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Efficacy of African American Grandmothers Regarding the Education of Custodial Grandchildren

Valarie Louise Petty Boyer
Walden University

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Review Committee

Dr. Marilyn Simon, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Linda Crawford, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Glenn Ayres, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2015

Abstract

Efficacy of African American Grandmothers Regarding the Education of Custodial
Grandchildren

by

Valarie L. P. Boyer

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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August 2015

Abstract

The roles of grandparents, from occasional helpers to custodial adults in their grandchildren's lives, often raise levels of social discomfort among those involved, especially when the children are still in elementary school. A disproportionate number of custodial grandparents are African American women. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 8 custodial African American grandmothers in Delaware regarding the education of their school-aged grandchildren. The theoretical foundation was Carter and McGoldrick's theory of families as interconnected systems, and Sands, Goldberg-Glen, Shin, and Robin's theory that life event changes often lead to stress and coping strategies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using open and axial coding to reveal common themes. The grandmothers saw themselves as surrogate parents to their grandchildren and depended on support programs to help with their grandchildren's education. A recommendation is for school districts to build relationships with these African American grandmothers to help facilitate the education of their grandchildren and provide effective and affordable services. Disseminating the findings to educational leaders could lead to the development of more programs to assist custodial African American grandmother families, thus promoting social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother, Eugene C. Petty, who passed away on February 24, 2010. Whenever he called me, I would tell him, "I am working on the computer doing coursework." I always took time to talk, and never put him off. I would then remind him to call back, I would be there, and I always answered his calls. I have really missed Ced as I travel the road to complete this degree. This heartfelt dedication is a small token of my remembrance and love for my dear brother Ced.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

The focus of this study was the phenomenon of custodial African American grandmothers and how they cared for their school-aged grandchildren. Many factors contributed to this continuing role of African American grandmothers, but the challenges these grandmothers face regarding the education of their school-aged grandchildren have not been studied exhaustively. This study revealed how custodial African American grandmothers are ensuring that the educational needs of their grandchildren are being met. The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is so common that it has generated acronyms such as GAPs (Grandparents as Parents) and GRGs (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren) (Goyer, 2006). The 2000 U.S. Census reported 4.5 million children were living in grandparent-headed households, a 30% increase since 1990. In 2010, the U.S. Census reported that the overall number of grandchildren living with grandmothers had increased 51% to 7.5 million since the year 2000, and the highest percentage is among African Americans. When parents cannot attend to their children, the grandmother frequently becomes the primary caretaker because societal tradition and maternal instincts prevail. Researchers have shown that this can be particularly true in the African American family (Cabin, 2013). Grandmothers usually come into the parenting role the second time after a significant disruption in the family such as military deployment, divorce, death, drug or alcohol abuse, or incarceration of the biological parent (Goyer, 2006). When grandmothers assume the role

as parents of their young grandchildren, they need to be able to assist them in their education, although it may have been a long time since they were inside a classroom. Many did not have the time to be actively involved in their own children's education and may not have the skills to assist their grandchildren with their homework or provide special assistance if needed. It was unclear how African American grandmothers are dealing with the educational challenges and needs of their custodial grandchildren. The intent of this study was to reveal the lived experiences of African American grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren to identify this phenomenon through how it is perceived by these women.

Problem Statement

According to Shakya, Usita, Eisenberg, Weston, and Liles (2012), children who are cared for primarily by a grandparent were more likely to be living below the poverty line (28% versus 17%) and have lower median household income (\$36,000 versus \$48,000) than children who were not being cared for primarily by a grandparent. It was not clear why grandparents live below the poverty line, and it was not known how these grandmothers were assisting in the education of these grandchildren. A qualitative phenomenological study of the lived experience of African American grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren provided helpful information to governmental agencies in general, and educational institutions specifically in terms of what can be done to support the educational needs of children being raised by their African American grandmothers. The problem studied was the need to understand the efficacy of African

American grandmothers regarding the education of custodial grandchildren.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe, through the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising school-aged grandchildren, how to cope with the educational challenges of custodial grandchildren. I conducted a narrative inquiry process using dialogical retrospection of in-depth interviews with grandmothers who were primary caregivers to grandchildren. This included questions related to their feelings, thoughts, regrets, finances, and how they were assisting their grandchildren with education. I used the dialogic process to make certain that each participant communicated her own unique life experiences.

Specifically, I explored how the caregivers perceived their experiences regarding the education of their grandchildren and how they were meeting the children's educational needs. The results of the study may assist grandparents, educators, and legislators in seeking to meet the needs of the grandchildren in the care of custodial grandmothers.

Research Questions

This study included one overarching research question and four subquestions.

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren?

The subquestions explored were the following:

SQ1: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

SQ2: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ3: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ4: What role, if any, does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild?

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) theory of a family system and Sands, Goldberg-Glen, Shin, and Robin's (2009) theory of stress related to significant changes in life events. Carter and McGoldrick contended a family is an interconnected and interdependent system. When the grandchildren are separated from the biological parents and placed in the care of the grandparents, the family system is affected because important parts of the family are emotionally removed. In this study, the biological parents were absent from the grandchild's home. This study can be useful in identifying solutions to assist in coping with these feelings of isolation experienced by the grandparents and the grandchildren.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I used interpretivism as an approach to a phenomenological study to describe the individual experiences of African American grandmothers. According to Schwandt (2007), proponents of interpretivism consider the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. Schwandt

contended that social factors construct the world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation.

The study was an emic account of behavior and beliefs of the African American grandmothers. An emic account comes from a person within a culture (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). I interviewed the grandmothers using questions that I developed based on a review of the related literature. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. With the permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy.

NVivo 9 software helped manage the data and confirmed the themes that emerged. Both open and axial coding was used in the analysis of data. Following Shank and Fischer's (2006) recommendation, open coding was used to break down the interview narratives in order to compare responses for similarities and differences; axial coding explored the relationships, categories, and codes and made connections between them. I looked at what influenced the central phenomena of grandmothers caring for school-aged grandchildren.

To prepare for the research, several approaches to social research were explored. Because the focus of the research study was African American grandmothers, an ethnographical study was appropriate. However, the preferred focus was on the impact of lived experiences and how educational needs of grandchildren were met, rather than to address the influence of membership in a specific ethnic or racial group.

The case study approach was also considered and rejected because case studies

involved examining one individual or group as a unit (Merriam, 2002). In a case study, there would be no focus on the lived experiences, but only the factors that affect the individual or group. The primary methodology employed would be a narrative-phenomenological study because the objective was to collect information regarding the lived experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon of educating children in the care of their African American grandmothers. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the phenomenon as seen through those who are having the experience. The goal was to look for patterns of success and to assist in the education of the grandchild with the development of programs and policies to help improve the lives of children whose guardians are their grandmothers. A quantitative approach was rejected because this would require testing a hypothesis, which was yet to be formulated regarding the educational needs of grandchildren being raised by African American grandmothers (Merriam, 2002).

Definitions

The following terms are germane to this study:

Custodial grandparent: A grandparent caregiver designated as the person who has been granted legal custody of a child.

Educational needs: The assistance necessary to help a school-aged child succeed academically in a school setting.

Grandparents as Parents (GAPs): As an acronym, custodial grandparents (Grover, 2006).

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRGs): As an acronym, custodial grandparents (Goyer, 2006).

Kinship care program: A program available to assist caregivers during the transition period when a child moves into their home.

Noncustodial caregiver: A grandparent or other caregiver who does not have legal custody of a grandchild (Cabin, 2013) SNAP: An acronym for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a food stamp program available in most states of the United States.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all participants understood the value of the study and were motivated to give honest answers. This assumption was likely to be met because participation was voluntary, and participants could leave the study at any time. It was assumed that the responses would be insightful and would enable the researcher to answer the research question. Prepared questions served to structure responses and led to data that could be effectively analyzed. It was also assumed that discernible patterns would evolve. Carefully worded questions ensured this assumption was met.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study was the experiences of African American grandmothers who were raising custodial school-aged grandchildren in the state of Delaware. This study was confined to investigating the experiences, perceptions, needs, and attitudes of African American custodial grandmothers regarding the education of their school-aged

grandchildren in Delaware. The selection was based on the geographical convenience that enabled face-to-face interviews. As the researcher I was able to drive from north to south in the state of Delaware within 2.5 hours. In addition, Delaware offers extensive social services through the use of modern technology and strong working relationships with partner agencies.

Limitations

This study was a qualitative phenomenological study of African American grandmothers in the state of Delaware. Due to the small sample size and the use of purposeful sampling, the generalizability of the findings is limited because it may not be applicable to other races or genders. Although the ability to generalize applies only to certain types of quantitative methods, transferability may apply. Unlike generalizability, transferability does not involve broad claims. I invite readers to make connections between elements of this study and their own experience. Transferability was enhanced by including the research context and the assumptions central to the study. The person who wishes to transfer the results to a different context needs to determine the applicability of the information to his or her situation.

Significance of the Study

This study involved analyzing the lived experiences of African American grandmothers raising their custodial school-aged grandchildren, and how these grandmothers perceived the support they give to their grandchildren's schooling. The outcome of this research may help educational leaders to develop initiatives and

programs to assist grandmothers in successfully caring for grandchildren.

Hill and Craft (2003) found that children who do not live with their biological parents frequently have more disruptive behavior disorders in elementary and middle school, read below grade level, and have lower math achievement scores than their peers. Exploring and analyzing the challenges, in addition to examining the experiences of African American grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren, could provide information that may improve the lives of both children and their caregiving grandmothers. Educators attempting to differentiate instruction to serve this segment of a diverse group of students may benefit, as can grandparents and children develop coping strategies for use in the classroom and beyond (Schultz & Switzky, 1993).

Implications for Social Change

Because the phenomenon of grandmothers caring for school-aged grandchildren is a growing trend in the United States, implications may exist for schools, communities, and the nuclear family. According to Thomson and McLanahan (2012), most children placed in custodial care of a grandparent come from homes where the biological parents cannot, or will not, care for their children. Thomson and McLanahan found that educators and sociologists have expressed alarm over the number of juvenile offenders (over 50%) coming from homes lacking two parent caregivers. Special services are needed to help many grandparents deal with the behavioral and psychological effects on children from these homes. Social service organizations that work with the placement of these grandchildren are tasked with supplying counseling along with health care benefits and

periodic physical assistance to grandchildren because many grandmothers are not financially able to provide such care.

Teachers and school administrators may need to be more sensitive to such grandchildren who are not living in a traditional nuclear family. According to Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010), these children may experience emotional difficulty, and one result can be lower teacher expectations because of the child's circumstances. When behavioral issues become evident during the school day, and there is only one grandparent as the primary caregiver for the child, schools should know how to communicate effectively with the grandparent to ensure the success of the child. Dallaire et al. (2010) found that not all grandparents embrace this new role because of the educational challenges regarding homework, test preparation, and parent teacher conferences. School leaders may need to reevaluate their interactions with grandparents as serious caregivers who need more assistance while in the process of caring for their school-aged grandchildren. Those who are planning to become caregivers to grandchildren need to be aware of challenges that this new role presents.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study, using a dialogical retrospection interview process, was to describe the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising school-aged grandchildren regarding how they are coping with the educational challenges of their grandchildren. The findings of this research may help educational leaders to develop initiatives and programs to assist those

facing this challenge. In this study, conclusions were based on the participants' responses to predetermined open-ended research questions, and unscripted follow-up questions as indicated in the Data Collection section of Chapter 3. The interview process provided participants with an opportunity to voice their perceptions and concerns by verbalizing personal lived experiences. This study was confined to investigating the experiences, perceptions, needs, and attitudes of African American grandmothers who are raising their school-aged grandchildren in the state of Delaware.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature identifies grandparent caregivers as a growing phenomenon in the United States and includes prior studies conducted in this area. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the research design. Chapter 4 gives an account of the data collection and data analysis regarding the study findings. Chapter 5 includes the conclusion and recommendations from the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Grandparents in the United States are the primary guardians for approximately 3 million children. African Americans represent a disproportionate number of custodial grandparents. According to the U.S. Census (2011), 5.7 million grandparents were living with their grandchildren, with 42% (2.4 million) of them as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate and analyze African American grandmothers' lived experiences raising their school-aged grandchildren. Chapter 2 includes a critical examination and synthesis of the literature related to traditional roles of African American grandmothers, custodial grandmothers, custodial relationships with grandmothers and grandchildren. The effects of schooling, parent and guardian involvement in education, grandmothers as effective educators, grandparent caregiver rewards, and community resources available to custodial grandparents are also examined.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was based on materials found in online academic libraries, books, dissertations, and peer-reviewed articles. Sources were selected because they were directly or indirectly related to the issues that grandmothers faced when raising their children's children. The online sources include EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Emerald, and ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis databases. Commercial search engines such as Yahoo and Google Scholar were used for additional Internet searches. Keywords used in the

review of literature either individually or in conjunction are: *African American grandmothers, Black American caregivers, caregivers, social service, parental involvement in education, bonding with grandchildren, roles of African American women, absentee grandfathers, challenges facing African Americans African American school-aged children, and absent biological African American parents*. Approximately 120 current peer-reviewed journal articles were reviewed for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) family and systems theory and Sands, Goldberg-Glen, Shin, and Robin's (2000) theory of change related stress or that major changes in life events creates stress.

Family and systems theory contends that family is an interconnected and interdependent system. This theory emerged from general systems theory by scholars who found it had many applications to families and other social systems. Any system is defined as a bounded set of interrelated elements exhibiting coherent behavior as a trait (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Families are considered systems because they are made up of interrelated elements or objectives, they exhibit coherent behaviors, they have regular interactions, and they are interdependent on one another.

The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person's operation is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the life of others. Families differ somewhat in the degree of interdependence, but it is always present to some degree (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). According to

Bacon (2014) parental involvement with the child regarding cognition and the socialization process and the response of parents is connected to the behavior of the child, which further supports Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) theory involving how the families members are interdependent upon one another. When this interdependence is broken and the child depends on the intervention and cognitive response of another family member, namely the grandmother, behaviors from the child may change negatively or positively.

