” candidates are afforded. For example, women of color often teach longer than their non-minority counterparts. Additionally, a higher percentage of women of color have experience at the elementary level rather than high school. This becomes a disadvantage because they are not in high visibility positions and therefore are not seen as superintendent’s material. According to Tallerico, women of color “... may be overly immersed in the ‘norm of teaching’ that, by implications are somewhat inferior to or less than the norms of administration”(112). Finally, minorities often don’t make the initial cut of the headhunters in the research and selection process. Many times headhunters make the first cut and often the ten to twelve chosen to be forwarded to the board look like the headhunters themselves, the board or like the “ideal” or “model” superintendent of the past.

Historically, traditional mainstream educational scholarship has little to nothing to say about the influence of gender and race/ethnicity on policy and practice. Benham and

Cooper's (1998) study of nine minority women in the United States supports this statement. They presented often-unheard stories of the lives and contributions of diverse women school leaders, in both formal and informal positions of leadership. Many of these stories had never been told. The telling of these stories was significant in order to redefine educational leadership from diverse perspectives.

This study shares alternative viewpoints of leadership based on the experiences of Black women. I was interested in examining their life stories to find out how race/ethnicity and gender affect the practice of Black women school superintendents creating socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/institutional culture

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

This study is significant because it will contribute to the limited research about superintendents. Although superintendents hold a prominent position and are considered important educational leaders, research about them and their work is scant. Johnson (1996) concludes that the study of the superintendency is one of the most significant gaps in research on educational administration. Because of the limited amount of research about the superintendency, there is a need for continued examination of the woman superintendent, the African American superintendent and specifically the African American woman superintendent. "One of the areas in school leadership most obviously neglected is minority women's leadership" (Ortiz 1998). This study will provide an opportunity for the voices of Black women school superintendents, the often-ignored

minority school leaders, to be heard.

Additionally, this study offered valuable insight into the larger role-played by Black women as school superintendents in the struggle for social justice. It will further both scholarly understanding of school leadership and add to the body of leadership practice for social justice change in schools.

#### ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions were central to this study. First, the term "socially just" might be differently defined and enacted by each woman; however, the outcome, providing an equitable learning environment, will be similar. Second, that Black women who work to create social change are strongly influenced by their own social, cultural, and historical context; therefore some may be successful and some may be unsuccessful at navigating the boundaries and barriers toward creating social justice. Finally, the Black woman school leader brings a unique view of schooling and school leadership to her practice based on her own social, cultural, and historical experiences. This often looks different from the historically dominant leadership style of mainstream culture.

#### DELIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how race and gender affect the practice of four Black women school superintendents working to create socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/institutional culture. The study included the narratives of four Black women school superintendents serving in urban school districts. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select the participants for this study. The study was limited to those Black women serving as

superintendents in urban school settings. Hence, the small sample size (four women) limits the generalizability of the study findings.

Even though I used the feminist perspective as a lens to study these women, this is not a study of feminism. Additionally, this was not a study about the entire life story of the biographer or the participants. I critically analyzed how the forces of race and gender impact moments of each participant's life story.

### INITIAL GUIDING FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

As a Black woman with seven years of administrative experience, I came to this research with the perspective of a Black woman school leader. My professional, personal, and academic experiences shaped my perspective and subsequently determined how I viewed the world. These biases influenced my decision to use Black Feminist and Critical Race Theories, Social Justice Theory and Superintendent Leadership Theory as my initial guiding framework. The theoretical constructs from each of these theories are underlined and a description of each theoretical lens follows this overview.

The first lens of the guiding framework for this study is based on the philosophical tenets of Black Feminist and Critical Race Theories. The Black woman superintendent offers a complex situation in that race and gender often compound the perception of her leadership. Black feminist theory emphasizes race, class and gender as categories of connection. Spelman (1995) states, "it would be quite misleading to say simply that black women and white women both are oppressed as women and that a black woman's oppression as a black is separable from her oppression as a woman because she shares the

latter but not the former with the white woman. An additive analysis treats the oppression of a black woman in a sexist and racist society as if it were a further burden than her oppression in a sexist and non-racist society, when, in fact, it is a different burden”(1995, p.42). This conceptual lens is based on themes of racial differences, gender differences and differences in power and privilege. Collins (1989) and hooks (1990) are among the scholars who advocate keeping race and gender at the center of our examination of policy and practice in leadership. Collins defined her status as a Black woman sociologist as being an “outsider within,” a position that she shares with others from marginalized groups. “Outsider within status enables Black women and others from marginalized groups to develop a more comprehensive and hopefully more compassionate view of reality”. Additionally, Collins and others including hooks, Benham, and Delpit maintain the importance of acknowledging that social systems, of which schools are a part, endow varying degrees of power and privilege (i.e. social capital) to different groups of people. Clearly the differences in power and privileges affect the ability of Black women school superintendents to create change and act for social justice.

Critical Race Theory is essential in this study because racism is a permanent feature in the United States and because this study is about Black women. Ladson-Billings (1995), Parker (1998), Brown (1993) and Solarzano (1997) perceive race as a factor that determines inequalities in the United States. Racism is so enmeshed in the fabric of our society that it’s considered normal and natural. Subsequently, race belongs at the center of the discussion. Taylor (1999) asserts that Critical Race Theory is based in two critical elements: (1) racism in America is a normal fact of daily life and should not be

considered aberrant or rare, and (2) the assumptions of White superiority are so pervasive in our political and legal systems as to be unrecognizable (Delgado, 1999). Critical Race Theory offers members of marginalized groups the opportunity to share life experiences while openly acknowledging that perceptions of truth, fairness, and justice reflect the mindset, status and experience of the knower (Taylor, 1999). CRT suggests that storytelling is a powerful way of dispelling and challenging the mythic norm of society. Storytelling, narrative, autobiography and personal history are appropriate venues for engaging and contesting negative stereotyping (Taylor, 1999). The advantage of this theoretical framework for oppressed people is that it challenges the White standard of normalcy (Calmare, 1995) as it grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color (Williams, 1991).

The second theoretical lens is organizational justice theory. This perspective helps me understand how these Black women superintendents work to create socially just schools. Equity theory (Adams, 1965) is one of the earliest approaches used to better understand organizational justice theory. First, distributive justice is the criterion that determines the distribution of resources. Procedural justice includes the process which determines whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced. Lastly, interactional justice includes relationships with subordinates: specifically the communication between supervisors and subordinates. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) argue that social justice is about full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. In a socially just society the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure.



The third lens of this framework draws on the leadership literature, specifically, the leadership of women. Historically, all literature about the women in educational leadership was derived from studies of males and from a traditional scientific management perspective. Only recently have women begun to study other women in the leadership and specifically in the superintendency (Schmuck, 1999). Astin and Leland (1991) studied “women leaders and the social movement—the modern women’s movement” (p. xvii) over a period of thirty years. Three major themes emerged from their study: (1) the women thought of leadership as a process of working with and through people, thus using power in a collective manner; (2) they all shared a strong, passionate commitment to social justice and change; and (3) the women’s performance as leaders consistently demonstrated a thoughtful approach that included clear values, listening to and empowering others, and always doing their homework. Astin and Leland concluded that the women leaders worked through collective and nonhierarchical action with other like-minded people to accomplish the social reform they desired.

Finally, this framework, based on Black Feminist and Critical Race Theories, Social Justice Theories, and Superintendent Leadership Theory was chosen as the guiding framework for this study because of the congruent relationship that exists between these theories and qualitative research methods. My conceptual lens is rooted in critical Black feminist postmodern theory. According to Benham and Cooper (1998), postmodern theory uncovers layers that reveal the historical, political, cultural, ethical, and gender discrimination to understand the lives of women (p.12).

The metaphor that I chose to explain my initial conceptual model is “Double Dutch.”

Many women and specifically Black women jumped rope as little girls. Those that were skilled would advance to the “Double Dutch” style, which is the addition of a second rope being turned simultaneously in the opposite direction from the first. This feat required numerous skills, which can be likened to the skills that Black women school superintendents must possess and/or acquire in order to create socially just schools. She must jump to a rhythm that allows her to stay on her feet while jumping through, across, over and sometimes between the ropes of race, gender, class, slavery, oppression, isolation, segregation, and glass ceilings. The Black woman superintendent is indeed the “outsider within.” She’s in the club but never a part of the club, jumping and dodging all the ropes but never once having the chance to “turn the ropes.”

#### PRELIMINARY EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how race and gender affect the practice of Black women school superintendents creating socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/institutional culture.

Following from the above-stated purpose, the central research question is: How do the life experiences of Black women school superintendents influence their navigating successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable learning environments?

From this major question the following sub-questions arise:

1. How do these women define the meaning of working for social justice? How does their experience(s) illustrate the meaning of working for social justice in schools?
2. How do these woman address tensions, both personal and professional (across

- institutional, political, cultural, economic and social arenas), that they confront as they work to create socially just learning environments?
3. What are the tensions between leadership for transformation vs. organizational structures, human relations differences, political stress and symbolic/cultural differences? What are the structural, political, and human barriers that one has to overcome?
  4. What does leadership for social justice look like? What place does this effort to lead for social justice hold in these women's practice?

### Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provides background information about the study, including the research questions. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. Chapter III includes a rationale for and description of the research design and methodology used in this study. Chapter IV contains the journeys of the Black women superintendents who were the focus of the study and an analysis of the themes that I identified. Conclusions and implications of the findings, as well as implications for future research are presented in Chapter V.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the available literature as it relates to black women in educational administration and more specifically, Black women in the superintendency. In order to facilitate a coherent and reasonably comprehensive examination of the related studies, it made sense to pay attention to three pertinent bodies of literature. First, groundwork for the literature review is provided by a discussion of Black Feminist and Critical Race Theories. Second, Social Justice Theories are examined to explore the decreasing demand for equity in education. Thirdly, there is an increasing body of literature about women in educational leadership and more precisely women in the superintendency, especially in recent years, which deserves attention.

These three bodies of literature lay the foundation for me to ask, "How the life experiences of Black women superintendents influence their navigating successfully or unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools?" This chapter ends with a summary that includes a rationale, from the literature, for the need and purpose of this study.

#### OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

##### BLACK FEMINIST THEORIES

Feminist theory is not simply about women, although it is that, it is about the

world, but seen from the usually ignored and devalued vantage point of women's experiences. (Ferguson, 1994, p.xii)

Harding (1991) bases her definition of Feminist Standpoint Theory on the historical devaluing and neglecting of women's lives as a starting point for scientific research. She argues that knowledge ought to include human lives while taking into account the different experiences of men and women in society. Harding recognizes that all women do not share the same race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation but instead they share different experiences, activities, struggles, and perspectives from each other as well as men. Grant (1993) concurs by saying that, "Metaphors like quilting, weaving, or plaiting are used by feminist standpoint theorists to show"[t]here is not one women's culture ; there are many"(Aptheker, 1989,p.13). Feminist perspective emphasizes what Lee (1994) sees as "feminist attributes of persuasion over power, cooperation over competition, collectivism over individualism and inclusion over exclusion (Johnson, 1997, p.10). This bears out in most of the literature about women in educational leadership.

Historically, the first wave of early Feminist theory focused on the rights of women to be educated. The second wave focused on the struggle for additional educational goals for women, i.e., the right to criticize the accepted body of knowledge, the right to create knowledge, and the right to be educators and educational administrators (Reinharz, 1992).

In a critical review of the literature on Black Feminist Theories, major themes emerge as pivotal points of Black Feminist Thought. One such theme is that feminism has never

emerged from women who are most often the victims of sexist oppression. Much Feminist Theory develops from “privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin”(hooks, 1984, preface).

hooks uses Betty’s Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* to illustrate this point. Freidan’s work looks at the plight of a group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white housewives’ plight to have more out of life in order to gauge the impact of sexism and sexual oppression. hooks takes issue with the popular notion of modern Feminist thought that “all women are oppressed”(hooks, 1984). This not does account for race, class, religion, and sexual orientation. Hooks goes on to say that the feminist movement itself is often oppressive for several reasons: there is a dominant voice of women that often turns a “deaf” ear to the silent voices (hooks, 1984,13).

Another theme that emerges from the literature is seen in much of Collins’ (1989) work. She states that we need to move towards race, class and gender as categories of connections. We need to step out of the box of dichotomous thinking and move away from the *either/or* and towards the *both and*. Collins asserts that we can do this by building relationships and coalitions that will bring about social change. Furthermore, she states that we are each responsible for making individual choices about which elements of race, class, and gender we will accept and which we will work to change.

Likewise, in a later work, Collins (1990) discusses Black feminist theory by stating that “an outsider-within stance functions to create a new angle of vision on the process of suppression. Black women have a distinct view of the contradictions between

dominant group's actions and ideologies" (pp.10-11). Collins (1990) notes that Black women as a group experience a world different from that of those that are non-black and non-female. She also cites that Black women have often occupied marginal positions in academic settings. She asserts that many Black women intellectuals have made use of their marginality, i.e. their "outsider-within" status, to produce Black feminist thought that reflects a special perspective on self, family, and society (Alston, 1995). Hence, the alternative view of adopting the "both/and" view of race, class and gender takes us out of that "either/or" box (Collins, 1989, p.4).

Collins (1991) explores the politics of black feminist thought by looking at the oppression of African-American women. She asserts that three interdependent dimensions have served to keep African-American women in their "assigned subordinate place" (Collins, 1991,p.7). These three dimensions include the exploitation of Black women in the labor market, political denial of rights and privileges afforded to white males, and negative stereotyping. Dealing with these issues and their related consequences left Black women little room for intellectual work. "This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite white male interests and worldviews" (Collins, 1991,p.7). This allowed the dominant voice in feminist thought to develop the theories and to be the only ones engaged in the discourse.

Collins goes on to talk about how Black women even in their oppressive state have found ways to become resistant. For example, Black women doing domestic work were allowed to see their white elitist families in very different perspectives than Black

men or other Black women who were not in the homes. Black women actually developed strong ties with the children and their employers. This seemed such a contradiction from Black women remaining in “their” place (Collins, 1991,p.11).

Collins asserts “...Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women” (p. 22). The Black woman’s standpoint includes these five basic dimensions:

1. There are certain themes that will be prominent African-American women’s experiences; we share the common experience of being Black in a society that has very little respect for women of color
2. That Black women will response or react to these common themes in a variety of ways based on our own previous experiences
3. That there is a connection between our experiences and our consciousness; that is, “Many African- American women have grasped this connection between what one does, and how one thinks
4. The difficulty between articulating a new found consciousness and fully developing that self-defined standpoint
5. The interdependence of thought and action

According to Collins, Black Feminism is “...a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community”(1990, p.39).

She affirms that the experiences, attitudes and perspectives of African-American women have been consistently ignored or discounted in the political theories of white feminist thinkers. While she acknowledges the important contributions white feminists have made to gender issues, she notes that these thinkers have not taken into account the intersection of race, gender, and social class as a feminist issue (Collins, 1990, p.16).

There are issues that arise from the experiences of African-American women that force them to see their experiences as women in a very different light (Collins, 1990, p. 22). Collins is not opposing the theories of White Feminist, but attempting to offer a feminist position that starts with Black women at the center of analysis (xii). She wants to expound a Black Feminist thought that starts and ends with the lived lives of Black



women.

Hooks' (1984) discussion of Feminist Theory focuses on addressing the issue of marginality. She states that, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside of the main body" (vii). She talks about being in the margin as compared to the center. An example is this is how African Americans were allowed to cross the tracks to the center to work as maids, janitors and other service related jobs while not being allowed to enter stores, eat in restaurant, etc. At sunset African Americans always had to cross back over the track, leave the center and return to the margin.

hooks (1993) suggests that feminism should be about creating awareness of the factors that alienate minority women, who are oppressed and without any choice "being oppressed means the absence of choice" (p. 5). hooks derives the meaning of oppression through the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class, "while Feminist analyses of women's lot tend to focus exclusively on gender and do not provide a solid foundation on which to construct feminist theory" (p.14). hooks goes on to expound further on the notion of marginality. She declares that, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (Preface). This accurately captures the African American experience as well as that of other marginal groups. Hooks defines feminism as, "the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely one group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men"(p.26). She goes on to avow that genuine struggle to end sexist oppression should also serve to strengthen other liberation struggles.

The theme of voice is prevalent in the work of Black feminists. Lorde (1984)

conveys the significance of voice for Black women by intervening, “Of course, I’m afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (p.42). It is expressed in Black feminist thought that having a voice requires that there must be an audience. Moreover, Collins (1991) offers a suggestion for Black women to gain their voice. She says, “Persistence is a fundamental requirement of this journey from silence to language to action” (p. 112).

Black women do not neatly fit into the mainstream Feminist framework of reference. Thus, viewing Black women superintendents from a Black feminist framework helps to establish a better model of analysis. Because of the small number of Black women school superintendents, moving from their “outsider within” status and beyond the glass ceiling and walls, requires much on the part of the individual and on the establishment, and the ways of old will not do” (Alston, 1995, p. 40).

Taken together, the ideas of Patricia Hill Collins, Ann Julia Cooper, Pauli Murray, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and other Black women intellectuals too numerous to mention suggests a powerful answer to the question, “What is Black Feminism?” Inherent in their words and deeds is a definition of Black Feminism as a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community (Collins, 1990, 39).

The philosophical foundations of Black Feminist Theories centers on the interrelatedness of race, class, and gender, the “outsider within” phenomenon and power

and privilege. Given that these are important constructs of Black Feminist Thought we also need to look at Critical Race, Social Justice, and Leadership Theories to gain a broader understanding of the work of the Black woman superintendent.

## CRITICAL RACE THEORIES

Critical Race Theory is essential because racism is a permanent fixture in many countries. Ladson-Billings (1995), Parker (1998) Brown (1993) and Solorzano (1997) perceive race as a factor that determines inequalities in the United States. As a result, the “power of race” is prevalent in the US (p.192). “Race socialization frequently privileges White characteristics and marginalizes characteristics associated with people of color (Sleeter, 1993).

Solorzano (1997) defines Critical Race Theory “ ... as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color” (p. 6). Drawing upon definitions of Critical Race Theory from various scholars Solorzano identifies five main themes that form this perspective:

1. The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism: Race and racism are endemic, permanent and central to critical race analysis.
2. The Challenge to Dominant Ideology: The traditional claim to color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity is challenged. He sees these claims as a way for the dominant to maintain their power and dominance.
3. The Commitment to Social Justice: There is an overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism.
4. The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge: The lived experiences of Women and Men of Color are centrally important to teaching the law and its relation to racial

subordination.

5. The Interdisciplinary Perspective: It's important to examine the law by putting race and racism in an historical and contemporary context. (p. 6)

In defining race, Solorzano refers to John Banks' assertion that race is a socially constructed category created to differentiate racial groups and to show superiority of one race over another (p. 8). Ladson-Billings (1995), another well-known scholar of Critical Race Theory, argues that Critical Race Theory (CRT) should be a matter of discourse in the discussion of inequalities in schools. Her professional desire is for Critical Race Theory to become a vital component in the educational research/scholarly community (p. 7). She shares that when she and her colleague (Tate) started this dialogue there were many asking why not gender, class, and multicultural perspectives. Ladson-Billings emphasizes an important point in Critical Race Theory, race still matters (8). She shares that even though racial categories have changed over time two categories remain constant: Black and White. Race is very much an important issue in this discourse.

To further her argument, Ladson-Billings shares that Critical Race Theory begins with the premise that racism is normal and permanent in America. She contends that Critical Race Theory should encourage teacher education to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in education and work to eliminate the racism. In addition, Critical Race Theory should become a vital component in the educational research/scholarly community.

According to Delgado (1995,p.xiii) Critical Race Theory was a product of the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the mid-70s who were both concerned about the slow rate of racial reform in the United States. Bell, Freeman and others were

frustrated that the traditional civil rights strategies (i.e. appealing to the moral sensibilities of decent citizens, protests, marches) no longer seemed to be effective. Though a separate entity, Critical Race Theory is an outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies. Critical Legal Studies is a leftist legal movement that took issue with traditional legal scholarship. Critical Legal Studies scholars favored a form of law that spoke to the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural contexts instead of focusing on doctrinal and policy analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

There are several tenets to Critical Race Theory. First, there is the notion that racism is so enmeshed in the fabric of our society that it's considered normal and natural. For example, in Derrick's Bell's *Faces in the Bottom of the Well* (1992), racism is seen as a permanent fixture in American society. Second, Critical Race Theory sometimes uses storytelling to examine what we believe about race. Thirdly, its critique of liberalism is still another tenet of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory asserts that "racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism has no mechanism for such change. Rather, liberal legal practices support the painstakingly slow process for arguing legal precedence to gain citizen rights for people of color"(Ladson-Billing, 1999). The final tenet of Critical Race Theory argues that the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation have been whites, specifically white women, and not blacks. Parker (1998) shares that the major point of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is to place race at the center of the analysis of how whites and institutions in the U.S. assume whiteness as the norm.

Secondly, Parker advocates the use of CRT in education and qualitative research. Parker states, "The nexus of Critical Race Theory from the legal arena, and qualitative

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research methods and methodologies in education, provides a framework to understand the centrality of racism in school and university settings. The narratives generated from qualitative research serve as a powerful link between historical vestiges of past racism and the effects of what the color-blind perspective omits with its present-day orientation” (p. 49). Parker thinks that theorizing about race from a critical perspective can allow a forum for dialogue about the ongoing realities and struggles centered on race (p.51). Parker goes on to say that the future implications of Critical Race Theory and its place in education will be determined by researchers and scholars examining its connections to racism in schools and its impact on students of color (p.52).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) assert that regardless of how much race is in the forefront in our society it still remains untheorized by scholars, especially in the understanding of social and school inequity. They assert that Critical Race Theory needs to be developed in the educational arena just as it is in legal scholarship (p. 47). To this end, Ladson-Billings and Tate state three propositions related to social and school inequity:

1. Race is a significant factor in determining inequity in the U.S.
2. Our society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property can be used to understand social and school inequity. (p.48)

Race continues to be a factor in determining inequity in the U.S. One only has to look at statistical and demographic data to realize that race is still a major issue in all aspects of inequity in the U.S. The theories about gender and class have proliferated while thoughts on race go untheorized (p. 49). This is even more evident as one realizes that the

class and gender based explanations are not powerful enough to explain the variation in school experience and performance among minorities (p. 51).

Another issue that these two theorists talk about is that U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights (p.52). A paradox lies in the fact that property ownership is important in the U.S., yet we have a segment of our society whose ancestors were once (not very long ago) considered property of their slave owners (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.53). Additionally, racism is seen as endemic and deeply ingrained in American life.

Ladson-Billings and Tate also question what they consider to be shortcomings with some civil rights legislation. They assert that the African-American students seem to benefit the least from the Brown decision and other civil rights legislation (p.55). Finally, these two authors look at the intersection of race and property in understanding a Critical Race Theory approach to education. The authors rely on Harris' (1993) "property function of whiteness":

1. Rights of disposition: students are rewarded for conformity to white norms and sanctioned for cultural practices that might differ from those norms.
2. Rights to use and enjoyment: whites use and enjoy the white privilege status.
3. Reputation and status property: being called anything other than white is detrimental to your reputation and/or status.
4. The absolute right to exclude: the unspoken rule that to exclude others is acceptable. (59-60)

Finally, these authors say "...as Critical Race Theory scholars we unabashedly reject the paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail. Instead, we align our scholarship and activism with the philosophy of Marcus Garvey, who believed that the black man



was universally oppressed on racial grounds, and that any program of emancipation would have to be built around the question of race first” (p.62). This leads to the next theme prevalent in the literature: the construct of power and privilege.

Power and privilege are two constructs that arise from the Black Feminist and Critical Race Theory literatures. Unlike people of color, women are not a numerical minority. Women are the majority in the U.S. population. They are considered a minority group because, like people of color, they lack access to power. However, even though White women lack social, political, and economic power, they enjoy a privileged status in U.S. society based on their race (Macintosh 1988; hooks, 1990).

School leaders must recognize and acknowledge that current social systems, including schools, endow varying degrees of power and privilege (social and political capital) to different groups of people. Indeed the differences in the distribution of power and privilege constrain the ability of ethnic minority women school leaders to connect with and engage in dialogue and action across differences. On an institutional level, the barriers resulting from racism often restrict Black people from access to power and privilege within the institution (Banks, 1995). “Scholars, practitioners, and gatekeepers (those who control entry into educational leadership) are socialized and participate in a society that makes cultural assumptions about women and people of color. Those cultural assumptions grow out of societal norms and values that marginalize these two groups” (Banks, 1995,p.67). “Decisions about who is the focus of research, who is recruited and hired, and who does or does not get promotions are made within a social context in which women and people of color experience an inferior social status and are often objects of

negative stereotypes”(Banks, 1995, p.67). Another theory closely aligned with Critical Race Theory is Social Justice.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORIES

There are immediate difficulties that one confronts when examining social justice because it does not have one particular meaning. Numerous theorists have defined social justice in a variety of ways. For example, Sadurski (1985) says legal justice is about conforming to the rules while social justice is about the distributive qualities of those rules. Judgments about social justice confirm that the rule distributes burdens and benefits justly among members of a community.

Several other authors expand this basic premise further. Rawls (1972) says that the principles of social justice provide a way of assigning rights and duties, and distributing the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. Griffiths (1998) tends to agree by describing social justice as a movement to a fairer and less oppressive society. She goes on to say that education is central to this movement and shares a working definition of social justice that emerges from her discussion. She states that:

1. It is good for the common interest, where that is taken to include the good for each and also the good for all, in an acknowledgment that one depends on the other.
2. The good depends on there being a right distribution of benefits and responsibilities. (p.4)

Related to this discussion Equity Theory can be used to get at the heart of what social justice is. The literature further presents three types of social justice within the Equity Theory: distributive, procedural and interactional. Distributive Justice is the criteria that organizations set up to determine distribution of resources. Special interest

groups often influence it (Folger and Skarlicki, 1999). Procedural Justice includes the process. It refers to the fairness of the procedures to determine outcomes, or rather, the study of how distributive decisions are made. It determines whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced. Finally, interactional justice includes relationship with subordinates and specifically the manner of communication between supervisors and subordinates. Employees' perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal treatment received during the enactment of the organizational procedures further define interactional justice.

According to Rizvi (1998) social justice is embedded within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent endeavors (p. 47) As Rizvi explains, social justice needs to be articulated in terms of particular values, which while not fixed across time and space, nevertheless have to be given specific content in particular struggles for reform. Although Ritzvi articulates social justice to reflect social and economic condition inequities, he does not focus his attention on issues of race, economic class, and gender. Rizvi fails to acknowledge the long-standing hierarchical power relations of race, class and gender that continue to be prevalent today, making Black women and children lower class citizens. Fortunately, other scholars acknowledge the power relations of race, class and gender.

Collins (1998) clearly recognizes that Black women have been experiencing “social mobility into the middle class by gaining formal entry into historically segregated residential, educational and employment spaces represents bona fide change” (p.13). However, Collins is quick to point out that overall, Black women are still facing

inequities because of their race, class, and gender. Therefore, many Black women feel obligated to challenge racial, economical, and gender issues of oppression. As a result of the oppression felt by Black women, they are concerned with seeking justice. Collins argues, “Even though Black women’s concern for justice is shared with many others, Black women have a group history in relationship to justice”(p. 244). In a critical analysis of why Black women are compelled to struggle for justice, Collins (1998) asserts that Black women believe “it is the right thing to do.”

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP THEORIES/SUPERINTENDENT THEORIES LEADERSHIP

The study of leadership theory is a relatively new field of study (Yukl, 1981). Scientific research on leadership did not begin until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. While there is no universally accepted definition for leadership, there are two assumptions found in most definitions. It is assumed that leadership is a group phenomenon and that leaders exercise intentional influence over followers (Yukl, 1981; Janda, 1960).

Yukl (1981) conducted a comprehensive review of research and theory on managerial leadership and concluded that the field is in a state on confusion. His concerns can be summarized to include: (a) the lack of agreement in the field about leadership as a concept; (b) the lack of agreement in the field about whether leaders exert influence on performance of the organization; (c) the conceptual weakness and lack of

clear empirical support of the current theories (Banks, 1995).

### Changing Views of Leadership and Change Theories

Today's educational challenges require a new kind of leadership, one that can bring together groups of people with diverse interests and needs and achieve results that will benefit the school and its surrounding communities. Comprehensive school reforms, global competitiveness, unstable economies, rapidly changing technology, human resource demands, and other concerns challenge educational leaders. Many of these individuals who have attempted to lead change efforts are abandoning their leadership position, citing the numerous difficulties with which they must contend. A reason for this phenomenon is in part the changing definitions of, expectations of, and needs for educational leaders. (Johnson, 1997)

Sergiovanni and Starhawk's (1992, 1993) scholarship adds a new assumption or paradigm of leadership in the concept of "power with" rather than "power over". These scholars believe that "power with" is the power not to command but to suggest and be listened to. Moreover, Sergiovanni and Starhawk assert that the source of power is the willingness of others to listen to leaders' ideas. Power with is not the authority to command, but acts as a channel to focus and direct the will of the group.

The American educational system is characterized by a history of reform and innovation. According to Popkewitz (1991), the purpose of change is to redesign social conditions to enable the individuals to exhibit the attributes, skills, or effects that are the expected outcome of the designated change. Popkewitz identifies power relations as a key component to the change process. The existence of these power relations ultimately

impacts the interactions between individuals as well as an individual's ability to affect the change process. He goes on to say that change is best understood within three main concepts: historically formed patterns, knowledge or epistemology, and power. Marris (1974) on the other hand, alludes that when encountering new situations, individuals rely on their experiences or historical perspectives to give meaning to the event. He refers to this as the conservative impulse. Marris states, "The will to adapt to change has to overcome an impulse to rerun to the past which is equally universal"(1974, p.5). Individuals gain confidence in the predictability of their surroundings. This allows individuals to attach meaning and respond. When confronted with the introduction of change, an individual will try to assimilate it into a familiar set of behaviors and understandings. Again, the individual utilizes his/ her previous experiences as a filter for the innovation. If it is easily assimilated into their comfort level, it will have a better chance of sustaining its existence. These two perspectives of change theory are similar in that they draw on an element of history or past experiences in the seeing and knowledge which is formed through these past experiences to give meaning to the new ideas.

#### WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Much of the literature on school leadership and theories of management and organization ignore women and often imply that managers are males or assume a gender-free position. This stance also ignores the issue of race, specifically the Black women school leader. Women and people of color were absent from the study of leadership until the late 1970s.

Sadly, this was not seen as problematic because researchers blindly assumed that

all findings could be applied with no regard to race and gender. Most theories that framed research did so as if race and gender were of no consequence (McGregor, 1960; Argyris & Schön, 1974). Research on and conducted by women and people of color add another dimension to the study of leadership. Even with more research being conducted there is still a paucity of research on both women and people of color and there is considerably more research being done on women than people of color (Banks, 1995). How can we account for this negligible amount of research? Feminist writers say organizations often segment opportunity structures and job markets in ways that enable men to achieve positions of prestige and power more easily than women. It is called “glass ceiling” effect; women can see the opportunities but the path is blocked by gender biases (Morgan, 1997,191).

The history of women in education and educational supervision is worthy of note. In the earliest stage of colonial American education, women were not allowed to teach or learn. The general belief was that women were inferior to men and that her place was in the home (Simmons, 1971). Theorists like Jean Jacques Rousseau concurred that women did not need an education because their task was to get married, be submissive and ornamental to their husbands, raise their children, and do or supervise the necessary domestic work (Sapiro, 1986 as cited in Hornbuckle, p.19).

The Revolutionary War served as a major catalyst for changing the roles of women and specifically their role in education. Women were left alone and charged with managing the home and business during the war. This resulted in greater confidence and pride in their abilities and they began to rally for legal and political rights (Clinton,

1984). Following the American Revolution, women began to lobby for education for themselves and their daughters. Access to education was granted to women as a result of their role in the education and moral development of their sons for citizenship (Shakeshaft, 1989).

In the late 1800's, women continued to dominate the field of teaching and the division of teaching and administration began to develop, however, administration was regarded as a male-dominated field. Women taught children under the direction of men as the managers (Tyack & Strober, 1980). Teaching remained one of the few occupational choices open to women, and it was mainly open for educated women who chose to remain single.

Since 1905 males consistently dominated school administration except in the early days of the elementary school principalship (Shakeshaft, 1989). Teachers have not always been women although in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, teaching has been identified as a female profession. Until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century men did all teaching. When women did enter the ranks of teachers, only white women did the entering. Black women teachers came on the scene in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Shakeshaft, 1989).

A number of women were admitted to the ranks of educational administration in the early 1900's. This "golden age" was made possible due to the Feminist movement, the organization of women teachers, the right for women to vote in local elections in some states, and economic advantages since women administrators were paid less than their male counterparts (Shakeshaft, 1989). After 1930, the number of women in administration began to decline. Many school boards began to cut back on women



teachers and administrators as a result of the Great Depression. Many felt that married men were supporting families while single women were merely supporting themselves. In summary of the years dominated by the world wars, women had brief opportunities in school administration during the world wars, because of the absence of men (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980).

Recent literature has been rich with descriptions of women leaders and their qualities. Gilligan (1982) and others have long argued that theories and concepts based on the male model may be irrelevant and inadequate as a standard for females. Gilligan was one of the first to recognize that women see the world through a different lens than men. She went on to challenge the prevailing theories of moral orientation and value development because women had been excluded from the studies, which originally established these norms.

Belenky et al. (1986) agreed that women differed from men in the following ways: women talk of connecting with ideas rather than mastering them, and women begin with a connected approach and become more objective as they go through life. One should conclude from this that that women as educational leaders would emphasize caring and helping over rights, rules, and principles and that schools and school systems led by women would be established to provide support to teachers and students as they go about the task of teaching and learning.

## **BLACKS AND BLACK WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

The first Black school administrators mentioned in history who could be

considered equivalent of our current school administrators, were those in Quaker-sponsored institutions. Black principals managed the Quaker-sponsored Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia from 1802 to 1903. Black administrators wielded influence in determining the educational objectives and practices of Quaker-sponsored Black institutions during the late nineteenth and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Jones, 1982,p.5). Those that would follow to serve as administrators did so primarily in Black schools and colleges in the South. During the Reconstruction period, freedmen's schools were established with the assistance of the federal government in order to educate Blacks. Schools were re-segregated when southern whites regained power.

In 1910, no Black schools offered courses above the seventh grade and the average Black school only operated four months a year (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Many of the great Black teachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began their careers as elementary teachers in segregated public schools. Others went on to establish separate private schools that served elementary through the college level. There were 14 Black women's colleges established by 1912 and a 1904 article noted that Black women had raised \$14 million for the education of Black children and 25,000 Black teachers (Amott & Matthaei, 1991).

The number of Black principals declined following the Brown vs. Topeka Kansas School Board decision of 1954. Schools in Black communities were closed or merged with schools for Whites, and White educators were appointed principals of the new schools (Jones, 1985). Records document the first Black superintendents being appointed in 1956 (Scott, 1980) heading all-Black school districts.

In literature, specifically referring to the Black superintendent, Moody (1971) and

Scott (1980) noted the presence of declining financial conditions, large non-white student populations, majority non-white school boards and staff, and serious problems in the districts where Black were hired as superintendents” (Jones 1985, p.22). A more recent study by Moody & Moody (1995) cited that of the 14, 881 school districts in the United States, only 215 had Blacks serving as superintendents. Seventy-three percent of the 215 were males and twenty-seven percent were female. An earlier study by Scott (1980) noted that not only were there few Blacks in the superintendency, but that the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) neither collected nor disseminated the names and locations of Black superintendents. It was as if they were nonexistent until they became heads of large urban systems (Scott, 1980).

Charles Moody’s dissertation, Black Superintendents in Public School Districts: Trends and Conditions (1971) resulted in the formation of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. The organization initially started as a group of Black superintendents who met to discuss their concerns. Both Moody (1983) and Scott (1983) cited that Black superintendents tended to head predominantly Black school systems.

More relevant to my study is the examination of scholarship about Black women in the superintendency. In “Seeking Representation: Supporting Black Female Graduate Students Who Aspire to the Superintendency,” Cryss Brunner and Lisa Peyton (2000) briefly review the sparse literature about Black women superintendents. Identified through this research were an unpublished dissertation and two articles by Revere (1989). She noted that before 1956, the fact that Black women superintendents existed was obscured. On exception that Revere found was a Black female named Velma Dolphin

Ashley who headed the Boley, Oklahoma, school district from 1944 until 1956.

There were also a few unpublished dissertations (Adams, 1990; Alston, 1996; Bulls, 1986; Payne, 1975; Revere, 1985; Watt, 1995). Recently, two pieces (Alston, 1999; Jackson, 1999) were published in an edited book (Brunner, 1999). Barbara L. Jackson's article chronicles the updated history and biographies of thirty-two Black women superintendents in office in 1993-1994 by focusing on their lives, motivations, and impact. Jackson noted that most studies of Black women focused on specific issues or problems. Four themes emerged from the interviews done in Jackson's (1999) study:

1. The women interviewed had the support and experiences as they grew up that, unknown to them, prepared them for leadership. When opportunity knocked, they accepted the challenge, which was their due, only to find, similar to many White and male superintendents, that their time in power was limited and the turnover was high.
2. Although they all discussed the difficulties of staying in the job, they believed that they were making a difference for students. Optimism was their sustaining attitude.
3. All who survived came to realize that the superintendency is "life in a fishbowl" and accepted their new public persona.
4. Belying the popular misconception that African American women were not as well prepared as others, their lives as young budding professionals amply demonstrated that they were ready for leadership (e.g. doctoral degrees, robust experiences in the field, and good strong connections to their communities) and had meaningful life experiences as educators.

In Judy Alston's (1999) article in the same edited book, she identifies the barriers and supports that Black women experience en route to the superintendency. Women in her study ranked the following five factors as either moderate or great barriers in their pursuit of the superintendency:

1. Absence of "old-boy network," support systems or sponsorship.
2. Lack of awareness of political maneuvers.
3. Lack of role models.
4. Societal attitudes that Blacks lack the competency in leadership positions.
5. No Formal or informal method for identifying Black aspirants to

administrative positions.

Furthermore, Alston (1999) found that the subsequent six facilitators were ranked as follows:

1. Positive working relations with the school board.
2. Solid teamwork with experienced qualified staff and faculty.
3. Acceptance by non-Black employers.
4. Confidence in personal and professional capabilities.
5. Provision of mentor or sponsor.
6. Acceptance by Black administrators and teachers.

## SUMMARY

These bodies of literature provide the foundation for me to ask how the life experiences of Black women superintendents influence their navigating successfully or unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools. The literature was reviewed to gain a better understanding of what race, gender, leadership and social justice are and what possibilities and boundaries exist for them in the study of leadership for social justice.

## Chapter III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore how race and gender affect the practice of Black women school superintendents as they work to create socially just and equitable urban school settings while navigating the tensions of the organizational/ institutional culture. I believed that the leadership experiences of Black women could be of value and contribute to our understanding of leadership. Narrative inquiry and phenomenological methods used in this work assisted me in understanding the life experiences, personal meaning, hopes and dreams of the select group of Black women School superintendents.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the individuals' life stories. The researcher explores a story told by the participant and records that story through the construction of narrative. This method assumes that people's lives are a story and then seeks to collect data to describe those lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote, "The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p.2). Polkinghorne (1995) states "stories are linguistic expressions of this uniquely human experience of the connectedness of life"(p.7).

Benham and Cooper (1998) grounded their study of nine diverse women school leaders in narrative inquiry. These scholars consider narratives as a valuable tool because; "They allow us to understand the world in new ways and to help us communicate new

ideas of others” (p.10). Their rationale for using narrative is that “Narrative methods might very well be more responsive to the researcher’s and practitioner’s intent to bring to the surface those experiences that go beyond superficial masks and stereotypes” (p.7).

Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1994) use of narrative in her research and writing confirms its suitability for this type of study. Her two decades of scholarship related to education and human resources uses narrative in the cultural tradition of storytelling. Lawrence-Lightfoot argues, “The African-American legacy of story telling infuses these narratives and serves as a source of deep resonance between us” (p. 606). It is through narrative that her African-American “storytellers” can reveal their life’s journey. Convincingly, Lawrence-Lightfoot asserts that through storytelling” returning to the source continually strengthens these journeyers” (p. 606).

### LOCATING MYSELF AS RESEARCHER

My interest in this study grew out of my own experiences as a Black woman school educator who has worked most recently as a middle school principal. In that position I was the first Black woman school principal in our district since the integration of our district schools. During my tenure as principal I dealt with issues of racism, sexism and classism directed both at me and at other minorities. I bring the memories of those experiences (biases may be a more accurate description) to this study. Additionally, I grew up in the mid-sixties as a member of a family that was well known throughout the surrounding communities as activists for social justice. I remember marching in a protest of inhumane treatment of Native Americans as a youngster. I remember participating in a

rally organized by my brother denouncing police brutality against minorities. I remember the worried look on my mom's face as she waited to hear word about my brother and my cousin as they attempted to integrate a local eating establishment or later as two cousins integrated the county public library. I bring these biased memories to this study.

As I began doctoral studies in Educational Administration at Michigan State University, I became aware of the lack of congruence between my own day-to-day leadership experiences and those described in the literature of educational leaders. Notably absent from this literature was critical analysis of the impact of race, gender, and class on the practice and conceptualization of leadership.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

### THE POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The participants for this research included a purposefully selected sample of four Black women superintendents leading urban school systems. Patton (1990) described purposeful sampling as the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The Council of the Great Cities Schools is an organization that is comprised of 55 of the largest urban school settings in the United States. This organization provided an avenue to identify and select potential participants. From that organization's membership roster, thirteen school systems were identified as having Black women serving as superintendents.

The sampling process included several steps. The first step involved making initial contacts with the identified potential superintendents. A letter was faxed and/or e-



mailed to each of the thirteen women outlining the nature of the study, and requesting an opportunity to talk to them about participating in the study. The participants were selected from this small number based on those fitting the selection criteria as well as those consenting to participate in the study. The population of this study is composed of four Black women school superintendents. The women selected met the following criteria established for this study:

1. Identified herself as African American or Black.
2. Was a public school superintendent in an urban school setting.
3. Had at least 20 years of tenure in K-12 education with a career path in teaching, counseling and administration.

#### DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

First, three in-depth interviews of one to two hours were conducted with each participant. I used a mini disc recorder for all of the interviews and took hand written notes. Interviews lasted between one and a half to two hours. All of the interviews were conducted in the participants' offices. My first conversation with the participants set the stage for an interview between two Black women who shared possible historical, social, and professional similarities. Prior to the first interview the four women were asked to respond to a brief biographical questionnaire. This questionnaire provided basic biographical information.

In Black Feminist epistemology, primacy is given to dialogue, and to Black women meeting others as subjects, rather than objects. I sought to create an informal and open relationship during the interview. My professional and personal experiences enabled me as a Black woman, to bring "theoretical sensitivity" to the interview process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This framed the interaction between the participants and me and provided

an early and comfortable interviewer-interviewee level of communication.

The interview protocols used in this study were developed by Benham (1995) and Coflesh (1995) and adapted for use with Black women. A variety of probes were used to establish each woman's life history, her formal and informal learning experiences as an educator, her meaning making of the connections between her work and life, and her understanding of social justice. A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the instruments and data collection methods. Following the pilot study, the researcher made minor revisions to the interview protocols.

Secondly, I shadowed the superintendents in their work settings for at least one day. I observed and took notes of their interactions with staff, students, parents, community members and school board members. For example, I had an opportunity to observe a meeting of one superintendent with a representative of the local teachers' union while they discussed some highly charged employment issues. In another instance I attended a statewide group of legislators, community colleges presidents, business leaders and others designated by the governor to examine the possibility of developing statewide benchmarks for student accountability. I was able to observe, make note of and question verbal and nonverbal actions that never surfaced during our interviews.

Thirdly, I conducted group dialogues, which allowed me to hear what other members of her communities see as acts of social justice from the superintendents. I requested the superintendent to select five persons and ask them to meet with me in order to discuss some of the problems she faces both as a woman and as a leader. In most instances the group dialogue members were district office staff but in one instance a

student, a parent and a community layperson participated in the group dialogue. Although interesting, these dialogues proved to add little to the results of this study. These dialogues confirmed that their colleagues and communities see these women as agents of change.

Lastly, I asked the women to share artifacts depicting their leadership for social justice. The women shared artifacts like books, photo albums, and newspaper clippings. One woman shared that a timer and a whip signified her leadership for social justice. She indicated that she was always on the staff to stick to the task at hand and get the job done. She saw her role of leadership in terms of being relentless and unyielding in her charge to provide the best education for all children and youth.

I kept a researcher journal (i.e. field notes) that allowed me to record details related to my observations, impressions, feelings, and reactions throughout the research process. Many experienced researchers write notes to themselves as a way to journal a personal record of insights, beginning understandings, working hunches, recurring words or phrases, ideas, questions, thoughts, concerns and issues (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Taylor and Bogdan, 1984).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection and data analysis were simultaneous throughout the qualitative research process (Merriam, 1988). Analytic procedures fall into five modes: organizing the data; generating categories, themes, and patterns; testing the emergent hypothesis against the data; searching for alternative explanations of the data; and writing the

narrative. The first step was that of organizing the data. Taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The field notes, audiotapes and documents were transferred into clearly readable form. Bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data was an enormous challenge. I read through the data many times to become familiar and intimate with the data. I reread the transcripts while listening to the tapes for the emergence of themes that appeared with some consistency. The literature review and, more specifically, the initial guiding framework served as a guide for initially marking the data that seemed to offer valuable insights as I reviewed the transcripts. After transcribing the interviews, I generated a matrix to help me organize and interpret the data. Coding was also useful in this procedure. The process involved a search for patterns and for connections between the various categories that later became my themes. In the literature, the term, “theme” was defined as a motif or subject for development. LeCompte et al (1992) stated that, “in qualitative ethnography, themes are used (a) to capture the variability of, spontaneity, and creativity of human social interactions, [and] (b) to organize the patterns of regularities amid chaos and complexity”(p.94). Finally I described those themes in Chapter Four.

In writing the narratives, I faced the inevitable challenge of deciding how to present judiciously and with clarity, the data collected. In relying heavily on the voices of the women, my goal was to present the passages that best captured the essence of the interviews, their experiences, thoughts, commitments and personalities. I feel that I accomplished this but I am aware that other data might as well have been chosen. While editing the narratives, I often called the participants to reflect, fill gaps in

information, or confirm that I understood the situation correctly.

Another issue that I faced was the accurate analyzing of the data or the criteria of interpretation. It's my responsibility as the researcher to verify my interpretation of the stories. To this end, I conducted member checking to verify my own interpretation of the collected data. A noted Black philosopher, a South African college professor and another professor who uses qualitative research methods in his own research, served as member checkers for my interpretation. This is in addition to my dissertation advisor who is also a distinguished researcher in the use of qualitative methods. Their feedback confirmed my interpretation of the data. Also, I triangulated the data with the use of shadowing, group dialogues and artifactual documentation.

#### LIMITATIONS

There are drawbacks with the use of narrative methods. One such drawback is the thought that the participants' answers may reflect what the participant thinks the researcher wants to hear. Generalizability or the ability to generalize descriptions and conclusions in one study to similar settings in another is a second drawback. Since narrative work is a study of a particular life in a specific context, it is difficult to generalize unique life experiences to a larger population (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The paradox of descriptive research is that while it serves well to magnify the dimensions of individual and group experiences, and enables one to achieve a depth of understanding rarely possible in quantitative research, the data do not generalize to large populations. This is particularly true of studies that involve small populations, such as this study. Nevertheless, certain themes emerged in the study that seem to be supported by the

finding of others (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1991; hooks, 1984, 1989, 1990)

A third drawback is the issue of internal validity or the trustworthiness of inferences. In this study numerous strategies will be used to ensure internal validity. First, using multiple sources to include interviews, shadowing, group dialogue, and document analysis achieves triangulation of the data. Second, the participant and I had the opportunity for ongoing dialogue to ensure that my interpretation of the data and conclusions are correct. Despite these potential limitations, this research is justified because of the need to explore the diverse perspectives of women and specifically Black women in the superintendency.

### ETHICAL CONCERNS

There are many issues that arise while conducting this type of research. The first and foremost concern of the researcher revolves around the issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data. These issues have raised fundamental debates in the academy about the nature of the academic enterprise and about the relationships among social science and research ethics, bureaucratic protection and political control and individual rights and obligations. Does the end of seeking knowledge justify the scientific means? What is public and what is private? When can research be said to be harmful to people? (See Punch, 1994; Wilkins, 1979; Horman & Bulmer, 1982)

Regarding the participants' right to informed consent, my participants were informed prior to the first interview about the nature of the study. They were informed about the study and told that they would be interviewed three times for approximately an

hour and a half to two hours, asked to reflect on their formal and informal educational experiences, and then requested to critically interpret the impact of their experiences on their practice. The participants were also informed that the interviews would be audio taped and that they had the right at any time to ask that the recorder be turned off. Finally, all participants were aware that they could withdraw from participation at any time.

In this chapter, I described the research design and methodology used in this study. Following this, I locate myself as researcher and describe the research design and methodology. Finally, I describe steps I used in analyzing the data and discuss the limitations of the study. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I have attempted to depict accurately the voices of four Black women superintendents who are leaders for social justice. The women's journeys are shared in the following chapter.

## Chapter IV

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the details of the stories of four Black women school superintendents. I use pseudonyms from African American fictional characters of nursery rhymes and well-known novels to mask their identity. The women tell the story of their journeys to leadership in their own voices. They talk of their early childhood, formal and informal education, becoming a leader, and the meaning of leadership and social justice. A brief introduction to the four women follows.

The stories begin with that of Mary Mack. She was born in Los Angeles, California, where she grew up in a working class family, the second of three siblings. She lived in Los Angeles until the age of six, when after the death of both parents; she went to live with her grandparents in Little Rock, Arkansas. At age fifty-nine, Mary Mack has thirty-eight years of experience as an educator and is presently in her first superintendency, a position she has held since 1996. Previous professional positions include those of teacher, central office staff, assistant principal, assistant superintendent, and deputy superintendent. She is married to a college professor and they have no children.

Sally Walker, the second participant, is fifty-three years old and is in her first year of her second superintendency. She was born and raised on a farm in a small rural town in Delaware, the second sibling of five. She has twenty-one years of experience as an educator as teacher, supervisor, vice principal, director, and assistant superintendent prior to coming to the superintendency. She is divorced and the mother of one son, a college



student.

Janie Crawford, the third participant, is a forty eight year old superintendent. The second of five children, she was raised in a middle to upper-middle class family. She has 24 years of experience in education including positions as a state department of education consultant, director, and deputy superintendent. Now in the first year of the superintendency, she is married and has two school-age sons.

Valeria Dutton, the fourth participant, is fifty-seven years old. The older of two siblings, she was born to a lower middle-to-middle class family in Pleasant Ridge, Alabama. At age two, her family moved to Van Wert, Indiana where she was raised. She is presently in the third year of her second superintendency. Her previous professional positions include those of teacher, assistant principal, assistant director, principal, assistant superintendent. She is married and has two adult sons.

All of the women except Janie Crawford grew up in working class families. Janie's father and mother had both earned college degrees and held professional positions. The four women in this study all have advanced degrees and administrative experiences prior to coming to the superintendency. All four women grew up in homes in which the importance of education was emphasized.

With the exception of Sally Walker, each of the women is married. Sally Walker had been married and was divorced while Valeria Dutton was divorced and had remarried a year and a half prior to our meeting. All of the women except Mary Mack had children; in fact, all of them had sons.

From the upcoming stories of their journeys, it will be evident that these women's

professional career movement was enhanced by the presence of mentors or advocates in their lives. Often, these mentors/advocates identified leadership skills and qualities that the woman themselves had not yet identified. In the following section, the story or journey of each participant in the study will be told in their own words under a series of headings, building on the prior introduction for each.

Table 4.1

**Black Women School Superintendents**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Social Background During Formative Years</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
<b>Mary Mack</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>Working Class Parents and Grandparents; Father: auto mechanic; Mother: homemaker Grandfather: custodian Grand-mother: did other people's laundry in her home</b>	<b>Married</b>
<b>Sally Walker</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>Working Class Parents Father: laborer Mother: homemaker</b>	<b>Divorced</b>
<b>Janie Crawford</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Upper Middle Class Parents Father: Executive Director Civil Service Mother: Medicaid Program Review Specialist</b>	<b>Married</b>
<b>Valeria Dutton</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>Middle Class Parents Father: military; laborer Mother: bookkeeper/licensed beautician</b>	<b>Married</b>

## THE JOURNEYS

### The Journey of Mary Mack: “*Leaping ahead on the pathway to success*”

Dr. Mary Mack was the first superintendent contacted about participating in my study. She was very receptive and willing to assist in the research. Even at our initial meeting, she was very warm and open. Her office was housed in a building that had been restored to look very stately and the building and surrounding grounds appeared neat and clean, with a real manicured look. I remember thinking that the building looked like anything but a district office for a school system.

At the first interview, I remember noticing the details of Dr. Mack’s office. Numerous shelves that contained memorabilia and particular pictures caught my eye, like those of Dr. Mack and First Lady Hillary Clinton together, as well as a picture of Dr. Mack and Kweisi Mfume, the present president and CEO of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Her office was large and very neat and presented a lot of evidence (i.e. artifacts on the walls and shelves) that she was well thought of in the previous districts where she worked.

Growing-up and Coming of Age: “*There was no doing what you wanted to do, you just knew that you would do*”. I was born in Los Angeles, California, where I lived for five years. Born on November 22, 1939, I was the second child of four. My younger sister was born at the time my Father was in the tuberculosis sanitarium. When Dad knew that he wouldn’t get better, he took us back to Little Rock, Arkansas. We had more family there. After Dad died Mom returned to California and later married my stepfather. My

Mother died in 1945. That July my brother and I were sent to live with our grandparents. We were close to my mother's family; we were close to a lot of grandparents...my father's mother and my father's father and my mother's father were all alive. They all lived within forty to fifty miles of us, but we lived basically with my maternal grandparents.

My family was working class with middle class attitudes and values. My father was an automobile mechanic and Mom worked in our home. My grandfather was a porter at the bakery and my grandmother did other people's laundry out of our home. My grandfather was a very proud person who always dressed immaculately. He would leave home wearing a three-piece suit, shirt and tie every morning. He would go in and change into his work clothes to clean the building, but when he came home he was in his suit, white shirt and tie again.

Since we had younger siblings living elsewhere, I was considered the baby of the family. My brother was very protective of me and I looked up to him. You could say that I took advantage of being the younger. To give you an example, I would spend my money on something foolish, whatever money I had, and if I ran out, I would go to him and because I was his little sister he would give me some of the money that he had saved (laugh). I have to say I was probably more of a risk-taker than my brother. My brother was very much a conformist. If this was the rule he followed it. I would find all these other things to do and while I would do what I needed with books, I also started thinking about how I could get around what I believed to be the strong opinions or beliefs of my grandparents and logically do it without causing harm to me, to them, or to anyone else.

My brother would even look at me and say what are you doing? He always followed the rules. I didn't break them, but I bent them. I think risk taking is a matter of you take the risk and be prepared to suffer the consequences.

In school, I had to live under my brother's shadow. I was always told; your brother would never have done that. Calvin would not have done that. I would say, I'm not Calvin, leave me alone, I don't care. I'm sure that for my grandparents I was not an easy child to raise. I was always testing the limits.

I started school in Los Angeles and then moved to Little Rock, Arkansas at age five. Little Rock was a city of about 150,000 and the capital of Arkansas. We lived in the city where we bought a house. Both parents had completed high school but they didn't do any college as far as I know. My father's sister and her husband became very influential in our lives. They would come to visit us and we would go visit them often. When they came it was always an adventure trip. They wanted us to see the world so they would take us on a lot of trips. We also had a couple of cousins that would also come for the summer. Whatever was cultural, my aunt and uncle would expose us to it. Sports, cultural activities, etc. we experienced it while we were there. They always tried to make sure that we did things that were important. If we wrote them a letter with grammatical mistakes they would read it and send it back with corrections.

Well, there were two professions I guess that were most talked about when I was growing up, nursing and teaching. We looked back and forth between both. The only other career option for you was doing clerical work. I had my appendix out when I was a senior in high school and I went in the hospital and said I don't ever want to come back

into one of these places again. So that kind of knocked nursing out of my choice pool. On the other hand I had always played around with being the teacher, playing the teacher in the neighborhood and that kind of thing and the more I got into it the more I knew it was my niche. I loved it.

I went through the public school system. I went to school ready to read. I did pretty well in school. I lived four blocks from Central High School. My grandparents constantly reminded me and my brother of the importance of education, as did our uncle and aunt who took a special interest in the informal education that my brother and me received. They constantly exposed us to varied activities and provided experiences (i.e. plays, theater, sports, etc.) that would broaden our cultural horizon.

I attended Dunbar High School. Dunbar was one of the only Black schools with school accreditation as far back as 1933. The principal had a Ph.D. as well as several people on staff. This was very unusual. The staff was very strong and very demanding. All of us attended one school and there was that kind of community interest in what we were doing. We had no choice, there was no doing what you wanted to do, and you just knew that you would do. We had a counselor who called a group of us in one day. She said you're going to summer school because when you go to college your scholarship may not be enough to sustain you. You'll need a skill, so you're going to summer school. We went to summer school to take one or two courses that were required for college so that we would have time in our schedule to take courses like typing. We would take typing/shorthand two periods a day in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade and we were also involved in newspaper, etc. Going to summer school allowed us to do all of that. Mrs. Green, the

counselor, was Eugene Gravely's aunt. Eugene Gravely (one of the Little Rock Nine), his sister, we all had piano lessons together. Mrs. Green had another agenda as far as vocational education was concerned. What happened to vocational education is that it became a form of tracking. There were those that could and those that could not. Mrs. Green said okay, while most of the people that are going into the commercial courses were those kids that they thought would go out and get secretarial jobs, that was not her belief. She had another agenda. But that's sort of my high school. I had a great time. The friends that I had and developed, the activities that I was involved in, I just felt good. I can look back and say that I had a great high school experience. I had a broad enough set of experiences that I would say was great.

Mrs. Green wanted me to go to Hampton or Spelman. Her niece, Eugene Gravely's sister, went to Hampton and she wanted me to go with her. And she did everything she could to get me a full-ride scholarship. I told her no. She also got me one to Spelman. And I said no. I did not want to go to school in the South. I did not want to continue with the southern experience. I also had scholarships through Rockefeller, who had lived in Arkansas, and he was trying to encourage people to be educated in and stay in Arkansas. I did not want to do that either. I wanted to leave and go someplace else and that's what I did. So I made the decision. Well, let me put it this way. My brother had also returned to Los Angeles and I wasn't going to let him get too far away. He was gone for two years after he finished high school and we were very close. And the fact that he had gone, I was definitely going where he was. So, we both went back to Los Angeles to go to college.

I went to the community college. I started my career at the community college and did very well there. I had to deal with being free and independent, but once I decided that I really needed to buckle down, I did. (laugh). That first year wasn't my best year in college but it told me I could do ... that I could compete with anyone. So, I did that. I did the two years there and lived with my stepfather and my great-aunt, who had come out to take care of my half sister when she was born and so I lived with them and went to college. I got a job and worked and stayed with them until my last semester in college. I did two years at the community college and then I went to the California State University, Los Angeles. At the time it was only a two-year college. I did that in a year and a half. At that time I decided that I didn't like going to school. And I started doubling up on courses. When I said didn't like going to school, I mean I didn't like having to get up, ride the bus across town, go to class, go to a part-time job, study, keep up. It was the routines that I disliked. I enjoyed the classes and stuff. Even though I had some other activities, I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. I did my last two years in a year and a half and that's how I got out and started teaching early. When you finish in Los Angeles, if you are doing well in your student teaching assignment you can sign a contract after that first year. They give you two different teaching assignments and if you have a successful first one you can sign a contract. Well I signed my first contract before I was 21, which turned out to be an illegal so I had to come back and sign another contract later.

