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FROM URBAN STUDENT TO URBAN EDUCATOR: A NARRATIVE OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN A SOUTHEASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted by the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2010

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FROM URBAN STUDENT TO URBAN EDUCATOR: A NARRATIVE OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN A SOUTHEASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT

NICHOLE S. DAVIS

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of 12 urban middle school teachers who were once urban middle school students. The study sought to discover reasons why these teachers returned to urban middle schools to teach and why they decided to stay.

A qualitative methodology, using the narrative design, was chosen for this study and interviews were conducted in order to obtain quality retellings of authentic experiences. The researcher sought to gain an understanding of life in the urban middle school environment. Purposeful sampling was used to select the 12 participants. The interviews with the 12 participants were recorded and transcribed. Six themes and three subthemes perceived by the participants as having an impact on why they return and stay in urban environments were developed from these interviews.

The identified themes were (a) caring, (b) motivation, (c) mentors, (d) opportunity, (e) relationships, and (f) commitment. The identified subthemes were (a) observations, (b) hope, and (c) parental involvement.

Conclusions drawn from this study should contribute to the advancement of recruiting and retaining quality urban middle school teachers. A question raised for additional research focused on urban school districts ability to motivate urban students to seek careers in urban education after graduation.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who supported and cheered for me throughout this process. Special dedication is given to my mother and father – Edna and Andrew Davis II, who instilled in me the drive to never give up on my dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I decided to apply for the doctoral program at UAB, I prepared myself to reserve the next few years of my life to understanding something about urban education. The one question I continuously pondered was “if urban schools are such horrible places, then why do urban students come back to teach here?” This curiosity led me to my topic, which has opened my mind to more than I imagined. I have met and worked tirelessly with new and interesting people.

I owe much of my success to the faculty and staff of both the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Alabama. I would like to express extreme gratitude to my dissertation committee: Drs. Loucrecia Collins, Lois Christensen, Linda Searby, John Tarter, and Deborah Voltz. They have provided sound guidance and support throughout this extensive process. I am grateful for their expertise and professionalism. I offer a special thank you to Dr. Loucrecia Collins who exposed me to a whole new world during my doctoral studies.

My colleagues are owed a great deal of gratitude in that they offered motivation and supported me. Your encouragement and well-wishes were comforting and sustaining when times got rough.

To my sorors, the lovely ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., I thank you for consistently checking with me to make sure I stayed on track and completed this program. Thank you for helping me celebrate the small successes that led to this big one.

I sincerely appreciate the urban schools that offered information, data, and time to make this study a success. I consider you truly talented and valuable experts in your fields.

To my pastor and church family who kept me grounded and spiritually motivated. Special thanks to Mrs. Francita Pickett, my Sunday school teacher, who pushed me every Sunday to work hard and trust in God.

To my family, who have walked me through every accomplishment I have made in my life. My sisters and my only brother, you are my role models and my inspiration. To my brothers-in-law and my sister-in-law, you have always offered kind words and positive motivation. My nephews and nieces, you make me better every time I look into your eyes. I strive to provide a path for you to follow. To my parents, you pushed me to never accept where I am and always try to be better.

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Urban education environments can be distinctly challenging places for learners and educators (Peterman, 2008). In fact, urban teachers have an overwhelming job. Howard (2003) alleged that teaching in urban schools has become one of the most "unpalatable" (distasteful) occupations. Howard cited four factors that lead to teachers' discouragement. These factors included (a) teacher retirement, (b) an increasing student population, (c) new classroom policies, and (d) teacher attrition. Because of these factors, "to prepare teachers for urban contexts, we must consider standards that represent a response to the culture of teaching urban schoolchildren" (Peterman, p. 15) and reduce the effects of the challenges they face.