The theory on change-related stress (Sands, Goldberg-Glen, Shin, and Robin, 2000) supports the view that serving as a primary caregiver for school-aged children often creates hardships for grandmothers. Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to a need. In this study, the demand is caring for schoolchildren. Custodial grandparents need support systems to help them deal with the pressure (Musil, Warner, Zauszniewski, Wykle, & Standing, 2005). A hardship for a grandmother raising school-aged grandchildren begins with physical demands, and often requires additional employment to have the income needed to care for their school-aged grandchildren. These hardships often produce emotional, physical, psychological, and financial stress. Resulting instability, in turn, could affect the education of the custodial grandchildren.

Few studies discuss the fact that grandmothers caring for grandchildren are most often menopausal. Menopause is life-changing event in a woman's and involves physiological, mood, cognition, and social changes (Hunter & Rendal, 2007). The bodies of these women are going through physiological changes which can include night sweats,

hot flashes, and mood swings which are stressful on a woman physically and mentally (Newhart, 2010). This psychological and physical condition is relevant to the care of grandchildren by a grandmother because it is a stressful time in her life that can affect her custodial role.

Conway, Jones, and Speakes-Lewis (2011) conducted a study with 85 custodial African American grandmothers and concluded that parenting by grandparents results in less emotional and caregiving strain relative to younger grandmothers. The greater number of roles assigned to the grandmother such, as marriage did not affect her caregiving ability. Emotional strains were not evident. This could be a result of having a support system such as a husband. Married grandmothers experienced less caregiving stress, and their age had no implications. Grandmothers may be more interested in maintaining close relationships with the grandchildren and see the opportunity to parent a second time as positive for the grandmother and the grandchild (Newhart, 2010). In this study I sought to understand these stresses and strains that may affect the life of a grandmother caring for a grandchild. Additionally, I investigated how stressors impact African American grandmothers as they assist their grandchildren with their education.

Parental and Guardian Involvement in Education

There is a dearth of literature regarding how African American grandmothers are navigating the educational system to assist the grandchildren in their care. A qualitative phenomenological study may elucidate how grandmothers are coping with the experience of raising school-aged grandchildren. These African American grandmother caretakers

were encouraged to speak from experience about the challenges of parenting grandchildren, how they dealt with their grandchild's educational needs, and the lifestyle changes that resulted.

The primary focus of this study was the experience of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren who are in grades K-12. In particular, it is important to understand how these grandmothers are coping with the educational needs of their grandchildren as well as adjusting to the change in family structure. Bowers and Myers (1999) argued that, based on evidence from social scientists, medical care providers, and educators, grandmothers were increasingly becoming the primary caregiver in families. In 1970, approximately 3.2% of children under the age of 18 lived in a household headed by a grandparent, often the grandmother. By 1997, the number increased to 5.6% (Bowers & Myers, 1999). Bowers and Myers suggested there was a dearth of literature on the challenges involved with the formal education of grandchildren. As of 2010, 7% of families were headed by a grandparent. Grandparent roles varied from occasional overnight visits to legal custody. Grandparents believed they were subjected to psychologically stressful situations when caring for school-aged grandchildren who came from homes where substance abuse was prevalent, and children had not been taught socially acceptable behavior (Bowers & Myers, 1999). However, the impact on the children's education was not clear.

Grandmothers raising grandchildren need to be aware of the importance of involvement in the grandchild's education as they begin the role of caregiver for their

grandchildren. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parental/guardian involvement is necessary from the onset of school attendance through adolescence. When the child's family is involved in the educational process, the outcome of success for the child in school is highly likely (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Henderson and Berla (1994) found that when parents are involved in the education of their children at all levels, they are successful not just in school but throughout their lives. Greenwood and Hickman (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of parental/guardian involvement in education during early elementary school years and found significant positive relationships between parent and guardian involvement and variables. Academic achievement, student sense of well-being, student attendance, student attitude, homework readiness, grades, and educational aspirations were all seen as positive. Greenwood and Hickman, however, found no studies that looked at custodial grandparents. Neither study addressed the custodial grandmothers or fathers. Further research may be needed to elucidate the area these children who live with their grandmothers.

Members of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) have advocated parental or guardian involvement in math education and recognized its connection to student learning of math (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). The Center for Development of Teaching (2008) conducted a study to understand why so many parents/guardians are not involved in their child's math education. The low involvement appears to be influenced by the parents' or guardians' negative opinion about math, their poor experiences with math, and their low opinion of their own math abilities.

Grandmothers raising their grandchildren may be handicapped more than others regarding the education of their grandchildren outside of the school environment because many years may have elapsed since they attended school. Assisting in mathematics or other subjects may leave them with feelings of inadequacy because of the time span between the grandmother's formal education and requirements needed to meet the grandchild's academic demands of today.

Parental and guardian involvement has been associated with socioeconomic status (Cooper & Crosone, 2007). Parents or guardians with high socioeconomic status, economically disadvantaged parents or guardians are less likely to be present in their child's education. Some of the reasons noted by Cooper and Crosone (2007) include the negative experiences with educators and administrators. In addition, compared to more affluent parents or guardians, economically disadvantaged parents are more likely to have physically demanding jobs and frequently work longer hours and hold several jobs, making it harder for them to be involved (Cooper & Crosone, 2007). The context of socioeconomic status of custodial African-American grandparents will also be considered in this study.

Custodial Grandparents

In a 3-year study, Whitley, Kelley, and Sipe (2001) collected data regarding African American grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. The authors found that the trend of being a caregiver to blood-related children is rapidly increasing in the United States and is associated with national social changes such as rising

unemployment, higher divorce rates, and cuts in federal government funding for social services. According to Whitley et al., children raised by grandparents exhibit a better sense of well-being than their counterparts raised by biological parents who are had financial and personal difficulties. Despite many negative aspects attributed to raising one's grandchildren, the authors found several benefits. Positive outcomes included a second chance for the grandparents to do things right, an opportunity to foster a familial legacy for the grandchildren, and love and companionship that may not have occurred otherwise. Also, Harper, Hardesty, and Woody (2001) found that despite the apparent inconveniences, many grandparent caregivers reported increased feelings of usefulness and purpose. This was true for both African American and European American grandparents.

Most custodial grandmothers love, nurture, and care for their grandchildren and should be acknowledged by courts, schools, and any organization involved with or responsible for a grandchild. Edwards and Sweeney (2007) found that these caregivers need assistance, but many do not draw attention to those situations or challenges that stress them the most. Instead, Edwards and Sweeney found that the many remain positive by not thinking of themselves as caregivers, but as parents again. The role of parent emphasizes the positive more than the negative, which can be seen as positive because it leads to less stress and more satisfaction for the grandmother or caregiver of the grandchild. Grandmothers take over the role of parenting to contribute to positive outcomes for their children and are willing to learn parenting strategies that will help the

grandchildren (Sanders & Kirby, 2012).

Edwards and Sweeney (2007) determined that children residing in the custodial care of grandparents tend to experience more problems in school than other children. Many of these children may have prenatal complications, as the mothers could have been using illegal drugs, which put the child at risk for behavioral, emotional, and cognitive issues. Hayslip and Glover (2008) found that grandparents experiencing problematic situations with grandchildren cited parental drug abuse, physical abuse, and a sense of abandonment as causes for these problems. Burton (1992) found that substance abuse among parents is one of the leading factors in grandparents assuming the role of a surrogate parent to their grandchildren. Burton also cited other factors, such as out-of-wedlock childbearing and joblessness among biological children. Other major reasons why increasing numbers of grandparents are becoming custodial parents to grandchildren include a substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, death, illness, divorce, incarceration, and HIV-AIDS. This study revealed additional reasons why African American grandmothers gained custody of their school-aged grandchildren (Burton, 1992).

Another factor to consider is the possibility of maltreatment by biological parents before the grandparents took over as custodial parents. Biglan, Flay, Embry, and Sandler (2012) found that grandparents become involved with grandchildren in order to remove them from a toxic environment that they are living in, which could lead to school-related behavioral problems. Biglan et al. did not explain what these grandmothers required to

help meet the educational needs of their grandchildren.

Hammen, Shih, and Brennan (2004) noted that custodial grandparents often suffer from a social stigma and a sense of guilt for having failed their own children and suggested that society often finds fault with the grandparents and places responsibility for the choices of their adult children on the grandparent. Carlini-Marlatt (2005) found that when the role of grandparent alone changes to the title of a custodial adult caregiver to their grandchildren, social discomfort becomes apparent. The grandparents in Carlini-Marlatt's phenomenological study had an unspoken assumption that something went wrong with their biological children when they were raising them. Whatever went wrong accounted for the discomfort that these grandparents were feeling regarding their emotions of not being socially accepted by their peers and isolated from society while in their new role as a parent the second time around. Carlini-Marlatt concluded that social acceptance is difficult when rearing grandchildren, but not necessarily for all grandparents in this role.

Mutchler and Baker (2004) explored two types of households in New England and the Deep South: two generations with the parental generation skipped and three generations where parents were present but the grandparent assumed a significant role in caring for the grandchild. Results suggested more grandparents care for grandchildren without the parent present in the South than in the North.

Mutchler and Baker (2004) enlisted noncustodial and custodial grandparents in their study. Participants were read a randomly assigned scenario that depicted a

grandmother and her grandchild and addressed differences in gender, problems, and assumptions. Many grandparents suggested that grandchildren experienced a sense of loss when not residing with their biological parents. Analysis of the data indicated that loss awareness varies according to the grandchild, with girls expressing a greater sense of loss than boys. A comparison of material hardship, mental health, and physical welfare of custodial grandmothers was the subject of a longitudinal multimethodological investigation of the well-being of low-income children and families in the wake of federal welfare reform (Bachman & Chase-Landsdale, 2005). This reform, which began in the 1990s, changed how federal and state benefits were distributed to families. This assistance included grandparents who were on a limited budget. The methodology involved field interviewers to select one focal child randomly and conduct 2.5-hour interviews with the primary female caregiver and the child. Two sets of data were collected, the first in 1999 and the second in 2000 and 2001 (Bachman & Chase-Landsdale, 2005). Bachman and Chase-Landsdale found that children from low-income neighborhoods had behavioral problems, which were associated with the deprivation of material objects because things could not be supplied to the child. Marriage was consistently related to all outcomes because the single grandmother was less likely to provide material possessions to the child. Lower educational attainment by the grandmother was related to the poor physical strength of that caregiver.

Williams (2011) conducted a study of grandparents raising grandchildren focusing on the relationships between the psychological health of grandparents and the

behavioral and emotional issues of the grandchildren. Williams found that when families are unable to perform roles that society expects of them, they may be faced not only with stress but a stigma of failure before they are able to get the help that they need.

Sometimes the advice is too late and does not meet the needs of the family. More data are needed to show trends in family caregiving that may bring about policy changes in state and local governments to assist these caregiving grandparents. Despite all the studies on this topic, it is still not known how custodial African American grandmothers are coping with the education of their custodial school-aged grandchildren.

More than 10% of African American individuals aged 47 to 77 live with a grandchild; for those aged 54 to 68, the prevalence is above 15% (Bloom & Cohen, 2007). In 2006, African American families represented the majority (52%) of all caregiving grandparents (Bloom & Cohen, 2007).

A study is needed to elucidate the lived experiences of grandparents who are raising their school-aged grandchildren. Although studies are available on African American grandmothers caring for grandchildren, there has been little emphasis on how they are addressing the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren (Collins, 2011).

Traditional Roles of African American Grandmothers

The grandmother is frequently the matriarch of the African American family because grandfathers are often absent due to poor health, death, or irresponsible behavior. African American grandmothers have assumed roles as kinship caregivers to their grandchildren. According to Cuddenback (2004), African American grandmothers have

been the moral support of African American families. Ruiz and Zhu (2004) stated that African American grandmothers have always been pillars of strength within the African American family. The grandmother often reinforces family values and reemphasizes the role of religion, self-respect, hard work, and a disciplined lifestyle.

Barber (2010) determined that most African American grandmothers regarded kinship bonding, spirituality, religion, education, and a work ethic to be critical values for their grandchildren. These values were transmitted by maintaining communication with the grandchildren through phone calls, family outings, and involvement with their grandchildren's activities. Barber (2010) addressed the social needs of custodial grandchildren with an emphasis on cultural values. What is missing from the literature is a recommendation directing these grandmothers to resources that may assist African American grandmothers dealing with the formal education of their grandchildren placed in their protective care.

Challenges Facing African American Grandmothers

African American grandmothers often face social, emotional, and physical challenges when caring for their grandchildren (Collins, 2011). The grandchildren's demands on African American grandmothers often leave the grandmother socially isolated. Older caregivers reported having little in common with young parents at school or in the community where their grandchildren congregated or with others their own age (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Topics of discussion between the caregivers and the young parents are confined to school-related issues and the commonalities between the children

regarding school and the education of the custodial children cared for by the grandmother (Gibson, 2005). Linsk et al. (2009) found that age differences between the grandmother and the grandchildren further limit mature conversations, which results in feelings of isolation, loneliness, and even depression for the grandparents when contact with other adults is limited.

Signs of stress are common in grandparents raising school-aged grandchildren, especially among African Americans (Carlini-Marlatt, 2005). Symptoms include a change in diastolic blood pressure due to the stress of being a caregiver. Factors that contribute to physical deterioration of the body include obesity, inactivity, and not complying with medical recommendations regarding the treatment of these disorders. These factors lead to heart disease, congestive heart failure and chronic kidney disease in African Americans more than any other racial groups (Taylor, Washington, Artinian, & Lichtenberg, 2007a). Carlini-Marlatt (2005) concluded that consistent grandparent caregivers of all ethnic backgrounds suffer from poor health and frequently have multiple health issues such as diabetes and hypertension. Educational programs giving the grandparents nutritional direction may decrease symptoms associated with life-threatening diseases (Whitley & Kelley, 2008).

Health challenges that custodial grandparents face include insomnia, depression, hypertension, and back and stomach problems, which can limit their physical interactions with their grandchildren (Collins, 2011; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2001; Whitley & Kelley, 2008). Musil and Ahamadi (2002) conducted a qualitative descriptive study with

86 grandmothers and found similar findings to Whitley, Kelley, and Sipe (2001). Smith and Palmieri (2007) found African American grandmothers are at an increased risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease while caring for their grandchildren.

