

Oral History Collection

Kathryn Mitchell

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney and Alfred L. Roberts

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Place of Interview: Dallas, TX

Dr. Dulaney: Okay, we're live. [Claps] That's the clap to start it together. Good afternoon Ms. Mitchell. This is September 6, 2011. We're at the African American Museum in Dallas, Texas. We're interviewing Ms. Kathryn Mitchell, who is a former teacher in the Dallas Independent School District. Let me start as Dr. Roberts joins us. Come on in Dr. Roberts, we're just getting started. Okay, first of all, tell me, where were you born?

Ms. Mitchell: Well, I was born in Tyler, Texas, which is about 100 miles from Dallas. I lived--I didn't live in Tyler, but I lived out from Tyler. The community that I lived in with my mother and father, we didn't have a school there. So, my grandfather gave the land for the school and the church. At

that time, it was really a deal with the school and the church working together. My grandfather gave the land and they had the church and the school able to have a one-room school. They named the community--it's still there, I was out there Monday--Jones Valley. I am so happy that they are able to keep the name of the community because that's the family name. We only one school and it went one through five. At that time, the Black schools were getting all the old books from the white schools. We also got all the old desks from the white school. We had a teacher that came in from Tyler and I never will forget. Her name was Mrs. Wade. She would come in early in the morning and do the fire and get everything all straightened out for us. But, I will tell you, it was something that I guess we appreciated because we didn't have anything else to do but to appreciate that. She was a person that really believed in discipline--I mean, we didn't have problems with discipline at that time. We didn't have any problem with reading. I was wondering last night if I could remember any of the boys or girls that couldn't read. The way we would do it--

we had a bench. This bench, all the first and second graders were come in on this particular bench and she would teach us to read. She influenced me very, very much. I said--because I liked the way she dressed and she had a car and all that--I said, "When I grow up, I really want to be a teacher. I really want to be a second grade teacher." Of course, that's what I was for thirty-five years. I was a second grade teacher. My experience as far as elementary school, to me, was wonderful, because once a year, we would meet up at Texas College, which was about seven miles from where we were, and we would have something they called an Interscholastic League and we would have to spell--some children would be spelling, some would have [unclear] contests and some would have writing--trying to win nothing but a piece of paper which was a certificate saying you won. I will never forget [that] I won second prize in spelling. The reason that I didn't win first prize, I missed the word, I'll never forget it, appreciation. So, anyway, I got second prize in spelling. I think I was in fifth grade at that time, but it was a wonderful experience to have

the Interscholastic League. Everybody, even the parents, looked forward to going to the Interscholastic League in order to hear their children and see their children and how we reacted.

Dulaney: You went to the Jones School from grades one through five. Where did you go after that?

Mitchell: I didn't grow up in Dallas.

Dulaney: Oh, I know. What school did you go to after that?

Mitchell: Oh, I went to Emmett Scott in Tyler. I went to Emmett Scott, and of course Emmett Scott from my house was five or six miles and we had to walk. It was a group of us because we lived in Jones Valley and Emmett Scott was in Tyler. I enjoyed it. We enjoyed walking for some reason. We carried our books and carried our lunches.

Dulaney: So you went five--you walked five or six miles to school every day?

Mitchell: Every day. Every day. We walked five or six miles to school every day. Back to getting ready for school--my daddy was a farmer. He planted cotton. The way I got my school clothes, my shoes,

whatever it is to go to school, they would always give the children the scrap cotton. I'm sure most young people don't know anything about that. But, we would go out into the field and pick the cotton that they didn't use for the regular cotton and take it and my daddy would sell it and then he would give my mother the money to go and buy our school clothes. So, we looked forward to going into the field and picking scrap cotton to get ready for school.

Dulaney: Let's go back to your parents. Tell me about your parents. When you said your father was a farmer, what about your mother? And what were their names, by the way?

Mitchell: My mother was named Pearl and my daddy was named Jesse. Neither one was educated. Neither one of them had an education, but they always said that they wanted their children to get an education. I was the youngest.

Dulaney: Of how many?

Mitchell: Six. Being the youngest of six, I was the only one that finished high school and I was the only one that finished college. But, my other sisters and

brothers, they had a very good life. They didn't finish college, but what they did, they did well.

Dulaney: What did they do? What did your brothers and sisters do to make a living? I may be asking you for too much detail here.

Mitchell: Oh, no, no, no. I enjoy this.