In truth, history dictated that urban schools would be derived from previously established schools (Anderson, 1988). In the school system under study, the urban schools were created as a result of society's need to keep high school students out of trouble and prepare them for the industrial future. The idea of George T. Winston was included as a description of the planning process of early education. This process included the belief for African Americans to be taught to "work, to submit to authority, to respect their superiors….The entire system of public education for the negro race, from top to bottom, should be industrial" (Anderson, p. 85). There was, however, opposition. According to Anderson there were groups who supported and opposed universal public schooling for Blacks and Whites. There were also extremists who favored a racially restrictive

schooling. This conflict went on for decades. One solution to this problem came years later which was free public schools for all people (Anderson). Within these public schools was created the concept of the middle school.

Specifically, Swain (2003) suggested that middle school was a time where urban students make critical and complex life choices. As a result, "they undergo rapid and profound personal changes between the ages 10 and 15 years than any other time in their lives" (Swain, p. 3). As middle school students struggle to live through the physical changes that occur, they struggle to keep up academically. As middle school students struggle to keep up, society constantly changes. When middle schools were first established in the 1960s, the world as we know it was quite different than it is today (Swain). According to Swain, urban middle schools should enhance the healthy growth of young adolescents as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient students who are optimistic about the future. With this concept, Swain envisioned a school atmosphere that catered to the specific needs of the urban middle level learner.

To illustrate, Irvine (1990) noted that schools today, as well as in the past, were believed to have a mirror relationship to the workplace or environment. If the workplace or environment suffered from poverty, racism, ignorance or violence, as did the urban schools. Irvine also suggested that economically deprived communities have been known to perpetuate deprived school districts. The consequence was that these districts struggled financially. Children in deprived school districts suffered the consequences of financial troubles. This suffering was recognized by Hollywood and publicized in a much more negative fashion.

Urban schools have not always been referred to or perceived as negative institutions. In contrast, Theobald (2005) reported that at one point in time the term "urban" was coined in concert with the "American Dream." Furthermore, he suggested that it is the media which truly displays urban schools and students as worse than they really are. Hollywood was a leading catalyst in displaying urban schools as dangerous places (Randolph, 2006). Urban schools were depicted as the worst schools in the country (Randolph). According to Randolph, Hollywood used the image of White teachers as those who would come into the urban school and make them all better. Specific movies have insulted the work of all veteran minority teachers and made them look ineffective at best. On the other hand, Hollywood came back recently with the release of positive movies that depicted urban schools and its constituents as institutions of pride and heritage. Movies like *Pride*, *Freedom Fighters*, and *The Great Debaters* provided audiences with a promising view of urban environments and the successful products they were capable of producing.

At the same time, an obstacle facing urban schools now is unequal funding. Because of unequal funding of U.S. school districts, urban teachers were paid less (Darling-Hammond, 2009). As if lower salaries were not enough, "urban schools suffered from far greater complications than rural or suburban schools" (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2002, p. 3). These complications were less funding, lower parental involvement, and fewer highly qualified teachers. Patterson et al. suggested that in urban schools, teacher resilience was critical to schools as they tried to accomplish what needs to be done, is to educate youth. Poverty, which is not unique to urban areas, was a major feature which was a predictor of lower student achievement (Jacob, 2007). Many urban districts must

contend with an eroding tax base, which makes them unusually dependent on state and federal funding. Reliance on outside factors further constrains urban districts. With the cost of living often higher in urban school districts, they may have a harder time attracting teachers than would other school districts (Jacob). This problem became exponentially bigger for urban students' potential to learn a strong foundational curriculum from progressive and successful teachers seeking to perpetuate the same characteristics for them.

As a result of the list of adverse circumstances, many urban teachers became skeptical, cynical, resentful, and eventually burned out. Stover (2007) estimated that the average teacher was expected to last only 5 years. Some educators lack the desire, dedication, and self efficacy needed to stay the course. In order to seek a solution to this problem, educators may seek to strengthen positive teaching skills and characteristics as they pursue school goals (Patterson et al.). Poverty, little to no rewards, and staffing remained problems as urban schools attempt to improve academic achievement. Accordingly, Jacob (2007) asserted that African American teachers often teach in districts that have high occurrences of students of poverty and of minorities.