Challenges regarding financial support of the grandchildren by the grandmothers when the biological parents are not providing any assistance may place the grandparent in the position of not being able to find affordable housing, medical care, child care, transportation, and respite services for the grandchild when the grandmother is working outside of the home (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). More research is needed to explore how custodial grandparents are finding the means to care for their minor-aged grandchildren.

According to Smith and Palmieri (2007), grandparents may need to use their retirement savings to support their unexpected family of grandchildren. When grandparents use their financial resources and stay at home with their grandchildren, these children do not need to depend on state-provided services such as daycare. The financial support grandmothers provide can also save on the costs incurred from child welfare charges by individual states (Silverstein, 2007).

Feelings of depression, anxiety, health problems, behavior problems, academic difficulties, aggression and feeling of anger, rejection, and guilt among grandchildren contribute to a grandmother's stress (Kortenkamp & Macomber, 2002; Solomon & Marx, 1995). To deal effectively with these stressors, grandmothers must be knowledgeable about current parenting strategies, healthy child development, and childhood disorders such as attention deficit disorder which can be noted in some school-aged children

(Jendrek, 1993; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999; Pinson-Milburn, 1996). Intervention programs may be helpful to these grandparents, according to Kelley, Whitley, and Campos (2010). Their study of 529 female African American grandmothers suggested those raising school-aged grandchildren could benefit from a home-based health intervention program. Availability of these types of programs is not known, and further investigation of African American grandmothers caring for school-aged grandchildren may reveal unknown resources for grandmother caregivers.

Linsk et al. (2009) examined 25 African American women raising their grandchildren to observe the effect of caregiving related to stress and depression. The authors concluded that there was more depression among these women than their cohorts who were not raising grandchildren. However, Linsk et al. (2009) did not study how these grandparents dealt with meeting the educational needs of their grandchildren.

Family structure is also significant in predicting whether a grandchild had any health insurance and quality health care. Joslin and Brouard (1995) found that grandchildren living in homes where the parents were not present were more likely to be uninsured than in homes where the parents lived with their children and their own parents. A search of the literature found no other studies regarding health care for grandchildren. After the institution of the Affordable Health Care Act (also known as Obamacare), it will be necessary to see if grandchildren in the care of grandparents will receive health care services.

Collins (2011) found that many African American grandmothers perceive their

family's financial support system as unreliable. How grandmothers are coping with these realities surrounding the financial care of their grandchildren will be revealed in this study, along with other mechanisms to handle the daily challenges involved in educating custodial grandchildren.

A correlational study involving 733 custodial grandmothers suggested grandchildren cared for by a grandparent had more emotional and behavioral problems, as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Question Survey (SDQ), than grandchildren who were not cared for by a grandparent (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Edwards and Daire (2006) found that children raised by grandparents had increased levels of behavioral and emotional problems that were exhibited in the classroom. A clinic provided interventions to improve behavioral issues of the children with an emphasis on counseling. The purpose of these interventions was to treat underlying symptoms of a broken family while at the same time providing respite care, help with homework, and assistance with behavior issues at home. Edwards and Daire found that grandchildren cared for by grandmothers are products of a family with just one parent or no biological parents, and any exhibition of negative behavior may be a reflection of the emotional underlying issues that the grandchild may feel.

Grandmothers as Educators

Grandparents comprise the largest group of people other than parents who assist children in schools. They volunteer to assist teachers with teaching children and with other duties identified by the classroom teacher. Schools are using grandparents as

volunteers to help in the classroom because 75% of the parents of school-aged children are employed (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Mitchell (2008) noted the importance of intergenerational learning between grandmothers and their grandchildren. Mitchell reviewed a study of grandparents that did home-based projects with their grandchildren, and these projects were acceptable to schools for evaluation with the possibility of creating a school district policy. The purpose was to develop skills in the culture, religion, reading, and linguistics that could be transferred to the classroom. The project demonstrated that grandparents could play a direct and active role in the education of young children.

Wright (2009) found that when a strong relationship exists between grandparents and their grandchildren, the entire family profits. Kelch-Oliver (2011) conducted an exploratory case study where a grandparent was asked to review school assignments and discuss the progress of their grandchildren with the teacher. Grandparents were successful in assisting their grandchildren in the social sciences and English but were less likely to help school-aged children with mathematics, science, and computer skills development.

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), the involvement of the parents and guardians has become more important in the education of a child (Whitley & Kelly, 2008). However, most teachers do not send home helpful hints regarding how parents or guardians could assist with homework (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009). A study was needed to determine what resources, if any, custodial grandparents

use to assist their grandchildren with academics.

Grandparent Bonding With Grandchildren

Most grandparents bond with their grandchildren and offer financial assistance to invest in the future of their grandchildren. Coall and Hertwig (2010) sought to understand the effect of grandparent and grandchild bonding in modern Western society, and more specifically, why grandparents were interested in investing in their grandchildren by giving them money and setting aside time to care for them, along with emotional support. Coall and Hertwig found that grandparents invested in their grandchildren. Coombs and Avrunin (1977) found that when a loving and caring bond exists between the grandparent and young grandchild, there was increased likelihood of the grandchild making healthy choices when he or she reached adulthood.

Grandparents finding themselves in the position of caring for their grandchildren can use the opportunity to have an active and productive bond. The time may be short or long, and often, no one knows when the children will be taken from their grandparents' care. Moments to bond become precious times to share and can be planned by preparing the children's favorite foods with their assistance or doing an activity in the house that only includes the children and the grandparent, such as pretending a bunk bed is a tree house (Silverstein, 2007).

Silverstein (2007) found that many grandparents living with their grandchildren take the time every evening to play a game. Backgammon, cards, or Scrabble for older children, and memory match, puzzles, or bingo for younger children are just a few

examples of ways to bond with grandchildren at home. Arts and crafts are activities that teach children how to recycle, such as using an empty cereal box or making egg cartons into caterpillars. According to Monserud (2010), bonding between grandparents and grandchildren depends on factors that develop as the grandparent cares for the grandchild. These activities also contribute to the informal education and the socialization of the grandchild. Social interactions between family members, in particular between grandparents and grandchildren, build a relationship, and this bonding can lead to an adult grandchild caring for an aged grandparent.

Grandparent Caregiver Rewards

Researchers who have conducted studies of grandparent caregiving have predominantly approached the issue from a social problem perspective and highlighted the stresses, strains, and burdens of these grandparents, thereby providing a somewhat unbalanced view of grandparent caregivers (Barber, 2010; Monserud, 2010; Silverstein, 2007). Silverstein (2007) determined 80% of caregiving grandparents found the experiences rewarding, and more than 25% reported it was more rewarding than stressful. Cultural meanings attached to caregiving have a bearing on whether grandparent caregivers perceive their role as more rewarding than burdensome (Sear & Coall, 2011). These meanings are informative regarding grandparents' legitimate claims to intervene on behalf of their grandchildren and their eventual success in assuming the authority of a parent.

Parents want to keep their grandchildren out of the foster care system and to

provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their homes where they receive love without conditions from a family member, and at the same time, the grandparent has a rewarding feeling of fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment (Smith et al., 2007). Watching the child grow, achieve, and emerge as a positive individual with goals is a reward for grandparents. These grandparents knew that they made a difference in the life of a child can be rewarding. McGowen, Ladd, and Strom (2006) found support for this assertion, noting that 32% of custodial grandparents reported the rewards outweigh the lack of funds or other inadequacies that they as grandparents may not have had at their disposal.

Community Resources and Outreach Programs

Select support programs are directed specifically toward custodial grandparents and are available in Delaware, the location of this study, which offers a program to assist grandparents with medical, food, and childcare expenses associated with caring for a grandchild (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012). SNAP, a food stamp program available in all states in the United States can be accessed online, and after applying and establishing eligibility regarding income, a family can receive financial assistance to pay for food using a debit card.

In Delaware, there are several other relevant social programs. The Kinship Care Program is available to assist caregivers during the transition period when a child moves into their home. The program helps grandparents meet the child's immediate need for clothing, shelter, health, safety, and educational supplies. A helpline is available at the

State Service Center for questions regarding caregiver-related issues. Medicaid is a medical insurance available to grandparents that include well-child exams, in- or outpatient hospital services, laboratory tests, behavioral health services, prescription medicines, dental care, eye exams, glasses, and over-the-counter prescribed drugs by a doctor. The Delaware Healthy Children Program offers medical insurance at low cost to caregivers who do not qualify for Medicaid. Food stamps also come under the Delaware program for supporting grandparents with little or no income. Qualifying food stamp households consist of people who live together, buy food, prepare meals, and include children under the age of 22 who live with their parents or grandparents (Division of Prevention and Behavioral and Health Services, 2011).

The Social Services Purchase of Care program in Delaware provides support to families who need childcare but cannot pay for all or part of the cost; the program is available to both parents and grandparents. The Purchase of Care program also provides information for rental assistance and security deposit help for rent along with energy bill assistance. The Division of Child Support Enforcement is a free service in Delaware that assists custodial parents and caregivers to establish paternity and obtain child support from parents. Public housing in Delaware is offered by several agencies and is available to assist those who meet the income eligibility requirements. Applicants who go through the process of seeking a subsidized home may or may not have custody of the child (Division of Prevention and Behavioral and Health Services, 2011).

Behavioral health services for substance abuse and mental health are available to

all children who reside in Delaware. Grandparents, as well as parents, are eligible to utilize this program. Delaware Behavioral Health Services provide a range of outpatient mental health and substance abuse programs that include 24-hour services. The Caregivers' Medical Authorization Law allows primary caretakers to provide consent for the services when the parents are not available. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), as outlined by the U. S. Census Bureau (2011), is available to adults to help with a child being raised by a caregiver or parent. Custody or guardianship is not necessary, but a blood relation to the child is required to obtain assistance. It is important to understand if these services are being utilized.

Summary

Chapter 2 included an analysis of studies related to the role of African American grandmothers raising school-aged grandchildren. The theoretical basis for the study was that grandparents frequently make the decision to raise their school-aged grandchildren when their children are confronted with a life crisis and need the grandparents to assist in the care of the grandchildren (Musil et al., 2005). African American grandmothers raising school-aged grandchildren take the responsibility for their financial and physical well-being. Grandmothers often have unique challenges when rearing the grandchildren along with the rewards of bonding and meeting the educational needs of these grandchildren. More study is necessary to reveal how these grandmothers are dealing with financial issues while maintain the stability of their custodial grandchildren. Thus, this study was designed to explore the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are

currently raising school-aged grandchildren. Chapter 3 describes the methodology that guided this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is so common that it has generated acronyms such as Grandparents as Parents (GAPs) and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRGs; Goyer, 2006). In these families, grandmothers are usually responsible for seeing that the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren are met. A responsibility that is especially prevalent in African American families. The problem under study was the need to understand the efficacy of this arrangement by revealing the lived experiences of African American grandmothers regarding the education of their custodial school-aged grandchildren. Chapter 3 outlines the design of the study, the role of the researcher, participant selection, and the methodology used to guide the investigation.

Participants selected for the phenomenological study of grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren came from three counties in the state of Delaware. As Glesne (1999) noted, “A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomena under study” (p. 7). In this case, the phenomenon was African-American grandmothers dealing with the educational needs of their custodian grandchildren.

The study population was African American grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren. The sampling technique was based on referrals from community organizations. A snowball sampling technique was needed to enroll a sufficient number of participants. Interviews were conducted until data saturation took place.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative phenomenological study elicited the participants' perceptions regarding the experience of meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren. Participants included 10 African American grandmothers. As noted by Moustakas (1994), phenomenology describes the meaning for a group of individuals of their lived experiences regarding a concept or a phenomenon.

A quantitative paradigm was considered and rejected for this study. Underlying quantitative methods is that reality is objective and based primarily on deductive forms of logic and theories that can be tested. By contrast, this study sought to understand, rather than predict, a human problem from multiple perspectives.

Quantitative methods focus on measuring, predicting, or validating theories and data (Creswell, 2003). Features associated with quantitative research include objectivity, generalizability, and numbers (Simon & Goes, 2013). Quantitative designs could have been applied in the study to investigate relationships such as that between the number of years of custodianship and the grade point average of the custodial child.

Simon and Goes (2013) explained that qualitative methodologies support the view that "reality, which is based on perceptions, is different for each person, changes over time, and derives meaning primarily from context" (p. 79). A qualitative method was more appropriate than a quantitative method for this study to explain the multiple aspects of the phenomenon. The goals of qualitative inquiry in general, and phenomenological studies in particular, are to understand experiences, explore a phenomenon, and provide

subjective account of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) viewed experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of a phenomenon with the person experiencing the phenomenon.

This study was transcendental. Transcendental phenomenological studies require that the researcher set aside prejudgments as much as possible and use systematic procedures for analyzing data. The Greek word, *epoché*, which means to refrain from judgment, is used to refer to setting aside prejudgments. Thus, the process is transcendental because the researcher views the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time and is open to its totality” (p. 34). I used bracketing to identify and set aside any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under investigation.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), a phenomenology is a theoretical description of one or more individuals' lived experience of a phenomenon. This type of study indicates that individual behavior is determined by the experience of the phenomena. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising school-aged grandchildren regarding how they are coping with the educational challenges of their grandchildren. As in all phenomenological studies, participants explained their experiences and were asked to reflect on their behaviors during these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The findings from this study might be of interest to educators who wish to provide support for these children. Based on the literature review conducted, a lack of information exists regarding African American grandmothers strategies to assist

with their grandchildren's education.

Case study and grounded theory studies were also considered. A case study is a comprehensive study of an individual or context conducted using methods such as unstructured interviews or direct observations. Case studies require multiple data collection methods by the researcher such as school records (Trochim, 2001). Due to privacy rules, these data would be difficult to obtain.

A grounded theory is inductive and develops relationships among categories and a property found in the data and develops a theory (Creswell, 2012). This study identified common themes and drew conclusions from the data collected, but it was not intended to develop a theory from the data with the realization of the uniqueness of each person's experience, which is better revealed by a phenomenological approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

A phenomenological approach is a method that, according to Lester (1999), is dedicated to describing the structures of experiences without theories, assumptions, or deductions. Through phenomenological inquiry, a researcher interacts with participants using interpretation as a method of analysis. The intent was to understand the lived experiences of custodial African American grandmothers regarding the education of their grandchildren.

