Elderly African American clergywomen as community and educational resources

Nancy Parker Seay

Follow this and additional works at: http://utdr.utoledo.edu/theses-dissertations

Recommended Citation
Seay, Nancy Parker, "Elderly African American clergywomen as community and educational resources" (2009). Theses and Dissertations. 1130.
http://utdr.utoledo.edu/theses-dissertations/1130

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The University of Toledo Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The University of Toledo Digital Repository. For more information, please see the repository's About page.
A Thesis

Entitled

Elderly African American Clergywomen as Community and Educational Resources

by

Nancy Parker Seay

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Master of Education in Educational Theory and Social Foundations

Advisor: Lynne Hamer, Ph.D.

Morris Jenkins, Ph.D.

Willie McKether, Ph.D.

Judith Herb College of Education

College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

December 2009
An Abstract of

Elderly African American Clergywomen as Community and Educational Resources

by

Nancy Parker Seay

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Master of Education in Educational Theory and Social Foundations

The University of Toledo
December 2009

This qualitative study examines the ways in which an elderly African American clergywoman constructs meaningful communication and makes sense of her life, in an effort to identify culturally appropriate pedagogical models for teachers of African American students. Extensive attention is given to past records of African American clergywomen in the United States to foster greater understanding of the struggles and historical significance of a community and academic resource that has previously received little, if any attention in educational research. Combinations of the folkloristic and womanist approaches were utilized in the analysis of three field observations, and narratives included in a sermon. Three distinct themes emerged relating to celebration, prophecy, and the call. Findings were developed to suggest pedagogical strategies that teachers can learn from preachers.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved pastor and many other courageous preaching women who have paved the way for generations to come.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Lynne Hamer, for her enthusiastic support of my uncommon subject. In addition, I am very grateful for my committee members, Dr. Morris Jenkins and Dr. Willie McKether for their support and advice.

I wish to thank Dr. Sherick Hughes who afforded me the opportunity to attend Graduate School by accepting me as a Graduate Assistant in his program. His intellectual rigor and challenging insights were influential in my topic choice.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband for his patience and understanding during the long hours spent in preparation of this thesis, and I wish to thank my mother for being a role model in academic pursuits.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii

Dedication iii

Acknowledgements iv

Contents v

List of Tables vii

Chapters:

1. **INTRODUCTION** 1
   - Introduction 1
   - Overview 2
   - Purpose and Significance of the Study 3
   - Framework and Research Questions 6
   - Research Design 6
   - Limitations of the Study 7

2. **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE** 8
   - Introduction 8
   - Historical Review of the Black Church and Rise of African American Female Clergy 10
   - The Current State of African American Female Clergy in the United States 16
   - Othermothers in the African American Community 17
   - Womanist Approach 18
   - Folkloristic Approach 21

3. **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY** 24
   - Introduction 24
   - Research Questions 24
   - Research Design 25
   - The Site and Setting 26
   - The Participant 27
   - Data Collection 28
   - Data Management 28
   - Data Analysis and Representation 28
   - Problems 31
   - Validity 32
List of Tables

Table 2.1: Data Analysis and Representation 29

Table 2.2: Line-by-Line Coding and Emergent Themes 30
Chapter One

Introduction

**********

The message that the Lord gave (at the) the first of the year,
And everywhere I go, cross-country... and carry this message...
It first had to begin in us.

Praise God.
We were teaching, and as the prophet says,
“You will be tried.”

Hallelujah.
As I taught this word in consecration this time,
The enemy attacked my very brain.
It seemed like a chisel was in my head.
And it chiseled away at the very skull, in the very bone.
I could hear it, I could feel it, I could feel the chisel.
The pain was so great.
But I already taught about the battlefield of the mind.
So I had to go through that battle.
And it was so extreme.

Many things that I’ve gone through, many healings...
From sermon introduction by Rev. Boyd

By analyzing a portion of a sermon and field observations of an elderly African American clergywoman, this research proposes to examine how she made sense of her life and how she constructed meaningful communication in the context of the Black church. Then, the way she constructed meaning and communicated in the Black church will be explored for usefulness in providing a model for teachers in predominantly African American classrooms.

Elements of the above narrative only allude to how Rev. Boyd, an elderly African American clergywoman, made sense of her life. This narrative contains all of the

---

1 Rev. Boyd is the pseudonym for this study’s participant.
components of a classic tale, replete with heroine and villain. She, as the heroine taught about the “Battlefield of the Mind.” Knowing the importance of her message, she taught it everywhere; not only in her church, but also across the country. However, as she fasted and prayed in preparation to take the message to Florida, a villain came and attacked her. She implied that the enemy (Satan) was threatened by the lessons she taught, because they exposed his villainous methods. Until this time, she had only taught about the battlefield of the mind. However, when the enemy attacked her mind, the lessons became ever so personal. Having been attacked by the enemy, in her very mind, she could now teach the lesson about the “Battlefield of the Mind” from her personal experience.

Overview

Correcting the historical and perennial academic underachievement of African American students requires cooperative support from all community stakeholders and institutions (Walker and Sprague, 1999). The family, the school, and the church are the institutions which have been most credited for maintaining stability in the Black community (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1991; Du Bois, 1903). Accordingly, academic achievement among African American students is strongly related to the themes of teacher-student relationship, academic self-concept and church involvement (Sanders, 1998).

A growing body of empirical studies link religiosity and church attendance to academic achievement and decreased risk behaviors among African American young people (Sanders, 1998; Brega and Coleman, 1999). In spite of a common assumption that young people become less spiritual with each succeeding generation, Sinha, Cnaan, and Gelles (2007) recently reported that young people in general, ages 11 through 18 are
overwhelmingly religious. Of the four dominant ethnic groups investigated by Sinha and colleagues, African American young people scored the highest for religiosity. In addition, existing research ranks African American youth higher in church attendance and religiosity than other ethnic groups in this nation (Smith et al., 2002). With these exceptional characteristics of African American youth in mind, this study identified a heretofore unrecognized and underutilized community resource, which also may have considerable cultural significance for many students. This resource has been present in most urban Black neighborhoods since the great migration periods of the early and mid twentieth century. This resource is highly respected and often called upon by community members in difficult times. This resource has a proven record for capturing the respect and attention of young people in the Black community. This resource is elderly African American clergywomen.

Purpose and Significance of This Study

Historical biases against older women, mingled with the current cultural bias toward youth in the dominant culture may have impacted the value general society places on older women. In academia issues relating to age and gender, combined with other marginalizing factors such as perceptions of race and class, may have factored into the tendency to overlook elderly African American clergywomen. However, this slight is unfounded in light of the significant and unique position of these feminine Black preaching sages.

Historically, elder respect has been a hallmark in traditional African American communities and institutions. This is especially true in Black churches. Unique to the Black church is the honorific title, “Mother,” which is bestowed upon older women who
have lived consistent exemplary lives (Krause, 2006). In this researcher’s home congregation, for example, church mothers enjoy preferred seating during worship services and are entrusted with caring for the sacred communion instruments. Krause, cited Lincoln and Mamiya’s 1990 landmark research identifying the high level of respect and power afforded church mothers in Black churches, “In some black churches pastors usually consult with the church mother before making an important decision because she can exercise countervailing power among key church members” (p. 275).

Sadly, although decades of research point to the deficits and failures of Black mothers (Case, 1997) research is limited on the positive contributions of other women in the African American community. Case presents the concept of “Othermother” as an example of women who have a positive impact in the Black community. The tradition of Othermothering, a vestige from slavery, is the support offered to biological mothers by more experienced mothers in caring for their children. The Othermothering tendency is well noted among Black teachers (Case, 1997; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005), however Black clergywomen as Othermothers has received little, if any attention in academic literature.

Clergy, especially pastors, are highly utilized resources within the Black church context. W. E. B. DuBoise noted in his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folks,* “The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a "boss," an intriguer, an idealist, -- all these he is.” Black preachers can exert tremendous influence among their congregations. For example, ethnographic studies have suggested that individual church leaders’ use of “cultural tools” such as religious rituals and distinctive preaching styles, impacts collective
behaviors within their congregations (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1991; Lee, 2004). This is important because African American clergywomen are more likely to lead urban congregations that feature demographics associated with high academic risk in children, such as increased representation of families led by single and low-income mothers (Konieczny & Chaves, 2000). This being true, understanding how Black clergywomen use their social capital and social positionality to provide leadership in addressing the unique needs of impoverished Black communities will add to the body of research on culturally relevant pedagogy.

Given the dismal conditions of many Black schools and the disappointing achievement levels of Black students, educational sociologist Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) recommended the reinvention of schools to meet the distinctive needs of marginalized children. A step in this direction would be to incorporate teacher-learner styles and relationships that are familiar to Black students. Case (1997) furthered this argument by citing Billingsley (1992) in calling for educational reform based on pedagogy derived from the experiences of African Americans. With this advice in mind, this study focuses on one African American clergywoman’s leadership, approach and ideology. Understanding her ability to form and pursue goals is not only inspirational, but is also a welcome addition to the academic literature related to African American community resources. In the process, this research will also make the larger, dominant culture and educational community aware of the significance of older African American clergywomen.
Framework and Research Questions

This study is significant because it identifies culturally appropriate methods of communication utilized within the context of the Black church. To meet this objective, narratives and field observations of the participant were analyzed to answer three key questions:

1. How did this elderly African American clergywoman make sense of her life?
2. How did this elderly African American clergywoman construct meaningful communication within the context of the Black church?
3. Can the way she made sense of her life and constructed meaningful communication, in the context of the Black church, provide a useful model for teachers in addressing the needs of Black students?

Research Design

The research questions informed the choice of a qualitative research design for a number of reasons. First, understanding how the participant constructed meaningful dialogue within the Black church context required research in natural settings to examine how context influenced the dialogue and actions chosen by the participant. In addition, this type of research design was suitable for a study limited to the lived experiences of a single participant. Finally, qualitative research is preferred for the study of phenomena that is not well known (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An important objective of this study was to present a little-known resource for educational research that has been traditionally existent in urban African American communities.

The folklorist approach encouraged a thorough examination of the participant’s words in their natural context, and aspects of the womanist approach provided structure
to comprehend the unique perspective of elderly African American clergywomen. Both frameworks aided in understanding how this woman made sense of her life and the methods she used to communicate information that she thought was important to other people.

Limitations of Study

One of the reasons this participant was chosen was because of the profound and lasting positive effect that she has had upon the life of this researcher. However, backyard research (Creswell, 1998), that is research performed in very familiar settings, does carry some risk. Familiarity with the site and participant may create expectations that constrain data collection, researcher role can be confusing for participants (Glesne, 2006). In this case the long-standing and close relationship between the participant and researcher may impact the researcher’s subjectivity.

Another limitation is the source of the data. Early in this research the participant became very ill and incapacitated. After several failed attempts to obtain a life history interview, a decision was made to rely upon the existing audio recordings and several field observations of her teaching to identify descriptive narratives for analysis. Consequently the data collected in this investigation was limited to portions of a sermon and field observations of a single participant during an approximately six week period in 2007. Therefore, this study is unsuitable for broad generalizability. However, this exploratory study will attempt to identify concepts that are transferable in specific contexts.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The topics to be covered in this review of literature include the history of the Black church in the United States and the role of African American clergywomen in the Black church. The historical review is followed by an exploration of the current state of African American clergywomen and the alignment of African American clergywomen with the concept of Othermothers in the Black community. This chapter concludes with an examination womanist and folklorist approaches in data analysis and interpretation.

In spite of the well-acknowledged relationship between the Black church and academic achievement among African American young people (Killingray, 2003; Raboteau, 2004; Sernett, 1999) academia has given little attention to African American religious history. Although the history of the Black Church has recently enjoyed greater recognition of in other disciplines, scholarship devoted specifically to the history and achievements of African American clergywomen is scarce. While lack of data for this could be blamed for this omission, Sernett (1999) countered, claiming lack of rigor in data collection was the primary problem. Collier-Thomas (1998) offered confirmation by uncovering an abundance of historical documents authored by African American women. Many of these nineteenth and early twentieth century documents included numerous references to African American clergywomen in the Black press, obituaries, and letters. Carpenter (1989 & 2001) also referred to several recent contributions to historical
research on African American clergywomen; however she focused on clergywomen within traditional mainline Protestant denominations (Best, 2005). Failure to recognize non-traditional churches lead by clergywomen may not be a simple oversight. Gilkes (1986) recounted her fellow sociologists’ admission of intentionally excluding small female led independent congregations from their research focus.

This review will present the history of African American clergywomen through a narrowing funnel beginning with the conception of the African American church and its role in the development of African American clergywomen. Special attention will be given to the expansion of the Black church resulting from the Great Migrations of the twentieth century. Finally, this historical review concludes with the rise of African American clergywomen as leaders of independent churches and their current status in American society.

The scope of this background history is limited to North American Protestant religious activity. Although the Catholic Church did offer parallel opportunities for female leadership through monasticism, its hierarchical structure placed men almost exclusively in clerical and church leadership roles. Additionally, the Catholic church’s claim to universality circumvented any rifts leading to an independent African American body (Killingray, 2003). Finally, although African American Protestantism existed throughout the Americas, especially in countries colonized by English or Dutch settlers, this review is limited to the experience of African American clergywomen in the United States.
Historical Review of the Black Church and Rise of African American Female Clergy

Although religion has been central in the African American experience since the arrival of the first African Americans at Jamestown in 1619 (Best, 2005; McCartney, 2003) few Blacks, freed or slave, became Christians before the Great Awakenings beginning in the early eighteenth century (Killingray, 2003). This was a period marked by fervent religious revivals and religious conversions. African Americans who converted Christianity attended predominantly White churches at first, and continued to do so well into the nineteenth century. Some independent Black Baptist churches began to appear in the southern colonies as early as the Revolutionary War period. In southern Georgia, slave masters hoped to stem the number of slaves escaping to find refuge with the nearby sympathetic Seminole Indians by allowing slaves to build their own churches and have their own preachers (Brown, 2008). In one instance, a slave, George Liele, organized a church near Savannah, Georgia in 1777 and continued the work until his emancipation in 1782. He baptized converts Andrew and Hannah Bryan the same year. Liele subsequently left the area and Andrew Bryan continued the work. With the permission of his master, Bryan received Baptist ordination in 1788 and erected a traditional building in 1794. People, chosen specifically for their building and iron working skills developed in Africa were enslaved and brought to the east coast to build the city of Savannah. They also used their skills to build a beautiful church of their own. By 1802 the church boasted of a membership of between 850 – 1000 mostly enslaved people (Brown 2008, Sernet, 1999).

African American clergywomen are largely a product of the Black church which has provided a consistent source of physical, social, emotional and spiritual support for
African Americans. The church also served as a buffer against the racial bigotry encountered by the Black parishioners on a daily basis (Youngblood & Winn, 2004). Black women were integral in the development of all activity in the Black church. Women influenced the development of the church, as well as leadership within the church, and church-based political activities resulting in social policies affecting the wellbeing of African Americans throughout the United States (Carpenter, 2001).

In 1799, Richard Allen became the first African American ordained in the Methodist Church. Allen was instrumental in the formation of the African American Episcopal (AME) church which was formed in response to the discrimination regularly experienced by Blacks in predominantly White Methodist churches of the North. This independent Black denomination produced many of the early female religious leaders and clergywomen including the first African American woman to receive ordination.

Biographies, autobiographies and written sermons provided data specific nineteenth-century clergywomen. Several of these women have received attention in recent scholarly works (Haywood, 2003; Collier-Thomas, 1998). Collier-Thomas identified the earliest known African American clergywoman as a slave named Elizabeth born in 1766. She was freed thirty years later. Like many of her later sisters in ministry, she experienced a dramatic “call” to preach which she resisted at first. At age 42 Elizabeth finally answered the call and preached for nearly 50 years before retiring.