Besides dealing with children and families in poverty and the other aforementioned adverse conditions, "the staffing of urban schools is a complicated problem" (Anyon, 2001, p. 27). According to Haycock and Crawford (2008), good teachers were not evenly distributed across geographically located schools, specifically urban schools. The main reason was that it was difficult to attract teachers for urban districts (Murnane, 2008). Although recruiting teachers to urban districts was often difficult, many districts offered sign-on bonuses just to get teachers in the door, or across state borders. Although

sign-on bonuses were positive incentives, many schools in the United States were still confronted with the dreadful reality of vast teacher shortages. Howard (2003) stated that over the next 10 years, urban schools will need to replace over 2 million teachers. Unfortunately, contributing to the teacher shortages and difficulty in recruiting urban teachers was the difficulty retaining urban teachers, especially the most professionally developed and skilled master teachers (Armstrong, 2006).

Consequently, not enough attention has been devoted to the teacher shortage in U.S. schools (Howard, 2003). According to Inman and Marlow (2004), the demands and educational conditions for new teachers were complex, which led them to begin to believe that they made mistakes in choosing the profession or in choosing to work in urban settings. Whether or not urban teachers leave and/or fail to be rehired, researchers developed the notion that "urban schools have been and will continue to be among those most severely hampered by a teacher shortage" (Howard, p. 144). Shortages and lower-quality teaching will have the most harmful outcome on students and communities that can least afford them (Howard). According to Darling-Hammond (2009), the failure to give urban students teachers who can or choose to teach our children as they deserve to be taught often leads to the predictable cycle of academic despair, dropping out and an inability to find gainful employment.

In contrast, according to Irons and Harris (2007) and Stover (2007), teachers in Virginia as well as Maryland have been offered bonuses as a part of a means to attract high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff schools. As a result, in 2004, all teachers in Virginia's urban districts were highly qualified (Irons & Harris). In addition, teachers in Baltimore, Maryland increased the number of highly qualified teachers; however, their tactics

included limiting the transfers of highly qualified teachers from hard-to-staff schools unless there is an equally qualified replacement available. Stover noted that New York City's school system realized that 85% of teacher college graduates took their first teaching jobs within 40 miles of their homes. This could be used as a recruiting tool for other major cities with urban districts. Also, Stover stated that New York City used lead teachers, those veteran high quality teachers, to help coach teachers in hard-to-staff schools in need. Many other major cities have similar programs designed to retain new teachers and provide them with help during the first 5 years.

At the same time, reform efforts have surfaced across the United States for years. As society progressed, reform efforts were made to keep up in education. According to Anderson and Summerfield (2003), urban school reform dated back to the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 where new vocational schools were built to supplement academic high schools, to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which focused on accountability. As stated, "Schools are inevitably a battleground for defining the nation" (Anderson and Summerfield, 2003, p. 38). As a result, changes by way of school reform will continue to take place in urban schools.

As a rule, culture played a colossal role in educating urban students. In some urban classrooms, "students of color are doubly disadvantaged in trying to get their voices heard" (Delpit, 1995, p. 109). Delpit suggested that urban teachers, Black or White, should be careful when responding to students' literacy education. Students will speak, and perform based on their culture. Culturally sensitive teachers were careful to refrain from offending the culture of the students. Culturally responsive teachers were those who applied "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance

styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Thompson, 2004, p. 16).Culturally responsive teaching provided teachers with a blue print on ways to reach urban students. According to Garcia (2002), teachers can help develop students' cultural identity by reinforcing positive attributes of each individual student.

Although urban schools faced many challenges, Nieto (2003) reported that urban teachers can be convinced to stay. According to Anderson (2006), many of the myths surrounding urban schools were simply myths. To combat such challenges urban teachers could start by expressing optimism, fostering a desire for change, and displaying caring and hope. In doing so, urban teachers commence to perceive their districts without the negative connotations (Neito). Instead of dwelling on the challenges, teachers can make the challenges work for them and students. Nieto also found that some urban teachers have stayed in teaching for many reasons. These reasons may have included, but were not limited to, the ability to (a) set high expectations, (b) set rigorous demands, (c) develop closer relationships with students and colleagues, (e) use encouragement, (f) exhibit trust and confidence in students, and (g) establish a sense of faith about teaching and learning. Corbett, Wilson, and Williams (2005) added that many urban teachers had positive attitudes and immense determination. Urban teachers thrived to offer students no other choice but to succeed (Corbett et al.).