Dulaney: You were the only one that finished high school and finished college.

Mitchell: Only one that finished high school and finished college. My brothers--my two brothers--I had three sisters and they were older than I was. We all grew up together. At that time, everybody had a nickname. They called me Kat. If I would get mad at them, I would say, "I ain't going to school, I'm going to quit school." So, that gave me a chance to get everything that I really wanted to get. I went on and I finished high school but I didn't not go to college as soon as I finished high school because my mother died and it kind of broke up the family and I lived with my brother. My brother was married. I lived with him. Then, after that, I met my husband and he was in college, but he hadn't finished college. He had

gone to Texas College for two years, but--he did go on and he finished college. We got married. After we got married, he said that he had to go to the army. We had two children. While he was in the army--we had a house in Tyler that we lived in. His sisters lived with me and they were going to college and we were all around the same age because I got married when I was young. Being around the same age, with the two children, I said to myself, 'Well, you know, they're in school. I'll start school.' So, then, I started college. We arranged it where my sister-in-law would keep the children and I would go to class. You know, how you arrange a class from nine to ten. I would go to school and they would keep the children.

Dulaney: And this is at Texas College?

Mitchell: At Texas College, yes. My husband had gone to Texas College in Tyler. The only thing--he had graduated and then he had to go to the army. The way I met my husband, and my granddaughter was laughing about it the other day, I was at his cousin's house and we were studying math. He came in. He was on his way to see his girlfriend who was down

the street. When he came in, he said, "What are you all doing?" So, we said, "We're studying our math." And he said, "Oh, that's my best subject." His cousin said to me, "Why don't you go with him? Go with him so he can work our math out." So, he was on his way down the street to see his girlfriend, but after we got to talking, he didn't go to see his girlfriend, he stayed there and helped us with our math. That's the way we met. He was helping us with our math and he was a very, very good math student. After a year, we got married. Then he went to the army. This is when I said, "You know, since he's in the army, I believe I'll go to college." Since my college was gone and all that, I didn't really have anybody to send me. I did go on to college along with my sister-in-laws who helped with the children. Then, after I finished college, I didn't realize that I could really do that well because I'd been out for about three years, but I started and I did real well. I was so glad to be off with the freshman because the freshman had to go to an auditorium and they had to sit over here, and I was so glad to move over when I was a sophomore. So, I went on to

college, and I graduated. After I graduated, and my husband got out of the army, he said, "Why don't we go to graduate school?" So, we moved to Houston in the summertime and I went to Texas Southern and he got his Master's in Administration before I did. After he graduated, he kept the children for me to go to school in the summertime. He helped me with my thesis because I had to write my thesis. He helped me. I passed the test in Graduate School and my major was Reading. That's what I got my Master's in.

Dulaney: What about the undergraduate degree? What was it in at Tyler? What did you get your degree in at Texas College?

Mitchell: In Elementary Education. Then, after I went onto Texas Southern, I got it in Elementary Education with emphasis on Reading. So, I had to do my projects on reading. After that, he got a job coaching-- after he got out of the army, we had the two children, he got a Waskom, Texas. That's right out of Louisiana. He got a job in Waskom. Then, I went down there and I taught the first grade in a lady's place for a year. He continued down there.

She came back--she had been on leave. They didn't have a place for me. So, I came back to Tyler and stayed down there and he would come home. My daughter was in my class. At that time, they didn't really put an age limit. She started first grade at four years old. I think we told them she was six. So, she started when she was four. My son was in the third grade. After that, he stayed down there a long time. About four or five years. Then, he got an offer out at Wilmer-Hutchins to be a principal. That's when I moved to Dallas. In 1954. I got a job. My first job was at CF Carr Elementary School. I worked out there for seventeen years. My principal was Joseph McMillan. That year, they crossed over teachers. Nobody wanted to go. Nobody wanted to go to the White schools. So, we went to [unclear], Nebraska on vacation. I told my principal, "Look, give me a bad evaluation, because I don't want to go out there to those White schools." He said, "Ms. Mitchell, I can't give you a bad evaluation. I do that and that's bad on you." So, anyway, I told my neighbors, "If I get a special delivery, give it to my son so he can call me." He called me and he