When I was in college, my girlfriend, Janie, and I who lived near each other, both rode the bus to our respective jobs and would then get ourselves organized to study. Janie



was the organizer. We both worked in the afternoons. I worked for the LA county Sheriff's Dept. and she worked for the county air pollution control district; they were both downtown LA. We would leave our offices, meet and then go to the library. We would get to the library about 5:00 PM and stay until the library closed at 9:00 PM. We would then catch the bus and go home. We lived just a few blocks from each other. We would do that Monday thru Thursday. Every Monday thru Thursday we spent four hours in the library, doing our homework and doing things that we needed to do, which was really good because it helped us keep up. I was going home to a situation where no body was thinking about college; my sister hated school. Janie was living with a brother and there were too many children in that house to study. So, by going to the library we got more intense studying done and that's how we got the work done that we had to do.

I went on to receive my master's degree in 1970. I married John on the day that I should have graduated with my Master's, June 13, 1970. He and I would have marched, but we decided that we would get married instead. He had finished his master's mid-semester and we both would have gotten our masters that day from CAL State, Long Beach. I then went on to get my Ed.D. degree in 1985.

People always ask what did you think of your college courses or your university studies; how important were they to you? At the time that I was in there, I would say they were totally unimportant and that they would not help me, but now I know that I utilize all of the book knowledge. The discussions that related around that gave me a basis for some of the actions that I take today.

Mentors and Advocates: "She said do it now".

Many people played a role in helping me define my own leadership and in identifying qualities or skills. There were three teachers at my junior high/high school that would encourage me. One was Mrs. Mozell. I was speaking at this affair for the High School Alumni Club and I looked in the audience and there she was. She said she always knew that I was one of the special ones and that's why she always encouraged me.

One principal said to me, "Aren't you going back to school?" and I said I couldn't go to school and really do what I have to do while I'm teaching. I tried it and it took the time away from me doing what I needed to do in my classroom. Two years later he came to me with a completed transfer form in my name and he put it down and said sign this. I said what's this? He said your transfer form; you're leaving 28<sup>th</sup> Street School. I said what do you mean that I'm leaving? He said you're not going to do anything different as long as you're here and you're too comfortable here.

I had been there seven and a half years. I taught different grade levels. I took on a lot of leadership kinds of things like being faculty chairperson. I was the person that led the in-services in Math when we changed, when we were going to the new Math. We had to have a leader from each grade. I did things like social chairperson. But, the principal said I had to leave and I did.

Then when I went to the next school and the principal there said you need to go back to school. Why don't you go on and enroll in a program now. He said to leave school now and go apply. I was interested at that time in library science. He said to go over to USC where there's a library science program and get enrolled. So, I went over to inquire and John (we weren't married at that time) said you know they have the media

specialist program at Cal State Long Beach and I went down and looked into both of them. I applied for sabbatical leave. So, I went on leave and did my master's in one year. I received my masters in instructional media and I picked up my administration credentials for elementary education at the same time.

Again, later when I was working in Maryland, my boss said that I needed a doctoral degree and told me to go and enroll in some program. I said okay I would. She said to do it now. And she literally said to go out the door and go to somebody's university in this area and get what you need to enroll. I followed her advice.

Then there were two women who were principals in Los Angeles who said, you're going to be a principal and helped me through the assistant principal screening process. They helped me complete my application to make sure it was in the correct format. You had to put your best foot forward. The application had these little blocks to answer the questions. They went over every word in every block. When I had to go for the interview they made me go and get what I was wearing from head to toe, even the purse, and bring it all for them to review. They wanted to ensure that when I went for the oral part of the process I was dressed appropriately.

I've come to understand the role that people played to help me move to the next level or next position. Sometimes things were done on my behalf that I was not even aware of. Equally as important to my academic preparation were those persons that I mentioned who played a role in helping me define my own leadership qualities and identify my skills, people like my principal, who kicked me out of the school. His thought was that I had more to give in a broader sense, so I needed to go and use those skills

someplace else. As I look back to the assistant superintendent that I talked about who sent me out to get the doctorate, she said you have to develop these skills, people are going to look toward you for direction and you need to have not only experiences, but formal training.

Two other things jump out in my mind, from one of my friends in Los Angeles. She said, “Well, Mary, you were the first one out of our group to decide to go back and get the administrative credentials and you’re the first one who applied for a leadership role. You’re the one who kind of got out and put your foot in the water to test it.” I think I was pushed into the water but they didn’t recognize how I was being pushed into the water. I was willing to step.

Leading for Social Justice: “ We can’t continue to limit ourselves to trying to serve only majority/minority publics. Every kid in America needs to see us”.

As I think of my life experiences that fuel my passion to work for fairness and equity, a lot of instances or experiences that I’ve encountered come to mind. When I was in third grade, I realized I had read everything that was appropriate for me to read at the “colored branch” of the public library. There were no more books for me to read. The librarian constantly made lists for me to go to pick up books at the “main library.” I couldn’t go in and browse and “pick out books”, I could just “pick them up”. I thought that this was just the worst thing that could happen to me.

My family honored the values of fairness and justice and was willing to stand up for it when necessary. One day I came home to find Daisy Bates in my kitchen asking my grandmother if I could participate with a group of students trying to integrate Central

High School. At a time when other parents or grandparents may have quickly said no, it's too risky, it's too dangerous, my grandmother said that it was up to me. At age seventeen, I chose to become a part of a delegation of students that attempted to integrate Central High School and was featured in the Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1956 edition of Life magazine with Daisy Bates and the other students. We paved the way for "The Little Rock Nine" who integrated during the very next school year. And I think that was a defining moment in that this was probably the most significant risk-taking thing that I had ever done of note. I didn't know what would happen when we got there, but I was not afraid to do it and I think my grandparents admired that in me, even if at times they thought I was a little too defiant. My grandfather was more concerned whether I would really make it because of my attitude. (silence) And he said, you know, a couple of times, he said, "You're just not going to make it"- in his own way. But at every achievement no one was more proud than my grandfather.

At the end of my first year of teaching, a girlfriend and I did something else unheard of in our day and time. What started out as a trip back home to Little Rock, Arkansas turned into a trip to Little Rock, Memphis, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Minnesota, and Ohio. We took two months and drove across the United States, two black females, alone, in 1961, no less. Janie and I decided, well, it started out that I was just going back to Little Rock and Janie to Memphis. We planned to drive. Then this trip got expanded. Someone said, "Well why don't you all come to New York?" Janie had a sister in New Jersey and one in Connecticut who both said why didn't we come visit. Then a friend of mine who lived in Minneapolis also said

why don't you come to Minneapolis. Janie then said "Why don't we visit your cousins in Akron?" So, we mapped out this trip that lasted two months. We did sightseeing and visiting relatives and friends all over the US for two months. I was twenty-one and she was twenty-two and we both felt such a sense of independence. If you think back to 1961, Blacks, particularly Black females were not out there alone. Truckers would say your parents let you out here? Our friends in Los Angeles asked what do you mean you're going to do this. Janie got engaged in March and her fiancée wanted to know when they were going to get married and she said they would get married next year because she and I were making this trip this year.

What we would do is call ahead about two hours to reserve our hotel room and when we got to the hotel, they would see our faces and our skin and say there're no vacancies. I would say but I called and they said it didn't make any difference. We drove into Oklahoma City and I called AAA. We always stopped around 4:00. I called AAA and said we're traveling and we've been turned down for lodging numerous times. I don't want to go to any more hotels and motels and have people tell me that we can't stay there. The lady said hold on; I'm going to let you listen in. Pick one in your price range. I picked one out and she called and she told the people that she had two Black women from Los Angeles who are traveling in Oklahoma City and they're looking for a place to spend the night. They had previously been refused. The first place she called, this man said where are they send them over. We were right across the highway. We went in and he apologized. He took us to our room and he said now there's no place within walking distance in this area where you can find anything to eat, do you plan to go out? We said

we weren't particular. He said call me when you're settled in and we did. He had food delivered with a table and didn't charge us for it. Those are life-defining experiences. We were turned down in some other places also. We were in Washington, DC. We took a boat ride on the Potomac. The boat stopped in Virginia at a little amusement park. We couldn't get off the boat because we weren't allowed in the amusement park. A lot of things like that happened while we were out there.

And then there was the time I was teaching first grade and the social studies lesson was about community helpers. Every picture in the text was of whites while my classroom was full of Hispanic, Asian and Black students. I went out, found a Black fireman, a Black policeman, a Black airline pilot and Black flight attendants, took my own pictures of them and used those pictures to supplement the text.

My first year I had to ask for a key for Saturdays because I had to go in and make sure I had everything just so. My girlfriend and I would alternate. We would go to her school and work all day one Saturday and the next Saturday we would go to my school and work all day. I always wanted to really do it right. I taped materials on reel-to-reel tapes so that the kids who weren't reading well could participate in social studies; they had the chance to have input. I knew they could understand; it was just that they couldn't read the written word, but if they heard it they could participate. Social studies was about the concepts and not about your skill as a reader so why leave them out? I did rewrites of things so that those just below level could still read them on their own. It was just part of me to do these things.

I try to be open to and accepting of people, recognizing people from across the

spectrum. I never do anything to belittle them or their self-worth. That to me has been probably the one thing I try to live by. John says that I'm as comfortable with kings and queens, if I were to meet one, as I would be anyone from any status or anyplace else. I go into it as accepting them as a person and not putting any value judgment on what they are or who they are. I think it's trying to be fair. I believe that all people have great skills and knowledge and capabilities to do. I say all children can do and will learn. I say they do and they will but what's important is how we frame the situation. How do we as adults provide the environment for them to learn those things that are going to be beneficial to them and not detrimental? I think because of how I was raised and because of my interaction with people it has been reinforced that they can do and will. People believed in me and if I have that belief, it can happen for others.

My gender has worked against and for me. With our administrative profession being so low in the number of women that are included in the superintendency, people tend to look at males first and then come to females. There may have been positions where I was being considered where I think they've done that. But then I was also lucky enough that in one position I got it because when they finished the selection process (they were choosing five people to head each one of the five areas), they had five white males. They knew in a district becoming more diverse, they couldn't appoint five white males so the executive staff, this was in Montgomery County, they had to go back to the table and say wait a minute; we need women and minorities in this mix. As they went through possible people for the position, my name was thrown in the mix. It probably would not have if they were not paying attention to race and gender and I met both categories



(laugh).

The move to Maryland was really big for me. I had just applied that spring to be placed on the eligibility list for a principalship and John had just completed his doctorate. Howard University contacted him about a position. I told him he couldn't apply because I wasn't moving east, no place east of the Rockies. But because of his social foundations background, they were real interested in him. He had the skills to fill a void that they had on their faculty. They knew of him through his writing, because he had used people at Howard for his dissertation. They kept offering him the position. I told him I would go back for a year, but I ended up staying longer. The day that the movers came to move our things was the day I went for my interview for the principal's eligibility list. It was a dramatic experience for me to leave when I knew that if I stayed I was going to get my administrative position real soon.

We moved to DC/Maryland in July and in November I got an assistant principalship. That spring the Deputy Superintendent wanted an administrative assistant and I applied for that position. I was appointed to Principal the next August. One board member said that every year my name came up on the appointment list. He said that I just kept moving right on up (laugh). I had several positions in Montgomery County. I received my doctorate in 1985 and then decided to leave the district after working there seventeen years. This was significant because people asked why I was going from wealthy Montgomery County to inner city Baltimore. I said because I felt I had done what I could do in Montgomery County. There was a challenge in Baltimore and I guess that's again part of me. After being in Baltimore a year and a half, the superintendent

asked me to be the deputy superintendent. I was an area superintendent so he demoted his two deputies and made me the lone deputy superintendent. That kind of gave me another added sense of hey; I might be able to do this (smile).

I think I learned more from just getting out doing the job but it's always been based in some type of formal training. Even in this job I'm learning. While I can truly see where I'm going I have to try to make sure that others are right along with me. One of my former bosses said you always get ahead of yourself because you want the action to take place and I'm trying to learn how to make sure that I bring everybody with me (silence). I think the principalship probably is my one experience that taught me more about leadership than any other position and it taught me the earliest. That next position I had was real complicated, but I learned on the job. It's like teaching; you really don't know what's going to happen until you get into that classroom. I think the principalship has the most autonomy in leadership. I knew if I couldn't get that staff to work with me and work for me that I wouldn't be successful. I was constantly trying to stay abreast of the things I needed to do to keep them with me and I learned more during that time, but I also knew that I needed to call people and say this is what I'm thinking of and this is what I did. It backfired; how can I get out of this (laugh) or this is what I'm going to do. What do you believe I should do?

I think if I was in the principalship longer I would have learned more skills of being a leader. Because of the nature of my progression, I sometimes think my promotions went faster than they should have. I look back and I would have loved to have been in the principalship longer.

I see myself as a collaborative, engaged leader, one who rolls up the sleeve and doesn't mind getting dirty. There are no tasks that I wouldn't do. I've gone into situations and people have said, what are you doing, you don't need to do that. I would say that it has to be done, let's do it, anything from moving chairs to stuffing envelopes. I can't separate the real work from what some people view as what I do.

I believe that educational leaders must ensure that all of our students are educated, self-directed and productive members of society. In order to accomplish this, educational leaders must garner support for the mission of schooling. Educational leaders are in the classroom and in the community as well as central office and on school boards.

I believe that youngsters should come out of school able to go into some field of work or go to college. It's their decision but they're prepared for either one. And it's not done when they're 8th grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and 10th grade. It's just done when they can come out with the choice because they will have had all of the prerequisites. I always took vocational education. I always tell my students that I want an A student to be my plumber or the contractor who's going to build my house. I don't want a person who was a D student, who was just put over there to learn monotonous tasks but one that has a broader knowledge. I don't think we do right by kids to "pigeon-hole" them so early.

One assumption is that women are more knowledgeable about instruction and what it takes for children to learn. As for African- American women, I think that there's a general belief that we're viewed as insensitive. There's a perception when African American women make tough decisions that have some impact upon other adults; it is viewed as insensitive, not necessarily the right thing to do. Even when all data will

support the action, we are seen in a negative light. It's a real phenomenon that you're just not supposed to make those hard decisions. Another belief or assumption is that we're not strong.

I think that, the major challenge, as a black woman educational leader is, will we be heard and respected for what we know and our ability to handle tough situations (silence). School boards want to know, will we be able to relate to the non-black population. I'm sure this board (a predominantly white board) sat there and asked this question: can she relate to us, can she relate to other whites in this community? Those are appropriate questions for them to ask themselves. That's a clearly fair question but it shouldn't be a disqualifier.

Another interesting phenomenon is that other Blacks challenge Black women more so than they challenge Black males in leadership roles. I'm not sure why this is so. Maybe it's the backlash of the historically maternally dominated families since our existence in this country. Other Blacks say I don't want to be dominated by the mother figure anymore and they're always looking for ways to tear down that female. That's just my wild guess. I have no data to back it up, but the challenges from some of our people of the same race or group is real interesting. Statements like- who does she think she is? I think it's part of how we have been socialized. As a group of people, we have not solidified the respect for our own African American culture within the American culture.

Some advice I would give to a Black woman aspiring to the superintendency: first, do not limit themselves to those things that are just Black oriented. It goes against my whole belief that a Black woman's place is a place where anyone wants to be,

whether it's black female, black male, white male. The mainstream, no matter how we look at it, it is still predominantly white and if experiences handling those interactions are not there, it's not going to happen. Take for example, the NABSE (National Alliance of Black School Educators). You know, I went to their annual conference for several years and I stopped going, not because I didn't respect some of the things that they were doing; I felt that it was limiting. It is a great avenue to meet other Blacks who are involved in education because it goes across the board, but to have that as the sole professional group that you become active in or attend the activities for is very limiting. The people who are looking for leaders look more in the broader context, they may come to NABSE to say we need to try to get more blacks but they want to also know what your view of the broader world is. They want to know that you're not limited. Most of the school boards, no matter where you go, are still white. Most of the higher-level positions are held by whites (i.e. assistant supt., deputy supt.) and the number of blacks in those positions is still very low.

Second, don't limit yourselves in regards to going places. I mean people still say, Big Speed, how did you get there? Well, it seemed like a match. It didn't matter to me that it was in the Midwest. You have to be open. We can't continue to limit ourselves to trying to serve only majority/minority publics. Every kid in America needs to see us. My husband says they need to see us in other places besides coming into their homes to clean or picking up the garbage on the street. If you could be the superintendent in Podunk, Iowa, be the superintendent of Podunk, Iowa. You don't have to be the superintendent of Chicago. Unfortunately, I think that's part of the mindset for blacks in general. There's

not the willingness to go to non-traditional places or to move period. I live here and I want it to happen for me here. That may not be the place for it to happen.

When I think of my own leadership a couple of things somewhat define my leadership. This frog, (a green and yellow cloth bean-bag looking frog) has become a symbol of my belief that there's urgency about education. We don't have time for small steps and frogs leap (silence) and so they usually leap a greater distance than they will take a step. You see all these frogs around here. It evolved from some work I did with administrators when I was in Baltimore. I took them on a retreat and at the end of the retreat, we had a team-building theme that used frogs and you had to make these frogs and when the activity ended I said we don't have time for small steps. We need to leap ahead and so everyone started sending me these frogs. Our themes became leaping ahead for total quality education, leaping ahead on the pathway to success. We just can't do it in small increments; we must leap ahead. That's part of my belief and I believe that children can do that.

The other artifact is Dr. Seuss' book entitled, "Oh, The Places We Go" with a personal note from an assistant principal thanking me for being included in our meetings and trainings. This one kind of symbolizes that I try to be inclusive and try not to create differences with people. This is from one of the assistant principals in a previous district. When I went to my area, I didn't have principals meetings. I had administrators meetings. I wanted the assistant principals at all the meetings and I put them on committees. I had them do training with the rest of us and they were involved in every thing we did. I said you will be a principal. When the principal's not there you're in charge. She gave me this

book in appreciation for my including them. The lessons in this book are just wonderful.

The last artifact is “ Our Friend, Mary” (a large framed poem written in calligraphy given to her by friends). This was the third thing that I thought of because my friendships are very important to me. I received this poem from some friends when we left Baltimore. It reminds me of the personal friendships I have. I’ve maintained very close friendships with people in Los Angeles, and I’ve been gone for over twenty-four years. I value my friendships. Those are the three things that came to mind.

The Journey of Sally Walker: “*I believe in children*”

I remember my first contact with Sally Walker because I was so impressed. I received a response from her on the very day that I faxed out my initial letter of introduction. What was even more impressive was that the phone call was from Sally Walker herself and not her secretary. Her voice was so soft and easygoing. She said that she had received my letter and wanted to respond. She shared, too, that her dissertation was also about African American superintendents. We decided during that phone call to meet for lunch to talk further about my study.

The day that we decided to meet for lunch I arrived at her office. The district office was in an old building and I had to ring a buzzer to be allowed in the building. I waited in the reception area before being called back to her office. I was surprised when Sally Walker came and escorted me back to her office. First, from her soft-spoken voice I was expecting a short easy going looking woman but instead Sally Walker is a tall, statuesque woman. I was impressed with the bright surrounding that I found in her office. She asked me if I would care for anything to drink. It was if I was visiting her in

her home. Her sense of hospitality was extended to my husband as well. When she found out that my husband had driven me to the interview, she made arrangements for him to work in her office while she and I went to lunch at a nearby restaurant. It was clear to me in the way that everyone interacted with Sally Walker that she was well respected there and also gracious and humble to those that she came in contact with, including other patrons of the restaurant as well as those serving her. During that initial meeting, Sally Walker agreed to participate in the study, but cautioned that the two hours that I had asked for each interview was asking a lot from the superintendents.

In the course of subsequent interviews, Sally Walker shared that since she had only been in the district a few months she was trying to get a feel for the needs of the district and went on to share the qualitative research she was conducting. She had a protocol that she used to ask questions of her participants and then shared the colorful visual chart that she used to display emerging themes that she was using to construct a plan of action for the district. In that shared work laid real life, relevant, and practical applications of all the skills that I was developing as a researcher; what a personal treat.

Growing-up and Coming of Age: “Our family crest would have three components: the farming... exemplifies the work ethic, the scholarship piece with the books of learning and then the cross for the significance of religion in our lives”

I was born in Smyrna, Delaware, the second of five children. The year was 1947. My father was twenty-one years my mom’s senior and they married when my mother was thirty and my dad fifty-one. Prior to marriage, my mom had lived and worked in New York City. Back then in the forties, it was unusual for a woman to wait as long as my mother waited to marry, but she did marry. It was her first marriage and she and my



father got busy having children. It was a second marriage for my father. His first wife had died in surgery and my mother instantly became a step mom to a number of children who were very much older than us. My father was a laborer and my mom, a traditional stay-at-home mother, wife and homemaker. And she just was a wonderful seamstress and splendid cook. She made a lot out of just a little. She knew how to stretch a dollar.

Up until age six, we lived in Smyrna, Delaware. However, my parents always had amazing wisdom and foresight and had purchased land early on, so we moved from our rented home on North Street in Smyrna, Delaware to Townsend and were no longer in a small town, but in a rural community. And that is where I grew up, on a small farm. On the land that we purchased, we built a home. My dad maintained the farm that helped supply us with the food to eat and where I spent my growing up years prior to leaving home and going to Delaware State College on a full academic scholarship.

Well, we spent a lot of time outdoors exploring our property and the land around us. We did a lot of outdoors kinds of activities like fishing and hunting for various wildlife and we just did lots of recreational things outside. Baseball was always a favorite. It was a community favorite and then once we got older, we tended to play football. Our home was a gathering spot where people from all over the community would come. We had a huge front lawn and that was substantial property so, it was a good place for people to come to play outdoor sports. And I enjoyed working on the farm with my dad. There was really very little in terms of recreation outside of the home with the exception of occasional Saturday night dances that we would have at the local high school, which was in the community of Middletown, Delaware, a bus ride away. The school would provide

busing for those activities. And at times, we had something called Canteen where we could go during the week after we completed our homework for table tennis, badminton, and things. That would be at the high school.

Life revolved around school, and, of course, the church. My parents were very religious and we were raised up in Pentecostal Holiness Church. It is called the Mount Sinai Holy Church of America. The headquarters are in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. So we worked hard at home and also at school and we excelled in the church. Religious life was very much a component of who we were. Our family crest would have those three components: the farming that exemplifies the work ethic, the scholarship piece with books of learning, and then the cross for the significance of religion in our lives. I became an early reader and enjoyed such things, as Call of the Wild by Jack London, for what we read in school was very, very traditional, though we were in a segregated situation in the school system at that time. It wasn't until I graduated from high school and a student at Delaware State that I ever encountered classroom situations in which they were not fully minority.

I had a very dominant and high-achieving elder sister named Liz. So I pretty much lived in her shadows. All of the teachers knew her. When Liz graduated from high school, she was salutatorian. When I graduated, I was valedictorian. So I graduated at the head of my class. She was the first in our family to go to college and I was the second. So I was pretty much always following in my sister's footsteps. And because she was out there and indeed the leader and very successful, I am thinking it may have been somewhat easier for me.

I graduated from Louis L. Redding High School in Middletown, Delaware, as valedictorian of my class and this is when we still had segregated schooling. Integration had begun to occur in connection with Middletown High School. I opted to stay at the segregated high school as opposed to going to Middletown High. Probably would not have gotten a full ride - I had a full academic scholarship to college and then with my church and other organizations kicking in for books and what not, we didn't have to do too much to worry about my going away to college. So that was a significant moment in my life. The combination of all this hard work and being real serious about studies and getting, if not family support, certainly not family resistance to doing those things. And as valedictorian of the class, I remember giving a speech. It was a speech I actually wrote myself and then my English teacher helped to fine tune it. So, yes, I remember all of that. Just like yesterday. And I can remember the valedictorian and salutatorian from high schools got their photographs placed in the paper and my mother somehow retrieved extra papers.

I graduated from college on Sunday, June 2, 1969, and the week of graduation I left Delaware. My father drove me to the train and gave me \$30 and wished me well and I moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey and that's where I stayed for several months before moving into an apartment in Long Branch, New Jersey. I had signed a contract to teach in Redmond, New Jersey. Another significant point in my life was my marriage to Leon Adams, who was a captain with the New Jersey State Police. Leon helped to integrate the state police. It was an entirely different life for me.

My early background and orientation taught me a work ethic and I carry that with

me to this very day. In addition to the work ethic, it instilled in me a deep sense of traditional family values and what is more, of the underlying spirituality and how very important that is to all that you do. My father also taught me that the early bird gets the worm. I still manage to come to work before 7:00 and put in long, long hours and if I need to do things at nights, I don't hesitate. My weekends are pretty much devoted to getting ready for the next week.

I started off going to school in Smyrna, Delaware. They didn't have kindergarten at that time and the system was still segregated so I was actually about six-and-a-half by the time I started first grade and I had a half year of first grade in Smyrna before we moved to Townsend. Then I attended a one-room schoolhouse for grades one through half of grade three, when my parents decided that I wasn't being challenged enough they moved me from that one-room schoolhouse to the public schools of Middletown to Louis L. Redding school. At that time, it was still segregated, so I stayed there from mid- third grade all the way to high school. There was one school: one wing for grades 1-6 and another wing for grades 7-12. And that school still stands. It is named for the late Louis L. Redding, who was one of the litigate attorneys in the historic Brown vs. Board of Education. And each year, Attorney Redding would come to our high school and give the valedictorian a scholarship—some kind of prize, and the year that I was valedictorian, I received it and was able to meet him and so history comes alive. He came every year. The school was named in his honor. It wasn't a big scholarship—maybe 25-50 dollars.

I always did exceedingly well in school, was studious, very serious and had a sensitive nature about myself. The dimensions to connect indeed, be outgoing, came later

in life to me. The academic success came early on. School was pretty much routine. You name it and I did it. If you were to name an honor or recognition, I somehow did it in high school - editor in chief of the yearbook, president of the student council, several years class president. I had all of those leadership opportunities and an opportunity to do lots of public speaking, both at school and also in our church. At that time people used to say that I talked so proper. I don't get that kind of thing any more, but those earlier days were good. Good nurturing experiences for me. And the extended community was very, very supportive of us.

Well, teachers were supportive generally of us and there were community people such as a lady in our community who we called Miss Essey and on a summer Sunday afternoon we used to have something called camps. And camps would be in Middletown or in Maryland somewhere and Miss Essey, a lady who was married, but whose husband was not very active in doing things with her, would invite my older sister, Liz and me to ride with her to camp. She always had a nice car, so that was a treat. There may be a church service, but we normally didn't go to church services. There would be street vendors and you just kind of walked along and got something to eat. Maybe you would buy something from a vendor, but I'm sure we didn't buy anything because we never had any money, but just to go and have a change of setting was good, so camp meetings, that was always nice and then we had Middletown and all sorts of camps all over. It was an African American phenomenon and I have never stumbled on anything like that.

Also, amusement parks were big at that time and a special treat would be when one of my older half-brothers, who was probably the most affluent in the family at that

time, my brother and his wife would invite perhaps me and my older sister to go to a recreational park. Usually out of state. What are some of the other things we really looked forward to doing with those significant others? We had a singing group at one point. One of my other older brothers would get us together to sing and then travel to various churches throughout the state to sing, so we did that.

My parents probably had the biggest impact on my education. Although they weren't highly educated, they never stood in the way in terms of our quest for education. I think some of it was just intrinsic, something that was just on the inside of us. We had a thirst. We knew that a better life would come through education. Also we had a very significant superintendent and principal in everything, Dr. Waters, who lived in Cheswald. His wife was a teacher in our school and I would say that Dr. Waters had a significant part to play as well. He would provide transportation to dances if we didn't want to ride the bus. He had me to work concession stands and trusted me with money and he always had something for me to do to keep me busy in connection with the school.

The dinner table on a Sunday was real significant. My mom was an excellent cook and she would cook things from scratch. We would get together routinely around the dinner table and we lived on the farm so we would ring the bell when it was time to eat. That was the tradition. When you heard the bell then you knew it was time to come to dinner. We would routinely, as a family, eat together, but Sundays were real special because we would have desert, and of course, the food preparation was done on Saturday. No one cooked on Sunday. That was the Lord's Day; we would always start with a prayer and there was always good solid rich discussion going on around the table that

was stimulating. There were seven of us with mom and dad.

I remember my father building a swing and he would swing sometimes and we would love seeing him swing and then we would swing. We would help him with the gardening chores and we had lots of responsibility for the upkeep and ongoing maintenance of our home and we did a good job.

I think early on when I first went to college, I was very straight-laced and the traditional walk with all of its legalistic and puritanical strengths continued to have a strong hold on me. However, I think by the time I graduated from college, those things had softened somewhat, although my spirituality and walk with the Lord was enhanced, but in other kinds of dimensions that had nothing to do with how I looked and with what I did do and didn't do. It was a little deeper and away from all of the surface kinds of things and that was powerful. It was very powerful for me.

Delaware State, where I attended, they did a lot with a little. We had limited resources, but it was a good undergraduate experience. It was a wonderful four years of college and learning. While there I joined a sorority early on, Zeta Phi Beta, and we were known to be elite, so that had significance. We were known to be elite and select, but we were known to do well scholastically. In addition to that, I just did well in studies and people saw me as a student leader. It was a wonderful opportunity to be away from home. Although I was about seventeen miles from home, I lived all four years in the dorm. It was just a good way of growing up, with a faculty who believed in you, who were warm, nurturing, and mentoring to some extent. Though I don't have any solid linkages with professors, it was just a general sense that they were supportive and well

meaning.

Well, I guess it was while I was working on my masters at Rutgers in the early seventies that I had some courses with people who were working on their doctorates and I kind of looked them over and checked them out and said, "You know they don't have any more on the ball than I do, if anything, I have more on the ball than they do, and I guess I pretty much decided that, gee whiz, maybe the goals that I had set for myself weren't quite high enough, so I went back and revisited, and I guess a lot of it wasn't planned, but it just kind of evolved. And then there were people along the way that were suggesting certain things.

Mentors and Advocates: "She's been a mentoring friend".

Terri Smith is a pioneer superintendent. I met Terri, a white female, about five or six years ago, and she saw some possibilities that perhaps I hadn't seen in me. Maybe Terri Smith is a mentor come lately. I met her when I was in Farmville and in the number two position. And it was because of her that I became superintendent in a local district. So yes, Terri Smith has been a mentoring friend.

Then, there was a woman at Van Berger's, now Macy's store, an employee there, with whom I worked in the early seventies and her daughter was super-successful. She was a Jewish woman and I guess in talking with her, I realized that perhaps some of the goals that I had set for myself I could easily attain and I needed to continue to set goals.