In the early 1800s, Jerena Lee was authorized to preach in the AME church by Richard Allen. She was the first known African woman to have that honor. Other early African American clergywomen included Julia Foote, Harriet Baker, Mary Small, Maria Stewart, and Frances Joseph Gaudet, among others. Carpenter (1989, 2001) explained
that many of these women started their ministries as evangelists during this time. She gave the example of Amanda Smith who traveled extensively throughout the United States, the British Isles, India and Africa, preaching and ministering to people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In her old age, she founded an orphanage for children near Chicago.

The experiences of early African American clergywomen were often tinged with suffering. Race-based adversity was not uncommon for these preaching women. Elizabeth risked re-enslavement when she preached against slavery in the southern states (Collier-Thomas, 1998) and Julia Foote became very ill aboard the deck of a steamboat because Blacks were denied access to warm cabin accommodations (Haywood, 2003). Another reason these clergywomen faced difficulty was because preaching was generally viewed as a gendered profession reserved for men. Jerena Lee gave several accounts of being denied the use of church facilities because she was not licensed to preach. African American denominations were typically reluctant to license women to preach. Like their White counterparts, these denominations maintained patriarchal hierarchies in leadership. Without licenses, women were denied official sanction to preach and were excluded from pastorates, as well as other leadership positions within denominational organizations.

Consequently, clergywomen’s authority to preach was constantly questioned by men and women alike. However, many clergywomen answered their detractors by declaring their personal responsibility to obey God surpassed their responsibility to obey the laws of men. Maria Stewart, for instance admonished her listeners concerning female preachers in her farewell address to her friends in Boston:
...be no longer astonished then, my brethren and friends, that God at this eventful period should raise up your own females to strive, by their example both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring to stop the strong current of prejudice that flows so profusely against us at present. No longer ridicule their efforts, it will be counted for sin. For God makes use of feeble means sometimes, to bring about his most exalted purposes (Stewart, 1833).

In defense of her call to preach, Jerena Lee referred to a well-known Bible account, "If an ass reproved Balaam, and a barn-door fowl reproved Peter, why should not a woman reprove sin” (Lee, 1884).

By the end of the nineteenth century the AME Zion church began to grant women ordination privileges. However, most other Black mainline denominations restricted women’s ministry by varying degrees. Conversely, at the beginning of the twentieth century, female ordination was standard in most Holiness churches (Sanders, 1996a). The Holiness movement produced the modern Pentecostal Movement in the first decade of the twentieth century. Sanders described how a Black Holiness preacher, William J. Seymour, was introduced to the gift of speaking in tongues by Lucy Farrow, an African American female pastor of a Holiness Church in Texas. Later Seymour carried the message that speaking in tongues was the evidence of being baptized with the Holy Spirit to another female-led Holiness church in Los Angeles. The message gained in popularity and the Azuza Street Revival was initiated. This event is generally believed to be the birth of the Modern Pentecostal Movement. Adherence to the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements fueled an increase in African American clergywomen. A rising number African American clergywomen departed mainline denominations to join smaller independent churches and denominations that were sympathetic to female leadership. An example is Jane Williams, who in 1886 founded and became pastor of the first Black congregation in the newly formed Church of God denomination, in Charleston, South
Carolina (Sanders, 1996b). Other clergywomen began to start their own independent churches.

Thus, social and spiritual needs arising from rapid urbanization during the Great Migrations were important factors contributing to the increase of Black clergywomen serving as pastors in independent churches (Gilkes, 1986; Best, 2005). Many of the independent churches, referred to as “Sanctified Churches,” developed in response to the convergence of the Holiness Movement, the Pentecostal Movement (Gilkes, 2001) and in the urban North, the Great Migrations of the early to mid twentieth century (Gilkes, 1986).

The Great Migration periods extended from the start of World War I through the 1960s. This period was characterized by the massive movement of people from the rural South to the urban North in search of more lucrative industrial employment. Boyd (1998) described the southern migrants as typically very religious, with church attendance being very important in their lives. The migrants valued traditional and demonstrative expressions of worship, as well as intimacy among the congregants.

However, these values were not shared in the more formal mainline Black denominational churches of the North. Consequently, many of the migrants fulfilled their desire for worship representing their cultural leanings by organizing independent churches and denominations outside of the existing Black mainline denominational churches. Many of these churches were the Pentecostal Sanctified Churches which emerged as indirect products of the Azuza Street Revival. Gilkes (1986) described the migrants’ perspective very succinctly, “…as free women and men, the Sanctified Church rejected a cultural and organizational model that uncritically imitated Euro-American
patriarchy” (p. 27). Zora Neale Hurston’s (1983) anthropological studies of Southern Sanctified churches in the 1930s identified the Sanctified Church’s conception as a product of protest against “high-brow tendency in Negro Protestant congregations…” (p. 103).

Gilkes (1986) listed the ways in which the Sanctified Church affirmed Black women in particular. First, the church supported the dignity of Black working women by offering a network of moral support within the family and larger community context. Second, in spite of its reputation for being unsophisticated and uneducated, in the Sanctified Church women were always encouraged to further their education, and then to use what they learned to serve the church. Furthermore many of the Sanctified Churches and denominations offered women licensure to preach. Among the Sanctified Churches that did not allow female ordination, women were almost always allowed to “teach” and hold prominent positions in denominational leadership.

In spite of the recent flurry of scholarship directed at the development of female ministry within mainline denominations, the significance and accomplishments of independent Pentecostal clergywomen has been obscured for the most part (Collier-Thomas, 1998; Best, 2005). Best’s examination of African American clergywomen the Great Migration eras provided rich descriptions of female-led religious worship and social outreach in Black Chicago. One example was Elder Lucy Smith, a native of Georgia, who left the Baptist church to establish the All Nations Pentecostal Church. Works Progress Administration (WPA) writers Harper and Bontemps (1941) described Elder Smith in their report on the African American religious community in Chicago:

…but the most famous preacher of the order is Elder Lucy Smith, a huge black woman who boasts of being the only member of her sex in Chicago ever to have
built a church from the ground up; unlike most other church edifices of the race in her district, her’s was not purchased from whites. Human sympathies of preachers were typified by Elder Smith in 1932 when she setup a soup kitchen to feed hundreds of unemployed workers. For six months, over ninety persons daily were fed in her kitchen. Both races were seated at the tables, the beneficent elder insisting that no difference be made because of color. Described as a simple, ignorant, untrained but deeply sympathetic woman who believes absolutely in her power to help and heal others, her congregation consists largely of new arrivals from the South and those Negroes who have not and probably never will become urbanized. They are persons of little or no formal education, mostly day laborers, domestic servants, WPA workers, and relief clients. Elder Smith's church for a time broadcast on the air an hour of its Sunday night's service.

Elder Smith, unlike most of her female contemporaries, was the pastor of a large congregation and the “Overseer” of a conference of churches.

Typically female headed independent congregations were likely to have started as prayer meetings in private homes and apartments, and later they moved into small storefronts (Collier-Thomas, 1998). Until recently, storefront churches were the object of suspicion and speculation because of their unconventionality, low status, and their association with emotional and noisy forms of worship. However, the migrants found these smaller storefront churches to be a place of refuge from the harsh realities of life in the urban North (Boyd, 1998; Best, 2005).

*The Current State of African American Female Clergy in the United States*

Although women represent 75 to 90 percent of all activity within churches, there are glaring disparities between female-headed and male-headed congregations. From a sample of 1236 congregations Konieczny & Chaves (2000) noted that first; women were significantly more likely to lead Black and ethnically mixed congregations. Second, they tend to have smaller congregations and fewer financial resources than male-headed congregations. Third, female-headed congregations are more likely to exist in urban settings. Fourth, their congregations have proportionately fewer two-parent families or
families with high incomes. Finally, female-led churches have a historically tendency to have majority female congregations. Elder Lucy Smith (Best, 2005) and Bishop Ida B. Robinson (Collier-Thomas, 1998) are examples of churches with congregations and leadership that were originally overwhelmingly female.

In addition, African American clergywomen in particular are more likely to lead independent congregations rather than denominationally affiliated congregations. Of particular significance to this research, the demographics associated with congregations led by African American clergywomen are aligned with the demographics of families with children at academic risk. Therefore, these churches may likely offer access to student populations in need of academic consideration.

Othermothers in the African American Community

Although much attention has been given to the failures of Black women as mothers, research is limited on the successes of Black mothers and other mother figures in the African American community. For instance, there is a predisposition among many African American women to act as Othermothers in their communities (Case, 1997). Case described Othermothers:

Othermothering and community Othermothering can be defined as African American women's maternal assistance offered to the children of blood mothers within the African American community. Originally traced to slavery, Othermothering was a survival mechanism that served as a vehicle for educational and cultural transmission (P. 25).

Case (1997) acknowledged that the status of Othermother is not automatic in African American communities, but that this status demands lengthy and careful cultivation. She also made the distinction between the positions of younger and older Othermothers. She referred to younger women as Othermothers, while the older, more...
experienced women were given the distinction of Community Othermothers. Community Othermothers were distinct because of their comprehension of the culture and norms of community. Additionally, their ability to exercise power in wider community forums indicated that they had already gained the respect of the wider community.

Older female sages are examples of Othermothers. Jimenez (2002) argued that the culturally embedded elder respect in Black communities was rooted in African tradition. She also pointed to the essential role played by older women in Black communities during slavery and the Reconstruction eras. As sage, she transmitted African cultural forms, socialized children to survive the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow, provided health information, and offered community healing. Indeed Jimenez (2002) asserted that among African Americans, the oldest person in the family was also the most honored person in the family. The oldest person in the family was typically a great grandmother between the ages of 60 and 85. Unique to the African American community, grandmothers’ remain involved in their children and grandchildren’s lives, even after their children have established independent households.

**Womanist Approach**

The womanist approach is a critical tool for understanding the unique perspective of elderly African American clergywomen. Social activist and writer Alice Walker is credited for coining the expression “womanist” (Gilkes, 2001; Phillips, 2006). Walker (1984) defined her concept of womanism at length in her book, *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*. This study draws from three primary aspects from Walker’s
definition: love of, 1) the Spirit, 2) the struggle, 3) the folk, and 4) the self, to develop a framework for understanding how the participant made meaning out of her life.

Spirituality is central in the womanist approach. However, spirituality, in womanist thinking is not compartmentalized and set aside for certain days of the week or to practiced in certain places. Spirituality is part of everyday life for Black women. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) demonstrated how one teacher, Mama Hawke, viewed her own spirituality as a resource enabling her to adapt to the challenges of teaching, “…she frames her teaching as a mission and sees herself as a child of God and as having the spiritual resources to undertake that mission”(p. 81). In the context of womanist spirituality in the Black church, Carpenter (1989) recognized the development of womanist theology as a building block for positive change in the status of African American clergywomen.

The womanist approach recognizes that the struggle of African American women is deeply embedded in other realities of Black life including racism, classism (Phillips, 2006), and in this study, elder respect and spirituality. A common criticism of feminism is that it overlooks Black women’s experiences. In this way, womanism differs from feminism because it rejects the notion that Black women have the luxury of bonding together under the banner of gender without giving attention to the other forces that equally contribute to their oppression. Womanism provides structure for understanding the perspective of African American clergywomen by linking the overlapping oppressions historically and currently faced by the African American clergywomen to the strengths embodied in their ministries. To this end Collier-Thomas (1998) asserted, “It is crucial to understand the widespread racism in White feminism and the widespread
sexism in Black male progressivism to understand the uniqueness of Black preaching women…” (p. 9).

“Folk,” a comfortable and down-to-earth term referencing people, captures the womanist experience, particularly when speaking about “old folk.” It challenges the socially constructed notion of “feeble old woman.” Indeed, womanism is a vehicle to venerate advanced age and to connect with the unique historical importance of elder women in the African American community. For example, Jimenz (2002) looked at the historical role of African American grandmothers, and argued that the role of grandmothers is fundamentally different from the role maintained in the majority culture. The clearly delineated terms of grandparental involvement in the lives of grandchildren, observed in the majority culture, did not exist in the Black community. African American grandmothers commonly considered the struggle to care and provide for their families as a life-long pursuit. A womanist framework uses the African American grandmother’s role to equate age with strength and ability. This contrasts to the tendency to view age as oppressive and limiting in the mainstream culture.

In viewing the self, the womanist approach defies the passive, docile, weak, and deferential qualities usually attributed to “good women.” To the contrary, strengths which were inherent to, or developed within, the African American cultural experience, are celebrated and embraced in the womanist paradigm (Phillips, 2006). The African American cultural experience includes racism, sexism, classism, and ageism. The womanist framework considers African American women’s experience as normative (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Womanism then, contrasts to the deficit theories held in
mainstream culture, which view African American women’s experience as irreversibly
damaging, not taking into consideration the historical resiliency of Black women.

For the purposes of this research it is important to note that the womanist
approach recognizes the importance of role models and mentors universally existent in
the African American female experience (Gilkes, 2001). Finally, womanism embraces
Black women’s maternal side. In education, Case (1997) identified African American
female teacher’s tendency to assert their maternal nature in relation to their students as an
example of “other-mothering.”

**Folkloristic Approach**

A close look at the construction of personal narratives offers the listener a glimpse
into the way that people make meaning of their lives (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).
Richardson (1995) proposed that the narrative, “displays the goals and intentions of
human actors; it makes individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs
comprehensible and it allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions to alter the
directions of our lives” (p. 200). Hence, the narrative is a means of communicating for the
narrator and a means of understanding for the listener. Furthermore, Richardson advised
that the practical purpose of the narrative is to state how (other) people live their lives in a
way to achieve their goals.

This study implemented a strategy featuring narrative research with the
folkloristic approach. Hamer (1999) defined folklore as “a situated performance of a
traditionalized text in which the performer takes responsibility for communicating a
version of the text to the audience that is meaningful to them in their current situation”
(p. 366). This research recognized the Bible as the traditional text, the participant as the
performer, the congregation as the audience, and the church settings as the current situation or natural setting in which the performance took place. On a more personal note, the mandate of folklore enthusiasts to protect and preserve unique oral texts from eventual extinction (Fine, 2008) fulfilled this researcher’s objective of preserving a portion of the participant’s story for posterity.

As this thesis is expected to have a wider audience among some readers who may not be familiar with the folkloristic approach within narrative analysis, a few things should be clarified concerning the language used in this genre. The folkloristic approach does not imply that the narratives being analyzed are folktales in the way that we were taught in grade school. For instance, the narratives are not looked upon like the American folktales of Paul Bunyan and John Henry. This approach does not challenge the veracity of the narratives. It is an approach to understand traditional texts that are performed (delivered) before groups of people (an audience). Likewise, the use of the words performance or performer does not imply that the person delivering the text is acting a part, as in a scripted performance. The sincerity of the performer is in no way questioned. Language consistent with this analytical approach was used for clarity in analyzing and reporting results.

Hamer’s (1999) research determined to examine useful teaching practices often overlooked in pedagogical methodology. At the same time she championed the use of personal dialogue to enhance and legitimize the written traditional text. Hamer identified concepts in folkloristic studies that are particularly applicable to educational research and by extension to this research. Foremost is the concept of performance, which is when a person takes responsibility for capably communicating information that she feels is
important to her audience. The concept that performance of a text can never be presented again identically in the same way as written text because of the instability of environmental context, caused Hamer to suggest that teaching performance cannot be standardized.