said, "You got a letter. You've been moved." I said, "Where am I going?" and he said, "You're going to Arthur Kramer [Elementary School]." I said, "Oh my god." That's the real rich neighborhood. That's where Dr. Estes' children went. Lot of doctors lived out there. Lawyers, everything. Anyway, Mr. Roland, John Roland, was the principal at that time. So, when I got back, and the principal went to work, I went out there to talk to Mr. Roland. I said, "Mr. Roland, I want to get my manuals and [unclear]." He looked at me and he said, "Why do you want them?" I said, "Because I want to prepare. I'm going to a new school." He said, "I'm not going to give them to you." I said, "You're not going to give me my manuals?" He said, "No, you're going to teach the second grade. You've been teaching boys and girls. You go home and have a good time and come here when you're supposed to." So that's what I did. I went out there, and it was really a learning experience. It was like I had second year education in college. It was nice. The teachers were very friendly. The parents were--the only they were concerned about was teaching their

children and that you have time to teach their children. So, naturally, everybody was saying, "Oh, you're not going to stay out there. You're just not going to stay out there. The reason you're not going to stay out there is because those white folks and those white parents, they listen, they laugh, they're all educated, and they [?]." I said, "Lord, I know I need this job. If this job is for me, just help me to work and have success." I went out there, and the first thing I did when I got there, after school started, I organized my parents.

Dulaney: Can I ask you to not do something? So your voice and your message sort of flows, don't do this [thumping noise]. We pick it up when your rings hit the table, we pick up every bit of it. It'll distort what you're saying.

Mitchell: Okay. So, I went out there and I had a meeting with my parents. At that time, every one of them came but one. She had to work at her husband's business. So, the first thing I said--and I made sure that everything on the letter that I sent out was correct, because I had my friend, who was a

secretary at SMU, write the letter for me. So that meant--I didn't want to send out anything that was not, you know. The principal had to okay the letter. I invited all the parents. When they came in, I introduced myself and I told them the reason why I was having the meeting was because of my children were going to a teacher of another color, I would want to meet the teacher too. I told them, I have worked for seventeen years in Dallas Independent School District and I taught boys and girls. I said, "The boys and girls are just like these boys and girls out here. The only difference in them is the color of their skin. If you cut them, you can't tell my blood from their blood or from this blood. I tell you what you do for me. All of the myths that you have taught your children about Black people--if you keep that at home, I will assure you that at the end of school, you will be proud. I'm out here to teach boys and girls. I'm not out here to teach color. I'm out here to teach boys and girls." So, I had a PTA meeting once a month. I had so many parents, and I bet you right now, I have about ten or fifteen trees planted in my honor because that's what they

give the teacher. A planted tree or book or something. I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it. I had children reading--they were in the second grade but they were reading on fourth or fifth grade levels. As I said, I'm better at reading than anything else. I had one that was going to transfer. They called me because her math score was not as high as the reading score.

Dulaney: Well, let me probe you on that a little bit. Did all of the students and all of the parents accept you?

Mitchell: They absolutely--I did not have--

Dulaney: You had a class of all white students?

Mitchell: I had--Oh, I did have one little Black boy. His daddy was a doctor and they wanted him to be in my class. That's one thing that the parents did do. My classroom never did go over nineteen. The first thing they would say when they would get to my class was, "How many students do you have?" At that time, you could have twenty, but it never did go over. If it went over twenty, they would ask for another teacher. Actually, I didn't have a single parent--on my door, I had a circle. On this circle, I had all kinds of children, black and

white, and I put "Well, all can learn." They were very impressed with that. In our school, we used to have a programs. But, out there, they didn't have programs like we did. The teachers would come to me and say, "Why do you work so hard?" I would say, "I'm not working hard, I'm just teaching." When I would have a program--I'd let the children do their own, they made their little costumes--the parking lot was just full, absolutely full. Even the principal, Mr. Roland, would come in there. He'd say, "Ms. Mitchell, what the hell are you doing in your classroom?" I thought he was fixing to fuss at me, but he said, "Every parent out here--I can't get all these children in your classroom. What are you doing?" I said, "Mr. Roland, I'm not doing anything but just teaching." We had an open-door policy for the library--I mean the book room. We can go to the book room any time we want to and check out books. You know, we had an honor system, and everything. I had children reading. One little boy, he was--how did his daddy call him--he was a loner. He read a lot, a whole lot, and he always liked to be by himself. His name was Michael Heron [?]. When he finished--and