A cross-gender mentor would be Dr. Ted Snail. He has been a superintendent for over thirty years so he has been a good mentor and a long distance confidant who I have always been able to turn to...wonderful career supporter. I first met Dr. Snail when I was



in the doctoral program at Lehigh in 1987. So, I think a lot of the guidance and career support that I got was pretty much internal. I am tenacious and real persistent. I don't give up easily. I am persistent, patient, long-sufferer. And those things have continued to stand me in good stand.

On the negative side, I had a very harsh boss in Farmville, Joyce Babcock. She was the superintendent and now lives in Florida. When I first came there as her number two person, she said that she had a three-year plan and that she wanted me to move with it, perhaps into the superintendency, and I was astounded because I was just getting there. I guess her saying that may have helped, but there was nothing that she did. She was mean. Evil and a crab, and certainly, I was loyal to her and worked exceedingly hard. The number two person is supposed to work circles around the superintendent of schools and I did just that. My role was to make the boss look good, but clearly she was a big pain to work for. She was just evil and nasty. I have not had good bosses. I can't really point to too many people who were great bosses. Judi Dutton was probably a pretty good boss, but she was just a little too protective.

A helpful mentor was Dr. Croctor, who was the reason I went to Lehigh for my doctorate. He was my professor for various courses when I was at Rutgers and lived about twenty minutes from my residence. We'd do things like this - I'd say to my husband, Oh, Dr. Croctor's going to be speaking tonight up at Lehigh. Instead of us taking a car and Dr. Croctor taking a car, let's call Doc, let's go by his house and pick him up and we'd do things like that so that he could rest. He's professor emeritus at Rutgers if he is still living. So he's just a fascinating person and he's been a long

distance mentor at times, certain times in my life.

Leading for social justice: “I know that each and every person has greatness in them”.

Living in this world, the world in which we live, each individual needs to have an opportunity to experience a level of success that is not constrained by forces that would be counter to having them realize the success that they are destined and capable of achieving. The success would be multifaceted in all aspects of one’s life. People should achieve the attainables. Students should be able to achieve those things that they very much want to attain in life.

I think for this community, shattering the chains of poverty and somehow attacking the culture poverty head on can bring about social change. There are some wonderful works that I read in the seventies and I don’t know if I have those books with me or not, but it deals with the culture and poverty and how you can shatter and break through. I think my life is a testament of how powerful that breakthrough can be for people who for whatever reason are born into circumstances that were far less than ideal. The educational piece is key. In terms of mobilizing people, I think you are able to do that by your sheer presence, role modeling and your example of professionalism. If you are careful not to give away all of your personal power, and neutralize it, you are able to tap into a force that is beyond you and the person you are addressing so that they can help to realize the potential that is out there and that is one thing that has been good since I have come to this community, I have been speaking with a new and added dimension in terms of conviction. I think of it as that force that is beyond me and also I have been able to tap into it and that has been just marvelous for me to witness that unveiling.

Last night, I led a community wide discussion of *Victory in Our Schools* and one community person said that she perceived me to be warm, caring, committed, and very approachable. And when we began to discuss the book you would have thought we were in church on a Sunday morning. There was such zeal in the room last night and I guess that's it, I'm not ashamed at all to tell about my humble beginning.

I don't think I came from an impoverished background at all, though by monetary standards, one would tend to believe that. Last night I shared that briefly. I shared my son's experience and I was convinced that each and every child could reach a high level of academic success. I told them that we had to make certain that no one fell through the cracks. So, it's an all out commitment to ensure that each and every child that journeys with us will indeed be successful. And they're all our children. Even when they make mistakes, we still have to wrap our loving arms around them to assure that we get them back on the positive path.

When I was in college, the civil rights movement gave the perspective that black is beautiful and I was very much involved in a number of speakers coming to our campus and I participated in a number of demonstrations and one of the demonstrations led to the closing of school early one year. No one could believe that someone as responsible and serious as I would participate in student demonstrations, but I was always of the opinion that if you had firm and definite convictions about something, it was important to step forward and make that stand for what you believe in and I guess I have always been that way.

Right now I am reading books like *The Royals* by Kitty Kelly. And you probably

say, well why in the world, and I wasn't sure why I was drawn to it, but I'm going to be able to use some of what I've read at the weekend retreat that I'm having with the Board. I think too often Boards of Education see themselves as royalty. I have a service orientation to leadership, but there's a passage in *The Royals* in which, I guess she was a princess before she became queen, she was perhaps a teenager, and there's this man, forty years old who had come and she was asserting that he would, he needed to bow to her. And I see some of that here in this district and it bothers me, you know the pulling of rank. I try to create equitable learning environments by leveling the playing field through technology and through so many enhancements and supports for learning; in addition I mirror the servant-leadership attitude. There are no little you's and big I's.

I told the assistant superintendents yesterday at the meeting, you're going to go over and support a principal and what you're going to do is start by doing what I've done. You're going to pick up a paper in the hallway and go to the bathroom and if the commode isn't flushed, you're going to flush the commode. You're going to take work gloves with you. We have them assigned to playground duty and cafeteria duty. We're going to go to support those people on the front line through orientation of service and support, not go in with our clipboards and making notes. So I think that's been key.

Social justice is fairness, fair play, everyone operating on a certain code of ethical conduct and standards and actually following up and being consistent in terms of candor, frankness, and treating the other person as you'd like to be treated. Social justice would indicate many of the principles under which our country was founded. It would echo the Constitution, the Bill of Rights; it would echo so many of those things that are just a little

elusive. Yes, we've made wonderful strides and tremendous inroads and we need to celebrate our quantum leaps that we've made as a country. But some of those shortfalls have been well written and documented. So we know that we have no ideal world, but we're all very much focused and striving to take the next step, and the next step.

Just this morning, I met with the principal of the high school. He talked about the fact that at graduation in the past they've had an exclusive dinner for board members and the speaker off-campus removed from the others. And I said to him this morning, we're not royalty; did I mention that I was reading *The Royals*. Well, I had it, I brought it in, and I think the last time I referred to Princess Elizabeth, she was ten and how she treated a forty year old; I think I had the page marked, it's somewhere here. Well, in essence, I ended up saying to the principal, oh, no; we're not going to do that any more. First of all, it's utilizing private monies, public monies for a private purpose. And I know better. And for me to allow that kind of thing to continue is just unacceptable. I said you are no little views in the eyes, if you want to eat after graduation, and then we're going to eat with anybody else, everybody else. We going to level the playing field and we're not going off to some private club and removed surroundings. These are social justice issues as I see it. I don't see myself as an elitist; I don't see the board as elitist. We should not be looking to distance ourselves. And I said, wait a minute, isn't this high school graduation, isn't this for the children? Why are we focusing on how the leaders of this district will be treated on that day? But that's tradition and history. I do have to be careful to make incremental change and maybe not move too fast, but in that instance I pretty much held my own.

My dream at one point was to just finish school, graduate, and immediately get married and have a house full of children. I had seen myself in a very traditional role at one time and those things didn't come. So, I just continued to provide for myself and make a living doing what I had chosen to do.

I guess a lot of it just evolved. My life has always been rather simplistic. I have not had lots of people to clutter my life and take up time, so a lot of my time has been productively engaged in going to school. That was a major joy and I don't know that I may have had lip service support at times, but when I have made decisions that indeed I was going to do this or do that, that was perhaps one of the few things that I had; that I was always very serious and focused.

I didn't know if I had the patience and was wired internally to be able to work with children; however, my student-teaching experience at Dover High School in Dover, Delaware, convinced me that I would be successful. The student-teaching experience was a grueling and rigorous one for me. My students were primarily Anglo and my teacher Anglo, but I was successful and I just became smitten by it and I knew education would be something that I would pursue. I came out of college at a time when teachers were in hot demand and you could have been signed to a contract anywhere in the country or the nation sight-unseen. There were many rich offers from Corporate America also, but I decided to go into the field of education and became a teacher.

I learned that I wasn't afraid of working hard. I learned that I was willing to go the extra mile for children, and children perceive me as nice, kind and caring. I also learned that my religious beliefs and values were very, very important and very much at

the forefront of who I was, and continue to be, as a person.

I am much more prone to embrace diversity. I am a collaborator. I like to hear many, many voices concerning any and all issues. I think it is important to be an active listener and I am not threatened by hearing the different voices. I am very democratic in terms of decision-making and like participatory leadership where I empower people who are close to the source to make wise judgments. I see my role really as a facilitator to make good things happen for children on behalf of all of our children. I see myself as a servant leader. I am here with that sincere, solid, service orientation. What is it that I can do as an extra set of hands and eyes to make your job a bit easier, not losing sight, of course, for the vision and the over-arching aim that we have for this district, to move it to a new level of academic achievement. So there is a combination of vision and a good over-arching view of where we are headed. At the same time, I have a goodly number of management skills and an orientation that is task oriented and I have to attribute that to my early background and training. I believe you need to get your work done before you play.

Recently I even realized that I don't value the material things the way that I had previously. A lot of my clothes are in storage somewhere and maybe I don't have fifty different outfits at home in the closet right now, and for once, you know, it hasn't bothered me; maybe I have twenty. I don't know how many I have. Enough shoes. There is a new level of consciousness concerning what indeed are the important things, and certainly clothing and attire and having a number of this and that and physical possessions no longer are important, where at one point they may have been. In 1993, I

was married and living in upper- income white America. We were the only Blacks in our neighborhood. We had an affluent home, in ground pool, multi-level deck, someone we paid to take care of the pool, the grounds, and I had a housekeeper and someone to help me care for Stanley. And I walked away from that to a more simplistic life and I call it my pond of Walden where I lived in a one-bedroom garden apartment for a year after that and just found a great level of peace. I thought I would miss all of those things and I found out I didn't miss it at all. I said good-bye to all of those things. I found a good level of peace and serenity. So that was a significant point of the marriage for close to 20 years. I would say that this wasn't right; it was a bold movement. Scared to leave behind your home. For me, how could a physical possession be more important than things on the inside? I couldn't understand people who thought that a home you possess and prestige were more important than some other things. And I still know for me that is right so I think that was a defining moment. It is liberating and I just took off after that. I had the mobility to move where the job opportunity was.

I am feeling a wonderful sense of accomplishment. And just a wonderful sense of reflective pride on what I was able to accomplish, even when there were formidable obstacles and restraints. And I am realizing all over again just how affective I am at what I do. I am just good at what I do and marvel at my productivity and what I am able to accomplish in a short period of time and I don't remind myself much because I think it is important to have humility and not get a big head, but I am pleased with where I am and what I am doing. We know the superintendencies are very politicized and I am not necessarily a very political person in some respects, but when it comes to doing what is



right for children, I am willing to stand up and be counted and let the chips fall where they may.

One of my mentors, Terri Smith, had convinced me of the local district's readiness for an African American female and maybe some aspects of the community were, but others were never able to really reconcile themselves to this female who came from out east and had no connections with the green and white of MSU to ride into their town to lead their school district. And you know I have never bought into this whole thing of racism and prejudice, and I guess I was slow to see it, but in hindsight, I am able to see that I was very successful but the town did not appreciate what they had in me and after I had given it all my best, I just sensed it was time to move on.

I explored a number of possibilities across the nation. I did know that I wanted to work in a district that would have a significant African American population. When you get to where I am in my career, you decide what you want to do for the rest of your career. When I had a chance to step back and think about it, I knew that I really wanted to do something that would be in support of African American children.

I'm thinking that my race and gender probably helped me. Because people liked to celebrate that, indeed in this district, I was the first female, and they are pretty proud of that, although I don't think it is a big deal. I was the first African American and the first female. I don't know that that was significant, though for some, they were very proud. To them it demonstrated that we were indeed as a community progressive in their thinking and ahead of their times. I think it has helped me tremendously. I have seen it pretty much as an asset for the most part.

Well, another important aspect is personal power. It is important that we not give it away and somehow do things that would counteract the personal power and the presence that we have and sometimes in service orientation, leadership roles, such as how I see the superintendency, you have so many internal and external constraints that you need to please, that it is difficult to find that fine line. You don't want to become a people pleaser, but you do want to have people walking away satisfied or feeling that they have been satisfactorily dealt with.

For me, the key has been personal development from a rather shy and timid and not so out-going person. I think I've evolved over time into one more prone to be engaging. I have worked and I will take initiative and I will do a lot of things, but I didn't start out that way. I think I started out as shy and all those things, but that's perhaps changed.

I've spent a lot of time investing and doing the hard work on me. That's been a very deliberate focus and I've spent considerable time. So I think the personal attributes were key. I've always been a solid scholar and I've had much, much success. And I can't point to professional experiences that were key for schooling and all of that has always been so much of who I am. I think when we put the two dimensions together, that's when it began to be real powerful - when I started owning the power that I had as opposed to giving it away. I just see myself; I could never, ever imagine in my mind's eye my having done the things that I've done and having the leadership role that I have now. I could never have conceived of this happening to me and sometimes, and I am not in awe of myself, but it's kind of surprising. I don't take myself real; real seriously, I just

see myself as an instrument of some good things hopefully that will continue to happen.

I've learned to become a leader through reflective thought and thinking, spending time alone, retreating, and spending lots of time on the inside. Knowing who you are, what you stand for, how you're wired, and what you're all about and then celebrating it. Not in a boastful kind of way, but in a perspective that would speak to serving with passion and being a real anchor and centered. I just know that each and every person has greatness in them. We use so little of our human potential and I am just convinced more today than ever, that each and every person has an opportunity to reach enormous levels of success. It all deals with having a plan. I am a chronic goal setter. And I carry my goals with me and write them down. Research would document that it is powerful when you do that, that if you have a plan for your life, your chances for realizing those goals are tremendously enhanced. And when you commit to writing what your life story is going to be all about and I have lived a very focused life. Instead of meandering, I have set very realistic and obtainable goals where I have had to stretch. And I have learned what perseverance and consistency and being persistent is all about and not losing the sight of what your goals are. I have had lots of adversity like everyone else in life, but I have been able to address those obstacles and go on and achieve in many, many areas. It is amazing. And I have about eight areas that I focus on, but you can't focus and do a good job on eight goal areas at once. And there is a force that is probably beyond me that helps me to know ... I'll show you a goal-setting chart at the end if you would like. I may have my goals at home right now, but normally I carry them in the back of my day runner. I have recently, on a Sunday, I was reviewing them again and I was saying, oh

how are you doing in this area or that area? But I have goals for all aspects of my life and bit-by-bit I have realized those goals and then when I reach a goal then I come up with something new that is going to help to grow and challenge me some more. And I have taught my son a little something about it, and my sisters earlier, and I have shared all the goal-setting literature. Sometimes when I did motivational talks, I give them from time to time; I talk about the goal setting and my life story. The goal setting works and also the way that you guard your thoughts and you keep the weeds out of your thinking. Over time that has proven again and again to be just very powerful. And when I go there and realize I have a weed, I sometimes tease myself. And say “Well, we have got to keep the weeds out.” We have to take the high road, the positive path. Those are some of the things that life has taught me that I have learned through early childhood orientation and as I continued to travel this course.

Leadership is the ability to inspire, help others, catch a glimpse of a vision in a place where we are able to collectively be that's greater than where we are. That's my goal for Highland Park and it's working. People are catching sight and a glimpse in their mind's eye of that future that is greater than where we are right now and conceptually they have begun to make the shift to higher ground. It is not there for the most part right now, but we are putting the infrastructure pieces in place bit by bit to support us as we make the conceptual journey. They are excited. There is a wonderful sense of intolerance to status quo.

I believe in children. That's my collective bottom line and I believe that we're going to be successful in reaching each and every child that we have in this district or any

district that I lead. And my son is a classic example of how we can reach and be successful.

As educational leaders we want to empower people so that they can be solid contributors to our society. And how do we do that? First of all by developing that person and helping them reach a certain level of potential. We know that humankind, even those high achievers, just happen to use such a small percentage of what they're capable of achieving so we use terms like maximize potential. We don't ever come near that even with the superstars of this world. The whole idea's to have that citizenship and economic infusion perspective. Let's make certain that we shatter any chains that are holding both back from achieving the kind of victory that we know people are capable of accomplishing in all aspects of their lives.

Educational leadership is the ability to inspire, to galvanize, to mobilize, to help bring a critical mass of people together and then the ability to sustain that level of energy commitment to a common and well defined goal. I think that that's pretty much the essence of leadership. A companion piece would indeed be modeling what it is that you're preaching and being a lead learner. You can't lead anybody if you're not sure where it is that you're going. You can't be a hazy conceptual kind of thing, you've gotta have clear, clear perimeters by which folk realize the path, the course that you'll take to get from where you are to where a group of people would be capable of going.

I guess at times people tend to look at gender and also race and some districts in which I had a leadership role and I was female and some folk may have thought that because I styled my hair, or colored it that I wasn't as old as I looked to be so I think I

received that age perception. We did such excellent work in Farmville; if we'd been males the reaction would have been very different, a female superintendent of schools, a female assistant superintendent of schools, you don't see too many districts in which you have two females at the top. And that's what Joyce Babcock and I did in Farmville. Your accomplishments are looked on in a slightly different light than what a male's accomplishments would be looked upon. Believe it or not, you still tend to work twice as hard.

I would imagine that usually when you think of female in leadership positions, significantly in leadership positions, we know we've got to be a cut above. We've got to be a little better at, at what it is that we do than our male counterparts, at least that's been my observation, that we're head and shoulders above, you know counterparts that may be similarly situated. What else, I don't want to sound sexist, but a lot of females, or some females that I encounter, are better administrators too. When it comes to the follow-through, the nuts and bolts of getting things done, we probably intuitively know what it means to have a tickler. And I met with someone this morning that didn't know what a tickler file was. And I, I didn't say anything, but frequently I run into men who don't know what tickler files are. So, what else, maybe sometimes we have reason to be just a little more compassionate, caring. Maybe some of those nurturing things that we have, may be evident, however, I've been accused of not being compassionate and not being caring. Some people have read me that way since I've been here so I can't say that universally it's true.

I guess my leadership style just evolved. From some reading, some course work,

some watching others. But basically, just going with your gut in an intuitive sense. A lot of this is common sense. I was in the Birmingham Borders bookstore this weekend and I heard one woman saying to, whoever she was with, she said, I don't care how many degrees you have some of this is just common sense. So having common sense and a sense of what's appropriate, attempting to, for the most part, treating people with the same kind of dignity and respect that you'd want to be treated with. Organization, I think, has been good and the task orientation has helped me and I think as females that helps us, it gives us a leg up if we are task oriented and have a work ethic, but all females aren't that. I guess that's some of it.

I don't know, the experiences that I've had with African-American females, African-American females in leadership roles have not been positive. And I don't know why that's so. It's not an issue that particularly bothers me; I'm not preoccupied by it. I don't interact with them on any ongoing basis because of what I've experienced. My focus right now is how can I join in linkages with people that will help to move this school district ahead.

I think, as Black women, we have to work harder to establish our credibility. I think that our personal, private lives are going to be held to another separate standard. We just have to be so much better. Also with all, with these high and enhanced standards, then we've got to be mindful of taking good care of ourselves. The care-taking piece is a formidable challenge. And last night I was speaking to a friend, who wanted to know that once I moved here to the community, would I have a published phone number. And I said well, I had my phone listed and the people knew how to get in touch with me but no one

abused it. In this setting I think I'm going to have to give some thought as to whether I want my phone number listed. I put in long hours. I think that some time should be private time, time for doing what's necessary so that when you return you're going to be in the best form. So taking care of ourselves, eating right, proper diet, getting the exercise that you need and doing everything that you need to do.

I think the artifacts that best describe my practice can be found in these scrapbooks. This page I thought was significant in that we did a 25.1 million dollar bond issue and it came in on budget and it had a schedule. We built this new school (blank) dedication and there I am on the stage for this school day that I brought back. Other dimensions would be my visiting the pre-school, the four-year-old readiness program and reading to them. And this is a white water rafting trip that I took on the Arkansas River overlooking the Royal Gorge in Colorado. And I think I told you last time, that's my favorite place to go vacation. That was two, two summers ago. I've been there for four consecutive summers. This past summer was the first one that, that I missed. This is like a self-selected artifact dealing with the building campaign, which was so very important in the expansion that took place in the community. Other artifacts would deal with the restoration that we made of the junior varsity program that was improperly dismantled in the area of football and the leadership role that I played. This is an example of a weekly column that I started in a local newspaper. Goal setting, I even got our children involved with goal setting immediately after my mom's death and named all these Raggedy Anns Esman. For at that time, I was just too busy to spend time visiting and grieving my mom. So I came back and started this as a way of celebrating her life. After her death I started



the Esman Mitchell Memorial Scholarship fund through the Optimist Club and I've underwritten the scholarship opportunity each year. That's her at church in

Delaware. The last Mother's Day before her stroke, all of us came together and we went to church with her in Delaware. And I don't remember where I was living at that point, but it meant a great deal that we were all there. And soon thereafter she had the stroke and she was never the same. Certainly philanthropy and making donations has been very much a part of who I am. When I was in Eaton Rapids, I made a financial donation to the roller hockey team and we took the Optimist Club children to see them play at the Appleplex. We did a lot concerning saluting employees for random acts of kindness and those people who were caught caring. That's something I initiated in connection with the Capitol Quality Initiative when I was in Farmville. I also launched the superintendent's reception for Meade's scholars, and we had all the names printed in the local paper and school paper. We had grants through the Art's Council, the Lexington area. We did a teen coffeehouse as positive alternative to youngsters' just hanging out in the local parks. You've heard of America's promise, and that's pretty much a part of that. While in Farmville we launched Farmville Reads, and we won some state awards for the novel approach. And that's something that was my brainchild. We got the local Rotary Club that I belong to, The Kiwanians, and other service organizations involved in underwriting support for our citywide reading satellites that you see here. I may have mentioned that. Monday night we had reading at the Family Center, Tuesday the public library, Wednesday at the recreation center and the chief, the fire chief was very involved

because they also read to our children. We emphasize literacy. You may have heard of the Make-A-Difference Foundation. Well, the novel approach that we took in the Atlantic City area won us one of eleven top awards. Our group went to Washington to meet with the President to get the award. That's one of our football players from the Farmville; the football players collected money for leukemia, the Leukemia Society. Let's see, three of the years that I was in Farmville I mentored a student in reading. Some of our newsletters would quantify the gains that we made under my leadership. We were fiscally prudent, we re-financed our bond and in so doing saved the district over a million dollars over the life of the bond. And that happened under my leadership. As you can see there are lots of cards and letters. Our county led the area in terms of MEAP accomplishment, when other districts were more affluent, so that's a point of pride. When I was in Farmville, I took the kindergarten students on a field trip to see my son play basketball at the Boarding School in Central Jersey, so they could see how they could grow up to be just as fine. Each of these scrapbooks would document so much in terms of artifacts and the contribution that I made. They also illustrate how important my family is.

**The Journey of Janie Crawford: "As a leader you have to understand before you can do anything".**

My first impression of Janie Crawford was that she was very professional. She also appeared pensive and reserved. Unlike the other superintendents in my study, her professional positions before the superintendency did not include teacher or principal. She had served as an educational consultant and then moved into district level

directorships and supervisory positions before becoming a superintendent. Her personal history includes marriage to a computer software development specialist and having two sons, ages twenty and twelve.

Growing Up and Coming of Age: “We were moving the school; we understood black politics”. I’m the second child but really was treated like the oldest. My older brother was developmentally late and so he had been living away from home from the time he was five. Particularly, in that day, that’s the way they worked it; it was called retardation, so really I was more like the oldest. My sister, Dawn, holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work. All the rest have a Master’s Degree in something. All of us were very high achievers through school. We all did well academically and the expectation that we would do well in school was always there. So we did well, varying degrees of well.

We grew up in Liberty, a small community and everybody knew Mr. Crawford, so that had its positives. Our parents always knew things we did, before we could get home. Also, people used to tease us about our vocabularies. The rumor was that my dad made us read the dictionary, which wasn’t far from the truth. My father always loved words. Whenever we came across a word we didn’t know, we had to look it up. We probably had, you know, more books than you can imagine in our house and lots of dictionaries. I don’t think we were particularly self-conscious of that fact. That’s just the way it was.

Up until the time I was ten, we lived in a neighborhood, actually not that far from Golden French High School, just south of Golden French, near Olds Avenue and the Olds Plant. Before the parking lots were put there, the neighborhood was the center of

everything. The African-American high school was there and there were whites that lived there too, typically older people. The African-American community was really a small percentage of the town. I believe, I think I saw some census numbers from the 50's and 60's and there were probably no more than 3,000 African-American people in town in the late 50's or, late 50's at least, maybe early 60's. I always grew up thinking, how do my parents know everybody? The community was small enough so that you knew everybody. Additionally, my grandmother had been a beautician so everybody knew our family.

As I look back at my roots. I think of huge feelings of responsibility. On that point, I had to watch my little sisters and they'd get in trouble and I'd get in trouble but I saw that as kind of a privilege of being the oldest. I felt particularly close to my mother, so I was just older and wiser (I felt) than the rest of the little kids. So, I think I've had plenty of self-held feelings of responsibility.

In our neighborhood we had people like my parents who had college degrees and others with backgrounds as attorneys, teachers and principals, and on the other end of the continuum, people who were on the welfare system, maybe next door. Just varying degrees of backgrounds and so the kids you played with, the kids you went to school with, it was very diverse. The school district itself was different by the time my youngest sister was in school then it was when I was there. Even though the schools were to be desegregated, the numbers of whites going to schools with us went down, as you got closer to the mid 60's. People started systematically finding ways for whites to circumvent attendance boundaries. It wasn't uncommon to have whites in your class and

in your school, even in the, you know “black schools” back then. They actually started hiring African-American teachers in 1952 and so it was fairly new, but the schools that had the most African-American kids did typically have someone African-American on staff. So my first grade teacher was African-American and knew my family. Many principals at some of the other schools were encouraged to have African-Americans, so from that experience, although there were issues of segregation, it wasn’t uncommon to have an educational experience with whites. Although you had mostly white teachers, along the way you’d have an African-American teacher.

For elementary school we went to First Street Elementary, which was one of the African-American schools as I said, with a lot of whites in the school. That number dwindled though. If you look at some of the class pictures from over the years, you can see that number dwindle to where there were probably half whites in the class, maybe a little more. By the time I was in fifth grade, my father was the president of the NAACP in Lexington; it was a time when, when they were looking at desegregation efforts before the school district was formally sued. My first grade teacher in that school, Mrs. Crows, was extraordinarily curious and I remember we spent the whole year talking about really deep subjects, for example the construction of the Neuse River Bridge. It opened about the time I was in first grade. We’d talk about that, how it was constructed and what a suspension bridge was. My fourth grade teacher’s classroom was quite chaotic, but during that year we made candles from scratch; we made soap, lye, we made baked beans from the little dried beans.

Until 1961-62, the area that we lived in had been redlined. Up until we moved in,

in 1962, you could not, as African-Americans, own a house in that neighborhood. You just couldn't buy there. About 1960ish or so, 61, a couple of people like Melvin Gunnings and a couple other people built houses there. Other Black people just began moving into that neighborhood. We were the second or third, family that moved into the neighborhood. We were still going to First Street School because that was our attendance area. However, the white students who lived in that neighborhood did not go to First Street Elementary. They went to Lindenvand School, which is over near the Boatman Body Plant, out of their attendance district. They all had doctor's excuses saying that for medical reasons they could not go to Main Street. When the NAACP discovered that, all the Blacks went to our guy, Dr. Anderson, now deceased, and got our medical slips so that we could go to Lindenvand. So there were about twenty of us from four families and we all had to go to Lindenvand in the sixth grade. That was our parent's decision. We were desegregating the school; we did that my sixth grade year. I remember crying all summer. In spite of that, it was a good year and we were overall treated well. There were some things, issues that happened, but overall our parents were able to be safety nets for us. It was overall a good experience. And I do think we were very aware of why we were there and what that meant. We knew that we were using the whites' tools (false doctor notes) to desegregate the school; we understood that.

At one point during that sixth grade year, one teacher slipped up and said something she shouldn't have said. We all went home and told our parents and our parents took care of it. We just knew that all we had to do was make a fuss. For example, one teacher referred to Brazil Nuts as Nigger Toes in class. It was well into the year and I

do think, generally, that was just part of her vocabulary. I don't remember if she actually recognized that she said it. So that was an experience. Also, it so happened at the time that the then superintendent of school's children went to that school; he had twin sons who were in my class.

In junior high, we went to Eastover Junior, which is the Educational Center now. It had the reputation of being the black school. Probably at the time no more than, maybe 30%, 25% of the student body was African-American. It was a good experience; I mean I learned a lot. By the second or third year, the person who became the principal there, Candy Allison, an African-American, was a good friend of my parents. Some of the counselors were African-American. Actually, I remember thinking my ninth grade year, we got a bunch of new teachers and a lot of them were African-American. It was very noticeable to us. So it was a good experience. I had some good friends there. One day a good friend of mine, an extraordinarily high achiever, had an opportunity to be editor of the school newspaper, but she didn't want to do it by herself, so she talked me into being co-editor of the school newspaper, which we used to have a ball doing. We would, you know, get out of class to take pictures of football players. On the flip side, I always viewed myself as extremely shy; my parents were very worried as I started kindergarten because I was very quiet and shy. When I was a seventh grader, my father insisted, that for an elective I take speech and dramatics, cause he felt I was too quiet and too shy. So I'm a seventh grader taking speech and dramatics, and most of the kids in the class were ninth graders. You had to stand up and had to do this improvisation speech. I remember being terrified, but I'll never forget from that day forward, anytime I had to do public

speaking, or anything, I'd always say, well if I could stand in front of those ninth grade boys, as a little seventh grader in bobby socks, I can do anything. And so, it just worked, and I always used it as a way to deal with my role. I obviously got public speaking from that. The class was a good teacher about watching your audience and how to take cues from the audience. It was really a good experience. Also, every year, the school had a talent show. One year a small group of my friends and I entered the talent show because it was just something to do. They had this community Jamboree, which was sponsored by all of the fraternities and sororities in the African-American community. Every year we were in the Debutantes and the Debutantes always did a skit, and so we'd have parts in that. So there were lots of ways of being active and showing leadership, building rapport; things like that that were so embedded in the community.