*Summary*

Although this literature review provides a basis for understanding the experiences of Elderly African American Clergywomen, further investigation is warranted because this is an emerging topic. Questions remain concerning the influence of elderly African American Clergywomen upon the educational decisions of young people in their congregations. For example, this researchers’ church has had middle-aged and elderly female leadership for over 40 years. In that short period of time there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people from that congregation who complete post-secondary education, with many holding advanced degrees. From this phenomena it could be questioned whether the gender, ethnicity, or age of the pastor, are contributing factors in academic achievement among their parishioners. Given the range of experiences among African American clergywomen and the scarcity of research in this area, future research possibilities are unlimited.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Even with the best-intended strategies, research rarely goes exactly the way it was planned. This study began with the intention of presenting a life history of this participant after conducting a series of in-depth interviews. Nevertheless, although interviews were scheduled on a couple of occasions, the participant rescheduled due to her very busy schedule. Then the participant became very ill. She assured me that she wanted her story told, but she wanted to recover her strength enough to coherently participate in the interviews. After waiting nearly a year, it became obvious she would not recover to the point that she would be able to grant the desired interviews. At that point in time, I had collected field notes from three observations of the participant teaching and leading public worship, and I had conversations with her about the present research. In addition, an audio file of her teaching during a public worship service had been obtained. The recording and field observations of her teaching were significant because they provided a model of her teaching style and interactions with her students/congregations. After consulting with her advisor, this researcher decided to continue this study with the existing data.

Research Questions

Understanding what is culturally significant for people of varied ethnicities is essential in advancing meaningful communication across ethnic groups. Developing
meaningful dialogues across ethnic and cultural lines is particularly important for teachers with diverse classrooms. For example, it may help to know that African Americans often incorporate religious themes into secular activities. Along these lines, Pattillo-McCoy (1998) posited that the church provides a “cultural blueprint” (p.768) for organizations, including schools, within Black communities. Therefore, understanding the significance of the Black church and how meaning is constructed, as well as communicated, within its confines may be very useful for teachers of African American students.

This study is significant because it identifies models of culturally appropriate methods of communication utilized within the context of the Black church. To meet this objective, narratives and field observations of the participant were analyzed to answer three key questions:

1. How did this elderly African American clergywoman make sense of her life?
2. How did this elderly African American clergywoman construct meaningful communication within the context of the Black church?
3. Can the way she made sense of her life and constructed meaningful communication, in the context of the Black church, provide a useful model for teachers in addressing the needs of Black students?

Research Design

The research questions informed the choice of a qualitative research design for a number of reasons. First, understanding how the participant constructed meaningful dialogue within the Black church context required research in natural settings to examine how context influenced dialogue and actions chosen by the participant. In
addition, this type of research design was suitable for a study limited to the lived experiences of a single participant. Finally, qualitative research is preferred for the study of phenomena that is not well known (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An objective of this study was to present a little-known resource for educational research that has been traditionally existent in urban African American communities.

Narrative analysis with the folkloristic approach (Hamer, 1999) was the overall strategy utilized in design and analysis. Narrative research is quite amenable for investigating detailed stories and experiences of an individual (Creswell, 2007). Although Hamer’s (1999) work examined teachers as storytellers, her folklorist framework adequately informed the analysis of this clergywoman’s unique dialogues combining decades of experience, womanist ideology, and Biblical theology. Useful for this research was Hamer’s suggestion that folkloristic theories and analysis offered a method to identify how the performer constructs meaning by creating relationships for their audiences through time and space. This study examined how an elderly clergywoman used genres, which Hamer defined as “forms of discourse” (p. 366) such as personal experiences, metaphors, legends and prophecy, to communicate with her audience in ways that were meaningful to them.

The Site and Setting

The independent Pentecostal church where the participant served as pastor was located in a predominantly White, lower-income urban neighborhood of a moderately sized Midwestern city. The traditional edifice was purchased nearly 30 years prior from a predominantly White congregation who had built a new church in the suburbs. The well-kept church had been remodeled twice since it was purchased from the former owners.
The building had two sanctuaries. The larger sanctuary was very impressive having large frosted windows, cathedral ceilings from which crystal chandeliers hung, cushioned pews that coordinated with the furnishings in the front pulpit area, a choir stand and baptistery. However, two observations took place in the smaller sanctuary. A description from one of the field observations is provided below.

The “small sanctuary” as it was called, had peach-colored walls trimmed with white. The walls were adorned with hanging scroll-like white posters with gilded scripture references. Long banners with scripturally inspired themes were hung at the front of the sanctuary across the top of the walls. The floors and pulpit area were covered with diamond patterned peach-colored carpet. There was no carpet underneath the old hard pews. The hardwood floors gave further evidence that the church was not new. Three rounded steps lead up to the pulpit area which was enclosed by low wrought iron railing. A couple of orange cushioned chairs were placed in the pulpit area with other adornments, but it appeared as if the area was rarely used.

The final observation took place in a different church in Florida, during a “Fellowship” service. Fellowship services were very special because the six churches for which the participant served as overseer gathered together from several states to attend church services together. A description of this church is provided in chapter four.

*The Participant*

The participant in this study, Rev. Boyd$^2$, was purposefully selected for several reasons. First, because she was representative of elderly African American clergywomen, the focus of this study. Second, she was critical to this study because her fifty-plus years of clergy experience, and her stature in the Black community. Finally, because many people, including this researcher, have testified to the profound and lasting positive influence she has had upon their lives, this small portion of her inspirational story was considered well worth preserving.

*Data Collection*

---

$^2$ Pseudonym used to maintain confidentiality.
Two field observations of the Rev. Boyd conducting prayer and Bible study in her Midwestern church building. As the researcher’s home church, this was a very familiar setting. The selection of this site offered the researcher relatively easy access to the participant. There was an additional field observation of her teaching during a Sunday morning church service in Florida. The introduction and actual teaching were also digitally recorded. Data collection took place over a six-week period of time in the spring of 2007.

Data Management

Digital recordings of the interview and sermons, along with transcripts were stored in a laptop computer and on a portable storage device. All interview and sermon transcripts were organized and maintained in a 3-ring binder. Field notes were organized and maintained the same way. Data was also organized for analysis with the assistance of QSR NVivo 8 software. All data was stored away and locked away from public viewing.

Data Analysis and Representation

Jones (2006) adapted Creswell’s (1998) *Data Analysis Spiral* to give a concise view of the steps taken in data analysis and representation. The table was further adapted from Creswell (2001) to represent this research with each procedure named and the methods used to perform the procedure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Management</td>
<td>• Data organized in QSR NVivo 8 Software, File Folders and Computer files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/Memoing</td>
<td>• Audio file transcribed and text was read through, margin notes, initial line-by-line coding grounded theory approach described in Charmaz (2006) for emergent themes. Second coding of chunks then coded with QSR NVivo 8 for overall themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing</td>
<td>• Using Folkloristic approach, described stories identified from themes as a series of situated performances of a traditional text (Hamer, 1999) in this case, the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classifying</td>
<td>• 3 distinct stories identified from sermon introduction, several themes identified within each story, metaphors listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting</td>
<td>• Interpretation by looking for larger meanings within the stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing</td>
<td>• Stories presented with focus on content and processes, as well as the meanings behind the performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audio files were transcribed verbatim into a Word document, which was initially read through and then placed in a frame to help organize the initial coding. The line-by-line grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) approach described in Charmaz (2006) was used for initial data analysis because of its emphasis upon extracting detailed data about a subject that has received little attention. This method was also chosen to increase validity, by reducing the possibility of the researcher’s view being imposed in the analysis, given her familiarity with the participant and the participant’s surroundings. At the same time, this method aided the researcher in looking at the data in a “fresh” way. The table below is an example of the initial coding process used with field notes and the audio file.
### Table 2.2
Line-by-Line Coding and Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Observation Field Notes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Line by line</strong></th>
<th><strong>Theme</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She announces that special guests are in the sanctuary and she invites the people to look around to see who they are. Finally, she announces that the special guests are the children in the congregation. She then called the children to come and stand at the front of the sanctuary. Twelve children, one around 16 and the rest obviously younger, came to the front of the sanctuary.</td>
<td>Announcing</td>
<td>Model Behavior: affirming children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking around</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coming forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Hamer, et al. (2007)*

The research was put on hold for several months while waiting for Rev. Boyd’s interview. Upon resuming the research QSR Nvivo 8 software was used to aid in coding the transcribed audio file again. This software program assisted the researcher in becoming reacquainted with the data in a short period of time. However, it was used at the most basic level to identify and classify re-occurring themes. Data coded in NVivo was then pasted back into a Word document to look at the data more broadly. Three thematic story lines emerged from the sermon introduction. The themes identified in the earlier grounded theory coding were easily recognized in the stories.

The folkloristic approach was utilized for more detailed analysis of the stories, their construction, and their purpose. Hamer’s (1999) research posited that stories are a way that history teachers connect events of the past to the present for their students. In her study the teachers gave an oral performance. In the same way, Rev. Boyd presented her Bible lessons as oral performances interspersed with examples, personal experience,
humorous adages and generous bantering with her audience. Folkloristic analysis included the distinctive details associated with the Rev. Boyd’s performance.

Problems

One of the reasons Rev. Boyd was chosen as this study’s participant was because of the profound and lasting positive effect that she has had upon the life of this researcher. The site was chosen because an insider I felt that I was able to approach many areas that an outsider may not have access. In conducting this research, I was considered a “native” on several levels. First, as a long-standing member of the participant’s church; secondly, as an ordained clergywoman; and finally because of my lengthy friendship with Rev. Boyd. However, backyard research does carry some risk. Familiarity with the site and participant may create expectations that constrain data collection, and researcher role can be confusing for participants and researcher (Glesne, 2006). Negotiating my role as researcher and participant at the same time was challenging. An excerpt from one of the field observations highlighted some of the challenges I faced. It is a confessional tale, which emphasizes the presence of the researcher along with the researcher’s account of complexities faced in the research process (Van Maanen, 1988).

**MY CONFESSIONAL TALE**

I arrived a half-hour after the service began and hurried into the small sanctuary. I was anxious because I did not want to disturb the congregation as Rev. Boyd taught. I hurried into the small sanctuary and promptly fell to my knees and began praying at the first available pew. Harried from being so late, I listened more than joining the others who were praying out loud. I found it hard to be a participant and observer at the same time, so I made a decision to be an observant participant until I was able to discreetly record my jotted notes. Rev. Boyd asked me to come forward to “stand” for a female pastor who was ill, and not present. I came forward and she called the women to come forward to pray for the absent pastor as I sat in her place. They gathered around, laying hands on my shoulders
and anointed my forehead with a little olive oil. I was happy to be in the prayer seat and received the absent pastor’s prayers as my own. My frustration from being late, and trying to figure out my role as participant-researcher, began to fade.

**Validity**

The confessional nature of this research (Van Maanen, 1988) contribute to its validity by emphasizing the researcher’s knowledge of the topic, setting, and most of all, the people involved. Additionally, the confessional leanings in reporting this research illustrates that the researcher is also known and trusted as an insider. Validity will be increased by careful triangulation of diverse data sources such as interviews, field notes and literature review.

Although the original intent was to allow Rev. Boyd to view this document before finalization to be sure her story was accurately presented, she died before the completion of this thesis. However, her granddaughter agreed to review this document to provide additional commentary and correction. She returned the documents to me with the following note attached, “It’s amazing that this last major message, and the only one of many that you hoped to record; was the one that sums up her life, and even her death so well. It’s kind of like a divine message in that way.”

**Confidentiality**

The formal process of data gathering began as an assignment during a qualitative research course. Confidentiality was addressed by first giving Rev. Boyd a face-to-face description of the intended study and possible risks. Later, a signed consent form for interviews and observations was obtained as part of the course requirement. As the study continued after the course ended, IRB protocols were observed. An informed consent form using the guidelines of the university’s IRB committee was obtained from Rev.
Boyd to continue with interviews, observations and sermon recordings. During the study, pseudonyms for the participant, members of congregations, her church, other churches and locations were used to protect the confidentiality of the participant and all involved parties.
Chapter 4

Her Story

Introduction

The events included in this account cover about a six week period of time. Large parts of three field observations and one audio transcript are presented to help the readers feel and understand the way this participant related to the people around her. In addition, because of the recent death of the participant, this chapter is also intended to be a complete and intact historical account, as well as a tribute, to be enjoyed by those whom she led.

The field observations are also important because they assist in understanding the narrative and provide an intimate glimpse at how this elderly African American clergywoman lived out her calling. The field notes are detailed to give the readers a sense of being there with the participant, Rev. Boyd. Even the confessional nature of the field observations are designed to draw the reader into the event alongside the researcher.

The First Field Observation

Parts of the first field observation concerned a trip to Florida that the six churches which Rev. Boyd led participated in. The account looks at methods she used to encourage her congregation to participate in this trip. It also included clips of her unique leadership style and her methods of interaction with a wide variety of age groups. The theme of her Bible Lesson was “Obedience to God.”
March 1, 2007

There were roughly 18 to 20 people in attendance with ages ranging from early thirty-something to seventy-something. Rev. Boyd was probably the oldest person present. Five married couples were there, four of which were either recently retired or retirement age. All were dressed casually, most the women in denim skirts, and some of the men also wore denim too.

Rev. Boyd’s skin was a creamy almond color with a yellowish hue. Her shoulder length hair was black with gray streaks at the temples and front. She was wore a black skirt and top with a short red jacket with a glittering rhinestone western style bolo around her neck. She completed her outfit with plain black pumps and sheer grayish hose. She sat on a folding chair, behind a cluttered card table down at floor level. On top of the table laid her Bible, organizer, an empty tape case, and a tape-recorder with microphone, a stack of folders, breath mints, anointing oil, and hand lotion.

She put on her reading glasses to begin the lesson. She asked one married couple to give a testimony, because they had been out of town for some time. The man testified that when he and his wife first married 40 ago, he was not able to take his wife on a honeymoon. So now he was proud to have taken her on a 40 day vacation visiting several states and attractions. He mentioned that he had visited two mega-churches during their vacation, but they were nothing compared to their own church. Then Rev. Boyd made an announcement about the upcoming trip to Florida.

Before starting the Bible lesson Rev. Boyd instructed all married couples to sit together so they could share the folders she had prepared. She asked me to pass out one folder to each married couple. Then she instructed the “singles” to sit with someone so
they could also share the few available folders. I then passed out folders to them. I was instructed to sit next to the young man whose paper we had prayed over earlier. He whispered that he would have to leave early.

I was finally able to start my jotted notes. It was about 1:00 by then. Rev. Boyd introduced her lesson about obedience. She began to expound from the prepared worksheet that had been distributed to the group. She read from the sheet and then amplified or expounded on the subject to explain each statement or scripture reference written on the sheet. She repeated statements like “Get this down in your spirit” and “Are you listening?” She interspersed current news events into the lesson and alluded to bus accident in Atlanta as she admonished the people concerning their need to pray. Although she taught while seated behind the card table, her hands were very expressive. They were in constant motion as she unconsciously waved a red ink pen like a concert conductor. When she spoke of the need to turn, she rolled her hands over each other to drive the point home. She spoke slowly, but with so much facial and vocal expression. She sprinkled her instructions with excited “hallelujahs” and “praise the Lords.” Maybe this was a technique to fill in the spaces as she gathered her thoughts for her next statement or perhaps it was a vehicle to relate her excitement concerning the subject matter. Going through the lesson Rev. Boyd noticed that one of the scriptures had been typed incorrectly and she appeared a little annoyed, but promised that the error would be corrected. She ended the lesson reiterating, “Obedience always brings blessings.”