I wouldn't keep the children. If you're in the first grade and you can read third or fourth grade, then this is fine. I just didn't, and I still don't believe in just keeping children just because you're in the second grade to not be able to move on if you want to. He came out to PTA one day and he said to me, "Ms. Mitchell, Michael is doing real well." I said, "Well, thank you. But, you know, Michael is just so smart. I think you should send him to a private school." He said, "Where?" I said, "St. Marks, [noise]." He said, "Want me to tell you something Ms. Mitchell? I don't care where I could send Michael. No teacher can do anymore for Michael than you are doing and have done. Michael is not going to be in a white situation all the time. I want him to be able to communicate and mix with other children. I wouldn't take Michael out of your room for anything." He was a very smart little boy. I think he's a doctor now. Every three or four years, we would have a reunion. The parents were very cooperative. We had a science program. At that time, it wasn't as strict as it is now. The parents would come and we would fill a science

class. They lived on a lake. Their backyard was a lake off of Hillcrest. They would take the children out there for their science class. They would have lunch and the frogs would jump up. When they would go back, they would have to write a story about the things that they saw. You know, the lake frogs jumping up and so forth and so on. It was a great experience. Then, I had a little girl in my class. This one was amazing to me. Her daddy was a rapist. That night, I got a couple of telephone calls because they had picked him up-- they called him the "Friendly Rapist." I don't know how they got their children. But, the next day, nobody said a word about those children. Their mother--anyway she had a lot of confidence in me. She would always come to my room, and she told me about it. She said, "You know, her daddy teaches her that you don't have to pay attention to anybody. You do whatever you want to to whomever you want to, to whatever you want to." She said, "You have helped her to realize that she can't do everything she can to everybody." Because, one thing I would do is I would talk to her and tell her that she had to get along with

the other children. I would say, "You see that hallway out there. You're gonna have to sit out in that hall all by yourself." They didn't like when their children would be in the hall, but they knew that they were in trouble. The next day, when she came out there and told me about her husband and everything, she did not go by the office, she did not tell anybody. She came to me. The principal said to me--it was a Mrs. Williams. You probably remember Mrs. Williams. She said, "Ms. Mitchell, for some reason, they wouldn't talk to me. What did they tell you?" Of course, I had to tell her that--you know, whatever was said. Then, I had two little boys in my class--they were rich students. The daddy was really good looking and everything. The momma went and bought an afro wig. Those boys, they were mixed up. They said that their momma and daddy was the type that, at home, you had to eat with this fork and had to eat with that fork. Everything that they would do, was black. On that desk, it was black. Everything. So, I suggested that--for them to go to the school psychiatrist. Of course, they agreed, because they were just absolutely mixed up. When they came out and they

did the test and everything, the test showed that it was something inside of them family-wise. Evidently, the momma and daddy didn't get along too well. This is the way that they had to bring it out. They said--I mean, the psychiatrist said, "Usually when you see a child and they don't have colors, it's something inside of them that they need to do." The daddy resented this. The psychiatrist told the daddy, "What you need to do is take up more time with your son. If it's mowing the yard, playing gold, or whatever it is, this is what you need to do." Of course, he resented that because he felt that the psychiatrist thought that you couldn't be rich and have decent children. One day, the little boy came into me and said, "Oh, Ms. Mitchell, did you hear about my daddy last night?" I said, "No, honey--", [He said] "Oh, he got killed." I said, "Really?" He said, "He was in a car accident," and he went on to tell me exactly how it happened. Of course, I told the principal and we all was mourning about it. When the mother came up there, I said, "We are very sorry to hear about your husband." She said, "What about my husband?" Then, I felt bad then. She said, "You

mean he came up here and said that?" I said, "Yes." See, that was the indication that something was wrong there. There was another little boy in my school--he was a real close buddy. Everywhere I would go in the afternoon--his sister was in the sixth grade. One day, I had a [unclear] magazine, because I taught a lot of Black history. Those kids knew Black history. He saw this magazine and he said, "Ms. Mitchell, ain't that a Black man?" I said, "Yea" and he said, "Oh, Ms. Mitchell, my daddy said Black folks lie. My daddy--" I just let him go on. "My daddy said Black folks steal. My daddy said Black folks dumb. My daddy said Black folks that they're really just not--" I said, "Oh, really? Oh. Did you realize that I'm Black?" "Not your Black, oh, no, no, no. Not you Ms. Mitchell, not you." I said, "Well, my husband is Black and my children is Black," [He said], "But we're not talking about your family, Ms. Mitchell." So, I wanted to make sure that his daddy and momma knew about this. So, when his sister came by in the afternoon, she was in the sixth grade, she said, "Oh, my momma gonna whip him, Ms. Mitchell, when he get home." I said, "Oh, no, she not gonna whip