Research Questions

This study included one overarching research question and four subquestions.

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren?

The subquestions that were explored follow:

SQ1: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

SQ2: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ3: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ4: What role, if any, does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of inquiry, and the credibility of the study depends on the competence and skill of the person gathering and analyzing the data (Patton, 2002). I was the instrument of data collection, by making conducting interviews using prepared questions, audiotaping the interviews, taking field notes, and conducting analyses of data. Moustakas (1994) noted that in a phenomenological study, reflections should include the personal experiences of the researcher. I bracketed my beliefs by constructing a mind-map, as recommended by Simon and Goes (2013), regarding my thoughts and experiences of educating my

custodial grandchild. The process allows readers to understand my position as the researcher.

As a grandmother raising a grandchild from birth, I was aware of the challenges and rewards associated with this type of relationship. I was also aware that my experiences might be unique because I do not fit into the model presented by many researchers regarding the physical and financial conditions of a single grandmother. I evaluated the data as presented to me and kept any preconceived notions in abeyance.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

This qualitative phenomenological study involved criterion sampling to select the participants. According to Patton (2002), a criterion sampling is necessary to review and study cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance. For this study, the participants were African American women who cared for their custodial school-aged grandchild or grandchildren. These participants came from the state of Delaware, where I reside. Selection was based on the geographical convenience, which enabled face-to-face interviews, which were accessible through driving a vehicle since the entire state can be driven from north to south within 2.5 hours. A convenience sample of 8 women who were custodial caregivers of grandchildren were recruited from diverse sites (Musil, 1998). With respect to phenomenological studies, sample size recommendations range from six (Morse & Chung, 2003) to 10 (Creswell, 2012). Saturation was reached in this study.

Instrumentation

Research data were collected from in-depth interviews about the participants' experiences caring for their grandchildren. This data collection procedure was designed to ask participants to reveal information regarding how they interact with their school-age grandchildren and vice versa, with a possible reconstruction of their family experience. Interviews enabled the researcher to place observed behavior in context and to understand the lived experiences of the participants.

This study included the use of two instruments as assessment tools (See Appendices A and B). The first (Appendix A) was a survey to gather demographic information. This was followed by an in-depth interview (See Appendix B) to gather data to form a phenomenological perspective of what it was like to raise a school-aged custodial grandchild. The interviewees granted permission, and the interviews were digitally recorded. Taping the interviews ensured the data were recorded accurately. The interviews included only the participant and the researcher. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes. A professional transcription company transcribed the tapes. This company is under obligation to keep all information confidential.

The questions for the interviews were developed through a search of the related literature (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002; Solomon & Marx, 1995). Two experts in the field of human development and two experts from the field of education reviewed the questions and found them to be unambiguous, culturally appropriate, and should enable me to answer the research questions and solve the problem framed. The experts were faculty

members from the University of Rhode Island who study familial relationships.

Additional follow-up questions served as a strategy to make certain that each participant understands her own unique life experiences.

Procedures for Recruitment and Data Collection

Recruitment was through community center postings, recommendations from school personnel, church organizations, or personal knowledge of individuals who were aware of African American grandmothers caring for custodial grandchildren. Information was provided regarding how to contact me through email, phone call or text message.

The snowballing technique was used to obtain an adequate sample size. According to Simon and Goes (2013), the process of snowball sampling involves asking participants to nominate another person with the same trait to also participate in the study. This process continues until a sufficient number of participants are enrolled. More participants were not needed to obtain data saturation.

Participants had the opportunity to speak about their concerns and tell their stories using personal narratives, feelings, and reflections (Christensen, Schneider, & Butler, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The interviews lasted no more than 1.5 hours. With permission, these interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure clarity of the shared information given by each participant. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted as needed to further clarify the details and meaning of the interview data.

The face-to-face interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant, in a near-by community center. When this was not convenient, then a suitable

place was established. The participant received a request to complete a consent form prior to the interview. In-depth interviews were appropriate because this gave participants the opportunity to speak about their concerns and tell their stories using personal narrations, feelings, and reflections (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The interviews followed an interview protocol (see Appendix D) that elaborated on the intent of the study and the role of the participants. I also ask each participant to take a moment to think about a response before answering the questions.

Each participant received a code name based on a selected pseudonym. I am the only person who knows the true identity of the participants. I did member checking by giving the transcripts back to the participants, explaining certain themes that evolved, and asking them to check for accuracy.

Interviews were conducted at community centers or the home of the participant, whichever was more convenient for the participant. Data were digitally recorded. The interviews were conducted at convenient times and generally lasted no more than 1.5 hours. In the event that we went over the time allotted, there was a mutual agreement between the participant and me to continue the interviewing process. Participants were informed that if they have any questions to contact me directly through the telephone and if a follow-up was needed we would arrange a mutual time and meet at the same facility or home where the first interview took place. I recorded handwritten notes in a journal and took note of body language and facial expressions.

Data Analysis

NVivo 9 software was used to help manage the data and facilitate accuracy of data analysis. The following seven steps of the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) were used to analyze the data.

1. Horizontalization: Every expression relevant to the experience was listed.
2. Reduction and elimination: Invariant constituents were determined by testing each expression to make certain that the data contain the experience and I can abstract and label the information. Expressions were eliminated if they did not meet the above requirements, and overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions will be eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The *horizons* that remained were the invariant constituents of the experience.
3. Clustering which defined connections among the identified themes.
4. Validation by final identification of the invariant constituents and themes.
5. Using the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes; *Individual textural description* of the experience was constructed, including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.
6. *Individual structural description* of the experience was constructed based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation.
7. Individual textural description integrated the structural qualities of each research participant involved.

Data analysis began by reading the transcripts of the interviews. Coding was used to find common themes throughout the interviews. Categories were identified, and the frequency of common themes identified. A detailed examination of the information minimized any bias that appeared.

The data analysis process included reviewing the transcripts of the audio recordings and my handwritten notes. I imported the documents of transcripts, audio sources into NVivo. The software guarantees private handling of the information. I exported the data from NVivo to use in my final dissertation. The data analysis process involved constructing individual textual and structural descriptions of each participant's experience (Giorgi, 2009). The goal was to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience and the underlying and precipitating factors that account for the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2002).

Both open and axial coding were used in the analysis of data. Following Shank and Fisher's (2006) recommendation, I used open coding to break down the interview narratives in order to compare responses for similarities and differences. The transcribed texts were analyzed line by line to ensure that saturation of all identified categories was achieved.

Axial coding followed open coding when the information from the open coding was assembled and presented in a coding paradigm. During axial coding, the data were reassembled to identify new connected categories. This was achieved by exploring the conditions, context, action/interaction strategies, and consequences that influenced the

phenomena and/or social processes of grandparents raising their school-aged grandchildren.

The steps involved organizing, preparing for analysis, reading transcription data and then entering the data into NVivo 9 software. Once the data were entered into the program, coding began by organizing chunks before attaching meaning to the data collected. Themes were analyzed and placed into meaningful units to analyze the experiences of the participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers substitute data trustworthiness for validity and reliability. Trustworthiness consists of the following components: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility establishes that research is believable from the viewpoint of the participant who can judge the results. In phenomenological study, credibility is obtained through bracketing, in depth interviews, and member checks (Jasper, 1994). Transferability in research is the responsibility of the researcher who is doing the generalizing. This term refers to the degree that qualitative research can be transferred to other settings. When a common theme was recorded from all interviews, this might suggest transferability of the findings beyond the study to other grandmothers caring for school-aged grandchildren who are not of African American descent. Dependability in qualitative research is referred to as data that remains stable over a period of time. Strategies to establish dependability include self-checking during the interview process, and the use of follow-up questions. Confirmability refers to the

degree that others can confirm a research topic. At the completion of the study, data can be audited and examined for possible bias or misinterpretation.

Ethical Procedures

Potential participants were provided with information about how their data will be used, what will be done with the data, and the security of the recorded interviews. I made it clear that any words, conversation, and contact would remain confidential. Prior to beginning each interview, participants received a request to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C and Appendix D), which explained how their privacy would be maintained, and their ability to leave the study at any time without consequences.

Maintaining confidentiality was a vital factor when beginning a study. All participants were aware of the parameters, questions, and confidentiality of the information being collected. Once IRB approval was granted from Walden University, the solicitation process began. Interviews took place in community centers where a private room was secured. According to Erlen (2010), collecting information through investigations and research exposes participants to a certain level of vulnerabilities. To protect the identity of the participants, code names were assigned. To offer additional protection of confidentiality, all files, including audiotapes, notes, and transcripts were securely locked in a personal safe that only the researcher can access. Information stored in an electronic data format will be password/finger swipe encrypted computer at my home for 5 years, after which I will dispose of all materials.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to uncover the lived experiences of African American grandmothers raising their school aged grandchildren. As with most phenomenological studies, participants explained their experiences and reflected on their behaviors during these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The inquiry focused on how these grandmothers are assisting their school-aged grandchildren with their educational needs. The analysis of the data identified common themes of behavior and adaptive skill sets employed by the participants. The next chapter presents the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising their school-aged grandchildren in regard to coping with their custodial grandchildren's educational challenges. Demographic surveys and face-to-face interviews served as the methods of data collection.

This chapter begins with the research questions that guided this study. The chapter continues with a description of the research setting and participant demographics. An account of the data collection and data analysis procedures precedes the presentation of the study findings. I will present the results of the thematic analysis and organize the findings of the study by the guiding research questions.

Research Questions

One central research question and four subquestions guided this study.

Central Research Question: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of their custodial school-aged grandchildren?

Subquestion 1: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

Subquestion 2: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren?

Subquestion 3: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren?

Subquestion 4: What role, if any, does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild?

Setting

For this study, I collected data within the context of a demographic survey and individual interviews. I administered the surveys and conducted the interviews in local community centers or the participants' homes, depending upon the preferences of each participant. None of the participants reported any significant life events or acute personal circumstances at the time of the interview. Thus, no such factors are believed to have influenced the data collection process or the interpretation of the study findings.

Demographics

The target population and the selected sample for this study consisted of African-American grandmothers who reported raising their school-aged grandchildren. Participants selected for this phenomenological study came from the three counties that comprise the state of Delaware. Kent County has an estimated population of 169,416 and a median household income of \$55,149 (US Census Bureau, 2014a). Sussex County has an estimated population of 206,649 and household income of approximately \$52,710 (US Census Bureau, 2014b). New Castle County, the largest of the three, has approximately 549,684 residents, with an estimated household income of \$64,537 (US Census Bureau, 2014c). Eight women participated in the study. Participants reported raising between one

and three grandchildren, with ages ranging from 16 months to 14 years. Data saturation came after six in-depth interviews when no further themes evolved. Demographics of the study sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

ID	Age	Grandchildren		Custody			
		<i>n</i>	Ages	Legal	Physical	Length of	Employment
1	66–75	2	7, 13	Yes	FT	10 yrs.	PT
2	56–65	2	10, 13	Yes	FT	13 yrs.	PT
3	56–65	3	8, 10, 14	Yes	FT	5 yrs.	FT
4	56–65	1	6	Yes	PT	2.5 yrs.	Yes
5	66–75	1	11	Yes	FT	10 yrs.	FT
6	66–75	3	16 mo., 10, 16	Yes	FT	* <i>Uns.</i>	PT
7	40–45	3	4, 5, 9	Yes	FT	5 yrs.	Disabled
8	46–55	3	4, 5, 10	Yes	FT	10 yrs.	FT

Note. Grandchildren refers only to custodial grandchildren. ID refers to the participant's code name, i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. **Uns.* indicates unspecified number of years.

Data Collection

Data collection began with the recruitment of participants. Recruitment occurred through community center postings, recommendations from school personnel, church organizations, or personal knowledge of individuals who were aware of African American grandmothers caring for custodial grandchildren. Information was provided regarding how to contact me through email, phone call, or text message. This process continued until a sufficient number of participants were selected for the study.

I utilized two methods of data collection in this study: a demographic survey (see Appendix A) and in-depth interviews (see Appendix B). I administered the surveys and

conducted the interviews within a single meeting with each participant. Prior to beginning data collection, I secured a signed informed consent from each participant and obtained verbal permission to audio record the scheduled interview. Participants completed the demographic survey within approximately 10 minutes. After receiving the survey from the participants, I began the interview. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Once the interviews were complete, I thanked participants for their participation, answered any questions they had concerning the study, and informed them that could contact me directly by telephone if they had any questions at a later date.

Participants were sent transcripts of the interview to check for accuracy within a designated time given by the transcription service. In case of a discrepancy regarding an interview, I contacted the person interviewed by phone for the purpose of clarifying any questions that arose during the transcription of the audio or field note questions by the researcher. For three of the participants, follow-up interviews were held to pursue more deeply themes that emerged. All discrepant cases were recorded, and no changes were made or material deleted from the transcription.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the demographic surveys were compiled and summarized. These data allowed me to offer a thorough description of the study participants. In analyzing the interview data, I began the process with transcription of the interview audio recordings. After completing the interviews, I secured a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews. Through transcription of 29

typed pages of text, I was able to perform textual analysis of the interview data.

To complete textual analysis of the interview data, I utilized the modified Van Kaam method, as described by Moustakas (1994). The following seven steps of the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) were used to analyze the data.

1. Through *horizontalization*, every expression relevant to the experience was listed.
2. Using *reduction* and *elimination*, the invariant constituents were determined by testing each expression to make certain that the data contained the experience and that I could abstract and label the information. Expressions were eliminated if they did not meet the above requirements, and overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions were eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The *horizons* that remained represented the invariant constituents of the experience. During this step I thought through the meaning of each initial code and recoded as needed.
3. Through clustering, connections were defined among the identified themes.
4. Validation of the invariant constituents and themes was accomplished by comparing the identified invariant constituents and themes to the account of each participant.
5. *Individual textural descriptions* of the experience were constructed, including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews.
6. *Individual structural descriptions* of the experience were constructed based on

the individual textural description and imaginative variation.

7. Individual textural and structural descriptions were integrated to arrive at a synthesized composite description of the *essence* of the phenomenon.