I attended Selma High School. I think I was extremely well prepared for the university as I came out of Selma. The high school had an exceptional writing program. I could write anybody under the table. I was just very well prepared for that. At a time when a lot of other schools had stopped systematically teaching writing and composition, Selma was still teaching that way. During my junior and senior year in high school. African American awareness was really heavy there. When I was in, maybe my junior or senior year, right around that time there were walkouts within the school. African-American students would protest things that happened in the community. I was extremely active, so much so that my sister said, "if you walk out of that school one more time, we will be in major trouble" and nearly scared us to death. So when, actually when Martin Luther King was killed and all the African-Americans students walked out of



school, my sister and I remained in the building. We were afraid that Mommy would find out.

I remember in a history class having this debate with this kid about, I don't remember exactly what it was about. It was something about African-Americans and feelings of belonging. I remember his comments generated his feeling that if we felt that way, we needed go back to Africa, that kind of thing. The teacher was trying to manage the discussion a little bit, but he wasn't very successful. I remember that year we went to the student council; a number of African-American students did, because we felt that we weren't represented in student council decisions. We were concerned about who was chosen as the DJ for the dance or what things were happening or how they spent their money. I remember one of the members of the student council said something to the effect about us having had the audacity to question them and then saying, you do know what that word means, don't you?

Except for the bumps of desegregation, when I see students that went through Selma with me, both black and white, we all have good, fond, common memories about the school. By my senior year I think we did an African-American assembly that the students put together and the major issue around that was that white students did not want to attend the assembly. The school administration felt that all assemblies should be mandatory. Some white students were going to walk out. The school was concerned about how what was going to happen, so they invited people in from the African-American community. They had several clergy and leaders in the African-American community there. We had put it all together, we had poetry by Giovanni, Dunbar, Sonja

Sanchez; the known original poetry had African-American quality. As I look back, probably the content, the tone, and the messages were the black power kinds of thing. That was disturbing to a lot of the white students. Before the assembly we had our own original art and posters and collages and drawings and things and other kinds of artifacts there on display. This was a long time ago, so this was, you know, very innovative and brave for the times.

We had a white principal who was in his first or second year in that building. There were some people who felt that the student leaders who created the assembly should be expelled. And I'm about to graduate. There were threats that the Ku Klux Klan was going to come and march on the school. To the credit of the school and the principal, they stood their ground. They brought in the parents and communities to come in and talk about what to do, how we'd even manage this and what to do about the kids. You know, I mean just really, they were very supportive; the whites didn't necessarily have to be. I don't know, all of the behind the scenes. I think the principal was there maybe one more year and then, he moved to a downtown position. And in fact, ironically when I first started in the district, I was working in a downtown office and he was also working in a downtown office at the time, so we sort of re-connected. He was a good guy.

As juniors and seniors in high school, our class was reading *Souls of Black Folks*. We were reading and discussing it and we really had wonderful discussions. The students who were into this were, they weren't all star students, in fact a lot of them, teachers would have ranked low on the Richter scale. Most people were thinking these

are not kids that could discuss philosophy. Nonetheless, we would discuss international politics and international economics systems. A couple of the guys in particular, we'd gone to junior high together and I knew that they hung out on the corner on Friday nights with the winos and tried to bum a drink or something, or cigarette or something. Well, we were all part of this group, you know, we were moving the school; we understood black politics. So that was important and it's important for a lot of ways. We all kind of moved toward this leadership role, you know, so this group was really different from the cheerleaders, the athletes, or the debts. We didn't kind of see it that way, we weren't looking at ourselves, and we didn't see it that way at the time. That group was really important and it taught me a whole lot, it shaped a lot of things and it shaped my thinking.

The teacher I had in my junior and senior year, I had him a couple times, but I remember he taught World Literature but before you read anything you always set it in context. So you talked about what was happening in that part of the world and other parts of the world at the time this piece of literature was being created, and the history of the author, the other things they were dealing with in their life. How this tied in with and was consistent with, or contrary to, the prevailing thought of the day. So you really had a nice connection and he was just a real excellent teacher. He just retired maybe about four years ago and he wrote some of my letters of reference for college. And the teacher I had for African-American history, Mrs. Jackson, who grew up North, had just a wonderful understanding of African-American history and in particular in local context, but also in a disparate kind of look, so that was wonderful, very supportive of students.

As I started working at a career, I always had a strong interest in art and in design. I toyed around with the idea of going into fashion design. You know, in those days your parents said, “you’re going into education or you’re going into nursing, you’ll always have a job.” Well, as I looked at education, I thought about my friends who were being counseled into the college prep. I mean in some ways they got through; sometimes teachers helped them because they saw the potential, but they weren’t the ones who were necessarily seen as college material. Timing was everything. Because it was the late 60’s, they all managed to get scholarships and are exceptionally successful today. And these are kids who, you know if you call them, in today’s terminology, were at risk. You never would have thought they’d be extremely bright people, extremely dedicated folk and good, good, good folk. And so, it was for that reason, I thought I should be a counselor, because people don’t understand folks like my friends here, so I can do something, I can change that. So that was part of my thinking. But the other thing I learned is that you’ve got things beyond your control, and that was the lesson I learned.

I graduated from Selma and went to college. I didn’t gravitate toward a lot of the black power things that were happening on campus. I didn’t get involved with those that were involved with weapons, drugs and with political things that were way out on the edge. There was always word about secret service and FBI agents being on the university’s campus so I totally disassociated with groups when I was on campus. I kind of hung out with my roommates and I was really into books. I also worked full time.

I wanted to be a counselor; I thought that would be something good and meaningful to do. I would be giving back and it was an interest. I think somewhere in my, I think

around my senior year in high school or the summer before my senior year, it was somewhere in there, I took a psychology class that was extremely interesting, and I liked a sociology class that I took. And somewhere in there, I got fascinated with issues of testing and I've always tested well. I was really interested in issues of testing and the impact of testing on various communities. I started developing it, got an interest there, which I ended up following up on my undergraduate program and taking some behavioral psychology and taking some measurement and testing courses as an undergraduate, which kind of serendipity, led me to my career in research and evaluation. So it was just an interest and, and things, things just fell in place.

I thought about what that I learned about friendships. Friendships are people and not positions and titles. I mean it's the people, and it's having those connections with people. And so, I think that was important. I think role models by position weren't so important to me. I was telling somebody, in some communities it's rare when African-American and poor kids see people, other than their teacher, with advanced degrees and still have friends with no high school education, or have adults who were role models with no high school education and they were all seen as good, great role models. So that was, that was probably my biggest thought.

I'm real close to my mother. She went to college and received her associate degree. She later went back to school for her nursing degree. When she went back to work, I was probably six, and then she went back for her nursing degree when I was about eight or nine. So I think the one thing I think learned most from her is that you do anything you have to do. If you want to do it, you do it. And so, from that standpoint now, I mean I

think early on you have education, nursing, or whatever with the careers, but that was pretty, that pretty quickly melted away. I think early on I knew I could do whatever I wanted to do from that standpoint. My parents were supportive of what you really want. You did have the stereotypes, you know, how you look; you've got to look good, you've got to be a good girl, and you know all those kind of things. Other things, like don't get too fat (smile).

Mentors and Advocates: “ They particularly showed me by example, how to be authentic, to just be focused on doing the right thing”. I had lots of mentors, some from up close, some from afar. Edna Edwards, who was deputy superintendent before I was, she and I were pretty close. She lived a block away from our house when I was growing up and would tell stories about seeing me walking through high school. And, I went and told her, Eva you have to quit telling those stories. She was a real mentor, early in my career from afar, you know, as I saw her move up through the district, and wow, she's really great. She was deputy superintendent when she retired; she was deputy superintendent for instruction. She had been a principal, assistant principal, teacher; she'd been director of personnel, director, and deputy for support services. When I started working in the district, she was director of elementary education, and very, very connected, knew, knows everybody.

Octavia Metts, who was a good friend, was another mentor. She and her husband were good friends of my parents. Octavia was a principal, then director of elementary education after Edna. Octavia, Dr. Metts, was the quintessential administrator, who could do the right thing, and do it with grace and with honor. I can't think of the times

that I ever saw Octavia visibly angry. She would challenge things, ideas, but she wouldn't lose control, never got angry. She was just a wonderful mentor. And so, in fact we all, after she retired, we'd get in meetings sometimes and they'd give a little, ahem, and people would say Octavia, what would Octavia say in this situation. I mean she just, she led by example. She'd never check you out, but she lead by example that way. She, she was just a wonderful, wonderful mentor.

Dr. Campbell was a real mentor. Campbell came to Eastover Junior; I think he was one of the group of math teachers that came when I was in ninth grade. Later, when I started working in the district, when I was working on my Master's Degree, about 1975 or so, I asked if I could shadow him as part of my thesis. So, I spent a long time following him around. He was principal at Golden French at the time. I learned from him a few things. One, Dr. Campbell is very deliberate at how he and I called it work; I used metaphors, of how he orchestrates the educational landscape. He feels, for example, that you refer to each other by title, Dr. Campbell, Mrs. Johns and Mr. Smitherman. And he always does, I mean, I would never think to call him Clyde, you know, he's Dr. C. and Dr. Campbell. I think Dr. C. and Octavia Metts probably, although other people too, but they particularly showed me by example, how to be authentic, to just be focused on doing the right thing. You know, even if you have to change your mind and say, well, I didn't get that right, didn't get it right. So the two of them, there are a lot of others, a lot of others. Mark Malik was great. He and Mark Benjamin both, as supervisors, administrators, both did the best thing for me which was to let me do and go, let me do and go and do what I want to do. They would say to me, you know, you've got the power. Under both of their leadership, I

grew a lot and learned a tremendous amount.

As I began to work in the district, I saw things going on that were of interest to me and fortunately I had a, an outstanding supervisor at the time. I remember, at the time, there was a planning committee that was the probably top level administrators in the district and they met with principals and department heads and developed the five-year plan for the district. I thought that was fascinating, so I asked Mark, you know, can I do that, can I go to that. He said sure; I'll get you a seat at the table. I was probably twenty-one at the time and I looked very young for my age. I looked about twelve. And so, here I am at the table with the superintendent and the deputy and I'm just eating this stuff up and as I'm reminded from time to time, I didn't keep my mouth shut. So I'd ask questions, well, how does this relate. This experience gave me an outstanding understanding of the school district, things that you don't get most times in your career and education. So I knew how the bus garage ran, I understood about the maintenance and the building construction and budget issues. I really had that from the very beginning of my career. I had that. I remember my first evaluation with Mark was that I really did a lot of good things but I had to talk about what I knew. I had to talk about what I had done, because other people didn't know. So I had to make sure that people knew what I had done, which wasn't my style. I still have to work at that. That was important, I think that was a good lesson.

I was an evaluation specialist in research and evaluation. I went around the district and evaluated programs. Some of them were funded by state and federal funds like Title I. Some of them, one of the first one's I did was the alternative program. So I'd go in, I'd



spend time in the building, I'd talk to people on the staff, I came up with an evaluation, decide was the program effective or not. I issued reports. There had been several reports over the years and they hadn't really gone into the heart of what the issues were and probably couldn't make the change and its effectiveness. So they really liked the evaluation design I came up with and there were issues of credibility. Was the evaluator someone that was seen as credible by the staff? And, and again, I remember going out to look at the program, and this was in 1974. So the program is in an old house. There was a big pool table in the middle of the building. And so I go in, I play pool. Kids sometimes would talk to me about the program. I think they thought I was a student. I could talk to the staff; because the staff liked that too. So we came up with a really good credible evaluation. They felt good about my evaluation. It was authentic and got to the real issues of the problems, but in a constructive way.

There were other programs I evaluated also. One of them was the merging testing program that we were developing with five other districts, so I ran around the state and did this design, designed the test and ran the item analysis. At the time there weren't many people in the research offices trained in evaluation and testing. So I knew how to do item analysis and T test and different kinds of stats. So that was real helpful.

I think I learned early. Actually along the way I had to keep stepping back. When I started the work, I was certified in English and social science. There was a glut of English and social science teachers, so I took the evaluation and testing job. A few years later said - do I really want to go and teach, because if so I need to do that now so I can get years in teaching - or do I want to keep on this kind of fuzzier track of what I was doing. And

every time I would think about that or think about things, I always thought, I really like being in a place where decisions are being made. I really think I have something to add. So that always kind of led my career moves as I worked throughout the district. That was really important to me and I've always enjoyed that.

Well, I think again my non-traditional track in measurement and evaluation helped. I have pretty deep rather knowledgeable school system experience. Instead of the traditional principal track, I was able to go pretty deep into understanding a lot of different aspects of the operations of the school, from finance to operations to, you know, research and evaluation and grants and the legal aspects and the legislative aspects, really a lot of different levels. If I'd been moving around from the assistant principalship to principalship, I probably wouldn't have had that deep knowledge I was able to get.

In fact, I was talking to the editor from newspaper and he was saying that he saw me, probably more than other superintendents he has seen, change into the business side of schools. It was sort of, why was that? That has sort of been my career path; it's sort of one foot in either camp. You've got to understand that not just instruction is important, that's our business, but you also have to understand the running of the business. And you have to understand the business side and I think that's what the measurement evaluation and insight and all that does; it helps to round out, not only instruction from curriculum, but it also rounds out instruction from how children and people think and learn and grow, and adults as well. It shores it up with a lot more science than curriculum typically has and it also, from the measurement research standpoint, shores it up with a lot more research and design. And to understand how tests work and how measurement works.

And then it also, this was a long time ago, but there were a lot of organizational development sites in the psychology department, which helped me look at systems reviews of how organizations work.

I learned to become a leader a little bit by watching people, a lot by curiosity, a lot by reading. I read a lot in business circles, so I read Harvard Business Review. I read a lot on management and leadership and they have just tons of books on leadership, from a business, you know perspective, a fair amount on administration.

As a leader you have to understand before you can do anything else. That's what I really work hard at. I try to listen and then play back to the people that I'm talking to what I've heard so I get it right. I think that's, you know what I find to be important, especially with the teachers and the in folks, and then okay she gets it. I think that's really important.

As a leader I think I struggle between a balance of control and collaboration. I mean I always feel myself somewhere in between. I truly believe that collaboration is the best, but I always feel myself inching back over to that control side and trying to, you know, particularly when you collaborate for a long time, it has to get done. Grab it up. So when I get home and I'm dealing with my son, you know I've told them ten times, pick up their socks, I'm picking them up. So I always see that as a struggle.

I guess it's the idea of this synergy, building synergy and climate and assembling the working pieces to make change and to move the organization. It's maximizing that use of research, resources and talent. You have to move things forward and to take on those roles of, of crystallizing ideas, making sure we understand what the problems are,

making sure we have movement, consistent movement, and checking back, and making connections. And so it's doing all those things I think is leadership. Sometimes it's empowering. Sometimes it's kind of daunting. Sometimes it's allocating resources. A lot of it is modeling and ethics. I think that probably as much or more than anything, probably what speaks of all this is the ethical role of leadership.

Leadership is creating opportunities, setting a vision, providing the resources, and the accountability. I mean that's what this whole loop, that's probably it. I think leadership happens wherever you are. In the middle, whatever. Leadership is wherever you are and it's, it goes back to your having a vision or what it is you're moving toward. You have to be able to put together the resources, or make it happen. A lot of it is making it happen. Making it happen with resources and the right people and places and the climate and all those things to make the vision happen. You have to be absolutely accountable and hold people accountable in situations and institutions and departments. You have to stay true to the cause, about what your business is. It's all those things. You have to stay knowledgeable, but you can't know it all and you have to have around you, throughout your institution, experts so that you can rely on them. I'm not going to know anything when I run into bosses or whatever. I expect people to advise me on that so that, you know, I say is this too wide a vision, is it too wide on resources, and so put all the pieces of the puzzle together, but they got to know that part of it. So leadership is making all - sort of an orchestra leader - making all that happen.

I think that with women, we see more non-traditional ways of using power. I think you do see with women more of, how power gets used, how decisions get made, how

those things are slightly different, and I think that's policy. Sometimes you do have to go toe-to-toe and use traditional methods, but not always. I think the issues and approaches like when you win and all of those are a little more in sync with women's ways of dealing with power sometimes. But you also see negative ways; sometimes we play out the stereotype of power. Sometimes people go into round about routes to get to what they want. So there are some negative things you know. You know crying, pouting and you know, all that kind of stuff. And so learning how to not use those kinds of politics, I mean that's the important thing. But some people do use those kinds of politics to make changes, try to get, to build power and to use those as power plays and power initiatives. You know, like people come to you or they don't, what they complain about or don't. You know how things get couched. One of the media yesterday said something about one of the superintendents, said you know the superintendent makes issues around here a lot. And I'm not one that makes commands, but you notice the things that people want to, you know quote you as making a command about, no that wasn't a command, you know use common sense here. What should you do?

I think women in general usually are credited with listening a lot more; they're a lot more empathetic. They're a lot more collaborative. They're a lot less authoritarian. Black women in general are typical, traited with being decisive. Being straightforward, you know. That contrasts a little with the generalized views of women, of making tough decisions. Doing the tough stuff. Those would probably be the biggest. I think it, well I think it's something that Edna Edwards taught me. Edna said not to let people get put in a role, or in a box. I think that's important that we, we have to, I mean if we're going to

really, be the person who you want to be, you want to be a leader on a big stage, then don't let people type cast you. And I think that's got to be, you know real important. So, I'd say carefully control your environment. Do what's right when you're in it. And do absolutely everything you have to do for the job. But you also have to keep at some point in mind, your career. So, at some point you have, you need to make conscious decisions about that. And sometimes you make, put career advancement on the back shelf, and you may put career decisions on the back shelf. It needs to be a conscious decision; let me put it that way and not by default. And I see a lot of people, things happen to them by default. They just kind of get sucked down this little, you know whirlwind, rather than to make some conscious decisions.

I would say to a young black woman aspiring to the superintendency to keep your options open. Stay inquisitive. Don't shut doors on yourself. It's not so much resume building, but skills and knowledge building, so look at ways of doing that. I had to work hard at issues of working with different groups. You have to; you have to sort of find a way to navigate a lot of these things. And so it was good that I didn't close off hope. You've got to kind of step back and say okay wait a minute, what do I need out of that, what is good for me out of that, or is there something else that might be a better way to do it, you know. You learn from everything. I think, but also being real conscious where you spend your time and attention. It might be different for black or white. It's probably the same for everybody. I know that we seem to get pulled on more. So we've got, you know, you know race and culture. With our roles with community and with, church and family and you know, you know women's issues, and you know professional issues. As

women and Black women we probably get pulled in more directions than a lot of other people.

Leading for Social Justice: “We have to look at who owns the issues and the promises and the solutions”.

I think social justice has to do with looking at rights, looking at people’s rights and making sure that, that it’s not just a matter of the letter of the law, but that how it plays out in fact, that it’s authentic. Just because it’s legal doesn’t mean it’s right. One piece, it’s not total, but one way to do it is by looking at the facts, being data driven. For example, suspension data, you can look at how that happens from many ways, students’ rights, students’ and others, and for what, that’s best telling the picture. You may not understand what you have, but it starts painting the picture; it starts leading to other questions and other kinds of data to look at. So, I believe, one way to think about social justice issues is to start there.

You can put together boxes of data, look back for a hundred years; people know African-American students perform lower on most, many of the academic tests than others. There’s nothing new in that. But the issue is what do you do about it; how do you help people. So, one thing is looking at data. Second, is coming up with some good models, or how do you make change. And then what is the time line; what are the expectations for making change. Then who’s going to do it. And then holding them accountable for doing it. See you’ve got to have that whole cycle. And then we’ll pull you back, so people know you did it. But if you don’t do that, then we’ll be talking about these same issues fifty years from now. And we have to look at who owns the issues and

the promises and the solutions. Sometimes we have held on to too much of the ownership, or sometimes we've placed the ownership in the wrong place. We have here a program for achievement initiative, which is really the problem of the gap of achievement between black and white students in this district. It's a great idea; this district did not have to do that because overall achievement is extremely high. But what's evolved over the last two to three years as the program's in place, is that people say, what's happening to academic achievement, is it going up? Ask Blanche, it's Blanche's job. No, Blanche's job is not to make it go up. Blanche's job is helping the rest of us. But if achievement is going to change for African-American kids, then the classroom teacher and the principal and the superintendent, everybody else has to own that problem and own the solution.

How do you put all those together in making a system that could work?

It's issues like understanding when, or while I'm looking at the success and effectiveness across the district and whether it's a definite result of your income level. Those issues don't become stereotype issues, they become defining issues. In terms of student success, you've got to think access. You've got to look at all that. You have to look at how, how we communicate that and we have to look at our role as leading it, teaching it, and then doing it. I think those are all happening at once. Like the Civil Liberties Union, in talking about issues of discipline, a student might say liberties. There's this role that the schools are having to lead. At some point we have to teach kids; it's almost like parenting. And, and as a parent sometimes you say to your kid, it's not always fair but this is right. And sometimes kids, as a parent your child can be in trouble for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even if they didn't do it, or whatever, if they're in the wrong place at the



wrong time there's going to have to be a punishment. You know from a white, well maybe they're not you know, maybe they're white, not black and you know, due process and all that stuff. But from a planning standpoint there's a lesson to be learned here. And to balance that between the lessons to be learned and student's rights from a legal, human rights aspect, you've got to put those together. The problem though is if you allow too much of the parent lesson to be learned, that leaves way too much, or it leaves a lot of subjectivity. And minority kids, kids whose parents may not have had as much education or whatever, are the ones that have been the losers on that. So there's nervousness in just relying on that, so, but somehow you got where, in between two places here and you've got to bring it together. And, and schools can't be so leaderistic or regimented that the teacher can't help the kid; you know let's get it together you know. And so you've got to have, be able to make those human connections, and if we get so egotistic it makes it difficult to do that. And so we've got to, it goes back to, criminal justice, society, someplace we've got to have a place in between there where we can do the right thing, but do it with human connections, with kids. And our achievement data, making sure everyone has it. Some of the other, understanding it, making sure that everyone has ownership for it. On the achievement gap initiative, that the ownership is kept in the building with the teachers and principals and not at a central office. So just trying to keep that attention at the level closest to making the change.

One social justice issue that we're looking at now is the issue of suspensions and expulsions. I mean the whole issue of suspensions and expulsions is a huge one. Who gets suspended for what, and what things do we have for these, you know, looking at how

we make those decisions and how we have, and I think rightfully so, school systems have very low tolerance for fighting. I think we have to have low tolerance for fighting. But that impacts African-American, Latino students a lot more. You know we went to Disney World, my husband and my son, and we were walking through Disney and they decide they're going to horseplay with one another and they're punching each other, jumping around and stuff. There are cultural things that kids do, you know and they horseplay and they're jumping around. The critical issue is how a larger society views that; well that also gets interpreted as fighting sometimes, African-American, Latino kids get caught up in that a lot more than others. How that balances between, then do we say we have less, more tolerance for fighting or do we say change culture? How do we work those issues out and how do we prepare kids for a larger society when they're suddenly at the mall and seventeen or eighteen; that's assault, and you know, whatever. How do you deal with that? So I think, I think that things we struggle with all the time, access to courses, I just got a, I asked for a review of how many students by ethnicity and gender are in advanced placement, college courses, while they're in high school. It is appalling how few African-Americans are. A lot of high schools are 2500, 2000 kids. So a graduating class puts out 500. So there are issues of access, issues of equity, and we get institutional issues. There are cultural issues. There are access issues. There are, you know, it's not as, the call is not necessarily, not to excuse it all, but it's not necessarily as easy as it was thirty years ago, when we said it's just institutional racism. There's more to it than that. So I go back to my last experience; we had those same kinds of issues and often the lead administrator and the teachers, many of the teachers, and the administrators were all minority so it

wasn't just that. There was more to it. I think we are facing these issues all the time.

The Journey of Valeria Dutton: "While I was superintendent, under my watch, whatever length of time that is, that my goal was to make sure that there are five Black women who become superintendents".

My first impression of Dr. Dutton was that she is a no-nonsense, task-oriented leader. She's accustomed to everything being exact and spelled out. For example, when I sent her the fax introducing my study and myself, I requested a phone conversation so that I could talk to her about the study. In response, I received a phone call from her assistant requesting to know the exact nature of the comments and questions that I would ask in this phone conversation. She would not consent to answer questions until she knew what the questions were.

Growing Up and Coming of Age: "He looked at my test scores and told my parents that they should never allow me to do anything but exceptional work at school".

I was born May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1943, in Pleasant Ridge, Alabama, the oldest of two children.. When I was two, my parents moved to Van Wert, Indiana after my father, who had spent four years in the military, came back. My mother was a high school graduate and has an associate's degree. My father worked at Bendix in Van Wert, Indiana and was never laid off, so that was kind of a very steady experience with children as a household, as a family, economically. My mother had her beautician's license, so she did other people's hair now and then. She continued to do it even after she started working as a bookkeeper, only she didn't do it full time anymore, just for friends. Then she worked in, like an accounting, bookkeeping office, that's what she, what her associate's degree was in.

We grew up in a household that had a mother and father. We had a very strong

relationship with our church. We grew up in an African-American Episcopal Church, which had a lot of activities for young people like going to camp, young people development class and stuff. It was the kind of the experience that a lot of my friends had. We were expected to go to church; our parents had very strict, you know, rules about when you had to be home, and what you could do and those kinds of things. So my upbringing was traditional.

I think I had a very special role in the family because I was not only the first child for my parents; I was the first grandchild for the whole family, for all of us. You know I was like the doll they played with. So I got a lot of attention as an infant and toddler.

I went to public schools in Van Wert, Indiana. One of the interesting things is that I never had an African-American teacher until I was in grad school. Never did. When I was in school, the schools I was at, we were always a very small minority of the, of the student body. So that was different, I guess now, but that was all I knew at the time, so it didn't seem so different. I went to a K-6 school. Then I went to a junior high school. And then I went to a high school, the 9-12, the 6-8, the K-6 kind of schools. Those were the arrangements that were then. You know it was at a time when it was more difficult, not impossible, but much more difficult for African-Americans students to be involved in a lot of different things. I did well, so there were some exceptions, but I was aware of the exceptions so that wasn't uncomfortable. But that didn't seem so unusual either. I did have one significant thing. I think I was in the ninth grade before a teacher actually verbalized to me that they thought I was a very bright student. So, I do kind of remember that. In fact I remember because the teacher asked me to have my parents come and visit

him and I thought, what is this about? But he did and what he simply said to them is that he looked at my test scores and that they should never allow me to do anything but exceptional work at school. So that was kind of pleasant. But other than that, it was just getting through it, you know. I did well, but I was as interested in other things as all the other kids were. It was pleasant.

I would say my mother and my father probably influenced my educational success more than anyone. They just expected you to do well, expected you to go to college, expected you to behave, and those kinds of things so it was just like a, it was just a normal culture in our family. Actually, actually I think the most significant, I think I actually wanted to be a teacher, well, I think there were limited opportunities. My father, for instance, wanted me to go into business. Well, first of all I just wasn't too interested in it, but there were teachers in my family so I think I just kind of slid into it.

I haven't regretted it. I had aunts and uncles who were teachers and you know I kind of admired them. So I don't think it was anything much more significant than that. And then I think the thing that probably more than anything is responsible for the way I think now, today, in terms of teaching and learning is just having kids yourself in the sense that, you know, I really did insist on everything I wanted for my own kids. I didn't play around with it. Even though I was an educator, what I learned as a parent made a difference. Other than that, I think I truly understood my job was to try to be fair, make sure the kids got the best shot they could get, try to hold adults responsible, that kind of thing. But just going through that process as a parent, I think elevated it to a different kind of thinking about that in terms of other people's children.

Having been the first child and first grandchild, I always felt good about myself because it was, there was no reason ever not to feel good about myself. Now, having said that, I mean I had experiences that were unpleasant experiences. We took a lot of lessons. We took swimming lessons and I think it was real obvious to me, my sister never thought of that. We were in a class that, you know, it was a different treatment in the class. My sister and I were treated differently. So I didn't like that. That was unpleasant. But I just never felt badly about myself, because it just wasn't part of my experience.

I think I understood, in our house, that, well both of my parents raised us, and both had rules. If there was a bottom line rule, it was my father's. I understood that. When I was a young person the issues were more about being black or not being black than they were about being female black and male black. In my mother's family, there were ten girls and two boys; so, I always had strong females around me. I just didn't think much about the issues about whether my issues were female. I thought the issues were being black.

What has kept me in education is that I actually enjoy the work and I know it's really important work. And I've actually been able to do everything I've wanted to do. So, I mean I have the experiences that I've wanted to have, not always having them just when I wanted them. I had a couple of really good teachers, which is always interesting to me because a couple of good teachers kind of override the many bad teachers you have, because you don't so much remember the bad ones as you do the good.

I was a music major. It was during a time when there was very little conversation about diversity, and poor kids, and those kinds of things. So I think what, what happened

to me in the university which I think is critically important, is it teaches you how to think, not what to think about, but how to think, you know about, you know, a different way to look at work, research. It taught me how to hone my skills in terms of, of music. Taught me some of the thinking about other educators. Taught me how to do statistics, all those kind of things. But really did not do much else. I think they're still, unfortunately, places like that. I can't say I didn't learn because I did. I learned a whole lot more about music and you know I learned psychology. It was just a little different in grad school, but I think as much of anything, you know the other kind of things you bring to this job. A lot of things you need to do this job, you actually don't get in school.

Mentors and advocates: “ I would say I’ve had significant advocates, all along the way”.

I’ve had mentors. I’ve had a lot of people, I mean, just lots of people along the way that, the only reason I’m hesitating is because there is really a formal definition of mentor. And I don’t know that I would put it in quite those terms, but I would say I’ve had significant advocates, all along the way. And often times, almost everything that I’ve done, almost everything that I’ve done, it has really been because I was doing something that was going very well here and then somebody says you ought to think about this. I mean it’s just, it is uncanny, you know. I call them advocates. And I would also say, these people are sometimes people you don’t always know. Having said that, there are a few people who just have been with me.

Well, one would be, who is now, presently not doing too well. She is, was, a human resource director in St. Martin whom I met right after I went to St. Martin. And she has just always been there listening, giving really good feedback, positive and

negative. You know, being supportive along the way, encouraging. I was in the first class of superintendent's prepared, and so she was doing this search, and she didn't call me right away. But when she did call me, she asked me if I was interested and I told her no. So, I think she called me four or five times and I finally told her I would think about it. Then, I came here one weekend to see what it was like. I wanted to see if I had any vision or feel for Mt. Vernon, Ohio. And so, that's how I got in the process. I actually heard that the superintendent was going to resign in December. A person who lives here and used to work over at the university, saw me in a meeting and said you ought to apply for Mt. Vernon. I had been a Minnesota superintendent and I said no, I can't do that, you know I can't have this and then leave. There was no vision in my mind about Mt. Vernon, so I said no, I'm not interested. He says oh, okay. So that was it, and then, I don't know, the first part of May, late part of April, Loretta started calling. She called me one day at work while I was at, in my office and she said I want you to think about this. I trust her. I don't trust all headhunters; in fact I don't trust most of them, but I do trust Loretta.