you." The next morning, here she comes, the mother. Tears in her eyes. She said, "Ms. Mitchell, I'm so sorry that he said that." I said, "Honey, don't be sorry. This is what you told him. You told him this. Don't be sorry about it. There was no need to whip him last night. The only thing you're going to have to do is to teach him that Black folks are human." I told him, "My daughter went to the University of Texas." [He said], "Ms. Mitchell, your daughter is different from other people." I said, "You're just going to have to teach him that Black--because one of these days--" His daddy worked for Time Magazine. I said, "One of these days, he might have a Black boss. You're just going to have to teach him. That was absolutely wrong for you to whip him last night, because this is what you have taught him and this is what he brought back. It did not insult me at all. Don't feel bad because you think that I'm insulted, because I'm not insulted over it." Another great thing that I had out there, I was able to get a good field trip. Those parents, after they organized, they would do anything that I would ask them to do. I wanted to take them, to

let them know, that not all white people were not rich. There were some wealthy Black people and we had a Black [unclear]. I had one of the parents call in and get us a bus. I told the bus driver that I wanted to go to a poor White neighborhood and I wanted to go to a Hispanic neighborhood and I wanted to go to a [unclear] neighborhood, because they knew about Black people being maids and so forth and so on. So, we did. I don't know where they got this bus driver, I really don't. I had about five or six parents go. They ended up at my house, because I showed them Mr. Roland's house and they ended up in my house, having a little reception. This bus driver, I don't know where he found these poor white folks, but they had goats out in the yard. And dogs, plenty of dogs. He said, "Boys, and girls, these are poor white folks." The parents were on the bus and everything, and he stopped. Little houses, you know. I don't where we must have been. We left there and we went to [unclear], this Hispanic place. You know, where they have all the Hispanics. He told them all about that. I didn't have to say anything. Then, we went out to Bishop

College, and we went to--Dr. Conrad, he was on the school board. I said, "When you see the bus turning around in your yard, that's my class." I showed them Dr. Conrad's house. I showed them Mr. Roland's house. Then we ended up at my house. After the field trip, at our PTA meeting, the parents came to me, "Ms. Mitchell? Would you get a field trip up for parents?" I said, "No, I will not. I'm out here to teach the children. I will not." Then, in the spring time, one of the classes--a class came to my house and they had a slumber party at my house. The boys didn't come--the parents would bring the boys that morning and my husband did hot dogs in the backyard or somewhere. At that time, my husband got in the corner and let us have the house. I had chores for them. I just wanted them to know that Black people live. I told them that what I wanted to do when they got there that I wanted them to call their parents and let them know that we were okay and we got there alright. I was eavesdropping on one when she called, she said, "Ms. Mitchell lives in a brick house." I don't know what they thought folks lived in. "Ms. Mitchell lives in a brick house.

She got a king-sized bed. She got two bathrooms." She was telling her momma, you know, all that we had. To me, the purpose for us being out there was to let them know what was going and that Black people was like everybody else. The little Black boy, his name was Michael [unclear], he went home and told his mother. He said, "Mom, do you think me and Ms. Mitchell are the same Black?" She said, "Yes. You are the same." He said, "Well, she told us some things about Black folk that I haven't learned." She came up there and said, "Oh, Ms. Mitchell, I'm going to have to do some teaching. I haven't taught my son. He didn't know anything you told him." It was really--I really enjoyed the experience. They invited me, at that time, I think they stopped giving gifts. White folks do whatever they want to do. I got all kinds of gifts at my house right now. Cakes, and pies, that the maid would cook and bring up there when I came home. One of the principals, I think it was Mr. Moore, he said, "You know, Ms. Mitchell, I know that we're not supposed to give gifts, but you've done so much for my son, there's no way in the world I'm not going to give you a gift. I am going to