Along with facing the challenges with optimism, urban teachers may take a more personal approach to creating a desire to stay. There exist teachers who did not accept failure as an option (Corbett et al., 2005). In a study by Corbett et al., the researchers found that urban teachers who stay often took responsibility for students' success instead

of placing the blame elsewhere. Urban teachers also had a desire to act on their personal and positive beliefs about urban schools and what they were capable of achieving.

Specifically, many personal and positive beliefs in urban education lead to the notion of social justice. According to Kohn (2008), social justice was a part of urban education. Through social justice teachers demonstrated a sense of community and responsibility for others. Urban teachers strived to include social justice as a part of the explicit and hidden curriculum by building relationships. Instead of trying to change what they know they cannot, many urban teachers changed the focus of the problems by establishing personal relationships. According to Fischmann, DiBara, and Gardner (2006) urban teachers who flourish developed personal relationships with students without compromising their personal values. Urban teachers responded to the apparent increase of student problems by broadening their responsibilities (Fischmann et al.).

Namely, Nieto (2003) described caring and hope as human characteristics demonstrated by teachers that effectively remained in urban settings. “Teachers’ caring promotes a sense of belonging for urban students” (Nieto, p. 3). Patterson et al. (2001) stated in a study of resilient teachers that the commitment to teaching (as a social justice) is a “calling.” This calling offered a resilient teacher “a higher power for strength on difficult days” (Patterson et al., p. 7). When teachers referred to a higher power, hope resounded as a driving force and therefore “hope is the essence of urban teaching” (Nieto, p. 3). Resilience was essentially flexibility and buoyancy. The urban teacher had internal characteristics which Collins (2001) said cannot be taught as skill sets can.

Consequently, re-establishing hope in urban schools was a must. Teachers in urban settings often express hope in their students, abilities as teachers, newly inducted teachers, promise of public education, and profession of teaching (Nieto 2005).

On the whole, Stanford (2001) suggested that the needs of urban students were great. However, veteran urban teachers had the experience, character traits, knowledge and skill to teach any student, not just the "good" students. Thompson (2004) reported that any teacher can appear to be successful when working with all well-behaved and high achieving students. However, urban teachers may not always appear successful when working with urban students who experience adverse conditions. Thompson went on to state that becoming and remaining an urban teacher was not easy, but it was a challenging, yet rewarding option that was available to all teachers regardless of background or district.

Problems for Study

The following problems were identified for this study:

1. Urban school districts faced the challenge of recruiting and retaining, highly qualified and quality teachers with strong effective personal characteristics.

2. There was a void in the literature describing urban students who return to teach in urban environments.

3. There was a conflict in the literature about why urban middle school teachers stay.

According to Jacobs (2007), highly qualified, and high quality teachers were likely to begin a career in urban or suburban schools. However, urban teachers were more

likely to change schools or leave the profession than suburban teachers (Jacob). Howard (2003) revealed that many new teachers leave the profession without making it through the first year of teaching. As urban teachers leave, urban schools suffered teacher shortages. Urban students often bore the burden. Howard also suggested that research discussions have begun to center around how to recruit more qualified teachers. Specifically, the discussions were focused on how to recruit teachers who embodied personal characteristics of strength and flexibility, and how to retain them in the classroom to educate our students with potential.

For this reason, a narrative study into the life of urban middle school teachers who were once urban students may reveal ways to ameliorate this problem. There was a plethora of research on what the students demonstrated to prove success. On the contrary, there was a paucity of research on what teachers, who were once urban students, demonstrated that lead to their willingness to stay.

Moreover, gaining urban students' cooperation and attention in urban classrooms involved establishing an environment where urban teachers paid close attention to students' cultural and ethnic needs, as well as social, emotional, and cognitive needs (Brown, 2003). The best way to ensure this type of cultural appreciation was through culturally responsive teaching.