She asked the people to return their lessons with the folders, but to keep the flyer about the trip to Florida. It was about 1:40. She reminded the people about how much the Florida trip would cost and gave information about the nightly price to stay in the
hotel. Then there was discussion from the congregation about the length of the trip and how many drivers were needed for the vans. Rev. Boyd encouraged as many as could to go on the trip. Then she asked for a show of hands for how many intended to go on the trip. Several people raised their hands and she wrote their names down. She admonished the church leaders to make the sacrifice to go on the trip to fellowship with the sister church. She gave examples of the times she went on trips in spite of the discomfort. She told of times that she went on evangelistic trips while she was sick, of times she had to stay in roach infested hotels, of times she had sleep on the floor, and of times she was left hungry in strange cities. She challenged the leaders, “What can you tell people if you are unwilling to go?”

Then Rev. Boyd asked one of the church mothers if she wanted to go. The church mother answered yes. Rev. Boyd told her to prepare herself to go on the trip. Then she encouraged the married couples to go. She asked a young man who had arrived late if he was going. He said that he had to check with his job. Rev. Boyd said she was putting his name and his wife’s name on the list of people who were going. She admonished the people to “stretch their selves wide.” She asked if anyone had questions. The church mother replied, “I am trying to see how many nights we will be staying.” Rev. Boyd replied, “Two nights.”

Rev. Boyd ended the discussion by saying that the lesson they had was fitting for this year. She asked everyone to come forward and hold hands in a circle. She asked the young man who arrived late to lead them in closing prayer. He did. After talking with several of the people afterwards, Rev. Boyd called me and announced to the others that we had a meeting planned. I accompanied her to her office at the church. She said she
did not want to interview today, she only wanted to talk about what we would be doing. I gave her a copy of the local Black newspaper, and then asked her to read the two articles about the widening achievement gap for African American children in our city, despite the district wide improvements that had been boasted about by the school board. Rev. Boyd responded, talking about education, poverty, and White teachers’ concepts of African American children.

I told her the three aims of my research were to first save her biography for posterity, and then to look at her life as a model for reaching young people and finally, to look at her techniques as a model for culturally relevant pedagogy. Rev. Boyd was then ready to talk. When I told her that I was going to ask her to tell me the story of her life from as far back as she could remember, she assured me that she “had a story to tell.” I regretted not having the digital recorder on right then, but I knew I had made the right decision. We packed up and left out around 3:30. The next observation and first interview was scheduled for the following Friday.

The Second Field Observation

The second field observation took place one week later. It was also Rev. Boyd’s 79th birthday. This observation featured her approach towards a 90 year old church mother. This same church mother was used by her as an example in the transcript of her teaching. The theme of her Bible lesson was “Obedience to God.”

March 9, 2007

When I arrived, only Rev. Boyd and one of the older church mothers were in the small sanctuary awaiting the rest of the group. I wished Rev. Boyd a happy birthday. The church mother chided herself for forgetting Rev. Boyd’s birthday and immediately
wished her a happy birthday too. Rev. Boyd made small talk about the early arrival of her house guest and her unexpected birthday gifts delivered to her at the beauty salon that morning. She then told me how a young man and his wife had compiled all her Bible lessons, some dating several years ago, and neatly put them in a large notebook.

We heard people entering the church speaking loudly and shouting “hallelujah” and “praise the Lord.” Rev. Boyd told me to look out there and see who was coming. I went up the small flight of steps and peeked over the banister to see three women escorting a frail, 90 year old church mother to prayer. One woman was on either side of the church mother and one was behind her with a wheel chair. The church mother slowly climbed the steps, while the other ladies encouraged her loudly. “Come on mother, you can make it, you’re almost there…” The mother had climbed two half flights of stairs on her own, and appeared tired. I suggested to one of the ladies that we each take one of her arms and one of her legs and carry her down the remaining half flight of steps leading into the small sanctuary. We seated her on the closest pew to the steps. The old church mother repeatedly sang “hallelujah” as she waited to be placed in her wheelchair.

“This is for you,” one of the ladies announced to Rev. Boyd, “This is your birthday gift,” referring to the old mother’s presence at the Bible Study. Rev. Boyd bent over and affectionately hugged the old mother while telling her that she loved her. The old mother responded with more “hallelujahs.” By this time several other people had come in.

Twelve people altogether attended the Bible Study that day. Rev. Boyd introduced me to a middle aged woman from Liberia and we made small talk. Soon Rev. Boyd asked a husband and wife couple to lead the service. After the opening prayer they
asked people to share their testimonies. One middle aged woman stood and told how she had been healed from an ailment.

Then Rev. Boyd asked me to testify about the older mother’s impact on my life. I spoke about her ability to cook well and my personal interactions with her decades earlier. The older mother was attentive and looked as if she wanted to respond. Sometimes she incoherently mimicked words that were spoken by other people. We all chuckled at her unexpected remarks. She sang and offered praises to God while I gave my testimony. From time to time I stopped my talking to chime in with her “praises.” It somehow seemed disrespectful to try to speak over her sincere praises to God.

The wife of the couple leading the service also testified about the older mother’s impact on her life. She recounted a comical situation she experienced some 40 years earlier as a newlywed. Then she told how the older mother and the older mother’s husband had helped her during a difficult situation. After that, another church mother testified that Rev. Boyd had told her the previous Sunday that God was going to work out a difficult situation in her life and by Monday it had happened. The Liberian lady testified about all the wonderful things that had happened to her in the month of March. Then a middle aged lady testified about how she was unexpectedly given a car and had to overcome her fear of going over bridges to get the new car repaired at a repair shop on the other side of the river.

The couple leading the service then yielded to Rev. Boyd. She was wearing a gold knit sweater with a black and gold hounds tooth print cardigan with a black skirt and black boots. A young man indicated that he had something to say. He then brought a gift bag to Rev. Boyd and asked her to open it. She took out a tape recorder and
microphone that was identical to the one already sitting on the card table. The young man instructed her to take this tape recorder home, and when she had ideas or when the Lord spoke to her, she should then immediately record it. Rev. Boyd explained that the young man and his wife had bought the other tape recorder as well. She thanked the proud looking young man for his gift.

Rev. Boyd spoke about being 79-years-old. She looked at the 90-year-old mother and told her that she loved her again. Then she told the story of the young man who had given her the gift. She spoke about the physical, emotional and spiritual progress he had made from the time he first began attending the church. Then she entered into her Bible lesson reminding the people that she wanted to encourage them. She taught about the “Battlefield is in the mind.” She named four things that must be done to win the battle for the mind. Later she spoke about the steps of faith. She weaved examples from the people’s testimonies as illustrations for her lesson. At some point the older mother had fallen asleep in her wheelchair. The room was quiet with a few “amens” and “praise the Lords” whispered from time to time as the lesson continued. She closed her Bible study by enumerating three strategies of Satan.

Everyone came to the front of the sanctuary to hold hands and pray. Then we were dismissed. The Bible study was a little shorter than the one last week. I talked to a few people afterwards and by the time I was finished, the older mother had already been whisked away to her apartment next door to the church. The interview was postponed again because she had to prepare for events associated with her birthday.
The Third Field Observation

I attended the church service in central Florida to observe and record the ministry of Rev. Boyd. This church was one of the six fellowship churches from four different states, all for whom she served as overseer. Leaders and members from all the fellowship churches joined forces to encourage the local pastoring couple and their congregation with their presence, as well as their financial offerings. The Fellowship services started Thursday night and continued through Sunday morning. All the services took place in a small storefront church located in a strip mall along a main highway, inconspicuously nestled between two businesses; one of which might have been an insurance agency.

Rev. Boyd’s sermon took place during the final Sunday morning worship service. In addition to my role as researcher, I also attended as a Fellowship pastor. A portion of the field observation notes taken during the sermon are included to add context and a deeper understanding of the setting in which the participant practiced ministry. The theme for her teaching was, “The Battlefield of the Mind.”

April 1, 2007

The sanctuary was so crowded that another row of chairs was added to provide more seating. The room’s capacity seemed to be ninety to a hundred people. All ages, from very small children to older adults were in attendance. However, the bulk of the crowd appeared to be teens and young adults. All were African American except for one White female who came with her pastors from a church in Michigan.

The congregation was standing and singing rousing worship songs when Rev. Boyd entered the sanctuary wearing a simple black suit with an accordion pleated skirt. Her trademark pillbox hat, which she usually wore on Sunday mornings, was missing.
Her clothing was understated, compared to the younger female pastors and pastor’s wives who wore more ornate suits with matching hats and accessories.

When the singing stopped Rev. Boyd was called forward to speak. She announced that special guests were in the sanctuary and she invited the people to look around to see who and where they were. Obediently, the congregation looked around searching for the special guests. Finally, Rev. Boyd announced that the special guests were the children scattered throughout the congregation. She then called the children to come forward and to stand at the front of the sanctuary. 12 children, one around 16 years old and the rest obviously younger came to the front of the sanctuary.

However, before Rev. Boyd addressed the children, she looked toward the rear of the sanctuary and saw the local pastors’ son. She called him forward also, and he obediently responded by coming forward. He was young man appearing to be in his mid to late 20s. She lovingly called him her grandson, even though they were not biologically related. He smiled a little nervously at first, but seemed to appreciate the attention. From her words, I inferred that the young man might have been a “prodigal,” that is someone who had once been actively engaged in the church but for some reason had left the church and its teaching. However, Rev. Boyd did not chide the young man about what or who he was at the time, but she encouraged him by talking to him about who he would be, or maybe had the potential to be. She spoke to him as if he was already that person that he was really meant to be.

When she was finished speaking to the pastors’ son she began speaking to the congregation again. They were already standing up when she announced that they were going to sing to the children who were still standing in the front. The pastors’ son
returned quietly to his seat. She instructed her church organist to accompany the
congregation as they sang the chorus, “Jesus Loves the Little Children.” After a couple
of stanzas Rev. Boyd playfully halted the singing because the whole congregation had not
joined in. She made it clear that she wanted everyone to sing, and to sing loudly. The
congregation started singing again, but this time more loudly.

The children faced the congregation before them while staring with wide eyes. At
first a couple of the toddlers smiled and seemed to be proudly bask in the attention. They
were motionless for the most part. A couple of the little girls began to twist back and
forth as the congregation serenaded them. The wife of the husband-wife pastoral team
moved and stood quietly behind the fidgeting children. They calmed down, and she
returned to her seat.

After the song Rev. Boyd instructed the children to turn around and face her.
They complied without hesitation. She spoke kindly to them with words of
encouragement and then told them to return to their seats. In closing she reminded them
to “keep their feet in the house of the Lord.” This was a discrete reminder for the
children not to get up and walk around during service. The children had been quite
distracting in the previous service by moving around and walking.

Rev. Boyd stood behind a clear Plexiglas podium. She then began to introduce
the pastors and the cities that they came from. She gave a short tribute to each pastor and
the ministry work that they were involved in. Then she asked the members of her
congregation to stand. Several of the pastors of other churches also stood. She talked
about some of the sacrifices that people made to come on the trip.
Rev. Boyd explained to the congregation that one lady (from her church in Ohio) was planning to remain in Florida to visit with relatives. However, two of the relatives had passed away since the lady arrived two nights prior. Rev. Boyd also talked about the lady’s husband, the young man who had compiled all of her written teachings into one book. She spoke some about the young man’s spiritual journey from being a street person to becoming a responsible husband and officer in the church.

She then spoke to the leaders, “I have walked in every office” (referring to the Biblical 5-fold ministry positions of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher). She explained that she was not bragging, but merely stating the truth. She added, “Titles don’t mean anything.” She continued to give instructions while smiling from time to time when she said something that might be considered harsh or difficult.

After her sermon introduction, she down at a card table placed in front of the sanctuary to teach the lesson that she had prepared. She held a microphone in one hand while using the other hand expressively to describe her recent illness. She closed her eyes as she described the physical pain, “It felt like a chisel in my head.” She began to tell the story of her illness, and then veered off to speak about another person’s, an older church mother’s struggle. She used the church mother’s story as an example. She did not finish the story of her own suffering.

Her hand was in constant motion as she spoke. The congregation responded at the pauses in her speech with, “Amen, hmm, yes and right.” To explain what humility was, she used the example of a doormat. “The doormat does not say anything.”

She finally announced the title of her lesson, “All Things are Now Ready.” Her hand rested quietly in her lap. The congregation became quiet and still as she
transitioned into her “teaching mode.” There was no continuous noise or background music. A few people responded to her teaching with soft affirmations from time to time. At some point binders with the teaching notes were handed out to the congregation because most people had their binders open and some were taking notes.

Rev. Boyd continued to teach with her hand is resting on top of the table. She chided the congregation; “It’s quiet in here.” The congregation chuckled as she mimicked people’s actions to illustrate her teaching. Some of the congregation quietly nodded their heads in assent to her teaching. The teaching and congregational response seemed like a choral production. Everyone responded on cue and in rhythm. No one was overly loud or disruptive. She even encouraged congregational response by asking questions like, “Do you believe this?” The congregation then responded, “Amen.” The teacher and the students were like one elegant organism as they interacted in the learning process.

Rev. Boyd’s hands moved expressively at times and sometimes even her foot moved to add emphasis to her teaching. Her facial expressions changed quickly and easily. Sometimes she closed her eyes, at other times she smiled. Another technique she used to add emphasis was pause for a few seconds. From time to time she turned to look sideways and behind her at the pastors that remained in the pulpit area behind her. She spoke strong and forcefully.

I noticed a teen-age boy sitting along the wall, between the drum set and open doors. Rev. Boyd had taken out time to publicly speak prophetic and encouraging words to this young man at the previous service on Friday evening. Now he was staring at her,
almost fixated. He was very quiet and still. From time to time he glanced at his binder and took notes.

About 50 minutes or so into her presentation Rev. Boyd remarked to the congregation, “I’m losing you.” She meant she was losing their attention. She quickened the pace of her teaching. The young man next to the wall yawned and changed positions. Her voice remained expressive, but she changed pitches, loudness and speed until she finished the entire lesson and closed her binder. The congregation then closed their binders too. However, Rev. Boyd continued teaching, citing passages from other lessons she had prepared. She moved quickly.

After she finished teaching, she called the pastors of the church and their family members forward to be prayed for. The other fellowship pastors assisted her. She instructed other pastors to pray for the family members, but she prayed for the pastors. After everyone else that desired prayer was prayed for, she departed the service to prepare to catch her plane home. At her request, the service continued after she left.

The Message

The transcript below is the introduction before Rev. Boyd’s formal teaching ministry at the end of the three day Fellowship service. The transcript divided naturally into three distinct sections: The Celebration, Prophetic Words, and The Call.

The transcripts, covering nearly 30 minutes, are almost verbatim. However it would have been difficult to impossible to transcribe every word because there was so much interaction between the speaker and her audience. Therefore, representative audience responses are in italics. Audience responses are limited in the transcription of the third section to avoid distraction from the words of Rev. Boyd. This is a particularly
rich section of the narrative with Rev. Boyd sharing from her personal experiences and the experiences of other people in the church. In addition, the audience responses were significantly less during this section of her instruction. Formulaic expressions (amen, hallelujah, praise God, etc.) spoken by Rev. Boyd are in bold print. The narrative is presented in poetic form to capture the tempo of the speaker and to appreciate the exchange between the speaker and audience. A series of “…” represent a pause in speech.

April 1, 2007

PART I

The Celebration

In fact, this is the gala.

_Hallelujah_

The due day,

(one man) _Praise God_

This is the day… that the Lord has made.

_Amen_

And we all want to…what?

(Several voices) _Rejoice_

Rejoice!