I began the process by importing the typed interview transcripts into NVivo. I read through the data several times to develop an overall understanding of the participants' collective responses. Upon repeated readings of the data, tentative themes (invariant constituents) began to emerge from the data. These tentative themes were saved as *Nodes*, or categorical labels, within NVivo. To find further support within the data, I compared these burgeoning themes to other participants' interview responses. When a statement was found that offered support for an identified theme, this excerpt was saved to the appropriate Node within NVivo. Through this process, I was able to refine the themes (invariant constituents) and confirm that they were fully supported and explicated by the data, thereby ensuring that data saturation was achieved (Kolb, 2012).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a concept by which researchers assess the rigor of qualitative research (Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011). As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the evaluation of trustworthiness consists of a four part criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. The methods by which I addressed each of these four principles are described in the subsequent sections.

Credibility is the degree to which the research findings are a true and accurate representation of the phenomenon of study (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). A primary method by

which credibility can be established is through the use of triangulation (Hanson et al., 2011). In this study, I employed triangulation by interviewing multiple participants who could each offer a unique perspective concerning the phenomenon of being a custodial grandparent. By comparing these diverse accounts, I was able to arrive at findings that were supported by the consensus of several individuals.

Member checking is another method by which the credibility of a study is enhanced (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). To implement member checking in this study, participants were sent transcripts of the interview to verify that the transcripts accurately portrayed the discourse that occurred during the interviews and that the themes developed were appropriate (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). In the case of a discrepancy regarding an interview, I contacted the person interviewed by phone for the purpose of clarifying any questions that arose during the transcription. For three of the participants, follow-up interviews were held to pursue more deeply the themes that emerged. Through member checking, I was able to improve the accuracy and completeness of the collected data and improve confidence in the accuracy of the findings resulting from my analysis (Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

Anderson (2010) also cited the examination of contradictory evidence as one method by which credibility is supported. In the analysis of data for this study, I noted evidence which appeared to run counter to the group consensus. In the presentation of the results I will discuss these discrepancies within the context of the larger themes.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be extended to other

participants or settings (Petty et al., 2012). It is primarily the responsibility of the reader to determine the transferability of a study (Hanson et al., 2011). The researcher provides rich description to facilitate the reader's ability to judge the applicability of the findings to other contexts. In this study, I contributed to transferability by offering a demographic description of the purposely-selected study sample (Lietz & Zayas, 2010), and by providing a highly-detailed account of the participants' responses (Petty et al., 2012).

Dependability denotes the extent to which the research findings are stable over time and can be replicated by another researcher (Petty et al., 2012). The creation of an audit trail is one method by which the dependability of a study is enhanced (Leitz & Zayas, 2010). To establish an audit trail I will provide a detailed description of the methodological procedures I employed in the conduct of this study. By detailing the procedures I used to collect, record, and analyze the data for this study, other researchers will be better able to replicate the study and to evaluate the soundness of the research (Hanson et al., 2011). Member checking, as previously described, was also among the strategies that were employed to improve the dependability of this study (Hanson et al., 2011).

Confirmability is the degree to which the research findings reflect the perspectives of the participants as opposed to the biases of the researcher (Hanson et al., 2011; Petty et al., 2012). Triangulation, member checking, the creation of an audit trail are all supported as strategies to achieve confirmability (Petty et al., 2012). In this study, the triangulation of participant interviews from individuals with varying perspectives

supported the confirmability of the study. Further, I utilized member checking to verify the accuracy of the collected data, and ensure that it accurately reflected the participants' expressed views (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Finally, the provision of a detailed account of the procedures for data collection and analysis will allow the reader to follow the process by which the data led to the research findings, and to judge the soundness of the researcher's interpretations (Hanson et al., 2011).

Results

The results of the analysis in this phenomenological study are intended to elucidate the lived experiences of African American grandmothers regarding the education of their custodial grandchildren. I will begin the presentation of results by listing the individual textural and individual structural descriptions for each participant. I will then present a composite textural and composite structural description for all participants combined. Finally, I will present the synthesized composite textural-structural description, which represents the essence of the phenomenon of interest. This composite description will be organized thematically, and presented according to the research question to which each theme pertains.

Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions

Participant 1

Textural description. Participant 1 reported use of books and magazines as educational resources for her and her grandson. In particular, she cited ADHD magazines as helpful aids in learning more about her grandchild's ADHD. She shared that her

grandchild is currently in special education at school and has a “504 plan.” She reported minimal use of the computer by her grandson, but stated that “he may go to it as a reference from time to time.” Participant 1 said that she communicates with her grandson’s teacher through “phone, email, and notes sent to school.” She pointed to tutoring as one tool to improve her grandson’s educational success. Participant 1 did not note any specific challenges relative to her experience as an African American custodial grandmother.

Structural description. Participant 1 claimed chief responsibility for the education of her grandchildren. She avowed, “I am their grandmother first, and I act as a parent. I try to help him as best I can acting as a parent/grandparent.” She depicted the completion of her grandson’s homework as “a struggle,” explaining that “He doesn’t want to do it, and keeping him focused is my job, and [at] times it’s very difficult.” Participant 1 shared that she tries to be an encouraging influence on her grandson by “encourag[ing] different projects that they do in school, asking him how his day was, who his friends are um what’s going on that kind of thing.” Participant 1 declared that she is hopeful concerning her grandson’s academic aspirations, saying, “I expect my grandchild to graduate from high school.” Participant 1 reported “ok” general health, but acknowledged the impact of stress on her life. She revealed, “I do have some issues that from time to time flare up due to the stress and activities that I have to maintain and keep up a pace with. In all and all it probably takes its toll.”

Participant 2

Textural description. Participant 2 reported that she assists her grandson academically by “making sure he is completing his homework.” Participant 2 denied awareness of any educational support programs, but reported that athletic programs are abundant at her grandchild’s school. In providing educational materials to her grandson, Participant 2 divulged that she “order[s] *National Geographic* online for my grandson, and *Time* magazine for kids.” Although she had not yet attended a school conference at the time of interview, she reported, “I am going to the first parent meeting next week to talk about the math test that he didn’t do so well on and see what we can do together to make him more successful in school.” Participant 2 revealed that she is in good health and shared that her motivation to stay healthy is that “I had to stay healthy and fit so that I could go biking and play ball, I had to be active, and not sit on a sofa and watch the cars go by.”

Structural description. Participant 2 affirmed that teachers have primary responsibility for the education of her grandchild but maintained that she is tasked with “backing it up...making sure that whatever they have assigned I support them.” Participant 2 described her role as “a parent and a grandparent.” She continued, “That means I have to be the disciplinarian by taking away privileges when my grandson has not completed his chores or gets poor grades in school. I am a Mom and a Mom Mom.” Participant 2 discussed her use of private tutoring for her grandson, but lamented the high cost of the service. Participant 2 indicated that she finds it challenging to monitor her

grandson's computer usage, but that she makes every effort to do so. She shared that she strives to encourage her grandson academically saying, "I tried to keep his focus off of parties, little teenage parties and encourage him to try to keep up his grades." She expressed a high level of confidence that her grandson will excel in school and reminds him of her expectation that he will attend college.

Participant 3

Textural description. Participant 3 revealed that she communicates with her grandson's teacher primarily through email, as this was specifically requested by the teacher. She disclosed that she attends after school activities and conferences when they are scheduled by her grandson's teacher. In effort to meet her grandson's educational needs, Participant 3 referred to her use of private tutoring. As she explained, however, "The only problem is that it is expensive." She listed the 21st Century Program as an educational support offered by her grandson's school. Participant 3 also reported reading from *Metro Kids* magazine to learn more about parenting. Although computer use is permitted, she shared that her grandson rarely uses it for schoolwork.

Structural description. Participant 3 reasoned that the primary responsibility for her grandchild's education lies with the school. She did, however, offer that "I take care of all of the needs of my grandchild, supplying him with school supplies, giving him a decent place to live." She described the completion of her grandson's homework as "a battle," and reported that she must be persistent until it is finished. Participant 3 expressed her desire to see her grandchildren complete high school and go to college. She

admitted, however, that there is no guarantee that they all will.

Participant 4

Textural description. Participant 4 discussed various education support programs and online supports including the *Khan Academy*. She lauded the benefits of using such programs, especially in light of the great expense associated with private tutoring. She also cited use of *Highlights* magazine in teaching her grandson about art, history, and domestic skills. Participant 4 described her grandson's homework routine saying:

I look over it with him. He sits at his desk and works out the problem, and afterwards he brings it to me. If he knows how to do it, he just starts his homework as soon as he comes home from school, while it is still fresh in his mind.

Due to his age, Participant 4 reported that her grandson does not require a computer to complete his schoolwork. He is, however, allowed to utilize the computer for playing games. Participant 4 mentioned that she attends parent teacher conferences regularly, and that the school is typically responsive to any requests she makes. She reported that her grandson's grandfather, a minister, is active in her grandson's life.

Structural description. Participant 4 asserted that as the grandmother, she has primary responsibility for her grandson's education. She held, "Your most important role for the child is to make sure that they are on track." While Participant 4 expressed concern over teachers' over-recommendation of Black children for special education

classes, she praised the school's educational offerings. She noted, "At that school, they are really good with the kids, and I think they are on top of everything; they take them on field trips, they do everything and have a real well round[ed] educational program at that school." Participant 4 beamed about her grandson's educational prospects and reported that college attendance is an expectation. Although admitting that raising her grandson is "tiring," she maintained that she possesses overall good health.

Participant 5

Textural description. Participant 5 listed "professional tutors and community programs [such as] the girls and boys club" as educational support programs of which she is aware. She also mentioned "peer group learning" and "online help" as useful tools. The completion of homework was described by Participant 5 as a "part of our daily routine." In assisting her grandchild with his homework, she revealed, "If I am aware [of] the particular subject, I will immediately help him. However, if this is a new concept to me, I will seek additional help from either his book or other resources..." Participant 5's grandchildren are allowed to utilize the home computer under the supervision of their grandmother. Participant 5 indicated that she attends after-school activities regularly and maintains a line of communication with her grandchildren's teachers through various means including phone and email.

Structural description. Participant 5 expressed the view that teachers and grandparents have "equal responsibility" in educating her grandson. However, she assigned teachers the role of "expert," viewing them as the primary purveyors of

education. Participant 5 viewed her primary role as a requirement to “parent and accept the understanding that I am the grandmother.” She explained:

I did not give birth to this child; however, it is my responsibility to parent this child as if I was a biological parent to this child. My title as grandparent does not diminish. Rather my title increase by becoming that parent figure who is responsible for the nurturing and protection of this child.

Participant 5 expressed concern with what she viewed as a tendency among non-Black teachers to recommend special education for Black students. She explained, “I think that White teachers are looking for problems and then want to turn to special education.”

Participant 5 accentuated the need to instill a sense of self-confidence in her grandson and cited the work of Maya Angelou as an illustration that “regardless of situations or circumstances in life, regardless of or in spite of adversity, one can learn to be confident in oneself.” Participant 5 advocated the need to provide enriching new experiences for her grandson, saying, “I feel that he needs to continually be exposed to program offerings...I would desire the opportunity for him to travel with me to locations that are diverse, culturally and educationally.” She reported that she believes in making the learning process fun and encourages her grandson’s interest in education through providing fun learning opportunities.

Participant 6

Textural description. Participant 6 described the joint decision-making process she shares with her grandchildren’s mother. She shared “I am the one who goes to

conferences; I'm the one who does the emails because, out of respect for the mother, we are both involved in the decision-making. The final decision we do together." Participant 6 discussed educational support programs offered by her grandchildren's school and by her church. She reported that she often takes her grandchildren to after school programs for assistance with homework. She also shared that she sits with her grandchildren while completing their homework to answer any questions that arise. Participant 6's grandchildren utilize a computer to complete some of their assigned work, but that their usage is monitored. As she explained, "Now my sixteen year old has a little bit more liberty, and so most of the time she is on for about I would say an hour and a half to two hours a night." Participant 6 shared that she checks in frequently with her grandchildren's teachers to ensure that their schoolwork is being completed and they are on track academically.

Structural description. Participant 6 placed great value on the role that she plays as her grandchildren's caretaker. She explained:

I think this is very important. It used to be very early on that families did this anyway. There were extended families. I myself had a grandmother who actually lived with me as I was growing up. She didn't have to do as much as I'm doing but she was of great value.

Participant 6 emphasized the importance of supporting her grandchildren and being attuned to their individual strengths and weaknesses. She discussed her attempts to encourage her grandchildren by providing aspirational and inspirational reading material.

Expressing offense toward the notion of special education, Participant 6 noted that her grandchildren excel in school and reported pride in their academic accomplishments. She stated, “[my] granddaughter, she is actually taking 9th grade classes. She has to be bused to a high school. She is of the gifted and talented.” Participant 6 disclosed the resentment she feels toward her grandchildren’s teachers when they suggest that C’s are an acceptable grade. In her view, this complacency with C grades is tied to some teachers’ biased judgments toward minority students. Participant 6 expressed a belief in the value of acknowledging each of her grandchildren’s unique needs. She asserted that caretakers should “vary [their methods] according to the needs of each of the students; you have different learning styles. You make sure they get certain experiences that will enhance their ability to comprehend certain things in the classroom.” Participant 6 revealed that she believes in celebrating her grandchildren’s accomplishments and making sure they feel supported.

Participant 7

Textural description. Participant 7 discussed the online educational tools that are used by one of her grandchildren. She expressed objections to outdated learning materials, saying, “I think these kids need newer textbooks. Because the books are outdated. They are not getting the information that they needed.” Participant 7 shared that she allows her grandchildren limited time on the computer, and has set up monitoring software to police her grandchildren’s usage. Participant 7 reported that she assists her grandchildren with their homework, but reports that her grandson rarely requires her help.

She indicated that she helps her granddaughter with “math and . . . reading comprehension paragraphs.” While she does have the phone number for her grandchildren's teachers, she reported that she seldom uses it. Participant 7 denied any active involvement from the children's grandfather.

Structural description. Participant 7 expressed a belief in the collective responsibility of the parents and teacher. Participant 7 reported that she envisions herself as a “caretaker” rather than adopting a “parent role.” She reported good general health and attributed her improved fitness to her desire to “participate more fully in [her grandson's] life.” She placed great emphasis on the importance of reading for her grandchildren. She argued, “I don't think kids do enough reading. Most kids read when they absolutely have to read they read.” Participant 7 shared that she was raised to view high school completion as a mandatory requirement, and that she holds her grandchildren to the same standard. She asserted, “They don't have a choice really. That's what our mom and dad told us, that college is option but high school is something we were going to do.”