Thus, a (future) narrative study on urban teachers has the potential to help remedy this deficiency by studying teachers in urban middle schools, who have been teaching in the urban environment for five or more years. In order to obtain lived experiences that may be beneficial for other urban teachers to maintain success, and sustain innovative, effective and progressive teaching methods for their students, the narrative design was best.

In addition, there was a lack of research on what urban middle school teachers who were once urban students did differently. It was unknown why urban teachers remain in urban school districts despite adverse conditions. In order to understand urban middle school teachers that stay in urban settings, current teachers' input may provide insights.

Howard (2003) states: "The issue of teacher shortage is complex and widespread" (p. 142). Accordingly, there was a void in the literature about urban middle school teachers who were once urban students. The current literature did not reveal reasons why urban middle school teachers remain in urban environments. This study may append to the body of literature in educational leadership and urban education. Appending to the body of literature may provide educators with evidence of what worked.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of urban middle school teachers in a southeastern school district who were once urban students to divulge why they stay in urban school districts despite adverse conditions. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon was urban middle school teachers who were once urban students and now teach in middle schools in a southeastern school district. Findings from this study may assist teacher education programs, teachers planning to transfer into urban settings, and current urban teachers.

Accordingly, a narrative study of the lived experiences of urban middle school teachers in a southeastern school district, who were once urban students, may aid in identifying ways to develop more urban middle school teachers in large urban districts. Studying these relationships required obtaining experiences of the participants. The in-

formation obtained from the participants' lived experiences gave meaning in terms of the larger context. District leaders may gain insight on how to create professional learning communities to support urban teachers. Unfortunately, urban districts were often teaming with teachers who lacked the knowledge, characteristics, and skills it took to effectively deal with and effectively teach urban students. This study may be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for the purpose of recruiting and retaining urban middle school teachers in an effort to increase academic achievement for students living in low socioeconomic school districts.

Research Questions

The following is the central research question for this study:

1. How do urban middle school teachers who were once urban students, describe why they return and remain in the urban setting?

The research sub-questions for this study included the following:

1. How do teachers describe what they do to ensure longevity in the urban setting?

2. What personal experiences do urban teachers explain that allows them to handle problems and issues as they remain in urban education?

3. What are common problems faced by urban teachers from their perceptions?

Definition of Terms

Academic Optimism is a teacher's positive belief that he or she can make a difference in the academic performance of students by emphasizing academics and learning, by

trusting parents and students to cooperate in the process, and by believing in his or her own capacity to overcome difficulties and react to failure with resilience and perseverance (Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008)

Culturally Responsive Teaching is using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2000).

Efficacy is teachers' "perceptions about their own capabilities to foster students' learning and engagement" (Shaughnessy, 2004, p. 154).

Highly Qualified Teachers are those who according to NCLB are required to be certified, by the 2005-2006 school year, are highly qualified that is, they hold a BA degree, are certified or licensed by the state, and demonstrate subject matter competence (Jacob, 2007).

Poverty Ideology is the willingness to teach in a poor school (Robinson, 2007).

Resilience in urban teaching is defined as proficient test scores of students taught as well as staying in the field of education for more than 3 consecutive years (Patterson et al., 2002).

Teacher Shortage means that the number of teachers the district wants to employ is greater than the number of teachers who are willing and able to work at the offered salary (Jacob, 2007).

Urban Districts are schools that are located in large central cities in the United States (Jacob, 2007). The U. S. Census Bureau (2000) suggested that urban cities are composed of a population of more than 50,000 people. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 1996) stated that urban schools are larger on average than rural

and suburban schools at ever level. NCES went on to note that poverty rates are higher in urban cities which leads to high rates of poverty in urban schools.