_AND_ be glad, be glad… in it.

And be glad in it.

We have had such a glorious time… in the Lord.

_Amen_

And God has showered us.

(One female voice) _Bless God_

I want to thank all of you cup bearers.

Cup bearers of the Lord,

Those that are carrying the Gospel.

_Amen_

That you were willing to put down your cup,

And allowed God to pour into your spirit,

It takes something,

When you are filled to the brim with revelations and words,

And God is speaking into your spirit as leaders.

_Praise God._

To be able, that is the greatest gift God can give you,

When you can step aside,
And allow God to pour into your spirits,
And allow your cups to be refilled.
And so we thank God for this day.
This is the day of dessert; you’ve had a seven-course meal.
Now this is the day of dessert and He is going to bless you.
We take our plane. We leave at one o’clock here.
And, all of you that are not taking the plane,
We want you to remain and allow God,
To continue to let Him pour into your spirit,

**He is faithful.**

*(One voice)* He’s faithful, yes!

We have some honored guests here today.
Look around and see if you can find them,
Some that you haven’t seen before.
Very important, you can’t find them?
You can’t?

*(Softly)* Hallelujah, yes…

We are asking all our little children to come up front.
Come up here to the altar.
Bring your children, all your little children. I honor the children.
Unless we come as little children, we cannot what?
*Can’t enter, amen, that’s right.*
It’s more of them. It’s a bunch of them.

Let’s move the table, let them turn their face that way, toward you.

**Praise the Lord, praise God.**

Let them just stand out front.
Calling the little children,
These are God’s precious vessels.
*Amen, yes…*

This is where you begun. Was I ever that little?
*(Congregation chuckling)*

We grow up, and we’re grown.
Turn toward us, their faces toward us.

*(She addresses the keyboard player)* Come on Brother Larry.

**Praise God, praise the Lord. Praise God.**

Now we want to sing, these are our special guests.
*Amen*

You all are my special guests.
*(To the congregation)* I don’t know about you. But I love children,
And I always want to give honor to them.
And they’re part of the service and so we want to sing to them.

**Praise God.**

And yes, that’s my grandson, that’s another honored guest for me today.
Come on up here Darnell.
*(Hand clapping and verbal affirmation.)*
Come on darling, Darnell.
When I first came Darnell was playing, teaching others how.
Still that same little baby to me, and I love him.
I love him so much.
(Looking at the young man) I want you to know I love you.
(Softly) Awwww
I think of you often.

Praise God.
And you shall be a part this con… you are a part of this foundation.
And the foundation, you will be a part of it.

Hallelujah
You shall help bring it forth.

Amen
Nobody looking, I’m speaking what God is speaking.
Yes, amen

Sometime we look at people; we want to cast this out and that.
But see, God has a way to bring them.
He wants the reality.
And, He promises to do that.
And I don’t care what you see today,
As you look on my grandson, he has to be blessed.
He is blessed. He does have a call on his life.
Yes he does!
You can’t get away from it.
No he can’t
And he shall walk in it.
Yes he will
Yes, that’s alright, you shall walk in it.
You will walk in it.
And this city shall be won!
(Hand clapping)
His family shall walk in it.

Praise God.
We speak things as they are.

God is a good God.
Amen

Now let’s sing to the children, Jesus…
Brother Larry, you want to play?
Or are you going to sleep?
(Brother Larry replies) No ma’am
Laughing
Keyboard playing melody.
Now we want everybody.
These are our honored guests.
These children are precious.
Alright, we want everybody to sing,
“Jesus loves the little children, all the little children of the world.”
Who all knows it?
Come on. Let’s sing.
(in unison)
Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight
Jesus Loves the Little Children of the world
Wait a minute. Wait, wait.
Y’all are not singing to these children.
(Congregation chuckling)
I can barely hear you.
I want you to holler.
These are God’s masterpieces.
Great men and great women,
That’s where you used to be.
Look what God has done in your life.
Somebody give Him a praise.
Come on.
(Congregation in unison sings the verse through four times)
Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world,
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight
Jesus Loves the Little Children of the world.
Praise God, praise God.
Hand clapping and verbal praising the Lord.
(The music stops)
(Addressing the children) We want you to know that Jesus loves you.
And we honor you today.
You are precious in the sight of the Lord.
You are very, very special… very special.
Oh yes, look at that smile.
God is faithful.
Now you may be seated.
Keep your feet in the house of the Lord.
God is good.
Clapping
Now let’s give the children a hand.
Louder Clapping

PART II
Prophetic Words

God has been good to us,
And we want to thank you for your hospitality and your love.
That smiling mother there,

_Amen_

As you smile mother, Mother Leggett,
God has manifold blessings.
You shall live, and not die.

_Amen_

The enemy has fought you,
But you have a determination to make it.
And you will make it.

You keep that continuation of love in your heart, and that smile.
If you don’t do nothing but come sit and smile,
You have inspired me today by your smile.
Many people today are… sad, in their countenance,
Forever complaining,

**Praise God.**

But I have a joy in my soul about you.
I feel that you are so glad,
Just to be in the house of the Lord today.
I believe that you have that message that David had.
“I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

**He is a faithful God.**

We want to thank all of you that have traveled.
Thank God for Sister Dimples (nickname).

_Chuckles_
All the way from Wis… Indianapolis.
She didn’t get here just to get here.
She came, and many sacrifices.
This precious pastor, Pastor Millie,
Praise God, such a blessing to the Body of Christ.

**Praise the Lord.**

These fellowship ministers and pastors,
Pastor Clemson and his dear first lady,

**Praise God.**

They were anxious to be here.
They gave up their services.
They have a beautiful church, beautiful people.
They gave up their services to be here on a Sunday morning.
And we thank for God for Brother Garvey and Sister Garvey.
Such great people of the Gospel,
Doing a great work in Marshall City,
God has blessed them, and their secretary came.
It’s a blessing,

**Praise the Lord.**

We don’t want to take you for granted.
Because, you didn’t have to come,
You didn’t have to give up your services. Sometimes we think it is a forced thing. Nothing is forced on you. Thank God for our assistant pastor. I appreciate him.

_**Clapping**_

Very supportive, very obedient, **Praise God**… Very trustworthy.

My son in laws, stand up, because I see you looking.

_**Clapping, laughter**_

Special accolades for you.

_**Clapping and chuckling.**_

Elder Ferris, Chairman of the Deacon Board and Deacon Clark. All the deacons, elders, and their precious wives, Everybody that came.

(Speaking to her congregation) All Saints Church, just stand up.

_**(Clapping)**_

_Amen, amen._

**He’s good, isn’t He?**

**He’s good.**

And we thank God for Brother, uh Da, Darlington.

_**Clapping**_

And his wife, it’s a blessing.

I was telling this precious baby here… that usually…

God has brought us all a long ways.

He brought us a long ways, all of us.

In the time of grief, and different things come,

We sometimes ball up and go under the table,

Or we leave abruptly.

And there is nothing we can do.

And, in their travel down here Sister Darlington, On the same day lost her stepfather in Tallahassee, And her aunt in Tampa, the same day. But they are here, and you would never know.

So we want to be in the service,

We want to enjoy Jesus.

**God is good.**

They came to the room this morning with such joy in their hearts.

We want to be in the service, we want to enjoy Jesus.

And this young man took every message, Stand up son.

I think I told you before.

Every message that I have preached, Every message, it’s been many, many years.

But he gathered every message.
Praise God.

Tapes?
But, just the messages that I wrote.
But he compiled them.
And the book is so thick.
You would never think that anybody would be that observant.
God saved him out of the streets,
Brought him a long way,
And he has a thankful heart,
And he loves God.
And I can appreciate him today.

PART III

The Call

I say to this Body of Christ,
Stay close to God.

Amen
Stay close to your leader.
Leaders put down your cups and allow God to fill you the more.

Praise God.
Have a listening ear,
Because this is the time God wants to speak to you.
You know sometimes we have a message, and we have a word.
There’s a time that this Word has to be proven.
We can teach it, we can preach it, we can speak it.
And we can walk in every office.
I have walked in every office.
I thank God for that.
There is nothing to boast about.
I never boast.
I never say who I am or who… what it is.
Titles don’t mean anything.
But the grace of God,
And the way in which you can stand… in the hard times.
For surely if you bring this Word,
You gonna have to prove this Word.
And that’s what it’s all about.
You have to eat it.
So make sure that every word you speak,
Make it short and sweet.
Because every word,
You’re gonna have to eat.

He is faithful.
So that way it can be digestible… and you can make it.
In the hard times,  
Because you gonna be tried.  
Today, we want, you all carry on the service.  
As we depart this place.  
The anointing will remain in this place.  
But, I do want to impart a word into your spirit.  
Is that alright?  
Alright  
Alright,  
**Praise the Lord.**  
*(Silence)*  
**Praise the Lord,**  
I am a teacher of God’s Word.  
*(Sound of papers rattling).*  
And the Word of God abideth in my… heart.  
I see a great work here.  
From the beginning, up until now,  
The enemy has tried… the works here.  
And your works must be tried with fire.  
Your ministry must be tried with fire.  
**Praise the Lord,**  
He takes the fight out.  
He takes everything out.  
Because as God begins to use you,  
Ah, when He begins to use you,  
You will fight, because you want to come out.  
**Praise God,**  
And he (the devil) don’t want you to see yourself.  
The first thing He (God) shows you is yourself.  
The message that the Lord gave,  
First of the year,  
And everywhere I go,  
Cross-country… and carry this message,  
And, it first had to begin in us.  
**Praise God,**  
We were teaching,  
And as the prophet says,  
“You will be… tried.”  
**Hallelujah,**  
As I taught this Word in consecration this time,  
The enemy attacked my very brain.  
It seemed like a chisel was in my head.  
And it chiseled away at the very skull, in the very bone.  
I could hear it, I could feel it… I could feel the chisel.  
The pain was so great.  
But I already taught about the battlefield of the mind.
So I had to go through that battle.
   And it was so extreme.
Many things that I’ve gone through,
   Many healings,
We seen God raise our church mother.
That’s what we want to see, miracles.
   We saw miracles from God.
Our church mother just raised up.
No pulse. No nothing, no nothing.
And many, just stroke after stroke,
And her face twisted and twisted.
   We was able to see,
Coming out of the prayer,
The elders the deacons,
We saw how the enemy just took her face and twisted it.
   Even the very structure of her face,
Her eyes would go up and it would come all the way back.
   Just twisted,
   But with the prayer,
And she is a prayer warrior,
Been on that prayer warrior seat for over 50 years,
   Praise God.
   Walked with her,
   Prayed together,
And, I never in my life seen her with a bad attitude.
   I never seen her speak a ill word.
I never seen her come up against a leader.
   I never saw her speak out.
   She stayed in her lane,
   And her lane was prayer.
Souls were delivered and set free.
And, even today and how old is she?
   90 years old.
Started as a young woman on the altar,
   And all she have left is a praise
Some have come against her,
   But, they got to walk that walk.
   Alright
   You…more than a title,
   It’s more than a name,
   It’s more than being seen,
   It’s more than being recognized.
But it is what God has ordained for you to do.
   And, if you can go through it,
   And you can stick with it,
God shepherd us all into a place;
The calling.
And sometimes we don’t want to walk in our calling,
Because we feel it is too hard.
Sometimes we don’t want to stay there until we are made.
We come out of the oven half baked and half done,
Looking good on the outside,
But, the inside is in turmoil.
And, very indigestible when you try to serve it,
But God is calling for holy people,
That will lift Him up and give Him the praise,
And, give Him the Glory.
God is looking for those who say,
“I die daily.”
And, it won’t be no more I,
But, it will be only Christ.
You won’t have to say who you are,
Or what you are called to do.
It will portray itself through your going through.

The Lord is faithful.
Some of us will walk away,
Because the task gets too hard.
But if that call is on your life,
You can run but you can’t get away.
Because, God is going to make you and mold you,
And, prepare you for the test.
And, He will fix you,
So that you will be like the doormat.
You might not have them in Florida.
We have doormats,
Because of the snow, the ice, and the rain,
And the heavy storms that come.
And, when they come, you put it at your door,
And, everybody can come and wipe their feet on it.
Sometimes there is dung on there.

Praise God.
And mud,
And, sometimes you have nails in your shoes.
And, you wipe it on the doormat.
And, the doormat don’t talk.
And, that is what God is trying to get us to today.
That we can take the fire so,
The storm and the heat,
And, the things that come our way,
And, we get in a place that,
And, we won’t talk.
We’ll just give God a praise in our hearts.
Today I want to speak into your heart,
“All Things are Now Ready.”
Luke fourteen, and the seventeenth verse,

“And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden,
Come; for all things are now ready.”
(Luke 14:17 King James Version)

Now remember as you answer the call to come,
You will have a battle in your mind.
God is calling some today.
And whatever place you are walking in,
He says come.
Come for all things are now ready.
Come without excuses.
Come just as you are.
Remember, I said you would have a battle in your mind.
Why would this battle be in your mind?
It is because your mind is the battlefield.
As I teach today,
Someone is battling in the mind.
Because, your mind don’t want to hear,
It don’t want to be still…

*******

The remainder of the teaching session lasted about forty more minutes after which
she left abruptly to catch her flight back to Ohio. I learned later that she had been gravely
ill during the entire time she was in Florida. She never completely recovered. Rev. Boyd
died on July 3, 2008. She was 80 years old.
Chapter 5

Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

This chapter simultaneously presents the analysis and interpretation of Rev. Boyd’s sermon introduction. This approach seemed most appropriate because interpretive meaning emerged naturally from intact sections of the narrative text. The whole process was carried out in reference to the three research questions for this study. The first two sections of this chapter answer the first research question, “How did this elderly African American clergywoman construct meaningful communication within the context of the Black church?” The third section addresses the first research question, “How did this elderly African American clergywoman make sense of her life?” The final research question, “Can the way she made sense of her life and constructed meaningful communication, in the context of the Black church, provide a useful model for teachers in addressing the needs of Black students?” will be answered in Chapter Six.

Hamer’s (1999) folkloristic approach, in which folklore is defined as “a situated performance of a traditionalized text in which the performer takes responsibility for communicating a version of the text to the audience that is meaningful to them in their current situation” (p. 366), was used to examine Rev. Boyd’s sermon introduction delivery. Hamer’s study focused on the pedagogy involved in classroom teachers’ storytelling. Similarly, this study will identify methodology involved in the delivery of
this sermon introduction. The application for pedagogy will be discussed in the next chapter.

In folkloristic tradition, Rev. Boyd’s presentation of her sermon introduction was viewed as the performance of a traditional text; in this case, the Bible. In addition, the performances took place in natural settings such as church services, prayer meetings, and Bible studies.

In her preaching performance, Boyd interjected familiar metaphors, examples from other people’s lives, and her own personal stories to present a rich and dynamic narrative account. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) described metaphors as “a figurative use of language” (p. 85), while (Czarniawska, 2004) referred to word’s Greek roots meaning “to transport from one place to another (p. 118). Metaphors serve a number of purposes in narratives. Coffey and Atkinson proposed that they aid in understanding familiar cultural domains within a given culture. This purpose is also advanced by Creswell (2007) suggested metaphors are a method to communicate meaning when the narrator is not able to use more direct and conventional approaches. Czarniawska also argued that metaphors help the listeners to understand the point of the story being told. In the first and third sections of the sermon introduction narrative, where metaphors were generously applied, some aspects of deconstructive methodology were incorporated in the analysis. This approach examines the narrative text’s construction for deeper, unspoken and hidden meanings by dismantling the text, and then searching for implicit, as well as, explicit meaning. One of Czarniawska’s analytic strategies (adapted from Martin, 1990); probing for multiple meanings associated with the use of metaphors, was utilized to search for
underlying meanings and purposes submerged in the vignettes scattered throughout the narrative.