Participant 8

Textural description. Participant 8 reported that she attends to the needs of her grandchildren when their mother is not present. She maintained that children should pursue educational activities and expressed a disapproval of excessive television watching. To address this need, she researched extracurricular programs in which to enroll her grandchildren. She described active participation in the enrichment of her

grandchildren, despite limited financial resources. She reported that she sought out educational resources at the “Dover Newsstand to help them learn how to write” and “took them to the library during the summer...[and] let them sign out library books.” Participant 8 also discussed the use of extended family as resources to assist her with raising her grandchildren. She reported that “their aunt is with them when I am at work,” and indicated that this aunt usually helps the children to complete their homework. While the children do have access to the Internet at home, their computer use is monitored closely by their grandmother. Participant 8 stated that she remains in touch with her grandchildren’s teachers through phone, email, written notes, and in person. She did, however, report difficulty attending after school activities due to work, but indicated, “if I had to [attend,] I would.”

Structural description. Participant 8 indicated that she feels a joint sense of responsibility for her grandchildren’s education. She expressed the belief that while “it starts at home,” the job of education her grandchildren should be a collaborative effort between teachers and grandparents. Participant 8 reported a great sense of pride and hope in her grandchildren. She expressed confidence in their futures saying, “[They will] all do good things and I’m quite sure that they will [graduate from high school].” She shared that the children’s grandfather is now deceased, but wistfully recalled the time he spent with his grandchildren. Participant 8 maintained that she carries herself in such a way as to engender respectful treatment at her grandchildren’s school. She offered, “Respect that goes a long way.” Participant 8 shared that she is in good health, and reported that she

maintains low stress levels by instilling discipline within her household. As she explained, “I don’t let them stress me. All I have to do is look at them. I just look at them and they know.”

Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

Composite Textural Description

Most participants reported active participation in activities meant to ensure that their grandchildren are academically successful. The participants cited a number of educational support programs and resources that assist them with educating their grandchildren. After-school programs, church programs, private tutoring, and online tools were all listed as helpful resources. In most cases, the children’s grandfathers did not play an active role in their upbringing. Attendance at activities such as school conferences was discussed, though participants generally indicated that this only occurs when requested by the teacher or when an academic problem necessitates it. Participants described having an open line of communication with their grandchildren’s teachers through different mediums. Participants reported that they assist their children in completing schoolwork and seek out educational materials and diverse learning opportunities. Participants did not mention issues related to the grandparents’ authority. Most indicated that they had never encountered any challenges to their authority relative to their grandchildren’s education.

Composite Structural Description

Participants felt a joint sense of responsibility for their grandchildren’s education. They asserted that education should be a collaborative effort between teachers and

grandparents. Participants expressed a high degree of confidence and optimism in regard to their grandchildren's futures. They espoused the expectation that their grandchildren will graduate high school successfully, and pursue higher learning. Some participants shared concerns about the implications of teacher biases on both lowered expectations for African American students and over-reliance on recommendations for special education. Participants expressed a strong sense of duty and commitment to the raising of their grandchildren. Several of the participants indicated that the completion of homework is sometimes challenging but reported that the encouragement and assistance they provide typically enables them to overcome these difficulties. Support and encouragement were mentioned by participants as important components of raising grandchildren. While stress and fatigue are relevant concerns, participants reported overall good health.

Composite Description of the Essence of the Experience

The process of data analysis resulted in the emergence of several themes relative to the research questions. I have organized the results of the study thematically. I will present them in the subsequent sections according to the research question to which they relate.

Central Research Question

The CRQ guiding this study was: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren? I identified five themes in regard to this question and the corresponding subquestions: (a) participants see their role as that of caretaker or surrogate

parent, (b) participants report overall good health, (c) they work actively to encourage their grandchildren's interest in school, (d) they have high expectations for their grandchildren, and (e) they accept some responsibility for their grandchildren's education.

Role as caretaker and surrogate parent. Most participants indicated that they view their role as a caretaker or surrogate parent to their grandchildren. Participants 3, 4, 6, and 7 explained that as grandparents, their role is to protect and provide for the needs of their grandchildren. To this point, Participant 3 offered, "I take care of all of the needs of my grandchild, supplying him with school supplies, giving him a decent place to live." Participant 4 explained this idea in more detail, arguing that her duties include "mak[ing] sure that he is eating properly, going to bed at a consistent and scheduled times... And that he is well cared for, like, protecting him, that he is around people who will do him no harm." Participant 7 emphasized the distinction between her role as a "caretaker" and that of a parent.

Participants 1, 2, 5, and 8 insisted that they see their role as a surrogate parent.

Participant 5 explained her conceptualization of this role saying:

As a grandmother my primary role is to parent and accept the understanding that I am a grandmother. I believe that I first must define my role as a grandparent. I did not give birth to this child; however, it is my responsibility to parent this child as if I was a biological parent to this child.

Participant 1 offered a similar account, saying, "I am their grandmother first and I

act as a parent. I try to help him as best I can acting as a parent/grandparent.” Participant 2 backed up this point, stating, “My role is to be a parent and a grandparent.”

Good health. All participants generally reported being in good health overall. Participant 5 explained, “I would say my general health is good. It has not adversely change[d]; however, it causes me to exercise more frequent[ly] so that I can be an example to him and participate more fully in his life.” Participant 3 reported having diabetes, but claimed good health otherwise. Participant 2 held, “My general health is fine and I think that it improved. I had to stay healthy and fit so that I could go biking and play ball, I had to be active.”

Participant 6 described her experience as a custodial grandparent as “a struggle” on some days, but listed no specific medical issues. Participant 6 revealed that she mitigates adverse effects on her health by enlisting the help of her grandchildren:

Well to be honest with you some days it’s a struggle and other days since I have a sixteen year old and a ten year old, and they’ve been raised to know that they have obligations it is a help. It is a win win situation. So my health because of this does not suffer so.

Encouraging child’s interest in school. Seven of the eight participants reported that they encourage their grandchildren’s interest in school through various means. Four participants maintained that they inspire their grandchildren’s interest by talking about school and asking them relevant questions. Participant 4 shared that she encourages her grandchild “by always asking about school and having resources at home that he can use

to help him with whatever he is studying at that time.” Participant 1 offered a similar account, claiming that she provides encouragement to her grandchild “by talking about it, by trying to encourage different projects that they do in school, asking him how his day was, who his friends are, um, what’s going on, that kind of thing.”

Several other participants asserted that they encourage their grandchildren’s interest through offering support and encouragement. Participant 2 offered, “I keep encouraging him that he wants to be successful that he wants to get into high school and get into an honors class if he can.” Participant 5 affirmed that she inspires her grandchild by “making the learning process fun.” Participant 7 offered, “For one thing I get them to read as much as possible. I don’t think kids do enough reading. Most kids read when they absolutely have to read, they read.” Celebration of accomplishments was mentioned by Participant 6 as a method by which she encourages educational success in her home.

High expectations for grandchildren. Every participant indicated that she has high expectations for her grandchild’s academic achievement and future success.

Participant 4 expressed certainty of her grandson’s future success, stating:

I’m really very confident that he will graduate and go on to college. He is one of those kids who really enjoys learning. One time I asked him what he wants to do and...I think he wants to be a doctor.

Participant 5 expressed a similar level of confidence, asserting, “With God’s help, there is no concern that he will not graduate. At this season in his life, I believe he desires to specialize in the field of computer technology. This is an area where he excels...” All

participants indicated an expectation that their grandchildren would complete high school successfully. Participant 1 opined, “I am certainly hoping that college or a technical school will be his aim. It may be more technical than college, depending on how he does in high school with his ADHD.” While college degrees were the reported goal of most participants, Participant 6 reported a desire for her grandchildren to pursue Master’s degree or to become PhDs.

Responsibility for education of grandchildren. With one exception, all participants acknowledged having some responsibility for the educational success of their grandchildren. Participants 1, 4, and 6 argued that they have primary responsibility for the grandchildren’s education. Participant 4 held, “I am responsible for making sure that he understands what is being taught in school. It is the parent’s responsibility... Your most important role for the child is to make sure that they are on track.”

Four of the participants asserted that teachers and grandparents share a joint responsibility for their grandchildren’s education. Participant 5 explained:

I would tend to say the teacher would be primary. The reason I say that [is] because she is the expert. You have to work together. She teaches it to make it understood in theory, and then as a grandparent, I would constantly make sure that my grandchild understood it. Teachers don’t have the time to teach one on every day. Equal responsibility in a sense.

Participants 7 and 8 both maintain that the education of their grandchildren is dependent upon a combination of parental and teacher responsibility. Participant 2 agreed

with this idea, suggesting, “I think the teachers are primarily responsible, but I am here to back it up... I support them and make sure he is completing his homework and that he is overall prepared for school.”

Subquestion 1

SQL in this study was: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren? I found four themes relative to this subquestion: (a) a lack of perceived challenges, (b) combatting stereotypes and lowered expectations, (c) dealing with homework, and (d) dealing with stress.

Lack of perceived challenges. When asked directly to discuss the challenges they encounter as African American grandmothers with custodial grandchildren, six of the eight participants reported experiencing no significant challenges. Participant 7 responded, “I don’t know of any that I can think of.” Participant 4 also denied experiencing any major challenged saying, “No not really. Last year I would have said something different. The teacher is on top of everything; if there are any issues she would let you know.” While several participants mentioned issues throughout the interviews that can be viewed as challenges, only Participants 5 and 6 articulated specific challenges in response to this direct question. These challenges, as well as those mentioned indirectly by other participants, inform the other themes presented in response to Subquestion 1.

Combatting stereotyping and lowered expectations. Three of the participants discussed the challenges of overcoming stereotypes and low expectations from teachers in regard to their grandchildren. Participant 5 expressed her concerns about stereotyping

of African Americans, saying:

I believe there are challenges generally speaking in raising a grandchild; however, as an African American, special challenges are more intense...many times we are judged by how we look, not how we think. I believe special challenges are apparent when we attempt to enroll in certain curriculum.

Participant 4 also discussed the problem of stereotyping arguing, "I think that White teachers are looking for problems and then want to turn to special education. We are fine now, but it was always my concern with the teachers and always pointing to special ed. for Black children." Participant 6 also observed that teachers sometimes express lower expectations for Black students. She shared, "The challenge that I face is that sometimes there's not the expectation from the teachers that I would like for it to be, and therefore, I have to be the one to suggest that my child can do more." Participant 6 added that she finds it challenging to interact with teachers "who feel as though because you are a minority that C's are ok in your household."

Dealing with homework. Several participants expressed challenges related to assisting their grandchildren with homework and ensuring that it is completed. Participant 1 stated, "Homework is a struggle. He doesn't want to do it, and keeping him focused is my job and at times it's very difficult." Participant 3 shared a similar experience, arguing, "It seems that I have to [stay] on my grandchild in order to get the homework finished right. I sit with him, and it is a battle." Participant 1 noted the difficulty she has with assisting her grandchild with homework due to lack of familiarity with the concepts he is

learning. She explained, “The way they do it is really foreign to me now because it’s completely different from the way I was taught and how I would tackle a problem and that causes problems.”

Despite these challenges, many participants offered successful methods for overcoming them. Participant 5 declared:

Though my grandchild has experienced a full day at school, he is fully aware that homework written or oral is a part of our daily routine... if he has questions, he will ask me for assistance. If I am aware [of] the particular subject, I will immediately help him. However, if this is a new concept to me, I will seek additional help from either his book or other resources in order that I can help him.

Participant 8 shared that she enlists the assistance of her grandchildren’s aunt to help them with homework while she is at work. Participants 4 and 7 maintained that they sit and review their grandchildren’s homework with them to assist with any difficult portions of the assignment. Participant 6 described her routine in detail saying:

Well on a daily basis, I help with the homework by taking some days we go to the after school program. The days they don’t go to the after school program, naturally we meet at the table and I help them. I don’t send them to the bedroom because I know from being a past educator that they don’t often know some of the questions that they should ask, and they can’t do their homework alone.

Dealing with stress. Three participants discussed the challenge of managing the

stress associated with raising their grandchildren. Participant 1 reported, “I do have some issues that from time to time flare up due to the stress and activities that I have to maintain and keep up a pace with. In all and all it probably takes its toll.” Participant 7 backed up this point, asserting, “Wow! It stresses you out a lot. I love them but they do.” Participant 8 also discussed the impact of stress, but maintained that she does not let it affect her. She claimed, “General health is good because I don’t let them stress me. All I have to do is look at them. I just look at them and they know.”

Subquestion 2

SQ2 was: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren? I discovered four themes pertaining to this subquestion: (a) magazines and books, (b) school-based programs and activities, (c) online resources, and (d) churches and community organizations.

Magazines and books. Seven of the eight participants mentioned magazines and books as a helpful educational resource. *National Geographic* and *Time* magazines were shared by Participant 2 as effective resources. Participant 4 revealed, “I subscribe to the *Highlights* magazine and it has a lot of different stories in it, of course. It’s got a lot of things in there like art projects for kids to do, recipes for kids to make.” Participant 3 reported findings helpful parenting articles in *Metro Kids* magazine.

Several other participants discussed the use of books as educational resources. Participant 8 shared, “I took [my grandchildren] to the library during the summer, and let

them stay for an hour and a half or so. I took them to places that were educational. I let them sign out library books.” Participant 7 also mentioned the use of educational workbooks “to help in tracing letters.” Participant 5 praised the poetry of Maya Angelou, saying, “For a child particularly, the work ‘[Still] I Rise’ shows that regardless of situations or circumstances in life, regardless of or in spite of adversity, one can learn to be confident in oneself.” Books were supported as educational resources for grandchildren and grandparents as well. Adding further support for the use of books, Participant 1 remarked, “My oldest son has ADHD, so I’ve gotten a lot of valuable information from a book by Ruth Neven.”