give you a gift." One of the doctors came to me-- he was on the school board, Dr. Smith. Oh, and I got a certificate for my children. They were the highest--their reading scores were the highest out of any other kids in any school here in Dallas. Mrs. Williams, my principal, came to me--we didn't have to come to PTA meetings unless we wanted to. She said to me, "Ms. Mitchell, I want you to come to PTA meeting tonight." I wondered and I went to the other Black teacher and I said, "Did Mrs. Williams tell you to?" She said, "No." I said, "I wonder why she's insisting that I come." Anyway, I did, and I asked the other Black teacher to come with me. When I got there, the Board president was there and he said, "You know, we have not seen this in the paper. Most likely, it will not be in the paper. Ms. Mitchell is getting a plaque for her children--highest scored children in DISD [Dallas Independent School District] and I think that is remarkable and it should be known." So, that's why I had to, you know, come to the PTA meeting. This little boy of mine, he was the Rowe Scholar. He was the first Rowe Scholar. He was the first one here in Dallas. They haven't made one

since. One night, the news media called me. I thought she was calling me about my son because he was very verbal too. She asked me, "Do you know Michael Heron [?]." I said, "Yes." She went on to tell me that he had finished Hillcrest and was going to Harvard. [She said], "We interviewed him because he got this scholarship, whatever it was, as a Rowe Scholar. We asked him what teacher influenced him all the way through school. And he said it was a Black teacher with the name Kathryn Mitchell." He said, "She influenced me more than anybody else and she taught me more than any teacher has ever taught me." His mother and father still stay in contact with me. He's in New York now.

Dulaney: Tell me, how long were you at Kramer?

Mitchell: Seven years.

Dulaney: So, seventeen at CF Carr and seven at Kramer?

Mitchell: The only way I got to go to CF Carr was on account of my friend Yvonne [unclear]. Mrs. Williams told me--I don't care if it was Black, or White, or Green. If teachers did not produce, you'll see cars out in the front. They're going down to the Board.

They get rid of those teachers. So, I told Mrs. Williams--she said, "Don't come telling me that you're gonna leave. I won't take that. I don't believe it." I said, "Mrs. Williams, I'm going to work at CF Carr. My friend wants me to go out there and help with the boys and girls. I want to go because I've thought about--these same boys and girls I'm teaching now--", my granddaughter went to school out there, "they'll be the same ones that are kicking my grandchildren and trying to keep them out of job. I want to go out there where I can help the Black children so that they can do well." She said, "Ms. Mitchell, nobody has said that to me. But I'll tell you what you don't do. Don't let anybody know that you're leaving. These parents will be down at the administration building and if they tell the superintendent not to give you a transfer, you will not get one. So, nobody here knows that you're leaving but me." Nobody knew that I was leaving until that Friday. One of the dads came up there and said, "Ms. Mitchell, why are you leaving? Did anybody do anything to you? What happened?" I just told him that I wanted to leave to work with my children.

When I came out there to work at [unclear], it was really a stressful thing to me. The reason it was so stressful, I saw what the teachers were doing out there and then to come out here and see what the teachers were not doing, it really hurt me. I had to go to the doctor. My doctor told me, "Let me tell you something. If you don't give that up, we're gonna come to see you down there and you'll be climbing the walls. You cannot make a principal, you cannot make a teacher or anything do unless they are told to do." The teachers that were sent out there were new teachers. They did not want to teach all the children. I walked in the classroom one day to get my children for Reading. She had one's mouth taped up. [unclear], she couldn't see that those white teachers would do anything wrong. She resented me because some of the children out there [unclear] mother or father out in West Dallas. They didn't want reading to-- they said, if anything happens to my child, send them to Ms. Mitchell. Well, she did not like that. I guess I wouldn't have either. It was really something that I had to adjust to the scene. The difference out there and the difference of how the

teachers out there worked with those children. I did not have any problems because I was a person-- I taught. I didn't go out there to play. I didn't play in West Dallas. When I worked with the children in West Dallas, I did the same thing. I had my PTA group. I would meet with the group in the evening because the parents were working and they couldn't come. It was nothing new. I did the same thing out there that I did at Kramer because my thing, when I first started teaching, my goal was that I knew what I wanted my children to learn, I knew what I wanted their teachers to teach them, so your child is just as important as mine. I wanted to teach their children the way I wanted my children taught. So, it wasn't any different than West Dallas. When I was in West Dallas, [?] had me training the aid. That was the time that we had aids in school. We got them [?], they were college graduates, but for some reason, I guess there was extra money, I don't know what it was, Dr. Roberts may know, but we got teachers to come into the classroom and work with teachers who were not aggressive as other teachers. I was the supervisor of about twelve teacher's aids. To

tell them, in the report to the principal, what they would do.

Dulaney: How did that program work? Was it successful?