Overall, the narrative was liberally infused with amen(s), hallelujah(s) and praise God(s) uttered by Rev. Boyd. Wharry (2003) referred to the use of these words and short phrases as religious formulaic expressions. Wharry investigated the use and purposes discourse markers in African American sermons. Interestingly, she found that African American female preachers use a greater variety of formulaic expressions than their male counterparts. She also found that religious formulaic expressions fulfilled a number of purposes in sermons. They were most frequently used as textual boundary markers. As such, they may signal a change in the use of language or presentation. For instance, Rev. Boyd used “praise God” to switch the focus of the narrative from other people’s sad responses to suffering to the joy she felt for Mother Leggett:

Many people today are… sad, in their countenance,
   Forever complaining,
   **Praise God.**
   But I have a joy in my soul about you.

A second use of the textual boundary is to change topics within the sermon. Rev. Body displayed this technique when she used the expression “praise God” to change the topic of the discourse from the children to Darnell:

   I don’t know about you. But I love children,
   And I always want to give honor to them.
   And they’re part of the service and so we want to sing to them.
   **Praise God.**
   And yes, that’s my grandson, that’s another honored guest for me today.
   Come on up here Darnell.

In contrast to the first two types of textual boundaries, the expressions might also indicate the continuance of a topic. Rev. Boyd used the expressions “God is a good God” and
“Amen” to return the attention back to the children after she had previously veered the discourse away from the children to Darnell.

We speak things as they are.

*God is a good God.*

*Amen*

Now let’s sing to the children, Jesus…

Another use of formulaic expressions is as a spiritual discourse maintenance marker. However, Wharry (2003) cautioned that in this usage, the expression were more than simple verbal space fillers because the choice of the words used as fillers are significant. Generally, religious space fillers are only used within the preaching context. As such, these particular expressions are chosen, instead of the more secular “uh” and “you know” to preserve the spiritual tone of the sermon. In a similar function, formulaic expressions might also be used as rhythmic markers to allow the preacher to take a breath without breaking the rhythm of the sermon during more intense portions. This may have been the case for Rev. Boyd, given her physically weak condition as she shared the intense rhythmic narrative below. The “praise God” in the narrative below could also be viewed as a textual boundary marker.

…The elders, the deacons.

We saw how the enemy just took her face and twisted it.

Even the very structure of her face.

Her eyes would go up and it would come all the way back,

Just twisted.

But with the prayer, and she is a prayer warrior,

Been on that prayer warrior seat for over 50 years.

**Praise God.**

Walked with her, prayed together,

And I never in my life seen her with a bad attitude.

I never seen her speak a ill word…

The use of the religious formulaic expressions as a means of group identification was not discussed by Wharry (2003). The words chosen by speakers in religious
formulaic expressions are distinctly religious and their use is reserved for religious events. However, they are also words that are shared with and used by listeners in the congregation. Since these words are shared and understood in only in the Black church context would suggest that they also serve as a marker of Black religious identity because people who use those words are also asserting their membership in the larger group.

Three major themes emerged from the coding that described Rev. Boyd’s communicative style relevant to the context. The themes corresponded with the divisions of the narrative and were analyzed as three separate thematic units. The first thematic unit “The Celebration” was naturally drawn from several metaphors used to describe the celebratory nature of the Sunday morning church service. The second thematic unit “The Prophet” was littered with encouragements and grateful motivational remarks directed toward individuals within the congregation. They concerned her positive public regard for and belief of future success of selected people attending the service. The third thematic unit “The Call” was more serious and cautionary. Stories of other people’s suffering and her own story of struggle subtly revealed her personal approach to and thinking about life.

Several smaller stories were pulled from the narrative for analysis. Hamer (1999) contended that stories provide a vehicle to construct as well as reconstruct meaning and vision. All of the stories shared a similar five part construction that included a hero, a difficult assignment, a complication, a villain, and a solution. Generally, the solutions resulted in the hero’s ability to fulfill their particular vocation within the local church congregation.
Finally, there was a juxtaposition of people who seemed valuable because of their titles or positions against people who (in the church context) would seem less valuable. For instance, she championed children, a wheelchair bound woman, and a young man who had stopped attending church. In contrast, she chided the adults for not recognizing the children and gave several admonitions to the pastors to not think too highly of their position or titles, as well urging them to restrain from preaching, and instead to listen to her.

Portions of the narratives from each thematic unit were analyzed below as examples of Rev. Boyd’s construction and delivery of meaningful communication in the church context. Further analysis uncovered her womanist approach to making meaning of her life.

The First Thematic Unit: The Celebration

The Gala

In fact, this is the gala.
This is the day… that the Lord has made.
And we all want to…what?
(Congregation shouts “rejoice.”)
Rejoice! And be glad in it.
We have had such a glorious time… in the Lord!

The first thematic unit began with a metaphor proclaiming the Sunday morning church service to be a gala celebration. The term gala is usually assigned to a festive and public event of great importance. In Rev. Boyd’s thinking, this Sunday morning gathering of pastors and congregations from several different churches across the country was one such occasion. On the surface it would seem that Rev. Boyd wanted to stress that this gala was a gift from God and thus an event of great joy and happiness. In doing so, she elevated participation in the worship service from duty to privilege for the
congregation. On a deeper level however, this was not just another church meeting for Rev. Boyd because of the importance of the message that she felt compelled to share. While the other church services and sermons preached by other fellowship pastors were part of the celebration, the gala was the grand finale, and thus the service with the greatest significance.

Implicit in attending a gala celebration is communication and participation with other people in attendance. Rev. Boyd encouraged congregational involvement and interaction by incorporating of a number of techniques. She used a modification of the well known call-response method in which the preacher makes a statement, and then asks the congregation to respond verbally. During the sermon she questioned the congregation, “Do you believe this?” Then she paused for the congregation to respond, after which, as if on cue, she would speak again. Sometimes, she would partially quote familiar verses from the Bible and then pause as a signal to the congregation to complete the verses. At other times she would speak and then pause, without asking for a response, yet the congregation knew from the rhythm of the sermon that a response was expected. All of the techniques elicited the desired affirmative response. Congregational participation was not random or disorganized because she skillfully guided their participation through open questions and rhythm, as well as the use of voice inflection and timing of delivery.

This portion of the narrative also advances Hamer’s (1999) thesis stating teachers’ classroom storytelling blends “nationally canonized, textbook information with the teller’s own repertory of stories (p. 364).” Hamer found that this mixture of personal stories and traditionalized text was a vehicle to enhance student interest in the subject.
being taught. However, in this case, Rev. Boyd’s metaphorical story of the church service as a celebratory event was validated by the Bible; the official canonized text. It is interesting to note how she seamlessly moved from her personal story of the gala, “In fact, this is the gala,” to the familiar Biblical text, “This is the day… that the Lord has made.” Consequently, this portion of Rev. Boyd’s narrative was not only purposed to promote the celebratory nature of the morning church service, but was also a Bible Scripture review for her listeners.

The Meal

And so we thank God for this day.
This is the day of dessert; you’ve had a seven-course meal.
Now this is the day of dessert and He is going to bless you.

Reminding the people that the gala was a culmination of the weekend events in Florida, Rev. Boyd offered a second metaphor in the celebration story proclaiming the church service to be the dessert at the end of the meal. She told them that up until this time they had eaten well; a seven-course-meal. However, this day was so special that it was called the dessert. The dessert was a metaphor indicating that this was the final and most special church service. Thus, God’s blessings could be expected. However, the joyful and celebratory theme carried an underlying sense of anticipation and urgency about the message she was about to share with the people who were there.

The Cupbearers

I want to thank all of you cupbearers.
Cupbearers of the Lord,
Those that are carrying the Gospel,
That you were willing to put down your cup,
And allowed God to pour into your spirit,
It takes something when you are filled to the brim,
With revelations and words,
And God is speaking into your spirit as leader,
To be able, that is the greatest gift God can give you, when you can step aside, And allow God to pour into your spirits and allow your cups to be refilled.

Rev. Boyd, as hostess of the gala celebration, personally addressed the different people who were in attendance. She used the metaphor of cupbearer to describe the pastors and leaders in the congregation. She implied that the cup they bore was their preaching ministries to their congregations. Their cups were usually full because they had to deliver to their sermons to their congregations. This day they were to come with empty cups. Telling the pastors to put down their cups was her covert way of restraining the more verbacious pastors from preaching before she delivered her sermon. Part of the urgency of her message was that it was to be delivered to these leaders, as well as their congregations. Time limits and her frail physical condition might have also contributed to the necessity that she be the only speaker. She reminded the preacher to remain silent again, later in the narrative.

The Guests of Honor

We have some honored guests here today. Look around and see if you can find them, Some that you haven’t seen before. Very important, you can’t find them? We are asking all our little children to come up front. Come up here to the altar. Bring your children, all your little children. I honor the children.

Continuing with the celebratory theme, Rev. Boyd playfully announced the gala’s guests of honor by inviting the congregation to guess who they were. After building a degree of suspense, she declared that all the children were the honored guests. By challenging the people to find the honored guests she implied that the children had not
been included in the service. To address this oversight she used adjectives to describe the children like “honored guests” and “very important.”

Separating children from adults is common in White congregations where children are dropped off at the age-specific children’s church room before the parents enter the sanctuary. In other cases the children are dismissed from the sanctuary before preaching begins. In contrast, children remain with their parents in the sanctuary throughout the entire service in many Black churches. In Rev. Boyd’s church it was not unusual for special services to last from three to four hours. At some point in the previous service the children became bored and some of them began to walk around causing some distraction from the preaching. Rev. Boyd addressed the children’s behavior by giving them ample attention before she began to teach. In this instance, she called the children forward to receive the tribute due to special guests. Instead of the children singing to the adults, the adults sang to the children. Thus, the celebration concluded with happy singing to the guests of honor.

The Grand Finale

Now you may be seated.
Keep your feet in the house of the Lord.
God is good.
Now let’s give the children a hand.

After the musical tribute Rev. Boyd gave verbal affirmations of love and prophetic words of hope (which will be examined later). She gave the children a short admonition before sending them back to their seats. She casually corrected the children’s behavior by telling them to “be seated” and to “keep their feet.” She maintained the spiritual tone of the service by paraphrasing a Bible verse from Ecclesiastes 5:1, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,” instead of overtly demanding that the
children not walk while she was teaching. Rev. Boyd diplomatically followed the admonition by encouraging applause from the adults. The children sat down and remained quietly in their seats throughout the rest of the service.

*The Second Thematic Unit: The Prophet*

Nobody looking, I’m speaking what God is speaking.
Sometimes we look at people,
We want to cast this out and that.
But see, God has a way to bring them.
He wants the reality.
And, He promises to do that.
And I don’t care what you see today,
As you look on my grandson, he has to be blessed.
He is blessed. He does have a call on his life.
You can’t get away from it.
And he shall walk in it.
Yes, that’s alright, you shall walk in it. You will walk in it.

Darnell was also identified as an honored guest. In addition, Rev. Boyd addressed him as her grandson. Then she recounted her first meeting with him, when he was active in the church as a musician. He was part of the foundation (the beginning) of the church, but she implied that he was no longer active in the church. In spite of his wayward actions, Rev. Boyd warned the congregation not to draw their own conclusions by stating that some people (erroneously) try to cast this or that out. It is not clear what she meant by casting out. The reference could have been to some people’s beliefs that the young man’s actions were motivated by the Devil or perhaps that some people may have thought Darnell should be cast out of the congregation. Either scenario implied that Darnell may have been involved in activity that was not sanctioned by the church. It’s interesting that she did not identify a villain that caused him to leave the church in this story. Instead, she offered a different picture for Darnell by suggesting that his life took a different turn because he was being prepared by God to fulfill the ministry call on his life.
So, no matter how things appeared, Darnell was still in the hands of God. Furthermore, God was guiding Darnell into his rightful place within the congregation. Finally she prophesied the happy ending of the story, where Darnell would eventually be rejoined with the congregation and fulfilling the ministry call of God on his life.

The narrative about Darnell fulfilled a number of purposes. First, she used Darnell’s story to instruct the congregation about behavior towards those who leave the church. Secondly, the story was meant to encourage the young man by letting him know that he was still an important part of the congregation and God still had purpose for his life. This story, more than the others, was co-constructed with the congregation. As Rev. Boyd spoke, the congregation exuberantly affirmed her words. In Darnell’s story, he was prophesied to be hero in the future. The assignment was for him to possibly serve in the preaching ministry or music ministry. The complication was Darnell’s separation from the congregation. This is the only story where no villain was identified. The oversight may have been because Rev. Boyd believed the complication was not the fault of a villain, but was God’s way of preparing Darnell for his future purpose. Finally, the solution was Darnell’s future restoration with the congregation and his future usefulness within the congregation.

Rev. Boyd began this section of the narrative with a declaration that she was “speaking what God is speaking.” In this sense, she believed that she was speaking prophetically. She prophesied to a young man who had been a part of the church, but had since left. Although there were many things that she could have said to him about his present condition, she chose to focus on his future in context with the congregation and with his parents. She declared that Darryl’s present state was not reality. Reality for
Darryl rested on his potential in his church and familial community. Thus, speaking prophetically, Rev. Boyd chose to point out Darnell’s potential instead of his present state.

Prophetic words were spoken to an older woman who was wheelchair bound.

As you smile mother, Mother Leggett,
    God has manifold blessings.
    You shall live, and not die.
    The enemy has fought you,
    But you have a determination to make it.
    And you will make it.

Mother Leggett was a rotund, older woman. Rev. Boyd seemed drawn to the people who were otherwise looked over. This preference was clear in Mother Leggett’s story. Mother Leggett smiled, in spite of her physical hardships. There was a villain, the enemy, who fought to keep her in his grasp of sickness and death. But Mother Leggett was determined to advance, even though her advance required fighting the villain. Her weapon against the villain was the love in her heart and her ability to smile during times of suffering. She had to continue to advance because she also had a (implied) call on her life. She was called to inspire the congregation by her example of suffering with gladness, and not complaining. Her faithfulness in suffering caused God to reserve many blessings for her.

In this story Mother Leggett was the hero because she continued to smile. She was given an assignment to inspire the congregation with her smile. However there was a complication, her physical disability. So the villain tried to use the complication to fight her. Her solution was to persevere because her enduring smile, in spite of her circumstances, gave her life meaning because of her usefulness in the congregation.
The purpose of this story was to encourage Mother Leggett and to present her as an example of fortitude in spite of great difficulty. An underlying message is Mother Leggett’s usefulness and inclusion in the congregation in spite of her physical limitations.

In like manner, there was also an underlying message in Rev. Boyd’s prophetic admonitions concerning the children.

These are God’s masterpieces.
Great men and great women,
That’s where you used to be.
Look what God has done in your life.

Speaking to the adults, Rev. Boyd used the metaphor “God’s masterpieces” to describe the children. This statement took place after she had playfully chided the adults for not singing loudly enough to the children who were standing in the front of the sanctuary. The metaphor defies conventional wisdom because it targets children, who are still in their formative stages, as the highest or supreme creation of God. Indeed, the word masterpiece is rooted in the language of the medieval guilds to describe the work presented to the guildsmen as proof that the presenter was qualified to be called master. In current times the mention of the word masterpiece also implies the artistic creation has substantial, if not limitless, worth. The immense value held for the children was implied by the metaphor Rev. Boyd chose to describe them.