School-based programs and activities. Four of the eight participants referred to the support provided through school-based activities and programs. Lauding her grandson’s school, Participant 4 commented, “At that school, they are really good with the kids, and I think they are on top of everything; they take them on field trips, they do everything and have a real well round[ed] educational program at that school.” Participant 6 similarly named Math League among the extracurricular activities offered her grandchildren’s school. The 21st Century Program Learning Centers Program was listed by Participant 3 as an educational support program at her grandchildren’s school. In addition to extracurricular offerings, Participant 1 also commended in-school accommodations for her grandchild. Participant 1 revealed, “My grandchild is in special education. He has a 504 plan, and that and meeting with the teachers is very helpful.”

Online resources. While all participants reported having Internet access in the home, three participants mentioned the use of web-based resources as helpful educational supports. The Khan University was cited by Participant 4 as helpful online resources. She elaborated, saying, “They have all kinds of resources with different topics of study such as math, science. You can get your answers to questions about how to do a certain problem.” Participant 7 offered “ABCmouse.com” as a useful resource, explaining that “it is for children ages 2- 6 or 7... [and it] teaches the letters and the sounds.” Participant 5 suggested that other online resources can be found through the Google search engine.

Churches and community organizations. Two participants listed programs and activities sponsored by churches and community organizations as useful sources of support. Participant 6 described the educational support programs offered by local community organizations and churches, stating:

The sororities have things for the children to do to help them with their ethics and value system. Ah, for my small ones, they have the little choir at the church, and also we have a youth forum and groups in which the children are able to talk to one another. We also have a class called “Saving Our Daughters” at the church, which we deal with helping children make good decisions.

Participant 5 offered more support to this theme saying, “I am also aware that some churches provide tutoring using classroom teachers who volunteer after school. Participant 5 also highlighted community organizations, naming the Boys and Girls Club as one useful resource.

Subquestion 3

SQ3 queried the following: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren? I observed three themes in regard to this subquestion: (a) more opportunities for exposure, (b) affordable tutoring, and (c) newer learning materials.

More opportunities for exposure. Among participants, several stated that their grandchildren would benefit from being exposed to more educational experiences.

Participant 5 emphasized the importance of enriching education experiences, saying, “I feel that he needs to continually be exposed to program offerings...to increase his knowledge, particularly the basics. In addition, I would desire the opportunity for him to travel with me to locations that are diverse, culturally and educationally.” Participant 6 also spoke to this idea, explaining, “There are different things that you do to enhance the growth of each child... You make sure they get certain experiences that will enhance their ability to comprehend certain things in the classroom.”

Affordable tutoring. Three of the participants cited affordable tutoring as a tool that could assist them with addressing the educational needs of their grandchildren. Participant 1 shared, “Tutoring I think is a really good thing that would help to improve. Certainly he has difficulty with math, and tutoring could certainly help him.” Participant 2 also discussed the importance of tutoring but noted the issue of service cost, saying, “Tutoring is a service that I now pay for, but I do wish there were a facility where I could get it free or a discount at least.” Participant 3 echoed concerns about cost of tutoring,

saying, “The only problem is that it is expensive.”

Newer learning materials. Multiple participants suggested newer learning materials as a resource that could help them in meeting their grandchildren’s educational needs. To this point, Participant 8 stated, “I’m thinking that the outdated equipment need to be updated.” Participant 7 agreed with this idea, reporting, “I think these kids need newer textbooks. Because the books are outdated. They are not getting the information that they needed.”

Subquestion 4

SQ4 in this study was, what role, if any, does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild? I discovered two themes in relation to this subquestion. Participants were evenly split in terms of the involvement of the children’s grandfathers in their grandchildren’s education. While half of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 7) reported that the children’s grandfathers were not actively involved in the children’s education, the other half acknowledged that the grandfather does play or has played an active role.

Grandfather non-involvement. Four of the eight participants reported that the children’s grandfather had no active role in addressing the children’s educational needs. The reasons offered for the grandfather’s absence varied from participant to participant. Participant 1 cited divorce as the reason for the grandfather’s lack of involvement, describing him as “out of the picture.” Other participants cited general apathy on the part of the grandfather. To this point, Participant 2 indicated that “the grandfather takes no

interest in the grandchild.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated, “We never hear from him.”

Active grandfather involvement. Conversely, four participants reported that the grandfather does or did play an active role in the education of their grandchildren. Participant 6 reported that her grandchildren’s grandfather is actively involved with the grandchildren. Participant 4 reported that her grandson’s grandfather is a minister, and that he encourages a sense of self-efficacy in their grandson. In the cases of Participants 5 and 8, the grandfather is now deceased but did play an active role with the grandchildren while he was alive. Participant 5 shared the following:

Unfortunately [he] is deceased. He has passed away. However, when he was living, he was involved, and they interacted together with doing so much [*sic*] things as fishing, hunting, sports games. Even [though] he was young, he would sit with him and share stories of his youth.

Data Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the lived experiences of African American grandmothers who are raising their school-aged grandchildren in regard to coping with the educational challenges of their grandchildren. Four questions guided this inquiry. The central research question was, what are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren? The four research subquestions were the following: (a) What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren? (b) What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in

assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren? (c) What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren?, and (d) What role, if any, does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild?

In this phenomenological study, I utilized a demographic survey and a face-to-face interview as the tools of data collection. Eight participants comprised the sample and offered information concerning their lived experiences as grandparents. Textual analysis of the interview data resulted in the emergence of several themes. In regard to the central research question, I discovered 5 themes: (a) participants see their role as that of caretaker or surrogate parent, (b) participants report overall good health, (c) they work actively to encourage their grandchildren's interest in school, (d) they have high expectations for their grandchildren, and (e) they accept some responsibility for their grandchildren's education.

Relative to research subquestion 1, I discovered four themes: (a) a lack of perceived challenges, (b) combatting stereotypes and lowered expectations, (c) dealing with homework, and (d) dealing with stress. In relation to research subquestion 2, I found four themes: (a) magazines and books, (b) school-based programs and activities, (c) online resources, and (d) churches and community organizations. Regarding research subquestion 3, I uncovered three themes: (a) more opportunities for exposure to enriching educational activities, (b) affordable tutoring, and (c) newer learning materials. In reference to research subquestion 4, I encountered two themes: (a) grandfather non-

involvement and (b) active grandfather involvement with meeting the educational needs of the grandchildren.

In the course of the analysis, discrepant cases were discussed within the context of the themes and presented alongside the other evidence. For the central research question, Participant 6 was noted as a discrepant case and discussed within the context of the good health theme. For subquestion 1, Participants 5 and 6 were cited as discrepant cases and discussed within the context of the perceived lack of challenges theme. Finally, for subquestion 4, an even split among the participants was discussed and presented as two conflicting themes.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I began by listing the research questions, which guided the research. I then described the research setting and provided demographics of the sample utilized in this study. I then explained the procedures I employed to collect data and the procedures used to analyze the collected data. Next, I presented the results of the data analysis in this phenomenological study, including the individual textual and structural descriptions for each participant. Then, I displayed the composite textual and composite structural descriptions. Finally, I presented the composite description of the essence of the experience. In the next chapter of this paper, I will begin by briefly recapitulating the results of the study. I will then present a discussion of the implications of the study findings within the context of the existing literature. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to reveal the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of custodial African American grandmothers caring for their school-aged grandchildren. This study revealed how these African American grandmothers were meeting the educational needs of their grandchildren. This phenomenological qualitative study used interpretivism to describe the individual experiences through interviews with the African American grandmothers.

Eight participants shared their perceptions and lived experiences as grandmothers raising their school-aged grandchildren. The guiding question in this study was: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren? Five themes emerged from the analysis of data: (a) participants see their role as that of a caretaker or surrogate parent, (b) participants reported overall good health, (c) they worked actively to encourage their grandchildren 's interest in school, (d) they have high expectations for their grandchildren, and (e) they accept some responsibility for their grandchildren's education. The identity of each participant was protected when the data were collected.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

In addition to the main research question, I also sought to answer the following subquestions:

SQ1: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

SQ2: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers

found effective in assisting them with the education challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

SQ2: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmother found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ3: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the education needs of their custodial grandchildren?

SQ4: What role, if any does the grandfather play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-aged grandchild?

Challenges regarding education of the grandchildren varied from *little to no stress* to *stressful* while attempting to maintain a high level of care for their grandchildren. One participant believed that because she is a grandmother, there was great importance attached to maintaining her health. Overall, the desire of the grandmothers was to be able to assist their grandchildren to be successful and further their education after high school. None of those interviewed doubted that their grandchildren would graduate from high school. All encouraged their grandchildren to strive for success and read books regularly.

These grandmothers searched for academic opportunities to address the overall cultural and educational needs of the grandchildren. Educational books, magazines, and online educational tools were valuable instructional assets for these grandmothers, which could be offered to the grandchildren. After-school programs were desired to assist the grandchildren with supplemental academic assistance. Regular encouragement related to accomplishments and struggles was also seen as beneficial. Aspirations for college were

paramount, according to these grandmothers, and directing their grandchildren toward a higher education was important.

Grandfathers, for half of the interviewees, were absent from the grandchildren's lives. One grandfather died, but the others were not in contact with the grandchildren for reasons that were not revealed. Although these grandfathers were absent, there was an authenticity in the desire by the grandmothers to have the grandfather involved in the grandchildren's lives.

Theme 1: Participants See Their Role as That of Caretaker or Surrogate Parent

All participants viewed themselves as surrogate parents to their grandchildren. These grandmothers viewed their role as a protector and provider for the grandchildren. This theme aligned with the current literature, which states that grandmothers have to find housing, medical care, and childcare services for their unexpected second family (Smith, Patrick, & Palmieri, 2007).

Theme 2: The Grandmother's Health Was Good

This finding does not support Smith et al.'s (2007) finding that these caregivers tend to have poor mental and physical health: weight problems, high blood pressure, alcohol abuse, and smoking, placing the grandparents at risk for cardiovascular disease and cancer (Health Publications, 2007). Taylor, Washington, Artinian, and Lichtenberg (2007) noted physical factors that lead to physical deterioration of the body. The health of the participants in this study was good, and they were motivated by being responsible for the care of their grandchildren to remain in good health. Stress was a concern, but one

participant stated that she did not allow the grandchildren to stress her.

Theme 3: Encouraging the Child's Interest in School

Seven of the eight participants reported that they encouraged their grandchildren with school. Research confirms that grandparents are important and are able to give students individual attention and show that they care about them. Most of these grandparents are educated and not ready to retire from the work force (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). According to Wright (2009), a grandmother studied regularly and reviewed school assignments as she drove her grandchildren home from school. The participants in this study encouraged education and were actively involved in educating their grandchildren, through different means such as books, magazines, after school supplemental activities, and online resources. Interview questions did not specifically ask if the grandmothers were educated; therefore, no data from this study explores the education of the grandmothers.

These grandmothers felt that success in education was dependent on building a strong relationship between the school and the family. According to Miller (2008), if the educational system maintains a connection with the family, the likelihood of school success increases. Baker (2008) found that children in grandparent headed households repeated one grade and 26% were in special education programs.

Participant 1 stated that her grandson is currently in a special education program. This grandmother did not reveal any challenges related to this program. Continual encouragement of the grandchild's goals persisted in spite of the fact that the grandchild

was in special education. The participant was determined to see her grandchild succeed in spite of the obstacle of special education placement.

Participants wanted to remain active and participate in community activities (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). Many grandmothers volunteer to assist teachers with teaching children. The Delaware YMCA has a grandparent program that helps grandparents learn how to assist students and teachers with daily routines. Musil and Warner (2009) found that grandparents often realize that it is easy for teenagers and young adults to follow a life path that does not involve advanced education that they prefer for them. The grandmothers in this current study encouraged academic and practical approaches to education to ensure that their grandchildren became contributing adults in society.

Theme 4: Grandmothers had High Expectations for Their Grandchildren

Each participant expressed confidence that her grandchild or grandchildren would attend college. I found that these African American grandmothers have high expectations for their grandchildren to attend college in the future. Participant 6 stated that it was her desire to see her grandchildren pursue master's degrees or become PhDs. The African American grandmothers in this study are actively involved in their grandchildren's education by assisting with homework or attaining the necessary services to have them tutored. Mitchell (2008) noted the importance of intergenerational learning between grandmothers, and their grandchildren. This assistance occurred when the grandparents volunteered to help inside the classroom. It is these grandparents who review school

assignments, and discuss the progress of the grandchild in the absence of the parents and hold high expectations for their grandchild's academic success. These high expectations start when the grandchild is quite young.

Theme 5: Grandparents Assume Responsibility for Their Grandchildren's Education

All the participants reported attending parent conferences with teachers. According to Silverstein (2007), many grandparents take the time to play board games and backgammon and do puzzles. Monserud (2010) found that these activities contribute to the informal education of the grandchildren.

Answering the Guiding Research Question

The first research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of African American grandmothers in relation to providing for the educational needs of custodial school-aged grandchildren? The lived experiences of these grandmothers were revealed in the identified themes. Grandmothers saw themselves as surrogate parents. Maintaining good health contributed to the ability of the African American grandmother to function and interact with her grandchildren. Encouragement from the grandmother reinforced values that the grandmother attempted to convey to the grandchildren.

The African American grandmothers in this study maintained high expectations for their grandchildren with regard to higher learning following high school. Responsibility for the grandchildren's education was believed to be that of the grandmother. Participant 1 used books and magazines. Participants 2 and 5 made sure

that homework was completed each day. Participants 3 and 6 communicated with the teacher through email regarding her grandchildren's education. Participant 3 utilized private tutoring to assist with certain educational needs. Educational support programs offered at the Boys and Girls Club were found to be helpful to some. Participant 7 stated that her grandchild worked independently and did not need help with homework. Participant 8 used the newsstand to find educational materials or attended the local library, which assisted in helping her grandchildren.

Subquestion 1

SQ1 in this study was: What are the educational challenges of parenting custodial grandchildren?

Some of the challenges mentioned included stress, setting high expectations, and assisting with homework. Six participants indicated no significant challenges. Three participants expressed overcoming low expectations from teachers when referring to their grandchildren. One participant stated that there is a stereotype by teachers that "C's" are acceptable in households of African American children. Homework assistance was another challenge expressed by several participants. This challenge was primarily because of the fact that concepts involved with learning are different today. A few other participants stated that it is difficult to get the grandchildren to complete homework without prodding them through the process.