Mitchell: It was. It was really a successful program. There were some teachers and there were some aides would really resented it. But, I told my aide that, when she came--I sat down and I talked to her and told her that we were going to be friends and we were going to get along, but the purpose of her being there was to help teach the boys and girls. Then, that's exactly what she did. After she was there a year or two, I recommended for her to be a teacher because she was a very, very good teacher. I said, "If you have anything--if you have anything that I say or do--come to me first. After you come to me and we still can't get along, then we'll go to the principal." We just, you know, never did have any disagreements.

Dulaney: Okay, let me ask you a question. Did you ever testify court in the desegregation suit? I ask that because you were a successful teacher--being one of the crossovers. It would seem like they would

have wanted to tell your story in court to convince all those white parents--

Mitchell: No, no, they didn't. I also had [?], who was an ambassador to come out and talk to my children. I wanted them to know that there were some smart Black children. I had Dr. Foster Kidd, he was a dentist, come out and talk to my children. I had somebody come out and talk to my class, because I felt that I was there to let them know that there were some Black people who were very successful. If Dr. Estes could see me now, he would call me Ms. Kramer. Whenever he sees me--"Ms. Kramer, how you doing?" One day, my consultant came out there and he said, "Ms. Mitchell, I want to see you." I said, "Oh my god, what have these parents gone down and said?" He said, "I want to know something. What are you doing out here? All the news that I get--I get telephone calls and everything about what a good job you're doing. What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm not working any harder than anybody else. I'm just working." He said, "Well, I'm telling you Ms. Mitchell. I don't need to come back to see you. You are just doing a wonderful job." My thing is,

if there is something that you do that you enjoy, then I guess you put your--I didn't have any pressure. The reason why I didn't have any pressure is because I enjoy teaching. A couple of Board members came to me and asked me what kind of job I would want downtown. At that time, that's how they gave a recommendation. I told him, "You know, I enjoy teaching boys and girls. Let me continue to teach." He said, "Ms. Mitchell, everybody is trying to get out of the classroom." I said, "For some reason, I enjoy the classroom."

Dulaney: So, your full career as a teacher was in the classroom?

Mitchell: After I came back to East Oak Cliff, I worked as an instruction resource teacher in Reading. That's when they had Chapter 1 [Reading Program]. So, I did that until I retired.

Dulaney: When did you retire?

Mitchell: When did I retire? I retired in 1988. I retired the year my husband passed away. The children felt that I should retire. I regret that I retired. But, after that--there was a school here that was just about fixing to be dismantled or whatever you call it if the scores do not come up.

Roberts: Low performance.

Mitchell: Yes, low performance. At that time, it would have moved the principal and move the teachers and everything. Dr. [unclear] called me and asked me if I would go out there and work with the teachers and the principal, Mrs. McGee [?] and help her move the school. I went out there and I really didn't want to go. I won't forget, they paid me \$25 an hour. At first I said I wouldn't go, but then I said, "Hm. I'm not doing anything." I wasn't old then because my husband had just passed and I was lonely at home. So, I went out there and started working with Mrs. McGee and we moved that school. Mrs. McGee was--some of the teachers were resentful now because they wanted to keep doing the same thing that they were doing--not doing anything. Mrs. McGee was the type of person--conference every morning. Everything that I would tell the teacher, they were going to come back and tell Mrs. McGee--she knew about it. We were able to move the school. I did that for about three or four years, then I went back to [?] and tried to help the other principal. Now, this morning, I

went out to [unclear] and I'm going to volunteer out there. The second grade.

Dulaney: Let me ask you. I want to take you back a little bit.

What was it like going to Texas College?

Mitchell: What was it like going to Texas College? With me, it was enjoyable because I wanted to go to college. Then with my husband, he was in the army, it really gave me something to do. Then, I was able to stay there with the children and help them with their lessons. They both have a nice successful education.

Dulaney: My next to last question, because I'm going to have Dr.

Roberts ask some questions--what was it like growing up on a farm? You said you mentioned to your children in your classes that you grew up on a farm. What was that like? What did you tell the kids about growing on the farm? Your children in your classes?

Mitchell: I told them, even the white kids and Black kids and

all that I was raised on a farm and I like buttermilk. I would tell them that I had buttermilk and cornbread. Oh, I would tell them stories about being on the farm and everything.