Summary

In brief, according to Stanford (2001), educators needed to seek the insights of positive veteran teachers before they leave the field. Howard (2003) suggested that urban schools can be challenging places to teach, likewise, Swain (2003) noted that urban middle schools can be even more challenging. Many of these challenges stemmed from environments surrounding the schools (Irvine, 1990), as well as Hollywood's depiction of urban living (Randolph, 2006). Reform efforts have been made to improve the conditions of urban schools (Anderson & Summerfield, 2003). A common denominator within the urban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2009) as well as the urban community was poverty (Jacob, 2007). For this reason, staffing urban schools was difficult (Anyon, 2001). As a result, there was a colossal shortage of high quality teachers in urban middle schools (Howard). Therefore, urban districts worked to find ways to improve recruiting efforts (Iron & Harris, 2007). Once teachers were recruited, efforts were made to make them resilient enough to stay the course (Patterson et al., 2002). After teachers decided to stay, concepts like cultural identity (Garcia, 2002) and social justice (Kohn, 2008) became catalysts for reaching urban students. Veteran teachers may be able to provide insight on ways to find hope in times of adversity (Neito, 2002). Providing an arena for veteran teachers to share experiences may allow the researcher to develop an understanding of how to coach other teachers to stay the course in urban middle schools.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter served as a review of the present literature related to the development of this study. Multiple facets of literature regarding urban teachers were reviewed. Significant information and data were identified from professional journals, Internet web sites, and books. This existing review of the proposed literature included teacher definitions and beliefs, the findings of many research studies important to teachers, and current and future implications for urban teachers, specifically in middle school environments.

The following topics were offered in the literature review of this study: (a) Introduction, (b) Theoretical Framework, (c) Challenges in the History of Urban Schools, (d) Current Challenges in Urban School Settings, (e) Challenges in Middle Schools, (f) What Influences Teachers to Stay, and (g) Summary.

Introduction

For years there has existed debate over what makes an urban middle school teacher remain in urban environments. However, the literature was not clear on describing what an urban middle school teacher, who was once an urban middle school student, does to remain in urban middle schools. While there was a minute amount of literature about what makes a successful middle school teacher, there existed an abundance of literature on the characteristics of urban middle school students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks underlying the research included several postmodern perspectives. These theories were feminist, ethnic and/or critical race theory, and critical theory. According to Creswell (2007), postmodern theories are based on changing ways of thinking instead of calling on action based on those changes. Postmodernism was composed of several theories that have common denominators that will prove beneficial to this study.

The first theory was the feminist theory. Upon hearing its title many assume that research must be focusing only on women and /or suffrage. However, the feminist theory also focused on "establishing collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative" (Creswell, 2007, p. 26). Feminist theory saw gender as a basic organizing principle shaping the conditions of individual lives. Within the study, the participants shared their experiences as female educators as well as male educators. Based on the feminist theory, representatives of both genders as participants allowed the researcher to view differences that may or may not arise.

The last theory associated with theoretical framework was the critical theory. According to Creswell (2007), this theory focused on empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender. In critical theory, researchers may encourage people to interact, change how people think, help individuals examine the conditions of their existence and more (Creswell). As it relates to teachers, critical theory criticized their knowledge base and revealed its effects on teachers, schools, and the culture's (urban environment) view of education.

These worldviews and theories narrowed to interpretive or theoretical stances taken by the researcher. These interpretative stances shaped the individuals studied, the types of questions and problems examined, the approaches to data collection, data analysis, writing, and evaluation, and the use of the information to change society or add to social justice (Creswell, 2007).

Theoretically, the aspiration for narrative researchers was to sort out a narrative view of experience. Experience was reported as experiences lived and told in stories. The aspect of the work in narrative studies overlapped in those of other traditions.

The second theory was the ethnic/critical race theory. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the ethnic theory (also called ethnic paradigm) had a criteria that reflected "Afrocentricity," lived experiences, dialogue, caring, accountability, race, class, and gender. Ethnic theory, like feminist theory, was a form of critical theory that lends itself to narration in the form of essays, fables, and dramas. Ethnic theory was usually grounded in the experiences of oppressed people like those in urban districts who live under difficult conditions. There was a combination of cultural studies involved with ethnic theory. These studies stressed lived experiences that focused on gaining meaning, and structural and material determinants, which focused on race, class, gender, and effects of experience (Creswell, 2007). The research design for this study was narrative in which the researcher wrote about the participants' lived experiences. This coincided with the cultural studies component of ethnic theory. The research focused on urban middle school teachers who were once urban students. These participants fell into either category. Race was an issue as urban districts derived from some racial issues in the past (see history section). Class was an issue as urban districts are found in high poverty and high-

ly populated cities. Gender was an issue as most teachers are female yet the study also included males. This could be an issue as groups and subgroups are developed.