Managing stress was a slight problem with several of the participants, but their love for their grandchildren helped these grandmothers to manage it so that there was no

toll on them physically. Keeping up the pace sometimes causes stress because of the activity demand of raising a grandchild. Participant 8 explained that she does not allow the stress to adversely affect her negatively by giving her grandchildren silent facial signals.

Subquestion 2

SQ2 asked: What types of support and strategies have African American grandmothers found effective in assisting them with the education of their custodial grandchildren?

African American grandmothers in this study used written literature such as books, magazines, as well as online resources to help them effectively assist their grandchildren at home with educational needs. School based programs along with churches, and community organizations were helpful as well. One participant used educational magazines such as *National Geographic* and *Highlights*. Another used *Metro Kids*, a parent magazine to gain knowledge and ideas regarding the education of their grandchild or grandchildren. The library was used as an educational resource used on a regular basis. Grandmothers also found online resources to be helpful when assisting them with homework and school lessons.

After school programs such as the 21st Century were helpful for some African American grandmothers to help enrich their grandchildren through extracurricular activities. Special education programs utilizing the 504 Plan were helpful to the African American grandmother who had a grandson enrolled in special education. Churches were

considered helpful to a few African American grandmothers because they contributed to the ethical and value system of the grandchildren. Online resources were also found to be of great value.

Subquestion 3

SQ3 questioned: What types of resources would grandmothers suggest in assisting them in meeting the educational needs of their custodial grandchildren?

African American grandmothers in this study looked for opportunities for academic exposure for their grandchildren, more educational materials and affordable tutoring. Continued exposure to these opportunities may enrich the children's educational experiences and enhance their academic growth. Tutoring was noted as a desired service, but the cost of this service was often too high. One participant suggested that the supplemental written materials provided in the schools were often outdated.

Subquestion 4

SQ4 in this study inquired: What role if any do the grandfathers play in providing for and responding to the educational needs of the school-age grandchild?

The grandfathers overall did not play active roles in the grandchildren's lives. Roles regarding rearing of children in the family rests primarily on the grandmother (Cuddenback, 2004). Grandfather roles were missing from the research regarding the grandchildren. The grandmother's importance in the grandchild and their supportive role was determined by Barber (2010) with reference to the spirituality, bonding, and critical values, but no reference to the grandfather is given.

This study revealed no primary roles involving the grandfathers of the custodial grandchildren, and confirmed findings by other researchers. Newhart (2010) found that when these grandmothers were married, they experienced less caregiver stress.

Research Reflections

Reflections reveal what the participants in the study experienced and the insights that these experiences offered to the reader of this phenomenological study. The participants explained their experiences as African American grandmothers regarding the education of their grandchildren, and how much they loved them and expected these children to love themselves, and have high goals.

During the entire study, I bracketed my personal feelings and attempted to put aside all presuppositions and biases from my own experience as a custodial African American grandmother to capture the full richness of the participants' experiences. I recorded and carefully reviewed the participants' perceptions to maintain the integrity of the data collected and conducted all interviews with professionalism and objectivity. I listened and then re-listened to the participants' individual stories. I carefully followed the research protocol as closely as possible and made every effort to respect each participant as a valuable source of information. In doing this, I was surprised to find that African American grandmothers were dedicated to ensuring that their grandchildren were college-bound, contrary to my past understandings. Understanding the experiences of these women helped me reflect on my own experiences and my high expectations of my own custodial grandchildren. In hindsight, I should have asked about the participant's

educational backgrounds and whether they were raised by grandparents.

One commonality was that most of the African American grandparents highlighted the importance of higher education after public education. The participating grandmothers also noted that after-school activities such as tutoring were vital to the educational goals. Despite limited income, the African American grandmothers wanted to be in the position to offer, and equip their grandchildren with the tools to experience, the best educational opportunities available. It was disturbing to see that a high percentage of African American grandfathers were not involved in the social or educational aspect of the grandchildren's lives.

Limitations of the Current Study

This study was a qualitative phenomenological study of African American grandmothers in the state of Delaware. Due to the small sample size and the use of purposeful sampling, the generalizability of the findings is limited and may not be applicable to other races or genders. Although the ability to generalize applies only to certain types of quantitative methods, transferability may apply. Unlike generalizability, transferability does not involve broad claims. I invite readers to make connections between elements of this study and their own experience. Transferability was enhanced by including the research context and the assumptions central to the study. The person who wishes to 'transfer' the results to a different context is responsible for making the judgment of how applicable the transfer is. Confirmability of the findings were enhanced by using member checking. As the qualitative author, I provided rich, thick description

regarding the setting, participants, procedures, interactions, to establish the boundaries and parameters of the study.

Recommendations for Action

The following recommendations resulted from the study findings.

- As African American grandmothers increasingly become surrogate custodial parents to grandchildren, there is a need for school districts to continue to build relationships and expand their outreach efforts with these women. Perhaps schools can help women in similar positions network with each other to provide support.
- Educating their grandchildren is a serious responsibility for these African American grandmothers, and there is a need for effective support groups and more affordable services to assist them such as tutoring. I recommend a center where grandparents can go to receive services regarding child finance, computer services where they can access available online resources, a small library with available resources, and counseling assistance to help with the day-to-day challenges that occur. Since many of these grandparents work, it would be important to provide flexible hours of service. This facility would have a director, counselor, financial advisor, day care advisor, and a basic exercise facility. Low cost tutoring, and mentors for grandchildren would be of value. A facility such as this could be invaluable to a grandparent who needs respite for the smaller children during the day, and a place to voice their

concerns regarding their care of a grandchild.

- Because some teachers suggested that the grandmothers should lower their expectations concerning grades and academic achievement for their grandchildren, the teachers as well as the grandparents may benefit from training for these teachers regarding how to work appropriately with custodial grandparents and other non-traditional guardians caring for school age children.
- Optional training for grandparents in the form of free parenting classes could be of value, especially for custodial grandfathers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies might target different geographic regions and different socio-economic classes when researching African American grandmothers as they may yield different findings as a result of differing lifestyle. Another phenomenological study might focus on a comparative analysis of Caucasian American grandmothers and African American grandmothers to research if there are any differences in the method they are raising their grandchildren. Expectations for each group could be further analyzed in an effort to glean insight on the grandmothers' foundation for the expectation of their grandchild's success.

I did not inquire about the educational backgrounds of the grandmothers in this study. It is possible that they were all highly educated, and I may have discovered different findings if the participants were less educated. Future studies should explore the

grandmother's educational background more thoroughly.

To explore the discrepancies between this study and prior research, future studies should consider exploring these inconsistencies. For example, some studies (for example Musil et al., 2005) showed that grandmothers raising children experienced stress and health issues, but in this study, stress and grandmothers' health did not appear to be major issues. Future studies could approach this discrepancy via a quantitative or mixed method to explore the level of difficulties raising children, and then correlate those findings to reported health and levels of stress as indicated by using Likert-type scales.

Implications for Social Change

This study might help social service state organizations to view African American grandmothers as attentive caregivers to their grandchildren. The study updates the most recent research and reflects the 21st century custodial arrangements for African American grandmothers. Policy makers who seek information about the issues facing these *grandfamilies* could use the findings from the study and help support appropriate programs such as after-school care and low cost academic tutoring, as well as provide places where these grandparents can network. A social change goal is to disseminate this information to school administrators who are in a position to implement programs that would offer assistance to grandchildren of these custodial caregiver surrogate parents.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study involved the lived experiences of African American grandmothers regarding the education of their school-aged

grandchildren. The research included the use of NVivo software to analyze the themes revealed in the study. Common themes were extracted from the interviews of 8 African American grandmothers. These five themes revealed themselves through textual and structural description using the collected data and revealed that custodial African American grandmothers are invested in their grandchild's academic success. The most important thing I learned from this study is the strength and compassion of these women.

For this information to be used properly, those receiving it, such as government agencies and schools, must consider doing a study of their African American custodial grandparent population to determine actual types of personal support and support needs for the grandchildren. These studies may find that more academic assistance is required. Results of this study revealed that African American grandmother caregivers need more financial and academic assistance when assisting their grandchildren with subjects that are challenging such as mathematics. African American grandmothers may also benefit from personal support regarding the promotion of reasonable but high expectations for their custodial grandchildren. Researchers may use this study as a means to develop educational resources to assist custodial African American grandmothers in ensuring the academic success of their grandchildren. Families come in all different configurations. It is critical that society understand the role of the family in promoting the well-being of children and provide necessary support to help educate each child.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions Part A

Please complete the following survey questions prior to the oral questions administered by the researcher, Valarie Boyer. If you prefer not to respond to a question please respond to the researcher with the words not applicable. This information will be collected in the presence of the participants by the researcher.

1. Name of Interviewee, Address, and Telephone Number
2. Date:
3. Time:
4. Location: (To be completed by the Researcher)
5. What is the age of your grandchild?
6. What grade is your grandchild in school?
7. When did the child first begin to live with you?
8. What is your first name only? (This information is for the interview only not to be displayed in the research analysis.) _____
9. What is your age? Check one:
 - 38-45 ()
 - 46-55 ()
 - 56-65 ()
 - 66-75 ()
 - 76-85 ()
 - 86 + ()

10. Do you have legal custody of your grandchild?
11. How long have you had custody?
12. Are you currently employed?
13. In what ways are your grandchild's parents involved in supporting his /her education, if any.
14. Does your grandchild live with you full time or part time?

Appendix B: Interview Questions Part B

Questions Specifically Regarding the Education of the Child

1. Who do you believe is primarily responsible for making sure that your child understands what is being taught in school?
2. Describe your role as a grandmother and a parent to your grandchild.
3. Describe any educational support programs that are available to you in order to help your grandchild succeed in school.
4. Have you found any literary sources such as books, magazines, historical documents and poems that help you with your grandchild's education? Please explain.
5. Please describe any additional educational services, such as special education services or other programs that would be of value to you and your grandchild.
6. Please tell me about how your grandchild deals with homework and any role you play.
7. Is there a computer with Internet access in the home? If so, how long does your child spend on the computer doing schoolwork each day? Do you supervise his or her use of the computer?
8. Are you able to contact your child's teacher through email or phone (or by written notes or in person)?
9. What do you think can be done to improve your child's education?
10. How often do you attend after-school activities such as parent teacher meetings?
11. How do you help to maintain your grandchild's interest in school?
12. If you have a custody document, how does it help you when interacting with your

grandchild at school?

13. As an African American grandmother caring for a grandchild, do you believe there are any special challenges you face when dealing with your grandchild's education?
14. What do you envision your child doing when he or she graduates high school? Is there any concern that he or she might not graduate from high school?
15. Is the child's grandfather involved with his or her upbringing? Please explain.
16. How would you describe your general health, and has it changed after caring for your grandchild?
17. Describe your role as a grandmother and a parent to your grandchild.
18. Are your grandchildren of the one race or mixed race? If mixed race, what challenges, if any, does this present? (If so indicate the racial background of each grandchild)

Appendix C: Informed Consent

**INFORMED CONSENT: PARTICIPANTS 18 YEARS OF AGE AND
OLDER**

Dear _____.

My name is Valarie Boyer and I am a student at Walden University. I am conducting a research study entitled, A Phenomenological Study of Custodial African American Grandmothers Regarding Education of Their School-Age Grandchildren

The purpose of this research study is to record and describe the lived experiences of grandmothers to determine how they are coping with their situation and what support systems are needed to assist them and help them assist their grandchildren.

Your participation will involve voluntarily completing this questionnaire and an in-depth, face-to-face interview where you will be asked questions about your lived experiences as you care for school-aged grandchildren. The face-to-face interview could be accomplished in 1.5 hours. Your participation has been requested because you have been identified as a custodial African American grandmother caring for a school-aged grandchild.

Any question that you would rather not answer can remain unanswered. There is no pressure to answer any of the questions, but rather it is hoped that you will willingly and honestly answer all the interview questions. At any point during the interview you may withdraw from the study and questioning. If you have any questions about the research at this time please feel free to ask. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant please call (612-312-1210) or email irb@waldenu.edu.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that it will add to the research in the area of African American

grandmothers caring for school-aged grandchildren. The study will identify resources that grandmothers find which are helpful when raising their grandchildren.

Confidentiality

The information solicited in this study will remain totally confidential and anonymous. Any information acquired virtually will be stored in secure servers that only the researcher can access. The interviews will be in sole possession of the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded into the researcher's laptop. No participant's name will be shared with anyone and only the researcher will have access to any information or other data.

Incentives to Participate

Participants in the study will not be paid for their participation.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time.

Questions about the Study

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have any questions later about the research, you may contact me at 302-222-0392 or by email at vboyer3@comcast.net

The participant should keep/print a copy of the consent form.

Agreement

I acknowledge that I understand the nature of the study, and the means by which my identity will be kept confidential. My signature below indicates that I am over the age of 18 and that I give my permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study.

Name of Participant (Please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

To assist with accuracy, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, I will be the only one privy to the tapes, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our participant requirements. Essentially, this document states that: a) all information will be held confidential, b) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and c) there will be no harm from participating.

This interview should last no longer than 90 minutes. During this time, there are several questions that we need to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning in our allotted time.

About the study

You have been selected to participate in this study because you were identified as a grandmother raising her school-aged grandchild. The research project focuses on the experiences of custodial African-American grandmothers how they assist their grandchild with school work, what services are used, and how they gained custody. This study does not aim to evaluate your experiences. The collected comments and experience from all participants interviewed will be summarized and reviewed using qualitative analyses techniques. The intent is to learn more about your experiences, and hopefully learn about what can be done to assist custodial African-American grandmothers in educating their grandchildren.

Appendix E: Public Notice

Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR

RESEARCH IN African American Grandmothers Caring for School-Aged Grandchildren

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study of

African American Grandmothers Caring for Grandchildren

Confidentiality is guaranteed

Answer questions through an interview with one researcher

Your participation would involve *one or two* sessions if needed. The first session will be no more than 90 minutes long. The Second Session will be significantly shorter in length of time. .

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,

please contact:

Valarie Boyer

XXXXXX

Education Department @ Walden University

800-925-3368

Email: *valarie.boyer@waldenu.edu*

**Walden University Institutional Review Board for Ethics Standards in
Research**