Thomas Davis, who's a headhunter at Springfield, Illinois, called me about Brookfield because my goal had been to become superintendent in 1994. It was my own personal goal. So he called and, sometime in the spring of 1993, said Valeria, there's this district, and it's small, and I think it's okay. I was on my way to a golf clinic but I told him, I said okay. From my perspective I was practicing. I was not interested in Brookfield. I knew it was between Minnesota and Chicago as I would go past it, but I'd never been off the highway to go over to it. I just applied and then ended up one of two finalists. That's just kind of actually how it happened. And in both, there and here, I think



it's, it's, I think it is a gift to be able to apply for a job and don't care if you get it. I wasn't looking for the job in Mt. Vernon, I mean in Brookfield, I was practicing. So I may have done a different kind of homework. I mean I don't know that I would have, it wouldn't have changed my mind, but I probably would have addressed it a little differently. I actually told him that I didn't need a job. I had a job. I think that would be the wonderful thing, if everybody would be able to apply for a job while they weren't being put out of another job, because it changes the dynamics.

The first year I taught a self contained third grade class, which was nothing I'd ever planned to do cause my major was music and I had a special minor in special education for the emotionally disturbed, but I never student taught in it. It did mean that I had a reading course, a math course, and all of that. And so what I understood right away was just how difficult it was. It was also scary because I really understood that I had third graders who needed to learn how to read and I wasn't an elementary major. I learned just how complex and scary it could be. It was my first year of teaching also. But I also learned that I was more creative than I knew, because I did find a way to trade off in places where I felt weak and teach something for somebody else and so we did do those kinds of things. After that I did teach music. When I went to Minnesota I was the first black teacher who had ever been in the building. In addition to teaching, you're dealing with just educating people the whole nine yards. I've had great experiences as a teacher. I love being a teacher. I love being a principal. I've just been real fortunate. I've enjoyed the work and know that things were improved during my tenure and whatever it happened to be, so that was real fortunate.

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When I was in St. Martin I was an assistant director of curriculum, I believe at this point. Anyway I got a fellowship from the Wood Foundation, which is a foundation that supports Wisconsin and Minnesota and upper Mid-West states. It was an Executive Fellowship program and we met for a whole year, off and on. That was a very significant experience at that time. When I worked on completing my doctorate, you have to do what they call full time work. I don't know what they do now but then you had to actually commit to doing something that actually calls you to be off work for a year.

I was off for two years and what supported me during those years is I had another Wood Fellowship, which paid enough money that I didn't have to work. Then I had a Ford scholarship. I was a Ford fellow for one year and I didn't change my life style at all that year, but for a two-year period I didn't work. One year I finished up my studies and the next year I simply wrote my dissertation. It was wonderful. Then I was a member of Superintendent's Prepared. That was 1992-1993, another significant professional development experience. And then in 1994, I was invited to be a member of the Danforth Forum for the American Superintendent, and have been for six years. These are significant development experiences. They also allow you to meet a lot of different people in a lot of different places doing things that are very important. Then I was invited to be on the Harvard Urban Superintendent's Program Advisory Committee. And while you're on the advisory committee, you have an intern and get an adjunct appointment. Then I was invited to an appointed position to AASA's executive committee. That's another significant piece. I've also been on the Council of Great City School's executive committee. So, in terms of critical staff development opportunities, each, in a very

interesting kind of way, was just timely at a different place, when I was doing different kind of things. So those were, these are all significant. I would wish all of these experiences for all superintendents, because it allows you to continue to grow.

All of these experiences allowed me to be places I might not have been. To meet people I may not have met. To have real conversations with you know, authors and you know, politicians, and this is the more important thing I would think, ongoing conversations with my colleagues. I've had a very, very rich professional, supportive, learning environment. Because all of these things, particularly all of these are about learning. These are learning and doing. And so, so it's been, it's been, it's been marvelous you know, it really has been.

I've enjoyed my work. I think for the most part I was where I should have been, that I was doing what I probably should have been doing. You know, I had the kind of personality that could deal with fairly tough things. I always felt comfortable about my ability to do the work. When I came here, you know the big question was, can she go from a small district to a big district. I actually didn't think that was such a huge question. Because actually I came from a large district of about 40,000. Then I went to Brookfield, which is 7200, and then I came here. So I didn't think it was a huge question, but it was a huge question for people here. I did call Sherry Holmes and talk to her a little bit. She was in Minneapolis and moved from tiny Carrboro to Minneapolis. Sherry said it was the same skills. She said you just have to organize yourself to handle the scales. I've had this big circle of learning here. It gives you many more ways to consider the world, man more ways to consider the work we do. You learn from mistakes and successes that your

colleagues have had.

I was able to do a lot of reading and some other kinds of things. I think it made me a better teacher, a more learned teacher, in that I had read and had formed new ways to think about things. They'll tell you here and in Brookfield, that every year they have to read a book. Like they have to read Leadership without Easy Answers or whatever. Then we work with it all year long. This year, actually, I've asked them to re-read Leadership without Easy Answers. In a smaller district it is a much easier thing to do. In a smaller district, in Brookfield, I had forty some, I can't remember exactly, forty some administrators, which meant I knew them all. I knew them all. I knew them all well, had been in all the schools many times. I could actually say I'd been in every classroom in the district, all those kinds of things, that I had been at all of the PTA meetings.

Now here, it's a whole different thing. I haven't been in every classroom. I shouldn't say that, I have been, I have touched base with almost every classroom over the first two years. My goal for the first two years was to try to shake every employee's hand in the district if I could, if they were at work the day I was in their school. I had an, this visit where I spent about fifteen minutes with a principal, about twenty minutes with a group of students and then I did a walk through the building, the goal of which was to speak to every adult person in the building, the cooks, the teachers, the whole nine yards.

So for the first two years, I did that. But that's not getting to know everyone. Then we have a PTA council, city council, where the presidents from every PTA are on the council; they don't all come, but they're invited to be on it. So they meet once a month. My other relationships with parents are either at events, or that kind of nature. In a large,

large system that responsibility for the close, close relationship has to belong to the principal. But in this system, it's like you don't have a one on one kind of relationships with school parents.

Then there's the school board. I now have three black board members and before this year I had two. It's two black board members and five white board members. This year even though we've had all the other stuff going on, there have actually been more 7-0 votes. There used to be a lot of 5-2 votes. Even though race wasn't always the issue, there was still philosophically, a 5-2 vote.

My role is to be a lead teacher. In this role I'm very demanding. I work hard. I have high expectations for others and myself. Others would say that I'm not patient. I would tend to agree. I enjoy my job and I have work to do, but I have fun at it. I'm focused. I don't always lead a balanced life. I applaud good work. You may see it as a celebration of good work. I am a person that I could like someone very much, but if they're not doing the job, they have to do something else. They have to have the ability to get the work done. It's not important that I'm liked; it is important that they think I'm fair. I'm willing to hear other people's opinion. There are multiple ways of getting the work done.

I actually like a lot of privacy, but the job of superintendency is a public job. If I weren't superintendent, it would be different. This job is not for everyone. You must be willing to do the work, take the heat and be accountable for your work. What happens is not personal. What actually happened is that I started here on September 29<sup>th</sup>. On September the 11<sup>th</sup>, they invited me here to give a speech at the Chamber of Commerce. I

thought, well, I've got to let them understand who I am and I couldn't, I could not also come in here and say anything negative about the strategic plan; which I wouldn't say anything negative, it's just that you can't do all that was in the strategic plan. So this is what I said to them; this is how you're going to be able to judge my work. You're going to be able to judge my work based on the fact that achievement is going to increase and we're going to operate the district more effective and efficiently, I said. And then, I want one of my goals, this is a personal goal, one of my goals is to raise hope, trust, and confidence in this school district, because everything I read said that didn't exist. So I framed those three goals in terms of how you could judge Valeria Dutton's work. And then later on, I asked the board to adopt those as district goals and they did. I had to think about how they could look at me. You know I had to tell them, you know a year from now, two years from now, three years from now, these are the things I want you to be able to look for.

The purpose of schooling is to ensure that students become young adults who are independent and productive citizens. Schooling is the process that makes that happen. It enhances the probability to have a democratic society.

For me, in this job, my responsibility is teaching and leading in a way that focuses people on their work and improves the results for children. A main part of it is teaching. A kid introduced me the other night as the district's lead teacher. I liked that. I liked that introduction. He said I want you to meet our district's lead teacher. I see my job as raising the caliber of everybody's work, getting everybody focused on their goals, and then producing some results. I don't think any of the other things matters in the end. I

mean it's a part of building capacity. That's what I have to do. But, you can build all that capacity, but in the end you still have to have some improved results. So it is working in a way that makes that happen, with other people.

What I said to the staff, from the time I got here, so they'd understand me a little better initially, is that my job is - which maybe goes back to defining leadership - my job is to work on the way they think about their work, and how they talk about their work, and then, how they do their work. I don't believe changing how a person does the work can happen, unless you first change the way they think about their work. And so from day one, I was in front of people, teaching people. Because it is about how we do this thinking, and then it changes the way we talk about the work, and then what follows is the change in our behavior. So, I think formative work, you know, but some people doubt; some people start with trying to change the behavior. I think this is kind of linear in making that happen. I mean to make it happen and stick. There are some superficial things you can do. And some of that has to be right away, but in order to make it stick you've got to start with, you've got to be working on a thinking piece.

Right now, we just have a wonderful relationship with our community. We have a wonderful relationship with our faith community. Every year I do a faith community breakfast and one of our goals is to have every one of our schools to have a faith community partnership. Our business community is wonderful. We have a wonderful relationship with our, what I'll call, social agency, Community United Way, Urban League, all of those. So that piece is just great. And so I can't, I don't have disappointments. My only issue is that I don't take on more than we can handle, take on



more than we have the capacity to handle. There are some people who come and want to do things, because it, it's just like it's contagious. It's like, wow, you got these people interested. So now I'm real proud of myself; that's why I've created a development office here. We just need a way to handle all of this stuff. The only problem is how do you manage the type of support we have at this particular moment. When I look back at previous positions that I've had, I know when you ask the teachers they would say that I left things better than they were when I came.

It seems stereotypical for women to be more concerned about academic achievement and more nurturing than men. School board members often worry if women are tough enough. They worry if they hire more women and people of color, will they be tough enough, whereas white women get called and that's just common.

I think women and men sometimes are different in how they decide to approach the fight. And there's the whole issue of the fight between people. And I just elected to take the higher road on that almost all the time, so that is probably more female than it is a male choice to do. And I also think that it is also more acceptable for a man to do it than it is a woman to do it, meaning acceptable by the broader community. I think there is still a lot of ways that people don't want to see women act or if they do, then you know, then you get more of a negative response for it. I don't know. I guess, I mean, the only reason I say that is cause I am a black woman, so they'd all be lessons learned by a black woman. But I think there are things all women in the superintendency deal with because they're so few of us, that if there were a lot of us then I think there'd be more distinguishing between black women. We're all just; you know there's just so few of us.

And we all have to deal with those kinds of things. The most difficult part of this job is finding that balance. It sucks your life up. I don't know how younger women with children do this.

Another aspect of being a Black female is that our people expect us to bend the rules. I think this may be the case for women and people of color. The tolerance for mistakes or the time needed to improve student achievement is a much narrower window of time for women and people of color.

Leading for Social Justice: “*My role is to be lead teacher*”.

Social justice, well, you know, I'm going to put, for the moment, I'll put that in the same category I'm going to put self-esteem and all those kind of things. I see my job in terms of people who teach self-esteem. I said you know, teach self-esteem; teach reading, math, science, and then people's self-esteem. You can't teach that if you don't know how to read; you're not going to feel good about yourself. I don't care how many self-esteem classes you take. So, then we get to social justice.

I believe in social justice. But I don't believe it has a chance unless you can survive with some skills and, and information; you need, you've got to have a good education. So that's where my role is and it, I can't change, I mean I can have a lot of personal stuff in it, but the criminal justice system is what it is. The housing system is what it is. They all need changing; it's what it is. How I play into this, if I can produce young adults who can think for themselves, read stuff, and be able to decipher what's true and what's not true, know how to go and get research, articulate and debate their own issues, that's how I help support social justice. If you can't do those things, you aren't

going to have any justice. You just aren't going to have it. So you can have everything else; if you can't do those things, you're still going to get ripped off by the housing system, the banks still going to have their way with you. No to mention the criminal justice system, you don't have a chance. So I see that as my role. I believe everybody has a niche and that's my niche. My niche is to support all those things by helping produce people who can address them themselves. That's the only way they'll get better. It's just a normal work of trying to get a system focused and producing increased achievement for students you know. I don't actually see my responsibility, as huge as it is, I don't see that it has encompassed every other piece of social justice. I think there's a piece in there for everybody. And so, if everybody just carried their bucket of water, we'd all be okay. But unfortunately, everybody doesn't. But I can't carry all the buckets and I don't try. I have a real focused responsibility. Now that doesn't mean in my personal life, I don't support this or support that, but in terms of my professional life, I know what my job is. And it does support what I think is a citizenry that can actually do something about social justice issues.

I think that sometimes patience is a virtue. I think I understand that it is much better off for getting the job done if you can bring people along with you. I don't think I've had to learn this but it's, I think comes in force effect, that it's always better to think about issues about being fair and honest. I think those always play out better for you in the end. And then I don't think there's anything that takes the place of being prepared and knowing, and just knowing about whatever it is you're doing. And I mean about bringing recommendations and all that stuff, but I think preparedness is, is a critical piece.

The thing that is regretful to me is that I believe there is a large number of parents, particularly parents of poor children who don't understand that; maybe that's not fair, who don't put enough energy in with their children around this issue of education to understand that change is not going to happen in large numbers, to a large number of people, and maybe their own kids, if they don't make this education piece the highest priority. So we do a lot of things in the school district, but I would say to you that all the players aren't at the table to make it happen. And so it happens almost then by happenstance, in the sense that it's not grass roots; it's not in huge numbers of our largest group of kids, our poorest kids almost, almost 60% of the district. Sixty percent of the district may not be involved in the process, or only involved in the process at the end. They don't get involved here and that, they find out here they don't like it, so then it is for the most part, really done, too late; it's a done deal. And so, the same with the social justice, social change. It is an opportunity to be in, to be educated, to be able to hold your own on an individual level. Can't do that, you're not real added benefit to the, to the group change. And then people who are willing to be active in it, active from the most fundamental way, which is making things happen. At home, to make the kids more ready and then active at the school level, active at the decision making level. Being on councils at school, when the school is making decisions about how it's going to do something. You know there's got to be somebody there, you know holding them accountable.

Except for the very first year of teaching, because there were other African-American teachers at that school, I've been the first African-American and first female. I want to get that straight, there's one position I wasn't the first female, but it was always, I

was always in a first position. And so, so when I got here, somebody asked me how I felt about that and I said, I don't know much different. And the other thing I'll say though, here, here in Mt. Vernon, there are a lot of women in executive or ownership, owning their businesses. It's a different kind of issue here. Maybe internally it's an issue, but externally there are a lot of women in, you know attorney generals, I mean, the city attorney's a woman, you got your women judges, so it's not a big issue. But, I think that probably going to a high school where there wasn't much attention given to African-American students, you know, had an influence. But it's the same thing in college and then, so, I think I'd go back to what William Raspberry said, when he said, racism is not an excuse to do nothing. So, it's like those things happen, you know. I responded to some of them, but, you know, then I just kept on doing what I was doing and so it just kind of worked out.

I would say power is the ability to get something done, period. And that some of it comes by the position you're in; some comes from your ability to work with people; some comes from just being there all time. So that, and I think there are a lot of ways to define what that getting it done means. So there are very powerful people who don't have a formal kind of position, you know. Let's see, when I was a teacher, I was a visiting student who wanted to be in the class. I was a music teacher so it was the power you have about productions it brings. So you had power to make school look good, to make parents happy. And then in my administrative positions, you know what I learned, oh, I mean, you know there is a whole lot of ways to use your power. Actually then, the more power you actually end up with by just making sure that the people who have the

responsibilities use the authority that they have, or they don't count on you all the time to make all the decisions, because that doesn't, that's not helpful.

I may redefine social justice for you, so you know how I'm looking at things. What's equitable for me is that, because we're the issue around equity. We're always talking about the money and whether the money had been given out in an equitable manner. I told them I was less concerned with that because equity to me is when we have equity and reach student achievement results. People are always worried about whose getting the last dime off Title I and all that kind of stuff, when the real issue is, all these years we've been doing Title I and we're still down here in the dumps in terms of the number of kids who can't read. So it is about results. I mean, I believe that money should be equitable and you have to use money differently to get different results based on what kids ought to know and all that kind of stuff. But, when we talk about justice, I think one of the reasons we're going to have problems with the future is because we're going to have kids that can't read, can't compute, won't be able to, to solve problems. And if they can't do that now, or couldn't do that in this last century, this new one coming up is going to blow them away. And so, that's why I keep trying to nail it down. If the kids can't do it, they're lost as adults.

We have a new organizational position that goes into effect in a couple of months. We added a position, Director for Equity and Multicultural Education and that person's responsibility is to put the equity test to everything that we're doing. We had a curriculum management audit that was wonderful. I mean, we're skating, but it was wonderful because it created leverage and allowed me to have some more additional

leverage to get work done. There are issues of equity all through the district and our budget illustrates how we're looking, using the budget to address those issues, also. I think the board assessment of all of their policies, which also came under audit, said you need to re-do all your policies.

When I thought about describing my leadership for social justice I thought of a timer. I'm always pushing the staff to get things done. The other artifact would be a whip, because in the same vein I expect things to get done.

When I became a superintendent, I said that I was hopeful that while I was superintendent, under my watch, whatever length of time that is, that my goal was to make sure that there were five women who became superintendents. I want to encourage people of color. I've got to get two more. I'm going to claim Phyllis, my deputy superintendent.

### **Theorizing the Lives of the Four Women**

This study explored the personal and professional experiences, perspectives, and commitments of four Black women school superintendents. Their separate journeys to the superintendency were varied but those journeys greatly impacted their leadership for social justice. In this discussion of the main findings and emerging themes I direct my attention to the four sub-questions and intend to theorize these women's lives in a cogent, clear manner. The four sub-questions again are:

1. How do these women define social justice? How does each woman's experience(s) illustrate the meaning of working for social justice in schools?
2. How do these women address tensions, both personal and professional (across institutional, political, cultural, economic and social arenas), that they confront in their work to create socially just learning environments?
3. What are the tensions between leadership for transformation vs. organizational structures, human relations differences, political stress and symbolic/cultural

- differences? What are the structural, political, and human barriers that one has to overcome?
4. What does leadership for social justice look like? What place does this leadership for social justice hold in these women's practice?

In this discussion my analysis draws on the interviews I conducted with the four superintendents, my field notes, the conversations from the group dialogue and meaning derived from documents and artifacts. Four major thematic areas emerged: (1) Influence and centrality of family, extended family and community relations; (2) Anchor of spirituality; (3) Disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy and (4) Passion to create social change in schools to impact the students, their family, school community, and the broader community. I will discuss these themes in turn.

1. Influence and centrality of family, extended family and community relations.

The importance of family to a person's sense of well-being has been widely acknowledged.

Our sense of uniqueness, of being rooted in one space to one group, comes from our membership in families. It is through the experiences of growing up within the confines of the family that we first begin to get a sense of who we are, what we are, and what direction our lives will take. When we examine ourselves, we find that who we are and who we can become depend in great part on who we started out to be. This is found in our families. (McAdoo, 1999, p.3)

Historically among African Americans, the term family refers not only to family members residing in a particular household but to extended family members living in other households. Martin and Martin (1978) described the extended family as a multi-generational, independent kinship system that is welded together by a sense of obligation to relatives. The most fundamental value of the Black family remain the commitment to



the family itself (Du Bois, 1908, 1969; Frazier, 1939; Herskovits, 1941, 1958; Billingsley 1968, 1992; Hill 1971; Blassingame 1972; Stack 1974; Gutman 1977). Billingsley (1992) developed a list of African American family values, which includes a commitment to education, a commitment to self-help, service to others, a strong religious orientation, and a strong work orientation. These values seem to underlie the aforementioned themes that emerged from the data.

Construct: Family Support. The influence and centrality of family is strongly indicated in the lives of the superintendents in my study. All four women reveal the impact their families, nuclear and extended, played in the formation of their self-identity during their formative years and their subsequent professional success. All of the participants experienced some degree of nurturing and adult continuity during their growing up and coming of age. They talked about their families' high expectations for them. The women talked about how close knit their families were. They described their families as always being there for them. This finding is consistent with other studies that focused on Black women school superintendents (Jackson, 1999). The women described their familial experiences of growing up and coming of age as instrumental in nurturing their leadership development.

Construct: Extended Family Support. Another key construct of the influence and centrality of family is the presence and support of the extended family (blood and non-blood relatives). The women reported that their extended families provided emotional support as well as material support as needed. In one instance, the grandparents cared for Mary Mack after the death of both parents. Responsible adults were always available and

hence the family support was consistent. The women enthusiastically talked about extended family members that took a special interest in them. From Mary Mack's and Sally Walker's comments:

My father's sister and her husband became very influential in our lives. They would come to visit us and we would go visit them often. When they came it was always an adventure trip. They wanted us to see the world so they would take us on a lot of trips. Whatever was cultural, my aunt and uncle would expose us to it. Sports, cultural activities, etc. we experienced it while we were there. (Mary Mack).

Also, amusement parks were big at that time and a special treat would be when one of my older half-brothers, who was probably the most affluent in the family at that time, my brother and his wife would invite perhaps me and my older sister to go to a recreational park. Usually out of state. What are some of the other things we really looked forward to doing with those significant others? (Sally Walker)

All the women reported feelings of competence in one or more academic areas as a child. The women indicated that one or more of their immediate and extended family members always encouraged them to use their strengths, talents and education to make a difference. All of the women seemed to agree that their feeling of self-worth was a result of support from both their immediate and extended family. They also reported that the community provided a nurturing environment, fortifying their sense of self-worth.

Construct : Community Support. All four of the women were active within their various communities. They were involved in school and community activities and often excelled. In these endeavors members of the community supported them whole-heartedly.

Consider the comments of Mary Mack and Sally Walker:

All of us attended one school and there was that kind of community interest in what we were doing. (Mary Mack)

There were community people who were generally supportive of us. A

lady in our community who we called Miss Essey used to take me and my sister to camps on Sunday afternoons... There would be street vendors and you just walked along and got something to eat. (Sally Walker)

The superintendents in my study shared the common experience of support from their families, extended families, and community relations. From the above discussion of these three constructs, two very important values related to the success of the Black women superintendents became evident. These are the values of a strong work ethic and a tradition of resiliency. Because of the importance of these values I will briefly discuss them.

Construct: Work ethic: Work and education are among the Black family values that African Americans stress to their children. Scanzoni (1971) described in his research how Black families have traditionally stressed the importance of work and education to their children, reminding them that because of their race they would have limited opportunities to get ahead in society. Thus, hard work and a good education was the route to success. All of the women talked about the work ethic principles they were taught as young children. Not only were they taught to work hard, but to also take pride of their task regardless of the job. For instance in their own words, Mary Mack and Sally Walker say that:

My family was working class with middle class attitudes and values. My grandfather was a porter at the bakery and my grandmother did other people's laundry out of our home. My grandfather was a very proud person who always dressed immaculately. He would leave home wearing a three-piece suit, shirt and tie every morning. He would go in and change into his work clothes to clean the building, but when he came home he was in his suit, white shirt and tie again. (Mary Mack)

My early background and orientation taught me a work ethic and I carry that with me to this very day. In addition to the work ethic, it instilled in

me a deep sense of traditional family values and what is more, of the underlying spirituality and how very important that is to all that you do. My father also taught me that the early bird gets the worm. I still manage to come to work before 7:00 and put in long, long hours and if I need to do things at nights, I don't hesitate. My weekends are pretty much devoted to getting ready for the next week. (Sally Walker)

While the importance of a good work ethic is not limited to Black families, given the history of racial discrimination and racial segregation, hard work and education have always been held in high regard in the Black community. We see this value passed on to these women. In addition, they acquire another trait that proves beneficial in their work for social justice. It is often the case that members of the community have had to show a great deal of resiliency in both their daily lives and their attempts to provide for their families. One of the important aspects of the African American experience has been our ability to adapt to the various social, economic, and political changes that we have been forced to endure. In essence, the Black families have always had to be resilient (Lawson, 1998).

Construct: Resiliency: The family is one of the strongest and most important institutions in the Black community. The strong Black family has survived the slavery system, legal segregation, discrimination and enforced poverty. Additionally, the Black family has had to contend with racially hostile governmental and societal practices, policies, and attitudes. To this end, the Black family has proven to be unusually resilient even in the face of awesome adversity (Franklin, 1997).

According to Kumpfer (1999), “resilience in an individual refers to successful adaptation despite risk and adversity” (p.181). It is broadly defined as “a process, capacity, or outcome of successfully adaptation despite challenges or threatening

circumstances” (Kumpfer, 1999, p.181). The resiliency research was introduced by child development researchers and other social scientists who wanted to change the focus of their research agenda from the deficit model (looking at what’s wrong), to a model that focused on the social and environmental forces that foster strength, resistance and resilience in socially vulnerable children. Specifically, researchers wanted to isolate and understand the facts that enabled some children living in negative situations including poverty, abandonment, racism, life with drug affected parents, etc., to survive childhood intact, and to become healthy and well-functioning adults (Benard, 1991). Resiliency is the ability to cope with, adapt to, and survive, difficulties in life and your environments (Gostnell, 1996).

All of the participants in this study grew up with one or more of the environmental and/or social “risk factors” (i.e. race, gender, class) much like the children studied in the resiliency research. The resiliency research offers a useful framework for understanding the rebounding that enabled the Black women in my study to overcome hardship, develop a strong sense of self, and to make substantial contributions as superintendents in their respective systems. For example, Mary Mack lost both parents before she was ten years old. She was able to overcome this hardship and seemed to experience a reasonable memorable and fulfilling upbringing. Additionally, she excelled in school, took on leadership roles and went on to become a successful advocate for children from varying family backgrounds. This same phenomenon was revealed in Sally Walker’s life. Even though Sally’s marriage was very important to her she seemed to rebound after her divorce and she stated that her professional career really took off.

These superintendents were able to draw on their personal strengths, experiences and love of family. The presence and support of the family, extended family and the community provided the foundations for a strong work ethic and the sense of resiliency that enabled them to climb to the superintendency. These groups also imparted them with the leadership skills they used as educational leaders today.

It's important to note that these women also carry this understanding of the value of family, extended family and community over to the raising of their own children and to the children/youth that they serve in their districts. Two of the women reveal the importance of having their own families and how that impacted their educational practices.

I shared my son's experience (of being labeled as learning disabled) and I was convinced that each and every child could reach a high level of academic success. That's my collective bottom line and I believe that we're going to be successful in reaching each and every child that we have in this district or any district that I lead. And my son is a classic example of how we can reach and be successful. (Sally Walker)

I think the thing that probably more than anything is responsible for the way I think now, today, in terms of teaching and learning is just having kids yourself in the sense that, you know, I really did insist on everything I wanted for my own kids. I didn't play around with it. Even though I was an educator, what I learned as a parent made a difference. But just going through that process as a parent, I think elevated it to a different kind of thinking about that in terms of other people's children.  
(Valeria Dutton)

Thus, their family and community experiences affected her education styles. These women also drew strength from another source The next major thematic theme is the anchor of spirituality.

## **2. Anchor of Spirituality**

**It is the spiritual aspect of the church that also sustains these superintendents.**

**According to Billingsley, spirituality is one of the basic values of the Black family. Historically, the church, the family, and the school are the three most critical institutions whose interactions have been responsible for the viability of the African American community (Roberts, 1980). However, it is through the church experience that many members of the community draw their daily strength. The church affiliation fosters a belief in a higher being.**

**Spirituality is the appeal to a higher power. The reverence and respect for a higher being, by whatever name, has been an indispensable part of the survival of Blacks in America. According to Hill (1971), spirituality is one of the most distinctive features of African American culture. Among African Americans after the family, the church has been the strongest institution and continues to be one of the anchors of the Black community today (Sudarksa, 1997). It has been theorized that many Blacks, until the end of slavery, clung to religion because they had no other means of normal outward expression (Pipes, 1997). The church and church community remain an important construct in the anchor of spirituality. Closely connected to the value of spirituality are the feelings of peace, care, and commitment that arise from one's belief in a higher being.**

**Construct: Peace, Care and Commitment. The anchor of spirituality is revealed when the women talk about their religious upbringing as well as their search to get in touch with their own spirit and soul and to be at peace with self. The theme of spirituality is evident in the phases they use that express their care and commitment to the children and**

families that they serve. All women had a self-defined spirituality and expressed the need for connection with something “bigger than” themselves. For example, Sally Walker appears to be defining or redefining her spirituality. She reveals a search to get in touch with her own spirit or soul:

In 1993, I was married and living in upper- income white America. We were the only Blacks in our neighborhood. We had an affluent home, in ground pool, multi-level deck, someone we paid to take care of the pool, the grounds, and I had a housekeeper and someone to help me care for Stanley. And I walked away from that to a more simplistic life and I call it my pond of Walden where I lived in a one-bedroom garden apartment for a year after that and just found a great level of peace. I thought I would miss all of those things and I found out I didn't miss it at all. I said good-bye to all of those things. I found a good level of peace and serenity. (Sally Walker)

I've learned to become a leader through reflective thought and thinking, spending time alone, retreating, and spending lots of time on the inside. Knowing who you are, what you stand for, how you're wired, and what you're all about and then celebrating it. (Sally Walker)

Almost all of the women spoke of the influence of their church in their growing up and coming of age years. In addition, they spoke to the support the church provided them as children developing oratorical and social skills and in providing access to information. Although two of them no longer regularly attend church services, they still deeply identify with the values learned in childhood.