Rev. Boyd also spoke prophetically about the children as “great men and great women.” As a prophet she did not distinguish who the children were from who they would potentially be in the future. She offered evidence of the children’s eventual rise to greatness by reminding the adults that they were once children. Thus, if the adults who were once children had become great women and men, then the same fate for the children in the church was not inconceivable.
The prophecy had two purposes, first to remind the adults of the importance of the children in the congregation and second for the children to hear and understand their importance in the congregation. Rev. Boyd continually reminded the children and other people who might otherwise feel disenfranchised, that they were an important part of the congregation. She used prophecy and encouraging words to assure people that they did belong, and that they were contributors to the life of their various church congregations.

In addition to using prophetic words in ministry, Rev. Boyd employed other communicative techniques to engage and encourage her congregation. She set aside time during this portion of the narrative to share thankful words. She expressed words of appreciation to the pastors and leaders, to the host church, to the people who traveled to be in the services, and to the young man who compiled her sermons. Voicing her appreciation made it clear to the congregation that they and their efforts were not taken for granted. In this short narrative she offered specific thanks to people seven separate times. Consequently, the importance of expressing her appreciation was assumed from how frequently she spoke works of thankfulness.

Mothering and using motherly words was the second technique frequently used by Rev. Boyd in a variety of situations. The concept of Othermother (Case, 1997) suggests that African American women tend act maternal because their concept of family extends beyond the narrow dimension of the nuclear family unit generally accepted in the dominant middle class culture (Jimenz, 2002). Rev. Boyd implicitly understood her Othermother status, although she had probably never heard the word. The Othermother approach was displayed when she spoke to Darnell:

- And yes, that’s my grandson, that’s another honored guest for me today.
Still that same little baby to me, and I love him.

I want you to know I love you. I think of you often.

This Othermother approach was used to affirm this young man who had drifted from the congregational norm. Although there was no biological relationship, she addressed him as her grandson. By publically acknowledging him as her grandson she displayed unconditional acceptance of him in his present state. He did not need to change for her to show love towards him. A hallmark of a mother’s love is unconditional acceptance.

At times Rev. Boyd lovingly addressed male members of her congregation as “son.” She spoke of the young man who compiled her sermons into a book in this manner:

And this young man took every message, stand up son.

The Othermother approach was used humorously to address the male musician:

Brother Larry, you want to play? Or are you going to sleep?

Research suggests that clergywomen use a maternal approach in relating to their congregations as an effort to mitigate resistance to their leadership role (Frame & Shehan, 2004). In this instance the musician was a man in his early sixties who otherwise might have been offended by the public chiding from a female. However, in this case he did go along with the playful chiding, probably because it was done with an Othermother approach. The younger man had also been won over by her motherly demeanor in addressing him as “son.” The Othermother approach to ministry, rooted in African American culture, was woven into the tapestry of her public ministry performance. This approach seemed essential for maintaining the attention and cooperation of her listeners.
The Third Thematic Unit: The Call

The call and the associated suffering was a major thread running throughout the entire narrative, but was particularly emphasized in this latter portion. Rev. Boyd transitioned into a longer narrative explaining the call after giving the example of an old church mother’s suffering.

…more than a title,
It’s more than a name,
It’s more than being seen,
It’s more than being recognized.
But it is what God has ordained for you to do.
And if you can go through it and you can stick with it.
God shepherd us all into a place;

The calling.

The meaning of the call, in this text, encompassed more than simply God’s command to preach. The calling was not about an individual agenda leading to personal recognition. Rev. Boyd saw the call as first, a fulfillment of purpose. In this sense the call was the personal acknowledgement of a life mission. Second, the call was also seen as a destination that all could strive to reach. As seen in the previous section, Rev. Boyd believed that everyone within the congregation had a unique purpose. When seen as a place, the calling could only be reached after enduring an (implied) difficult journey. Hence, the call was always tied to suffering in these narratives. For instance, Darnell had a call on his life that he and his family would fulfill. However, God had to first bring him to place of reality. The implication being that Darnell had not reached the place of his calling, but that God was prodding him in the direction of his calling through the things that he either was facing, or would face in the future. Rev. Boyd encouraged the suffering Florida congregation. She also referred to the suffering of people in her congregation and retold their stories to provide examples for her listeners. Finally, she described her own
suffering to fulfill the call of God on her life. Then she encouraged her listeners to endure and embrace suffering for the call of God on their lives.

Rev. Boyd spoke directly to the members of the Florida church about their suffering:

I see a great work here.
From the beginning, up until now,
The enemy has tried… the works here.
And your works must be tried with fire.
Your ministry must be tried with fire.
Praise the Lord, He takes the fight out.
He takes everything out.
Because as God begins to use you,
Ah, when He begins to use you,
You will fight, because you want to come out.
And he (the devil) don’t want you to see yourself.
The first thing He (God) shows you is yourself.

This narrative describing the church’s trials was constructed in the same way as the other stories. The church was the hero and the church’s ministry assignment was to be used by God. The trials the church faced were the complication and the enemy (the Devil who sent the trials) was the villain. The ability to withstand hardship and become transparent, that is to see their selves as they really were, was the ultimate solution.

The purpose of this portion of the narrative was to encourage the congregation and the pastors, as well as to help them withstand the inevitable difficult times they either were currently encountering, or would encounter in the future. The call was referenced when she spoke prophetically about the great work the church was to accomplish. Interestingly, although she identified the enemy in the narrative, the solution to their difficulties was not to conquer the enemy, but to conquer self. Thus, Rev. Boyd introduced the metaphor of “trial by fire.” In context with this portion of the narrative, the fire could be understood to be a refining or purifying force. When the refiner subjects
precious metals to the refining fire the impurities in the metal are revealed. She acknowledged that they would be tempted to fight to the enemy because he caused the suffering. However, instead of fighting back, she implied that the suffering should bring them to a place where honest acknowledgement self would defeat the enemy’s plan. Therefore, when the desire to fight was replaced with a desire for self examination, they would reach a level of transparency enabling them to fulfill the mission their church was called to perform.

Rev. Boyd also shared a compelling story about the suffering of an older church mother. This narrative, in part, was a tribute to the church mother, who was not present. Showing honor to other people, especially older people, was very important to Rev. Boyd. She had a way of showing honor publically with words as well as with deeds. She showed high honor to the 90-year-old church mother, even though the mother was no longer completely lucid. This church mother was described earlier in the field notes from an earlier field observation.

Then Rev. Boyd asked me to testify about the older mother’s impact on my life. I spoke about her ability to cook well and my personal interactions with her decades earlier. The older mother was attentive and looked as if she wanted to respond. Sometimes she incoherently mimicked words that were spoken by other people. We all chuckled at her unexpected remarks. She sang and offered praises praise to God while I gave my testimony.

Rev. Boyd had been close friends with the old church mother for over 50 years. Thus, she offered a vivid description of her old friend’s endurance during her suffering journey to fulfill her calling as a prayer warrior.

We seen God raise our church mother…
Our church mother just raised up.
No pulse. No nothing, no nothing.
And many, just stroke after stroke,
And her face twisted and twisted.
We was able to see, coming out of the prayer, the elders the deacons. We saw how the enemy just took her face and twisted it. Even the very structure of her face. Her eyes would go up and it would come all the way back, Just twisted.

But with the prayer, and she is a prayer warrior, Been on that prayer warrior seat for over 50 years. Praise God. Walked with her, prayed together, And I never in my life seen her with a bad attitude. I never seen her speak a ill word. I never seen her come up against a leader. I never saw her speak out. She stayed in her lane, And her lane was prayer. Souls were delivered and set free. And even today and how old is she? 90 years old. Started as a young woman on the altar, And all she have left is a praise

This story followed the construction model of the other stories. The old church mother was the hero, and her assignment was to pray. The complication was physical illness. The villain who caused the illness was the enemy (the Devil). The solution was her ability to persevere in her life-long calling to pray, in spite of the ongoing attacks of the enemy. Like the heroes in the previous stories, her fulfillment of the call on her life made her useful in the congregation. Even though she had lost many of the faculties that were present in her earlier life, including lucidity, she still praised God. Consequently, she was still valued and useful in the congregation.

Rev. Boyd delivered a riveting personal narrative about the physical suffering she had recently endured to fulfill her call to preach the message that God had given her:

The message that the Lord gave, First of the year, And everywhere I go, Cross-country… and carry this message, And, it first had to begin in us.
Praise God, we were teaching,  
And as the prophet says,  
“You will be… tried.”  
Hallelujah.  
As I taught this Word in consecration this time,  
The enemy attacked my very brain.  
It seemed like a chisel was in my head.  
And it chiseled away at the very skull, in the very bone.  
I could hear it, I could feel it… I could feel the chisel.  
The pain was so great.  
But I already taught about the battlefield of the mind.  
So I had to go through that battle.

Although this narrative is short it is very important because it provides insight into the 
way that Rev. Boyd made sense of her life. This narrative contains all of the elements of 
a classical tale replete with heroine and villain. It begins with her as the heroine teaching 
about the “Battlefield of the Mind.” She sensed the importance of this teaching because 
she taught everywhere she went, not only at her church, but also across the country. 
However, as she prepared through fasting and prayer to take the message to Florida, the 
villain came and attacked her. She implied that the Devil was threatened by this teaching 
because it exposed his methods. Up until this time she had only taught about the 
battlefield, but now she had become the battlefield. This battlefield had become very 
personal because it took place inside of her.

A glaring omission in this narrative is its coda. There is no neatly tied-up 
resolution at the end of her story. She concluded with an admission of the necessity of 
her personal suffering. Then, she abruptly began a new narrative about the suffering of 
another person. As a result the congregation was left with images of a devilish villain 
chiseling into her brain. This omission in the coda is best understood when looking at the 
purpose and moral of the narrative. Rev. Boyd wanted her listeners to know that she had 
to experience the things she taught first, to be able to teach effectively. She believed that
she could not face her suffering passively, but that she had to embrace the suffering experience to teach authoritatively. Thus, this story did have an ending, just not the expected happy ending with her conquering the source of her physical suffering.

Utilizing the story construction model, Rev. Boyd was the hero and her assignment was to share the message that God had given to her. The complication for her was the physical illness. The villain was the enemy who chiseled painfully into her head. The solution was her acceptance of the suffering, with the knowledge that this experience would enable her to share the message God had given to her with authority.

Unknowingly for Rev. Boyd, her personal narrative revealed aspects of the womanist approach in making sense of her life. Drawing from three aspects of Walker’s (1984) womanist approach: love of, 1) the Spirit, 2) the struggle, 3) the folk, and 4) the self, we can take a glimpse at how this elderly African American clergywoman made sense of her life. First, as mentioned in the narrative above, there was no account of her slaying the villain and there was no mention of a last minute rescuer. Her long life had given her the experience to understand the unavoidable struggles associated with love of the Spirit, love of the folk, and love of the self. For Rev. Boyd, loving the Spirit meant obeying the call by whatever means necessary because she held herself accountable to God for the way that she treated the folk she was called to lead. In womanist fashion, she did not wait for a knight in shining armor to rescue her from the villain because she saw herself as a warrior in her own right. So, she was not sustained by false hopes of reinforcements to help her fight the battle. The love of the Spirit and her desire to fulfill the call sustained her as she embraced the battlefield of the mind. She loved the folk, which are the people she was called to lead, enough to fight for them to get the message
that she believed God wanted them to hear. Inherent in her belief that she was a warrior, was an understanding that the self was not only willing but was also able to stand up to the villain.

The second belief revealed in Rev. Boyd’s personal narrative was her desire for authenticity. She emphasized that she had to personally experience the battle and go through it before she could ask others to do the same. She believed that embracing the struggle by her willingness to go through the suffering made her credible and trustworthy to her listeners. It was one thing for her to tell her listeners to fight on the battlefield of the mind, but it meant so much more for her to say that she had already fought on that battlefield.

Conclusion

The theme of the calling led naturally into her sermon topic that morning. She incorporated all the themes in this brief summary of her sermon introduction. The celebration was implied in the Biblical invitation to come. The prophetic words are echoed in the universal call and the promise of suffering. The call is evident throughout the narrative. The congregation is called to the banquet, but must expect to suffer before gaining entrance. However, the important thing is to answer the call.

“And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.”

(Luke 14:17 King James Version)

Now remember as you answer the call to come,
You will have a battle in your mind.
God is calling some today.
And whatever place you are walking in,
He says come.
Come for all things are now ready.
Come without excuses.
Come just as you are.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Implications for Pedagogy

Introduction

This chapter discusses the three themes identified in Chapter Five (Celebration, The Prophet, and The Call) to answer the third research question: Can the way Rev. Boyd made sense of her life and constructed meaningful communication, in the context of the Black church, provide a useful model for teachers in addressing the needs of Black students? Aspects of Rev. Boyd’s preaching performance were examined by utilizing a folkloristic framework for applicability in developing culturally appropriate pedagogy for teachers of African American students. A womanist framework was utilized for developing pedagogical approaches from the way Rev. Boyd made sense of her life. The overarching question addressed in this chapter is: What can teachers learn from preachers?

Teachers are confronted with the daily task of making learning meaningful within contexts that are useful and culturally appropriate for the learner. Understanding the centrality of the Black church in the experience of African Americans is a starting point for developing culturally relevant pedagogical approaches. Patillo-Mcøy (1998) stated that African Americans often incorporate religious themes learned in church settings with secular activities. In this sense, the Black church provides a “cultural blueprint” for community activities and communication. For example, Capone’s (2008) analysis of Barack Obama’s South Carolina victory speech pointed to Obama’s incorporation of a
number of oratorical techniques usually practiced in Black preaching. In similar fashion, the preaching performance can be a cultural blueprint for the teaching performance in developing culturally relevant pedagogical approaches.

Rev. Boyd used personal narratives in her pedagogical approach, to help her listeners understand difficult concepts, like suffering and delayed gratification in relation to “the call.” She presented her personal story to explain that she had a message to preach, but she first had to experience what she was preaching about, to authenticate it. Then she shared her story of suffering and delayed gratification. Although the benefit of suffering and delayed gratification can be very difficult concepts to grasp, when Rev. Boyd tied the concepts to her personal experience, her learners were provided with a model. In this way, Rev. Boyd made learning these concepts meaningful for her listeners.

Folkloristic theory can be quite useful in developing classroom practices that make learning meaningful for diverse populations. Hamer (1999) defined folklore as “a situated performance of a traditionalized text in which the performer takes responsibility for communicating a version of the text to the audience that is meaningful to them in their current situation” (p. 366). Hamer’s research examined the story telling behavior of history teachers. In one instance she described how Mr. Michaels, a White history teacher, using Alex Hayley’s Roots as the traditionalized text, compared himself to the African griot’s character to explain events as markers of time. In this way, Mr. Michaels used a simple personal narrative to help his students understand that the unfamiliar African griot was similar to their very familiar history teacher.

The use of culturally appropriate metaphors can also be significant in making learning meaningful for African American students. Creswell (2007) suggested
metaphors are a method to communicate meaning when the narrator is not able to use more direct and conventional approaches. Rev. Boyd liberally interjected familiar metaphors into her preaching performance to familiarize her listeners with complex ideas. For example, she used the dessert metaphor to indicate two things: 1) the conclusion of the services, and 2) the importance of that church service. She did not have to explain the purpose of the dessert because she knew the congregation was very familiar with the term and associated meaning.

Formulaic expressions are another feature of preaching that could be incorporated in the teaching performance. Words interjected into the preaching performance such as, hallelujah and praise God, along with other short phrases are examples of religious formulaic expressions (Wharry, 2003). These expressions are important because they are specific to the context in which they are uttered. Rev. Boyd used formulaic expressions to switch the focus of a narrative, to change topics within the narrative, to return the listeners attention to a previous narrative, and to maintain the current narrative. The words she chose were distinctly religious and their use was reserved for religious events. They were also words that were shared with and used by her listeners in the congregation. Thus, the people who used those words were also asserting their membership in the larger group.