Little boy said to me, "Uh, Ms. Mitchell. You know, rich people shouldn't die." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because they have money." I said, "Well then, [?]." I just explained to them and told them the things that I had to do as far as living on the farm and what we did have and what we didn't have. Even now, I wish my children, my grandchildren that they could go out on a farm. I talked about milking the cow and drinking buttermilk and all that kind of stuff. My daddy was a [?] and we would work and half of the money would go to the white folks and we would take the other half. I just told them the truth.

Dulaney: Alright. Dr. Roberts?

Roberts: You were a cross over teacher, which you've explained.

I guess that was 1971 or 1970 when the big crossover, Black teachers going to White schools for the first time. Do you think it was worth it to make--to have White teachers coming to Black schools?

Mitchell: Let me tell you what I really think about it. I think, as far as your personal--it's great because it let you know what happened out here with the white

children and what did not happen over here. But, actually, as far as the children are concerned, I think it was a handicap as far as the children are concerned.

Roberts: Could you elaborate on that?

Mitchell: I feel--when I say handicap, I just don't feel that the white teachers give our children the thing that they should know. They really don't have the experience of the Black kids, like I had the experience of white kids. See, I worked for White people, I worked in [?]. That's how I finished high school. They did not know anything. As I told teachers out there, my second grade teachers and [?], I said, "I know you White people, but you all don't know us. I know what it takes to get along with White people. But you don't know--" Most of the--you know, they had bad things, you know, parents that come up there and curse you out and parents that come up there and do so on and so on. But, they were fearful of our children. I think it was a complete handicap to our children because I know my daughter, right now, she tells everybody, "I am so glad I went to an all-Black high school"

because when she's in a meeting and everything, she says that the first thing they ask--when she went to medical school, the first thing they asked her, "Did you have all White teachers? What kind of teachers did you have?" She said that she was so happy to let them know that she had all Black teachers. So, as I said, it is an advantage and a disadvantage.

Roberts: My second question is what do you think we can do, because this is still going on--this being White teachers teaching Black kids--I guess my concern is that aspect of it. As you said, for some reason, we've been conditioned to understand that culture, or the main culture, if you were to claim it as that. So, we understand how to function and to societies like [?] we can function in both worlds. What do you think we need to do, even today, to help people who are not Black. Since our schools are predominantly Hispanic and Black, what do you think we need to do? What are some of things that they need to do to become effective teachers in our schools?

Mitchell: One of the things that I need to--that we need to do is do some extensive training with the white teachers. If you noticed--this is one of the things we said [unclear] was going to do this year, they sent the new teachers who are learning how to teach out to our schools. They supposedly send the best teachers to North Dallas. The only thing that I can say that can help, if I'm answering your question correctly, is do like they did in California--get some retired teachers to come back and mentor and help these white teachers teach. Now, in California and--in Los Angeles, I'm saying. In Los Angeles, they were able to get Black teachers--they paid them to come back and show these white teachers who are not used to teaching Black kids the things that they need to do. They tell me that was a success. That's one of the things that I'm sure probably won't happen because they're saying we don't have any money and we're not going to work free. That's one of the things that I think we should do. Last year, when I went out to [?] as a volunteer, one of the teachers--she was a really energetic teacher. She said, "Ms. Mitchell, will you please come in my

room and do a demonstration for me just to show me how to teach?" I said, "I cannot do that. That is your principal's job. If he wants me to, I will be happy to, but I cannot do it by you asking." Well, see, to me, the teacher was admitting that she did not know and that she needed help. Until these principals get into these classrooms, which most of them--just like that young man, he had never been in an elementary school. He was a high school history teacher. But, he is at [?]. He probably doesn't know that the teachers do not know. I think, unless they can persuade some of us to help and have the teachers understand that we are there to help them--does that help you?

Roberts: Yes, yes it does. Thank you.

Dulaney: Okay. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview?

Mitchell: No, I think I've talked too much as it is [laughs].

Dulaney: It's been perfect.

Mitchell: I enjoy talking about teaching boys and girls. I still enjoy--when I was at [?] last year, I wished I could have helped the teacher. I really wished I

could. She really needed help. I did help her as much as I could help her because I got a little-- six children in her room--she did say she didn't really have time to really work with them, so I really worked with them. I really enjoyed it and I hated to leave them.

Dulaney: Well, thank you very much. It's been very good. Dr.

Roberts has a form he needs you to fill out. We will send you a copy of the form and a copy of the interview--

[End of Interview]