Life revolved around school, and, of course, the church. My parents were very religious and we were raised up in Pentecostal Holiness Church. So we worked hard at home and also at school and we excelled in the church. Religious life was very much a component of who we were. (Sally Walker)

We had a very strong relationship with our church. We grew up in an African-American Episcopal Church, which had a lot of activities for



young people like going to camp, young people development class and stuff. It was the kind of the experience that a lot of my friends had. (Valeria Dutton)

All four women felt that they were spiritually grounded and that this grounding was a source of inner strength.

Construct: Inner Strength. The superintendency for Black women is often very stressful. It is imperative that these women take the extra measure to take care of themselves spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Sally Walker and Valeria Dutton share:

Also, with all, with those high and enhanced standards, then we've got to be mindful of taking good care of ourselves. The care-taking piece is a formidable challenge. I put in long hours. I think that some time should be Private time, time for doing what's necessary so that when you return you're Going to be in the best form. So taking care of ourselves, eating right, proper

Diet, getting the exercise that you need and doing everything that you need to do. (Sally Walker)

The most difficult part of this job is finding that balance. Otherwise, it sucks your life up. (Valeria Dutton)

The superintendents have worked hard to find a balance. They must be "centered." That is they must have confidence, commitment and a charge to advocate for social justice. The goals of justice and equality require nothing less. As they are for other oppressed groups, ideas of equality and justice are especially important for Black women in the United States. Even though Black women's concern for justice is shared with many others, African-American women have a particular group history in relation to justice. Spirituality provides one important way that many African-American women are moved to struggle for justice because it's the "right thing to do" (Collins, 1998). The struggle for

social justice requires a positive attitude, commitment and a platform for advocacy.

### 3. Disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy/mentoring

Given the social and political history of the superintendents in this study, it is clear why they have an attitude of advocacy for social justice. This disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy can be viewed as an extension of parenting of family, teaching resiliency and sharing common ground in both faith-based as well as individual spirituality. The mentoring relationship offers encouragement, advice and support to the person being mentored. This disposition as we have seen comes from strong family ties, community support, and a strong spiritual base. Thus far all three of the thematic areas are interrelated.

The women's attitudes have led to a commitment to social justice. The women are fortunate enough, because they're in the public sphere, to have a platform to advocate for social justice. We can understand how they arrived at this space based on their own experiences as mentees, benefiting from various mentors throughout their lives. These mentors took many forms: family member, teachers, and colleagues.

Construct of Family Mentoring. Several of the women talked about the influence of family, extended family and other members of the community encouraging them to excel. Family were also mentioned as having been important in providing them with advice, material support, acceptance, a model to aspire to, and as a mirror to reflect back their value as Black women. The primacy of the roles played by mentors and friends in the lives of Black women is mentioned in the literature (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1991 Hall, 1998; hooks, 1993; Lykes, 1983) as central to the healthy construction of self. Mary

Mack, Sally Walker and Janie Crawford provide evidence in commenting:

My grandparents constantly reminded me and my brother of the importance of education, as did our uncle and aunt who took a special interest in the informal education that my brother and me received. (Mary Mack)

Well, teachers were supportive generally of us and there were community people such as a lady in our community who we called Miss Essey and on a summer Sunday afternoon we used to have something called camps. Miss Essey would invite my older sister, Liz and me to ride with her to camp. There may be a church service, but we normally didn't go to church services. There would be street vendors and you just kind of walked along and got something to eat. (Sally Walker)

Octavia Metts, who was a good friend, was another mentor. Octavia was a principal, then director of elementary education after Edna. Octavia, Dr. Metts, was the quintessential administrator, who could do the right thing, and do it with grace and with honor. She was just a wonderful mentor. I mean she just, she led by example. (Janie Crawford)

Construct: Teachers as mentors. Then there were teachers and professors who took a personal interest in the women. The disposition of advocacy/mentors is revealed as the women describe their teachers and colleagues as mentors/advocates. They describe these relationships as an integral aspect of guiding, comforting and reflecting back an image of competence, worth and faith in their abilities. Mary Mack reveals her experience with one teacher:

We had a counselor who called a group of us in one day. She said you're going to summer school because when you go to college your scholarship may not be enough to sustain you. You'll need a skill, so you're going to summer school. Going to summer school allowed us to do all of that. (Mary Mack)

Mrs. Green wanted me to go to Hampton or Spelman. Her niece, Eugene Gravelly's sister, went to Hampton and she wanted me to go with her. And she did everything she could to get me a full-ride scholarship. I told her no. She also got me one to Spelman. (Mary Mack)

Construct of Colleagues as Mentor. Next, the women spoke of other mentors and advocates like former bosses and colleagues that served as mentors and/or advocates. They all talked of just doing their jobs when someone noticed them as being very talented, and encouraged them to advance to the next administrative position. Three of the women comment:

Terri Smith is a pioneer superintendent. I met Terri, a white female, about five or six years ago, and she saw some possibilities that perhaps I hadn't seen in me. And it was because of her that I became superintendent in a local district. So yes, Terri Smith has been a mentoring friend. (Sally Walker)

One principal said to me, "Aren't you going back to school?" and I said I couldn't go to school and really do what I have to do while I'm teaching. Two years later he came to me with a completed transfer form in my name and he put it down and said sign this. I said what's this? He said your transfer form; you're leaving 28<sup>th</sup> Street School. I said what do you mean that I'm leaving? He said you're not going to do anything different as long as you're here and you're too comfortable here. (Mary Mack)

I've had mentors. And often times, almost everything that I've done, almost everything that I've done, it has really been because I was doing something that was going very well here and then somebody says you ought to think about this. I mean it's just, it is uncanny, you know. I call them advocates. (Valeria Dutton)

Mary, Sally, Janie, and Valeria all benefited from the mentoring relationships from family, teachers, and colleagues. There is a biblically based passage that when paraphrased goes something like this, for whom much is given must is required. This is the case with the four women in this study. They believe it is their responsibility to give back to their community through their commitment to mentor others.

Construct: Reciprocity in Mentoring. The superintendents seem to take very

seriously their responsibility to mentor others. For example, as Janie Crawford talked about considering her career choices at an early age said, “ I wanted to be a counselor; I thought that would be something good and meaningful to do. I would be giving back...”. According to Sudarksa (1997) reciprocity is the principle that compelled African Americans to give back to their families and communities in return for what had been given them. Historically, Africans placed a high premium on mutual assistance and expected good deeds would be reciprocated either in the short run or the distant future. The commitment to reciprocity has remained an important value among today’s Black family. Sally Walker’s quick response when I contacted her was indicative of the attitude that she wanted to help as if she felt that this was her own way of mentoring me. Similarly, throughout the interview Sally offered snapshots of a mentor-mentee relationship developing between the two of us. Valeria Dutton shared her personal mentoring commitment that she made to herself:

When I became a superintendent, I said that I was hopeful that while I was superintendent, under my watch, whatever length of time that is, that my goal was to make sure that there were five women who became superintendents. I want to encourage people of color. I’ve got to get two more.

The influence and centrality of family, rooted in the anchor of spirituality and nurtured by the disposition of advocacy brings us to the last major theme, that of passion to create social change in schools. It is with this biographical background of family, spirituality and advocacy that we come to the superintendents’ views on social justice.

#### **4. Passion to create social change in schools to impact the student, family, school**

community, and the broader community.

It is important to locate this study in the social/political context of the 1960's and 1970s when all of the respondents came of age. Three of the four respondents acknowledge the influence of the Civil Rights movement as a having a major influence on them, their growing sense of being Black and their passion for working for social justice. In varying degrees, all the participants except for Valeria Dutton expressed being active in that struggle and linking their leadership roles today to their activism during that time. The passion to create change is revealed in the women's discussions of the political, equity seeking aspects of their lives. This thematic area is revealed when the women talk of their early political involvements. The superintendents in this study understood the role that political and economic powers have in the struggle for social justice.

Construct: Power With and Power for Social Justice. The women talked of the issue of power and privilege. In some of their growing up and coming of age discourse the dialogue was about the lack of power and the sense of inequity that they felt in certain circumstances. From Mary Mack and Janie Crawford's comments this is revealed:

When I was in third grade, I realized I had read everything that was appropriate for me to read at the "colored branch" of the public library. There were no more books for me to read. The librarian constantly made lists for me to go to pick up books at the "main library." I couldn't go in and browse and "pick out books", I could just "pick them up". I thought that this was just the worst thing that could happen to me. (Mary Mack)

I remember that year we went to the student council; a number of African-American students did, because we felt that we weren't represented in student council decisions. We were concerned about who was chosen as the DJ for the dance or what things were happening or how they spent their money. (Janie Crawford)

The women talk about the importance of power in creating socially just learning

environments both because of the urgent threats to survival Black women have faced and because of the complex nature of those threats. African American women, especially the women in this study, have adopted a pragmatic, strategic orientation to survival and to working for social change. Making a way out of no way is simply a fact of life (Thompson, 1998). Sally, Janie, and Valeria raised their concerns about power and in their own words say:

Well, another important aspect is personal power. It is important that we not give it away and somehow do things that would counteract the personal power and the presence that we have and sometimes in service orientation, leadership roles, such as how I see the superintendency, you have so many internal and external constraints that you need to please, that it is difficult to find that fine line. If you are careful not to give away all of your personal power, and neutralize it, you are able to tap into a force that is beyond you and the person you are addressing so that they can help to realize the potential that is out there. (Sally Walker)

I think that with women, we see more non-traditional ways of using power. I think you do see with women more of, how power gets used, how decisions get made, how those things are slightly different, and I think that's policy. Sometimes you do have to go toe-to-toe and use traditional methods, but not always. I think the issues and approaches like when you win and all of those are a little more in sync with women's ways of dealing with power sometimes. (Janie Crawford)

I would say power is the ability to get something done, period. And that some of it comes by the position you're in; some comes from your ability to work with people; some comes from just being there all time. So that, and I think there are a lot of ways to define what that getting it done means. (Valeria Dutton)

These superintendents see it as their job to empower their students and their families.

Construct: Power to Create a Difference in the Lives of Children and Youth.

The Black women superintendents in my study are passionate about creating social change in their school communities. They have gently and effectively led change in a

variety of circumstances. These women see education as having the capacity to change people, specifically their students, and to provide a greater chance for academic, economic and professional success. Thus, they see education as essential in the lives of the students and communities they serve. They see their role as that of empowering their students. Sally Walker expressed it like this,

As educational leaders we want to empower people so that they can be solid contributors to our society. And how do we do that? First of all by developing that person and helping them reach their full potential. We know that humankind, even those high achievers, just happen to use such a small percentage of what they're capable of achieving...

The four women enact their passion to create change in different ways. For example, Sally Walker expresses her distaste for the elitist status that her school board has enjoyed before her arrival in the district. She goes on to share her conversation with one of her principals about a graduation ritual that has gone on for ears and years. It seemed that the school board and the graduation speaker would have an exclusive dinner off-campus prior to the graduation ceremony. Sally Walker told the principal that they would no longer continue that ritual. She stated, "We're not going to do that anymore... First of all, it's utilizing public monies for a private purpose.... We're going to level the playing field and we're not going off to some private club and removed surrounding.... theses are social justice issues as I see it... And I said, wait a minute, isn't this high school graduation, isn't this for the children?"

Janie Crawford states, "One social justice issues that we're looking at now is the issues of suspensions and expulsions. I mean the whole issue of suspensions and



expulsions is a huge one.” Janie explains that they are disaggregating the data to determine why the suspensions and expulsions impact African American and Latino students more than non-minority students.

Valeria Dutton shares that when she went to her district there was an overall distrust of the school system by the communities within and outside of the system. She started an annual faith community breakfast and established a goal for every one of the schools to have a faith community partnership. Additionally, she and her staff worked hard at relationship building with the business community as well. She knew how important these relationships would be to the success of the school system. Valeria also described a new position, Director for Equity and Multicultural Education, which was being added to her organization. The person in this position will be responsible for putting the equity test to everything the system is doing. She stated, “There are issues of equity all through the district and our budget illustrates how we’re looking, using the budget to address those issues.”

Some of the instances are subtle changes while others represent going against the grain of some very deep-rooted rituals in the various school climates and cultures. Nevertheless, these four women all take their responsibility and commitment to equality and fairness very seriously. The passion to create change guides the way they think about and practice leadership.

### Summary of Themes

In sum, here again are the themes that emerge from the study of these four Black women’s leadership for social justice: (1) Influence and centrality of family, extended

family and community relations; (2) Anchor of spirituality; (3) Disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy and (4) Passion to create social change in schools to impact the student, family, school community, and the broader community. From the analysis of the data the women's definition of social justice includes: fairness, fair play, everyone operating on a certain code of ethical conduct and standards, being consistent in terms of candor, frankness, and treating the other person as you'd like them to be treated, looking at people's rights and making sure that, that it's not just a matter of the letter of the law, having the skills and information you need to think for yourselves, read stuff, and be able to decipher what's true and what's not true, and how to articulate and debate their own issues. In brief, social justice is about equity, equality and fairness.

This study finds all four of the women having the disposition, desire, commitment, and platform for equity advocacy. Their own personal and professional experiences have provided them with the foundation for this disposition. When they were younger and confronted with challenges to equity and equality they may not have had the necessary skills to deal effectively. However, as they've matured and taken on more leadership roles they've had the opportunity to develop the necessary skills and passion to struggle for equality. Throughout their lives, these women have succeeded and sometimes not succeeded at working between the lines of authority that still segregates, labels, and disenfranchises difference (Benham, 2001).

These women have worked through formal and informal structures to create change for the communities that they serve. They had vehicles like sororities, social clubs, their church and other community based organizations that have afforded them the

support while they go about the business of challenging inequalities. Unfortunately, this work is often painful. There are personal and professional losses that result from their commitment to their work. Personally, it sometimes means loss of family, friends and marriages and physical well-being. Professionally, their tenacity to work for equality sometimes means loss of the job resulting in not knowing what to do next. Additionally, the tensions associated with this work for social justice include institutional racism, sexism and classism. There are barriers that are embedded in curriculum, context and pedagogical strategies. Finally, the attitudinal tensions are still pervasive. There are such small numbers of Black women school superintendents that the profession remains predominately white and male dominated and Black women have to deal with those attitudes that see them as the “outsider within” (Collins, 1990).

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

I began this study asking why the traditional organizational and leadership literature didn't seem to include my reality as a Black woman school leader. Subsequently, I discovered a growing body of literature about Black women across disciplines investigating the lives and experiences of Black women (Collins, 1990, 1991; hooks, 1984, 1989; Jones, 1985; Jones and Montenegro, 1983, 1988) that more closely represented my own experiences and provided me a theoretical framework, which helped me make sense of my own experiences as a leader. In light of this, I wanted to focus on the leadership of Black women and specifically Black women in the superintendency. I wanted to know how they made sense of their personal and professional experiences and how these experiences influenced their work for social justice.

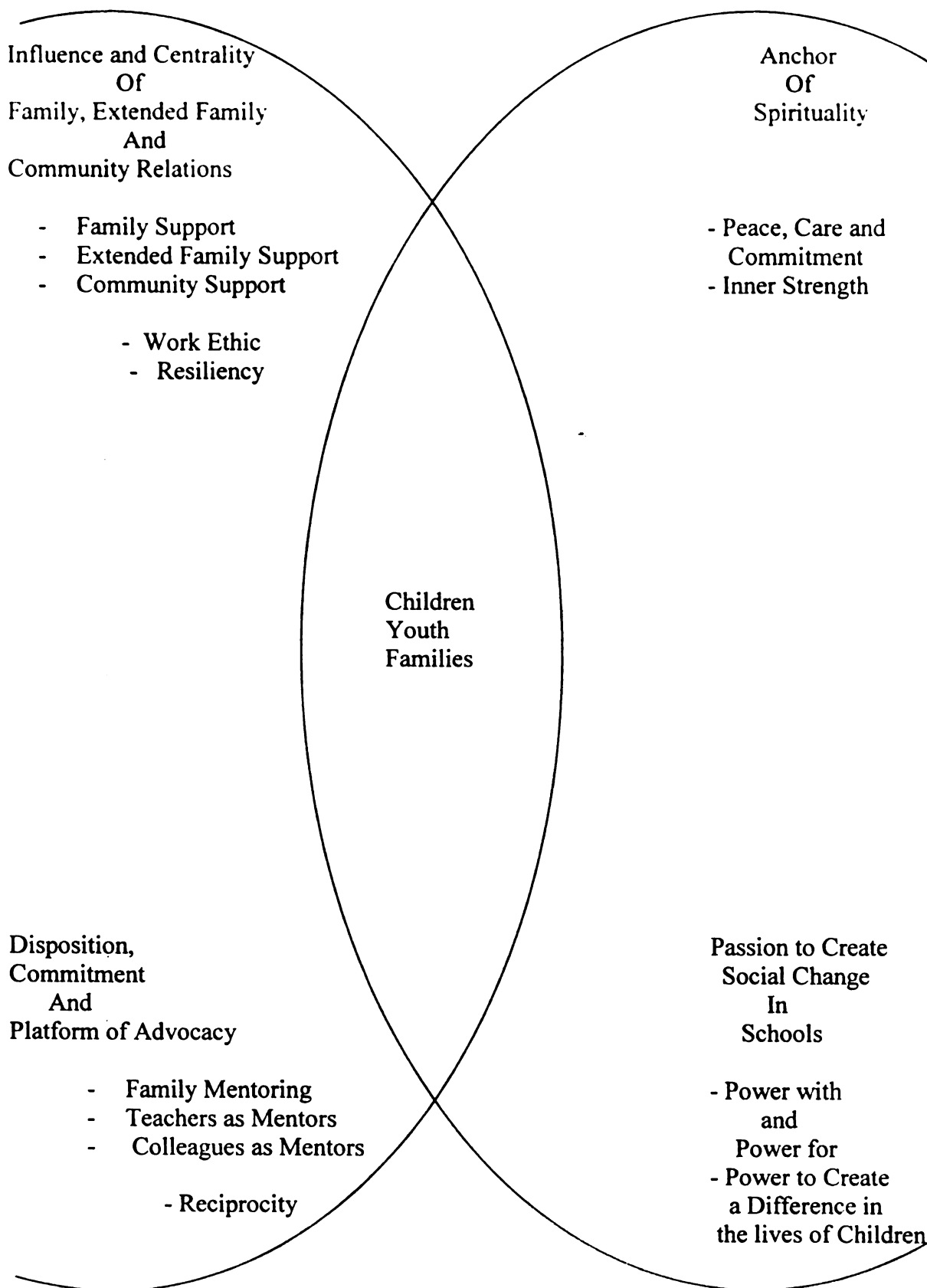
I used narrative inquiry and phenomenological methods to conduct this study. I chose these methods because they allow the retelling of the stories in the women's own voices. With the use of narrative inquiry and analysis there was no intention to control or manipulate variables (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote, "The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the way humans experience the world"(p.2). Because the study of leadership often is focused on individuals who are social change agents, narratives have the potential to capture expressions of lived experiences (Smith, 1994).

Black Feminist Theory was one of the philosophical underpinnings of this study. Black Feminist theorists place emphasis on the importance of dialogue for new knowledge claims. According to Collins (1989), "Dialogue promotes connectedness rather than separation and is an essential component of the knowledge-validation process for Black Women" (p.763). Critical Race Theory was another philosophical foundation for this study, which promotes the use of storytelling as an important construct. Derrick Bell's (1992) work is an explicit example of using storytelling to dialogue about the issue of race. Tenets of Black Feminist and Critical Race theories confirm the choice of narrative inquiry and phenomenological methods for conducting this study.

Although there were valid reasons for me to chose narrative as a methodology for conducting this study there were some drawbacks. I am aware of the following limitations of this study:

1. Because I interviewed only four women, I have offered a small snapshot of the reality of Black women school superintendents.
2. The women in this study were not randomly selected, therefore data was not intended for generalizability to all Black women school superintendents, but rather to contribute to the literature the experiences and voices of this specific group of women.
3. Because the women fall within a narrow age range their lives and leadership may not be representative of younger or older cohorts of Black women school superintendents.

When I started this study I proposed a model of double dutch. This model represented the multitasking that I perceived the position of the superintendency to be. This model does work for the superintendent's work, but the richness of this study adds more nuanced tones to the original model.



I used the model of double dutch to help make sense of the complex leadership of these Black women. Their leadership begins with a strong core with the children and their families in the center with a circular, spiraling effect representing the multitasking characteristic of the superintendency. The core of the model is the strength of commitment and purpose to children, their families and the community with which their efforts begin. Hence, I use the model of double dutch as a lens through which to view the leadership of these Black women. Their jobs as superintendents are complex jumping from one aspect of their leadership role to another without missing a beat or becoming entangled. Additionally, they must learn strategies that enable them to cope with their being marginalized by race, gender and class.

I believe this study begins to capture the voice and record experiences that can positively contribute to a more inclusive dialogue on leadership. The women in this study contribute a perspective on leadership that includes their historical and cultural and individual experiences. After reading and reflecting upon the transcripts, other collected data and related literature, I began to see the emergence of a Black women's leadership for social justice that embraces set of behaviors built upon the influence and centrality of family, extended family and community relations, anchor of spirituality, disposition, commitment, and platform of advocacy, and passion to create social change in schools to impact the students, their family, school community, and the broader community.

As I read the transcripts over and over I am reminded of the struggle for even the

most articulate of the women to tell her life story. Each woman is aware that the combination of the words “Black” “woman,” and “superintendent” represents for many a source of cognitive dissonance, an anomalous concept (Gostnell, 1996). They bring an alternative perspective to leadership. As Bateson (1989) has cogently expressed in another context, these women are not so much discovering the contours of their lives and leadership, as inventing them—creating both meaning and direction from their own mix of personal experiences (including negative and intermittently debilitating ones), cultural intuitions, skills, and moral and ethical commitments. In the process, they develop new constructions of leadership, “for what we search for does not exist until we find it—both past and the future are raw material, shaped-and reshaped by each individual” (p. 16).

#### **Restatement of the Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how the personal and professional lives of Black women school superintendents appear to define their passion and compassion, commitment and dreams, and work and action in creating socially just and equitable learning environments. In so doing, I hoped to develop a more inclusive view of the realities of leadership and a better understanding of the impact of the interlocking status of race, gender, and social class on the practice, pursuit and perceptions of leadership by these women.

Traditional mainstream leadership studies focus on White and male school leaders as the norm or standard by which to measure leadership. This study is grounded in Black women’s standpoint and places Black women at the center of analysis. The data in this study is presented as legitimate within its own right based on the women’s experiences



and does not depend on it's relationship, either its divergence from, or conformity to, the white, male or Black male experience.

The commitment and purpose of these Black women is an aspect they have in common. They are all committed to improve the lives of their students and their families through quality education. The women in this study all indicated that their leadership potential stemmed from the influence of their family, extended family and community relations. Their families and communities instilled in them a sense of responsibility to use one's strengths, talents, and education to create social change. Their personal experiences were also powerful forces that shaped the commitment and passion for equality that these women possessed. The women's commitment to fighting for equality also came as a result of their growing up and coming of age during the Civil Rights (1940-1960s) era. These women create social change in a variety of ways. They help create change by helping their students secure an education for themselves, they create change in the communities by helping the communities take control of their education, and they create change within their institutions by making them more responsive to diverse students.

These superintendents see education as a way to prepare their students to be successful in life. Education is often seen as a vehicle by which one can improve their life chances. For these women, education allows them to continue to jump the various ropes encountered in the multitasked superintendency position. In their stories, education allowed them to make a better life for themselves and their family and they wish the same for the children and families that they serve. For example, Sally Walker led a community wide reading of Victory in Our Schools. The community wide readings included students,

parents, community leaders as well as board members. Sally's belief is that all persons in her community benefit from being involved in the actual learning process. This belief and passion for their children and their families is powerful and they become othermothers to the communities.

Collins (1990) states that motherhood-whether bloodmother, othermother, or community other-mother- can be invoked by African-American women as a symbol of power. This is the type of power many African-Americans have in mind when they describe the "strong Black woman" they see around them in their traditional African American communities. Community othermothers work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability, which embrace conceptions of transformative power.

My intent of this study was to add to the current literature by examining how the personal and professional lives of Black women school superintendents appear to define their passion and compassion, commitment and dreams, and work and action in creating socially just and equitable learning environments. I wanted to better understand the impact of race, gender, and class on the practice, pursuit and perceptions of leadership by these women. One study cited in the literature found findings similar to this study. Jackson (1999) studied thirty-two Black women superintendents specifically examining their career paths and views of their position. She conducted fourteen individual interviews and a focus group of twelve. These were both subsets of the total sample. The questions asked in this study were primarily about their "growing up years". The themes that emerged from this study included: family, church involvement, teachers/mentors,

leadership style, boards, power, and politics and gender and race. The women in this study described the family, church and community support as preparing them to take risks, develop a self-identity and accept the challenge of the superintendency. They considered themselves to be aware of the dynamics of the school, community and school board politics and how that's impacted by race and gender.

Hence, what my study adds to the literature is a more contextual view of the nature of the personal and professional experiences of Black women school superintendents, and how these experiences have impacted their fight for social justice. The superintendents in this study present other ways to think about and enact leadership.

### **Primary Research Question**

In response to the question: How do the life experiences of four Black women school superintendents influence their navigating successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable learning environments? We must begin with a Black women's standpoint that embraces a reality defined by complexity and contradiction; by an acknowledgement that racism, sexism, and classism is a constant and serve as ever present reminders of the status of these women as Black women. What we find is that skin color, gender, and class makes all the difference in the world. These Black women school superintendents have dared to go where few other Black women have gone. Surrounded by their White male counterparts, these Black women are not allowed to forget they are women and Black. They jump between their position as a middle class, well-respected professional in the Black community that grants them prestige and

privilege and their position as a Black woman superintendent, which often deems them status as an outsider within their own profession. That each woman has developed a satisfying and productive life despite the persistence of racism and sexism as givens in their lives is a part of the story about Black women superintendents that is rarely heard, but is finally being told.

It's clear that the role of the superintendency is a complex one. Many superintendents must deal with crisis situations abounding in conflict and confrontation. Given that Black women superintendents wear their color, gender, and class (unlike their White male colleagues) the complexity of their role is intensified by these identifying qualities. Being Black and being female sometimes complicates their role as a person of authority and power. Statistics show that Black women occupy only about 1.5 percent of superintendent positions in the United States. Many members of society still don't expect Black women to be in positions of power like the superintendency. This claim is supported by a number of comments from the women in this study. They confirm the problem of race and gender inequities that predominate these women's experiences. In particular how they are perceived as leaders and comments about their leadership styles.

Additionally, Black women school superintendents also have the issue of dealing with the Black community. Many times Blacks impose greater demands on them than their white predecessors (Scott, 1980). Since the superintendents are Black, it is assumed by some in the Black community that they should have race based policies, that is, they should be more sensitive to issues of race and gender than their white and male counterparts and should have programs designed to advance Blacks. While the women in

my study are sensitive to issues of race, they work to foster a color-blind educational environment. This is evidenced by their consistent focus on the individual intellectual growth of their students. Often these social pulls put a great deal of stress on their personal lives.

On a personal level, these women are expected to carry out a multitude of roles: roles of motherhood, roles of spouses, educators and leaders of communities while leading their school systems toward increased student achievement. Often this comes at a price. For example, the responsibilities of the superintendency require putting in long days, which may in turn result in a strain to their personal lives (i.e. isolation from children and/or spouse, divorce). With no exception, on the days that I shadowed the superintendents most of them started their day by 7:00 AM and at 7:00 PM they were still on task. It is to their credit that they perform these jobs with enthusiasm and grace. Against all odds, these women continue to navigate across the difficulties and complexities to create socially just learning environments.

Needless to say, working for social justice places them at the forefront of controversy and conflict. These women appear to thrive on this challenge. What we learn from their efforts is that identifying and addressing issues of inequity, while it challenges the “status quo” of how schools think and go about their work, is an aspect of their work that they have journeyed to. In other words, it is not something that they wake up in the morning and realize that they must do, but that it is an innate disposition given their own histories of struggle.

What we learn from these women is a predisposition based on their own

relationships with their family and extended family and community networks has been fostered since childhood. These women are predisposed to fight for equality and social justice. In their early years of growing up and coming of age they were confronted with various situations that called for someone to take a stand for social justice. At that point their skills and knowledge base might not have been well developed but they dealt with those issues as best they knew how at the appointed time. As they grew older and more mature they developed and honed these skills enabling them to identify and address inequality in their personal and professional lives. Their strong family backgrounds, extended family support and powerful community role models influenced how these women navigate across school and life boundaries to create equitable learning environments. This is the difference between growing up in families in the 50s and 60s as these women did and growing up in the 1990s and 2000s. In urban settings we see this played out in the number of children and youth that feel alienated from both families and the communities (Lawson and Sanders-Lawson, in press). One of the problems these leaders face is developing an educational program that mediates between the various factions in the community.

Given that there is debate between those persons who favor a community-centered education and those who favor an individual centered approach, Black women in the superintendency, are often positioned between oppositional groups. It appears that these women believe in coalition building, collaborative decision-making, and collective effort, but that within this underlying effort to be inclusive they respect the “individual” spirit. Within the context of current, Western thought this appears to be a contradiction

or at least an inconsistency, but for these women it is not so clearly delineated. This may be explained by the fact that they respect individuality. This focus on individuality ties in very nicely with the concept of social justice. All of these women are advocates of individual autonomy. These women proved to be individualistic while young, and remained so as adults. They were unafraid to try new jobs and challenges. They all had the willingness to go against the grain if they felt it was right for kids. Their individualism came out in their discussion of leadership. These women identified with being Black and female but considered themselves as individuals first. Their educational programs are not afro-centric but rather it appears they believe in a multi-cultural education and society. Their philosophy of education focused on helping students prepare to live in a mainstream society and to succeed within that world. This leads me to reflect on the words to the song "United we stand, divided we fall!" Inherent in this song of liberation is the need to build strong individuals who can lead a critical mass toward transformation. For these women coalitions are made of individuals working for the same end.