With the model provided by Rev. Boyd teachers can benefit from the use of formulaic expression specific to their school context. Small words interjected in the teaching performance can serve as audible cues to prompt students to mentally anticipate the direction of the teacher’s lesson. These small, classroom specific formulaic expressions could be shared by teacher and students to contribute to a classroom
environment where students feel that they belong because they speak the language of the classroom.

From the above examples, it can be concluded that Rev. Boyd’s techniques for constructing meaningful communication in the context of the Black church can useful for teachers in predominantly African American classrooms. In the following sections the womanist way that Rev. Boyd made sense of her life will be discussed as a model for the development of culturally appropriate pedagogy.

Celebratory Pedagogical Approaches

“I hope I get the appointment at Royal Oak School, I hear the students are so nice there. I want to teach, I’m tired of babysitting.”

This statement was made by a White teacher who taught at Parkview Elementary, a school in a poor Black neighborhood. However, assuming this sentiment originated from the teacher’s racial biases alone is reductionist at best. Delpit and White-Bradley (2003) proposed that state-mandated testing frenzy has shaped the stringent behavior management practices and monotonous curriculum prevalent in low-income minority classrooms. As a result, they alleged schools have become oppressive places for teachers and students alike. Students at Parkview Elementary were strictly admonished to walk silently down the halls with heads facing forward, and their hands locked behind their backs, careful not to touch the walls on either side. These young people were expected to abide by the same rules of behavior placed upon prison inmates. Delpit and White-Bradley pointed to the absurdity of some schools’ insistence that children remain absolutely silent as they travel from class to class. They complained that mechanical way

---

3 Pseudonym for a school in a predominantly White, middle-class neighborhood.
4 Pseudonym
in which some classrooms were managed resembled prisons. Clearly, Parkview Elementary offered no cause for teachers or students to celebrate.

Celebrations are not solemn affairs, especially in African American communities. In contrast to the dull, prison-like environment at Parkview Elementary, Rev. Boyd provided a celebratory model co-constructed by teacher and students. Rev. Boyd welcomed verbal affirmation from her students and was not threatened when they became excited about the words she spoke. Her teaching and her students’ response seemed like a choral production because everyone responded on cue and in rhythm. However, she skillfully guided her students’ responses, so no one was overly loud or disruptive. For instance, she encouraged verbal responses from her students by asking questions like, “Do you believe this?” To which her students would respond, “Amen.” In Rev. Boyd’s model the teacher and her students were like one elegant organism as they interacted in the learning process.

Teachers can learn from preachers that classrooms don’t always have to be quiet sanctuaries where the only spontaneous conversation emanates from the teacher. From Rev. Boyd’s model, teachers can learn to co-construct the classroom environment with their students. Offering even brief opportunities for students to dialogue recognizes their unique experiences and viewpoints. With Rev. Boyd’s model, the teacher need not fear that the students will be too disruptive when given opportunity to dialogue, because the students will see their classroom as a community with its own standards for conduct. In this classroom community student and the teacher are responsible for maintaining a stable and cohesive classroom environment.
This type of classroom was described in Delpit and White-Bradley (2003). The seventh-grade class incorporated lessons learned from their study of ancient Egyptian culture into their classroom ecology. Many of the students developed self-regulated behavior as they came to see their classroom as a community requiring everyone’s cooperation to maintain cohesiveness. When one student disrupted the classroom environment with repeated inappropriate and disruptive behavior, the other students sanctioned her by temporarily ignoring her and her behavior. The larger classroom’s refusal to recognize the offender was a way of excluding her from the classroom community without engaging in maliciousness. Afterwards, the teacher helped the offending student to examine the preceding events in an effort to avoid future offenses. When the students see their classroom and teacher as a community, similar to the way Rev. Boyd’s congregation saw themselves, they will feel they have a stake in protecting the community environment. As a result, the teacher will be able to maintain a celebratory classroom atmosphere.

At the community level, celebrations are planned to commemorate things that are held in profound regard, things that the community cares about. For the purposes of this study, celebrations are considered an extension of what Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) identified as womanist caring. Rev. Boyd used caring words and caring actions to create a celebratory environment for her students. She thanked her students in recognition that the celebration was co-constructed. She was careful to publically affirm characteristics in her students that promoted a spirit of community, and she noted their specific related actions. At other times she addressed her students by name, mentioning their unique and admirable attributes. Rev. Boyd made sure that everyone was included in the celebration
by promoting the students who may have been otherwise overlooked, to the rank of
guests of honor. She used carefully crafted words and overtly affectionate actions to
convince her students that she cared about them. In return, participation in her classroom
was elevated from a mundane duty to a gala celebration of caring.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) identified womanist caring, demonstrated by, “an
embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk” (p. 71) as the cardinal trait
in exemplary teachers. Simply put, teachers who express womanist care towards their
students will treat them no differently than her biological children. She will prepare her
students to realistically face the inequities that are pervasive in their world, and she will
be willing to take risks on behalf of her students, with no guarantees of success. Rev.
Boyd exemplified these aspects of womanist caring in the way that she made sense of her
life. Consequently, this study would posit that teachers who demonstrate womanist caring
towards their students will be more adept at creating celebratory classroom environments.

Prophetic Pedagogical Approaches

A major concern of African Americans is that teachers underestimate Black students’
potential, not necessarily their performance (Ferguson, 2003, p. 467).

Recall the teacher from Parkview Elementary, who was tired of babysitting her
students. Unknowingly, the teacher displayed attributes of a false prophet. By giving up
on teaching, she prophesied that what she thought to be her students’ present state was
also their future state. Furthermore, like any good charlatan, she took measures to cause
her false prophecy to come to pass by continuing to babysit her students instead of
teaching them. Her students were able to distinguish babysitting behavior from
instructional behavior. They also knew that when their teacher looked at them, she saw
no future potential.
And I don’t care what you see today,
As you look on my grandson, he has to be blessed.

Rev. Boyd’s approach contrasts with the Parkview Elementary teacher. Rev. Boyd began her prophecy to Darnell with a declaration that she was “speaking what God is saying.” In this sense, she believed that she was speaking prophetically, and when she looked at Darnell she saw the same thing that God saw. So, although there were many things that she could have predicted about Darnell by focusing on his present condition, she chose to focus on his potential in context with the community. So, Rev. Boyd declared that Darnell’s present state was not reality. Reality for Darnell rested on his potential to be useful and re-integrated into his church and familial community. Thus, speaking prophetically, Rev. Boyd chose not to publically shame the young man, but instead directed focus on his potential.

So what can teachers learn from teachers? A great deal has been written to defend and to contest the self-fulfilling prophecy theory (Ferguson, 2003, Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Yet, it is known that teachers can and do predict students’ academic performance during the three quarters of a year that the student remains in their classroom (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). However, the discussion on teachers’ predictive abilities has not considered whether teachers can look at their students’ present reality, and then speak prophetically about the same students’ potential. Ferguson (2003) echoed those sentiments by stating, “A major concern of African Americans is that teachers underestimate Black students’ potential, not necessarily their performance” (p. 467).

Rev. Boyd’s belief in the potential of people was rooted in her spirituality. For instance, she believed she was able to see Darnell through the eyes of God. With this understanding she was able to acknowledge Darnell’s present state without accepting it.
In a similar fashion Dantley (2003) citing Cornel West (1999) described prophetic spirituality as combative in the sense that it resists the status quo while at the same time pushes for transformation. Dantley endorsed prophetic spirituality as a tool for educational leaders to simultaneously comprehend the present, plan a process of change, and imagine the future positive results. Aspects of prophetic spirituality are also seen in one of the qualities that Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995) noted in exemplary teachers; a belief that all students had the ability to achieve academically. Teachers do not have to accept things as they are, and they do not have to give up and resort to babysitting. After all, despite his secular leanings, John Dewey himself agreed, "in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God" (Dewey, 1897, p. 11).

_The Call to Teach: Influences on Pedagogical Approaches_

_I don't feel no ways tired,_
_I've come too far from where I started from._
_Nobody told me that the road would be easy,_
_I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me._

James Cleveland

Teaching poor African American children is not an easy job. There has always been an uphill battle to educate these children. Prior to the end of the Civil War enslaved Black children were prohibited from reading and at the same time, the establishment of schools for free Black children was hampered by racist legislation, such as the “Black Laws” in Ohio. After the Civil War, Jim Crow laws and a Supreme Court judgment establishing separate but desperately unequal schools served to further impede the provision of proper education to Black children. Structural barriers excluding many poor children of color from an education equitable with mainstream America continue to exist.
to this day. So, how should a teacher respond to the hardships associated with teaching African American Children?

Like the many preaching women before her, Rev. Boyd responded to the hardships associated with her vocation by remembering “the call.” She acknowledged that sometimes preachers (like teachers) do not want to “walk in their calling” because they feel it is too difficult. However, she proposed that at these times the call would not only sustain them, but the call would help them to create purpose from the struggles they faced. From Rev. Boyds’ perspective the call was first, a divine mandate. For instance, she believed that God had given her the message, “Battlefield of the Mind,” and that she was instructed of God to teach the message everywhere that she went. Another way that Rev. Boyd understood the call was as a spiritual vocation. In the narrative she stated, “it is what God has ordained for you to do.” In this sense, the call is a persons’ life mission.

In the education literature the call to teach has been associated with a variety of terms including passion, vocation and spirituality, to describe the intrinsic or inner motivation that some people have for teaching (Jones, 2006). Viewing teaching as a calling is not innovative. Before the turn of the twentieth century progressive education reformer John Dewey (1897) admonished teachers to “realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order…”

Nevertheless, from a womanist standpoint the call to teach takes on a fuller and deeper spiritual meaning. In this paradigm, the suffering involved with fulfilling the call is anticipated and incorporated into life experiences as a source of strength. Rev. Boyd prepared the pastors under her care to anticipate and embrace the suffering that was inherent in the fulfillment of their call to serve in the ministry. So, teachers can learn
from preachers that they need to be prepared to anticipate difficulty in fulfilling their teaching vocation and that there is value in their struggles.

The teacher at Parkview Elementary did not want to endure the hardship associated with teaching poor Black children. She longed for an opportunity to escape to a place where she would face fewer challenges. Another teacher once complained that her African American student challenged her authority by stating, “I will respect you, when you respect me.” There is no magic wand for a teacher to wave so that children will magically begin to listen, learn, and act respectfully. However, there may have been some validity in the student’s remark, if Rev. Boyd’s model is employed. Rev. Boyd did not wait for the children to show her respect before she was willing to acknowledge them. As an experienced Community Othermother, she showered the children with attention. She made the adults show respect to the children first. Later as she preached, the children showed her respect in turn. She did not gain that kind of wisdom from running away from hardship. Of her fifty years in the ministry, more than twenty were spent attending to the spiritual needs of hurting young people.

The final thing that teachers can learn from preachers is that if they are willing to endure for their high calling to teach, they will be heroes. Rev. Boyd was not afraid to make herself the hero in her story of suffering. Indeed, she elicited the image a womanist warrior who ran towards the battle.

The lives and pedagogies of eight heroic teachers were examined in Ladson-Billings (1995). These teachers had many things in common. They displayed womanist caring in the way that they viewed their students’ community. Instead of running away, they found ways to become a part of the places where their students lived. Some resided
in the community and others maintained connections by engaging in community activities. They also helped their students to take pride in their community by encouraging civic involvement. Their classrooms were also communities that were co-constructed with their students. These teachers also displayed prophetic spirituality in their attitude towards their students. They believed in their students’ ability to learn, as well as in their potential to succeed. They were willing to adjust their pedagogical approaches to enhance the likelihood of their students’ success. They helped their students build mental bridges to connect the things that are known to the things that needed to be learned. Finally, these teachers were passionate about learning and they were passionate about teaching. The pedagogy displayed by these teachers was consistent with the model constructed by Rev. Boyd.

At the beginning of this chapter the third research question was asked. Can the way Rev. Boyd made sense of her life and constructed meaningful communication, in the context of the Black church, provide a useful model for teachers in addressing the needs of Black students? This study would argue that the womanist way in which Rev. Boyd made sense of her life, and the way she constructed meaning in her sermon presentation can provide a useful model for teachers of African American students. Nonetheless, this exploratory study is only a starting point for examining usefulness of elderly African American clergywomen as community and academic resources.

**Conclusion**

Understanding that one of the purposes of a master’s thesis is to represent a significant contribution to the knowledge of the writer’s discipline, in my case Theory and Social Foundations of Education, this study is important in two specific ways. First,
it has contributed to new knowledge by focusing on an Elderly African American clergywoman as an educational resource that has previously received little, if any recognition. Educators need to understand the important role that clergy play in the lives of their students, as well as the models for socialization offered within their students’ places of worship. Second, this study offers an alternative model for teachers to consider in developing pedagogical approaches for teaching African American students. Teachers can also draw from the experience and example older African American clergywomen in relating to their students.

To argue for the significance of Elderly African American Clergywomen as community and academic resources this thesis was presented in the following way. In chapter one an overview of the research problem, purpose, questions, design, and limitations was presented in brief; thus laying groundwork on which to build a case for the study. The review of literature presented in the second chapter delved into the history of the Black church and African American clergywomen in particular. The historical review built a framework for application of the womanist approach because womanism is grounded in the unique historical experiences of Black women. The concept of Othermothers and Community Othermothers was presented to shed light on the distinctive resources available to children within African American communities. Finally, an overview of the Folkloristic approach served as a lens through which to understand the preaching performance of Rev. Boyd.

Chapter four focused on the authentic setting where Rev. Boyd delivered her preaching and teaching performances. Several pages of in-tact field notes were meant to bring the readers into direct contact with Rev. Boyd’s world. The actual words of Rev.
Boyd, and her interaction with her listeners were also laid out in poetic form, once again, to give the readers a sense of being there.

Finally, the research questions were addressed in chapters five and six. First, an examination of her sermon performance revealed a number of culturally grounded communicative practices such as: religious formulaic expressions, call – response, othermothering, and narrative co-construction with her congregation. Second, her personal narratives and the construction of stories within her sermon provided a framework for understanding how she made sense of her life. Although she did not expect life to be easy, she was sustained by her sense of purpose (the call). She also viewed suffering as a necessary ingredient for giving authenticity to the words she spoke. Finally, it was argued that the way that Rev. Boyd communicated with her congregation and the way she made sense of her life could be useful in developing culturally specific pedagogical approaches in predominantly African American classrooms. There were certain aspects of her preaching performance that could have application in teaching performance. Furthermore, teachers can be inspired by the way this elderly woman saw her life as purposeful, and was willing to tackle life’s hardships in order to achieve her purpose.

This thesis was not meant to be the definitive work on educating African American students. However, this study does raise questions about who should be included in the discussion about the most appropriate ways to educate these students. As this study was limited to the lived experiences of a single participant, the findings do not offer broad generalizability for pedagogy. Additionally, much of Rev. Boyd’s discourse was between herself and adults. Nonetheless, some specific aspects of Rev. Boyd’s
experiences and performance can be transferred to certain context and situations for teachers.

Future research in the area of education and elderly African American clergywomen can go in multiple directions because this subject is for the most part, unexplored. Empirical studies could examine the preaching performances of several different elderly African American clergywomen to identify consistent themes that are applicable to teaching children. Specific ways in which these pastors contribute to the educational decisions of their congregants is another possible area of future investigation.
References


NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 8, 2008.