Finally, these women all came of age during the Civil Rights movement and all but one indicated involvement in the movement. All four of the women were often the first in their communities to be involved in certain protests. Sometimes this came in the form of being the first Black woman principal, assistant principal, assistant superintendent or superintendent. Their educational programs may be a reflection and/or extension of their involvement in the Civil Rights struggle. The major goal of the Civil Rights movement beyond the end of segregation was the belief that the individual should

be allowed the opportunity to flourish. King's wish for children to be judged based on the content of their character rather than race or gender seems to be shared by the four women in the study. They all talked about supporting the growth of the individual students in their charge. These women are not interested in creating a system that produced uninformed/naive followers. They believe schools must allow for individual growth of each child. This belief was expressed by all of the superintendents in my study.

In the end, researchers must remember that approaches to social justice are historically and culturally situated. The approaches to social justice taken by the women in my study must be situated in the civil rights movements of the 1960s. This historical setting provides an important understanding for analyzing their approach to both education and leadership. These women bring to their educational programs a strong sense of social justice within a liberal democratic framework. This means that they try to establish an educational system that respects individual differences and fosters individual strengths. Their goal is to produce students that are good citizens, students that are intelligent and self motivated. This conception of teaching and learning is in line with a liberal democratic view of education and, of course, social justice.

### **Implications**

Given the analysis of the data in this study, the review of the literature, and the researcher's professional and personal experiences, some issues were raised that have implications for the preparation of Black women superintendents.

1. Institutions that have anything to do with children and their families must honor support and foster family strength. This is echoed in the Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory.
2. How we train school leaders in our leadership preparation programs is yet another implication. There are few courses in leadership preparation courses that



- teach the honoring of family.
3. Another implication for leadership preparation is the necessity for leaders to be taught the importance for reflection, contemplation, resilience, balance and peace and provided opportunities to develop the necessary skills. These variables are also discussed in the Black feminist literature.
  4. School districts need to establish means of identifying those Black women with administrative potential early in their educational experiences.
  5. Colleges and universities to work cooperatively with local school districts to recruit Black women for entry-level master's and doctoral programs and track their progression toward completion of graduate programs.

The analysis also raises some questions for future research exploring the experiences of Black women in the superintendency.

1. In light of the importance that religion and spirituality play in the lives of these women where does the issue of separation of church and state play out? Is there separation? Should there be? How can we maintain that separation but still keep the faith based values and principles that they bring to their settings.
2. It would be interesting to study specific educational programs put in place by these women. What kinds of programs are developed under their leadership? What are the major focuses of their educational programming?

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study was designed to explore the leadership and life experiences of Black women school superintendents. It just begins to extend the understanding of leadership through studying Black women's individual thinking and practice. The study's findings strongly suggest that there are different ways of thinking about leadership, ways that may be influenced by race, gender, class, and diversity of experience. When we look at the literature researchers fail to take into consideration the various ways of leading for social justice. Leading for social justice could mean at least three things: the behavior of the leader, the programs and policies put in place by the leaders and the goals and aims of the

person as a leader for social justice.

Secondly, some researchers assume that because the women are Black they hold a particular racial perspective or because they're women they hold a feminist perspective. However, the women in this study seem to situate themselves between the two perspectives. This appears to present a problem when looking at these women through the Black feminist lens. This point however needs further examination.

Finally, as school superintendents, these women must take into account their being both Black and female in a predominately white male profession. Given the paucity of research on Black women school superintendents more research needs to be conducted on their lives as superintendents.

I've learned that the issues in the study of Black women in the superintendency while provocative are not conclusive about the intersection of race and gender. I also feel that researchers have not seriously considered the issues of the Black woman school superintendent within liberal democratic theory. Once this is done issues surrounding Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race and Superintendents Theories will portray a more complete picture of what it means to be a Black woman in the superintendency.

### Concluding Thoughts

As a result of this study, I've come full circle. I started with questions about Black women's leadership because of my own experiences as a Black woman principal in my local school district. I wanted to understand the concerns and issues of secondary school leadership and how Black women coped with the personal and professional issues that come about when navigating the educational organizational landscape. I was particularly interested to know how race, gender and class impacted black women superintendents in their work for social justice. These women are an understudied group. Yet, their

presence has a uniqueness that must be examined and analyzed. I chose to record their journeys to the superintendency through the use of their personal narratives.

These narratives describe how these four phenomenal Black women leaders have made and continue to make a difference in the lives of their students, their families, and the broader communities. The road they have traveled has not been without challenges. For years they have been “jumping the ropes” between their professional identities of educational leader and that of a member of the black community. These women are forced to jump over and around race, class, gender, and culture issues to continue to create socially just and equitable learning environments. None of these women seemed to regret the choices they have made. From these narratives one gleams an understanding of tenacity and commitment.

As I reflected, my dissertation reaffirmed the knowledge that our social, historical, and cultural backgrounds shape our leadership styles. It is clear that these women understand that their personal and professional experiences did influence their own work for social justice. Their narratives bear this important point out.

Finally, these narratives give us historical documents about an important moment of United States history. The civil rights movement is prominent in the lives of these school superintendents. These women see education as that instrument by which to achieve some sense of equality for their children and their families. As a result, in their roles as superintendents, race, class and gender are prominent but they continue to focus on the empowerment of their students. Their work for social justice is simply, but more importantly, to empower their students and their families with the skills and knowledge

such that the general society respects the social and political worth of each individual.

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **UCRHIS FORM; APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS**

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT  
INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS  
INITIAL REVIEW (and 5 yr. renewal)  
UCRIHS**

University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

**David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair**

246 Administration Building, Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

PHONE (517) 355-2180 FAX (517) 353-2976

E-Mail - UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu

WEB SITE - <http://www.msu.edu/unit/vprgs/ucrihs/>

Office Hours: M-F (8:00 A.M.-Noon & 1:00-5:00 P.M.)

**DIRECTIONS:** Please complete the questions on this application using the instructions and definitions found on the attached sheets. (revised 4/99)

**1. Responsible Project Investigator:**  
(Faculty or staff supervisor)

Name: Dr. Maenette Benham

Social Security Number: 575-74-2235

**Additional Investigator(s):**

Name: E. Renée Sanders-Lawson

SS# or Student ID#: A27047052

Department: Educational Administration  
College: Education

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
SS# or Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

I accept responsibility for conducting the proposed research in accordance with the protections of human subjects as specified by UCRIHS, including the supervision of faculty and student co-investigators.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
SS# or Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
SS# or Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Address:** If there are more than two investigators, please indicate who should receive correspondence, and provide further addresses on a separate page.

**Responsible Project Investigator**

Dr. Maenette Benham

425 Erickson Hall

Department of Educational Administration

Phone #: (517) 355-6613

Fax #: (517) 353-6383

**Additional Investigator(s)**

E. Renée Sanders-Lawson

1350 Cove Court

Okemos, MI 48864-3406

Phone #: (517) 381-8446

Fax #: (517) 381-8446

Email: mbenham@msu.edu

Email:sande103@pilot.msu.edu\_\_\_\_\_

3. Title of Project: Black Women School Superintendents: Leading for Social Justice
4. Have you ever received Preliminary Approval for this project?  
No ☒ Yes ☐  
If yes, what IRB # was assigned to it? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Funding (if any) None  
MSU Contracts and Grants app. # \_\_\_\_\_ if applicable
6. Has this protocol been submitted to the FDA or are there plans to submit it to the FDA? No ☒ Yes ☐  
If yes, is there an IND #? No ☐ Yes ☐ IND # \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does this project involve the use of Materials of Human Origin (e.g., human blood or tissue)?  
No ☒ Yes ☐
8. When would you prefer to begin data collection? February 2000  
Please remember you may not begin data collection without UCRIHS approval.
9. Category (Circle a,b, or c below and specify category for a and b. See instructions pp. 4-7)
  - a. This proposal is submitted as EXEMPT from full review.  
Specify category or categories: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. This proposal is submitted for EXPEDITED review.  
Specify category or categories: 2-G
  - c. This proposal is submitted for FULL sub-committee review.
10. Is this a Public Health Service funded, full review, multi-site project?  
No ☒ Yes ☐  
If yes, do the other sites have a Multiple Project Assurance IRB that will also review this project?  
☐ No. Please contact the UCRIHS office for further information about meeting the PHS/NIH/OPRR regulations.



[ ] Yes. Please supply a copy of that approval letter when obtained.

11. Project Description (Abstract): Please limit your response to 200 words.

COPY ENCLOSED

12. Procedures: Please describe all project activities to be used in collecting data from human subjects. This also includes procedures for collecting materials of human origin analysis of existing data originally from human subjects

- Biographical questionnaires
- Critical Life Map
- A series of three interviews of 1-2 hours audio-taped on mini-disks
- Observation: shadowing of the participant for one day
- Group dialogue interviews: use of audio-taping to hear what other members of the community (family, co-workers) see as acts of social justice
- Document analysis: participants will be asked to share artifacts, journal, documents and other symbolical objects that represent leadership which relates to creation of a social just school and community.

13. Subject Population: Describe your subject population. (e.g., high school athletes, women over 50 w/breast cancer, small business owners )

- 4-8 Black women urban school superintendents.

- a. The study population may include (check each category where subjects **may be included by design or incidentally**):

Minors	[ ]
Pregnant Women	[X]
Women of Childbearing Age	[X]
Institutionalized Persons	[ ]
Students	[X]
Low Income Persons	[ ]
Minorities	[X]
Incompetent Persons (or those with diminished capacity)	[ ]

- b. Number of subjects (including controls) 4-8
- c. How will the subjects be recruited? (Attach appropriate number of copies of recruiting advertisement, if any. See p. 13 of UCRIHS instructions)
- Purposeful Sampling: The study participants will be Black women urban school superintendents. Participants will be sent a letter of invitation and then called to obtain their consent for participation.
- d. If you are associated with the subjects (e.g., they are your students, employees, patients), please explain the nature of the association.
- Not associated with the subjects
- e. If someone will receive payment for recruiting the subjects please explain the amount of payment, who pays it and who receives it.
- No payment will be received
- f. Will the research subjects be compensated? ☒ No ☐ Yes.  
If yes, details concerning payment, including the amount and schedule of payments, must be explained in the informed consent.
- g. Will the subjects incur additional financial costs as a result of their participation in this study? ☒ No ☐ Yes. If yes, please include an explanation in the informed consent.
- h. Will this research be conducted with subjects who reside in another country or live in a cultural context different from mainstream US society? ☒ No ☐ Yes.
- (1) If yes, will there be any corresponding complications in your ability to minimize risks to subjects, maintain their confidentiality and/or assure their right to voluntary informed consent as individuals?  
☐ No ☐ Yes.

(2) If your answer to h-1 is yes, what are these complications and how will you resolve them?

14. How will the subjects' privacy be protected? (See Instructions p. 8.)

- Use of code name for anonymity
- Data will be kept under lock and key in my private home and not at the subject's site
- Confidential data will not be shared with any other person except the dissertation director/advisor and dissertation committee. I will conduct the transcription process.

15. Risks and Benefits for subjects: (See Instructions p. 9.)

- No risk foreseen
- The subjects will benefit from knowledge and information gained and shared as a result of this study
- The educational community will benefit from knowledge and information gained

16. Consent Procedures (See Instructions pp. 9-13.)

Copies of Letters of Introduction to the Study and Consent Forms Attached

**CHECKLIST:** Check off that you have included each of these items. If not applicable, state N/A:

- ☒ Completed application
- ☒ The correct number of copies of the application and instruments, according to the category of review (See instructions p. 14.)
- ☒ Consent form (or script for verbal consent), if applicable
- ☐ Advertisement, if applicable
- ☒ One complete copy of the methods chapter of the research

proposal

## **Letter of Introduction/Invitation (Superintendent)**

**E. Renée Sanders-Lawson**  
1350 Cove Court  
Okemos, Michigan 48864-3406  
(517) 381-8446  
Sande103@pilot.msu.edu

(date)

Dear Superintendent:

Thank you for agreeing to hear more about my current research interest. My study examines the nature of the work of Black women school superintendents who make meaning of and navigate successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools in urban settings.

I will ask you to reflect on your formal (e.g., institutional schooling) and informal (e.g., family, culture and ethnicity, socio-economic background) educational experiences in an effort to discover how life passages have influenced your work for social justice. You have been selected to participate in this study because you meet the requirements of being a Black woman superintendent working to create social justice for your children and community.

The information provided through this process will be used as part of my completion for my Ph.D. in educational administration at Michigan State University. Your cooperation through completion of a biographical questionnaire, three (3) interviews, a shadowing of your "daily activities" and sharing of materials will be confidential. All data and information will be kept in a locked file.

I am including the consent form that briefly summarizes the intention of this research project, the voluntary participant status, the intention to retain your anonymity and confidentiality of all data, and your time commitment to this project. Please sign and return the form to me in the attached self-addressed envelope. I will follow-up with a call if I haven't heard from you within two weeks.

If you have questions feel free to contact me. If you want to know more about the

research process feel free to contact Professor Maenette Benham or Dr. David Wright at the addresses below.

Dr. Maenette Benham  
425 Erickson Hall  
Educational Administration  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034  
517-355-6613 Phone  
517-353-6383 Fax  
Email: [mbenham@msu.edu](mailto:mbenham@msu.edu)

Dr. David Wright  
246 Administration Bldg  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046  
517-355-2180 Phone  
517-353-2976 Fax  
Email: [ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu)

Educationally yours,

E. Renée Sanders-Lawson

### **Letter of Consent (Superintendent)**

You are invited to participate in the research project, "Black Women School Superintendents: Leading for Social Justice" conducted by E. Renée Sanders-Lawson, Ph.D. Candidate, Educational Administration Department, College of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

You received and read the letter from Renée Sanders-Lawson dated \_\_\_\_\_, which briefly describes the purpose and procedure of the research. The letter includes her name, address and methods of communication in case you have any questions or concerns about the study. The study examines the nature of the work of Black women school superintendents who make meaning of and navigate successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools in urban settings.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed three times, one and half to two hours each time, over a brief period of time. The study will ask you to reflect on both your formal and informal educational experiences, to critically think about how you think about educational leadership, and how you have addressed pressing issues of race, gender, class, segregation, and oppression in your practice as an educational leader in the past and the current context. The interviews will be tape-recorded and you have the right not to answer any particular questions and to ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. All written or artifactual items that you share will be returned to you. One group dialogue of at least five of your staff members or acquaintances on the subject of leadership and social justice will be conducted and tape-recorded.

All data and tape recordings will be kept confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed in the final report. However, due to the small number of Black women school superintendents today, your identity might be identifiable and therefore, only limited anonymity can be guaranteed. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and the information recorded during the interviews will be kept in a locked file. You may choose to withdraw and not participate at any time without penalty.

For more information about the research process, feel free to contact Professor Maenette Benham or Dr. David Wright at the addresses below.

Dr. Maenette Benham  
425 Erickson Hall  
Educational Administration  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034  
517-355-6613 Phone  
517-353-6383 Fax  
Email: [mbenham@msu.edu](mailto:mbenham@msu.edu)

Dr. David Wright  
246 Administration Building  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046  
517-355-2180 Phone  
517-353-2976 Fax  
Email: [ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu)

I have read the consent form and volunteer to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name



## **Letter of Introduction/Invitation (Group Dialogue)**

**E. Renée Sanders-Lawson**  
1350 Cove Court  
Okemos, Michigan 48864-3406  
(517) 381-8446  
Sande103@pilot.msu.edu

(Date)

Dear Potential Group Dialogue Member:

I am Renée Sanders-Lawson, a Ph.D. Candidate at Michigan State University in K-12 Educational Administration. I am writing because your superintendent has agreed to participate in a study I am conducting entitled, "Black Women School Superintendents: Leading for Social Justice". The study examines the nature of the work of Black women school superintendents who make meaning of and navigate successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools in urban settings. An important part of this study is contingent on your participation. I would like to invite you and about four other staff members, to participate in a group dialogue to talk about the perceptions you have about your superintendent in her efforts to create an environment of social justice.

The information provided through this process will be recorded and used as part of my completion for my Ph.D. in educational administration at Michigan State University. Your cooperation through the group dialogue participation and sharing of information will be confidential. All data and information will be kept in a locked file.

I plan to facilitate the group dialogue discussion in an hour-long session. The group dialogue will be scheduled sometime during the next month and will be held at the central /district office at a time convenient for you and your colleagues. I will contact you in the next two weeks to discuss this further and answer any questions you may have. I look forward to talking to you soon.

I am including the consent form that briefly summarizes the intention of this research project, the voluntary participant status, the intention to retain your anonymity and confidentiality of all data, and your time commitment to this project. Please sign and return the form to me at our meeting.

If you have questions feel free to contact me. If you want to know more about the research process contact Professor Maenette Benham or Dr. David Wright at the addresses below.

Dr. Maenette Benham  
425 Erickson Hall  
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East Lansing, MI 48824-1046  
517-355-2180 Phone  
517-353-2976 Fax  
Email: [ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu)

Educationally yours,

E. Renée Sanders-Lawson

### **Letter of Consent (Group Dialogue)**

**You are invited to participate in the group dialogue, which is a part of the study, “Black Women School Superintendents: Leading for Social Justice”.**

**You received and read the letter from Renée Sanders-Lawson dated \_\_\_\_\_, which briefly describes the purpose and procedure of the research. The letter includes her name, address and methods of telecommunication in case you have any questions or concerns about the study. The study examines the nature of the work of Black women school superintendents who make meaning of and navigate successfully and unsuccessfully across institutional, political, cultural/historical, economic and social arenas to create socially just and equitable schools in urban settings.**

**If you agree to participate in this study, a group dialogue will be conducted, which will last about an hour, and will consist of about four other colleagues, and Renée Sanders-Lawson.**

**All information will be held in strict confidence and your identity will not be disclosed in any form during the preparations or completion of the study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and the information recorded during this group dialogue will be kept in a locked file. The interviews will be tape-recorded and you have the right not to answer any particular questions and to ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. You may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.**

**For more information about the research process, feel free to contact Professor Maenette Benham or Dr. David Wright at the addresses below.**

**Dr. Maenette Benham  
425 Erickson Hall  
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517-355-6613 Phone  
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517-355-2180 Phone  
517-353-2976 Fax  
Email: [ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu)**

I have read the consent form and volunteer to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS, GROUP DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

## **Biographical Questionnaire**

### **Introduction for Participant:**

This questionnaire has been designed to provide us with a starting point for our first interview. Please respond to the questions and open-ended statements with brief written answers and mail the questionnaire to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope prior to our first scheduled interview. If appropriate, feel free to attach a résumé rather than responding to the questions about professional experience and educational background.

### **Biographical Background**

- What is your full name?
- Date of birth and place of birth
- Type of community in which you spent most of your growing-up years (rural, urban, suburban, etc.)
- Place of parents' birth. Highest level of education attained by parents
- Father's occupation; mother's occupation
- Birth order/number and names of siblings
- Did you attend public, private, or federal boarding schools? Provide a brief description of your formal school experiences.
- Information about professional and educational attainment (or attach résumé)
- Significant adults in your life other than parents. Explain why these adults have been or are important to you.

## **Interview Protocol**

There will be three one to two hours interviews with each participant, following her completion of a biographical questionnaire that will serve as a starting point for the first interview. The purpose of the interviews is to establish life history, experience and learnings as an educator and leader, and meaning of the connections between that work and life.

I will use the interview protocols developed by Benham (1995), Colflesh (1995) and Phendla (1999) for each of the interviews and have adapted their protocols for use with Black women. A variety of probes will be used to expand each participant's responses to the questions in the interview protocol: probing to better understand what the participants is saying; probing for definitions and clarification of the meaning of her response; probing to elicit concrete examples and stories that illuminate her original responses; probing to explore the impact of previous lived experiences on what she is saying about educational leadership, especially her own leadership which enable her to fight oppression and segregation to create socially just environments, probing to understand how she defines social justice; probing to extract how the characteristics most commonly associated with women leaders appear in their talk about educational leadership; and probing to make linkages between and among the interviews.

Participants will be asked to provide and explain three artifacts that depict their own leadership. They will be asked to tell stories about their artifacts in an effort to determine how they make meaning of their work.

## **First Interview: Focused Life History**

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

To put each participant's experience in context by asking her to tell as much as possible about herself and her life up until the present.

### **Role:**

To pose open-ended questions and to issue invitations for each participant to share her life experiences and educational experiences; to follow up, seek clarification, ask for concrete details, and request stories to illuminate her life events and lessons; to move the interview forward by building on what the participant has begun to share.

### **Introduction for the Participant:**

Because I am interested in the biographies of Black women educational leaders creating social justice for children and youth, we will begin with your life story. During the conversation, we will build on the biographical questionnaire that you completed. You will also be asked to expand on your life and educational experiences prior to becoming a leader. The focus of my study is on the relationship of women's lived experiences and tensions created by the power of race and gender, their thinking and practice as educational leaders creating social justice for their organization. So your life experiences will serve as a starting point for our continued exploration during the rest of the interviews.

## Questions

### **Family Background:**

- I am interested in learning more about your background: when and where you were born, who your parents were, stories about your siblings, birth order, your parents' occupations. I will use the biographical questionnaire to pose questions. I would like you to expand and clarify the information with personal situations and stories about your life experiences.
- What was that growing-up experience like for you?
- How did your position in the family affect your sense of who you were during your growing-up years?



- How was that for you?
- How does your family fit into this picture of your life?

### **Formal School Experience:**

- Tell me about your institutional experiences, e.g. elementary, middle (junior high) school, secondary school, and postsecondary school years. (Talk about language, culture, peer groups, about talents/skills, about extracurricular programs, political struggles, civil rights activity, etc.)
- Who were the adults who had the most impact on your education? How did they impact you?
- What valuable lessons did you learn about who you were, about your relationship to learning, about your relationship to the educational profession?
- Were there any aspects of your educational experiences that might have conflicted with the cultural norms you were growing up with?
- How did those conflicts work out, and what impact do you think they might have had on how you frame your educational practices today?

### **Growing Up and Coming of Age:**

- How did you feel about your self-identity at different stages of your life (e.g. preteen, teenager, young adult, etc.)
- What political movements (anti-apartheid, civil rights, desegregation, Vietnam War, etc.) affected your life? How so? What personal meaning did it hold for you?
- What were your perceptions of the roles of Black men and women? What myths and stereotypes affected you? What myths and stereotypes did you hold? Discuss these.

### **Professional Practice:**

- What factors played a part in your entering the education profession?
- What did you learn about yourself during your first years in the profession?

- How is it that you became an educational leader? Did you have a mentor?
- How is it that you came to your current position?
- Were there any stories of other individuals who moved you toward seeking a leadership role? What were they, and how did they affect you?
- How do you define leadership? Do you see yourself as a transformative leader?
- What role does the district governing body play in your school system? Talk to me about how decisions are made. Tell me more about who makes which decisions and why.
- What role do other stakeholders play in your school system? How successful/or not, were you able to develop partnerships with stakeholders (local businesses, community organizations, political organizations, etc.) How did you do that?
- What do you understand by the term “social justice”? What does the concept mean to you?
- What is involved in accomplishing social change, and how do you go about mobilizing others to action?
- How has the political landscape shaped your family background/growing up? How has it impacted on your formal education?
- Share with me some of your reflections on traditional norms and beliefs about women; Black women.
- How did they impact on you personally (e.g., marriage, guardianship, succession, relations with your own children, contractual power)?
- How did they impact on you professionally (e.g. professional development; interrelations with colleagues, teachers, parents, student; career growth/promotions; salary; benefits; maternity leave; etc.)? What role do they play in your professional practices as a school leader?
- How have your race and gender impacted on your educational experiences (formal and informal) and professional practices?
- What is your understanding of the term “power”? Tell me more about the meaning you derive from your understanding of the term. Who has it, who does not, how is power attained and maintained?

- How has power or the lack thereof played out in your experiences and professional practices?

**Lifeline Probes:**

- Continue to discuss those moments not touched upon by the above themes.
- Are there any moments that impeded your progress in your efforts towards creating a socially just and equitable school system? What were they, and how did they become obstacles? What did you do?
- What lessons have you learned that you can clearly say have impacted how you think and how you behave as an educational leader? Are there specific lessons learned as a result of you being a woman? A Black woman?
- What does learning mean to you? What makes it important?
- Is there anything else you want to talk about? Anything that you thought I would ask that I didn't?

Directions for Interview #2: For our next time together I would like for you to draw me a Critical Life Map. You're here but you look back from where you started to where you are now. Between those two points is a small river. There were seven (7) stepping-stones from there to here. As you stop and look back over your life what things/events in your life; what are those seven (7) stepping-stones that brought you to do the work that you do? What are those seven critical life moments that got you to this point?

## **Second Interview: Work History**

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

To concentrate on the concrete details of each participant's experience as an educational leader, with special emphasis on a selected group of gender-related, culture-related and social justice characteristics from the literature.

### **My Role:**

Similar to my role in the first interview: to encourage each participant to relate incidents, tell stories, and provide concrete details of her experience as an educational leader and to further explore what the participant is saying. To ask the participant to reconstruct those situations and experiences. To peel away the layers of oppression, discrimination, deeper values, beliefs, and approaches to leadership of justice.

### **Introduction for Participant:**

I am interested in exploring your experiences as an educational leader who is creating an environment of social justice and learning more about you as an Black woman educational leader.

### Questions

- Let's talk about your Critical Life Map. What events in your life lead you to this point? Share stories about those events.
- Talk more about any of the stories/situations that you mentioned in interview 1 that you feel are important.
- Are there any other stories about your growing up and coming of age that you feel are important to understanding who you are, particularly as a leader?
- Are there any other stories about your professional practice/career, your work as an educational leader, that you want to share?
- How did you learn to be an educational leader?

- Can you give me an example of an experience (i.e., in professional development) that has had a visible impact on how you see and carry out your role as an educational leader?
- What made that experience stand out above the rest?
- What opportunities for learning to lead, in your life and work, enhanced your learning as an educational leader?
- What opportunities for learning to lead hindered your learning as an educational leader?
- Tell me more about your relationship with teachers, parents and school board.
- I want to hear more about your role in the community at large, your failures and successes, your frustrations and joys in your endeavor to create a socially just and equitable school system.

**Current work context:**

- Ask the leader to provide contextual information, demographic information, and a description of the political and financial environment of her current work place. How are resources distributed? What criteria are used?
- Ask the leader to reflect critically on issues of concern that she is currently addressing and how she makes sense of these problems. Ask the leader if she suspects these issues are similar or different from the issues that her White and male colleagues in the superintendency are concerned with. Talk more about this.
- Encourage the leader to explore, discuss, and analyze her unique role in advancing education and to define her role.
- From your understanding of the term “social justice,” how have you created a socially just organization? Give examples to demonstrate this.
- What are some of the factors that have enhanced this process? Talk more about these factors.
- What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process? Elaborate more on these factors.

- Please describe a current initiative that involves you creating a socially just and equitable environment (for your school system or/and your community).
- Is there anything else you want to talk about? Anything that you thought I would ask that I didn't?

**Directions for Interview # 3:** I would like for you to bring three artifacts to our next interview that depict your leadership, your work. I will ask you to tell me stories about your artifacts.

## **Last Interview: Reflection on the Meaning**

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

To encourage each participant to reflect on the meaning of her experience as an educational leader creating social justice and an equitable school system.

### **My Role:**

To continue to pose open-ended questions and to issue invitations for each participant to make connections between her work and her life. To explore details and clarification, encourage further explanation, interpretation, and sense-making, and to follow up when additional information is needed. To keep the participant focused on making meaning from her experience and learning. To accept silence.

### **Introduction for Participant:**

During this last formal interview, we will explore the meaning that you have made of your work as an educational leader, learning to create strategies and establishing networks of support, fighting oppression, repression, segregation, isolation and injustices through silence while working to uplift and support your school system and community. We will continue to link characteristics related to women leaders and life experiences with your current work, with emphasis on how it makes sense for you. In addition, we will use some of the time to “tie up loose ends” from the previous interviews.

## Questions

### **Artifacts:**

- Describe your artifacts and how they depict your work?

### **Schooling and Education:**

- What do you believe the purpose of schooling and the purpose of education is?
- How did achieving a higher education impact your leadership development?

How has achieving higher education impact you as a Black person? As a woman? As a Black woman?

**Educational Leadership:**

- How did you learn to be an educational leader?
- What does educational leadership mean to you?
- What factors in your life (personal and professional) have enhanced and hindered your work as an educational leader?
- How do you see yourself as a leader? How do you think your professional colleagues see you? How would you like to be seen?
- What are some of the factors that have hindered/impeded the process of making effective linkages with your co-workers, parents, students and the community at large? Elaborate on those factors.
- How would you define social justice?
- Give examples of how you have dealt with issues of social justice
- What skills and strategies have you found to be most effective in your efforts to create social justice?
- Define the culture of your school system and community. What implications does this have on how you view leadership and how you practice leadership?
- What lessons have you learned about educational leadership that are worthwhile to share?

**Reflections:**

- Given what you have said about your life and your work, how have you come to understand leadership?
- Given what you have said about your life and your work, how have you come to understand transformative leadership?
- Comment on these characteristics of leadership most commonly associated with women in general and more specifically, with Black women and their cultural values.



- What are the challenges that you and Black women educational leaders face? Talk a bit about these demands and satisfactions? What do you do to deal with these challenges?
- What unique contribution to the education of children and youths do you think you have made? Would like to make?
- As you look back, what have you liked the most about your work and what have you liked the least? What is an area of your leadership practice that is strong, and what is not strong?
- As you look forward, how might you want to train the next generation of Black women leaders?
- What would you share with an aspiring woman interested in the superintendency? Would this be different for a Black woman? How?
- Is there anything else you want to talk about? Anything that you thought I would ask that I didn't?

## **Group Dialogue: Reflections of the School Leader**

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

To encourage participant to define leadership and to reflect upon their superintendent's leadership

### **My Role:**

To continue to pose open-ended questions and to issue invitations for each participant to make connections between their reflections of the school leader and her work for social justice. To explore details and clarification, encourage further explanation, interpretation, and sense making, and to follow up when additional information is needed

### **Introduction for Participant:**

During this group dialogue, we will explore the perceptions that you have made of the work of your superintendent. We will continue to link characteristics related to women leaders and characteristics of socially just school and environments.

### Questions

#### **Leadership:**

- How do you define leadership? In what ways do you see your superintendent as a transformative leader?
- In what ways has your superintendent displayed passion for equity and social justice (within the school setting and the community at large) illustrate with examples and stories
- What are some of the dilemmas you perceive she's had to face?

- How has she been successful or not?
- What activities is your superintendent involved in that reveal a school wide effort for social justice

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