Ethnic theory was similar to critical race theory. Both focused on experiences of oppressed people. However, with critical race theory "the depiction of ethnic groups of color is littered with negative images" (Delgado, 1995, p. 219). As a result, it was found that individual oppressed groups like urban teachers who have experienced such issues have a special voice that readers should hear (Delgado). In keeping with this notion, for the purpose of this study, urban middle school teachers (some African American) had a special voice that the audience should listen to as their experiences and stories are told.

Lynn and Parker (2006) defined critical race theory as "an analytical framework on race and racism in the law and society" (p. 258). Although race and racism were not the lead catalysts for this study, they provided a foundation as to how urban districts arrived as unbalanced environments in comparison to other districts. It was mentioned by Lynn and Parker that critical race theory was grounded in the context that the experiences of people of color were used as literary narrative knowledge and storytelling to challenge the existing social constructs of race. The belief that the experiences of White and/or European people were the standard experience was challenged. What society deemed as normal and standard may not hold true across the board for minorities and other people of color. Critical race theorists believed that civil rights law was never designed to help Blacks. According to Epstein (2006), the critical race theory emphasized the concept of racism being embedded in every educational institution in U.S. society. Instead of helping African Americans, civil rights laws seemed to hinder their progress. After all the changes since Brown *v.* Board, Delgado (1995) asked "if blacks are still not achieving,

what can be done?" (p. 466). Although Delgado noted there was no single solution, he believed that there should be subversive storytelling to fuel change as well as a continuous effort to work hard, make money, and move ahead. As Lynn and Parker stated, "one of the main arguments of critical race theorists has been that while classic forms of overtly racist behavior has subsided, everyday racism has risen" (p. 260).

With the notion that everyday racism was a societal problem, critical race theorists strived to link the concept of racism to current issues in urban middle schools. There was an "interrelation between critical pedagogy in urban education and the debates that plagued the nation" (Duncan-Andrade, & Morrell, 2008, p. 157). To prove its relevance to urban education, Lynn and Parker (2006) noted that "racism was a persistent construct that could account for inequalities such as dropout rates and school suspension rates for Blacks" (p. 266). Low property values, low social status, and poverty all helped to contribute to low quality urban schools. Lynn and Parker linked these issues with the affects of continued racism in the United States by stating that "critical race theory could be used to explain the important connections between race and class in American schooling" (p. 266). Epstein (2006) added the following contributions of critical race theory to urban schools: (a) race was a critical factor in establishing urban schools, (b) racism was rooted in socioeconomic status (SES) of urban citizens, and (c) racism is permanent in urban institutions.

For the purpose of this study, the much needed storytelling suggested by Delgado (1995) was performed by urban middle school teachers who were once urban middle school students. These teachers had overcome adversity, worked hard, were making their own money, and were moving ahead. Their stories were sought to expose a formula for

success for future urban middle school students and teachers. It was the objective of the researcher to use critical race theory to transform a societal myth of African American underachievement into African American triumph. Triumph was evident in that these urban teachers grew from oppressed urban students educated under adverse circumstances to successful African American teachers.

Along with these three theories was the notion that critical pedagogy worked to help teachers understand urban youth. Pendergast and Bahr (20050 stated:

> middle years work has tended to focus on the convergence and transformation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and to a lesser degree on organizational elements to meet the needs of young adolescents. (p. 45)

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) suggested that teachers should be better prepared for what was happening in urban middle schools. This preparation may allow teachers' pedagogy to reflect a deeper understanding of their students' lives and place urban middle schools in a better position to influence educational outcomes.

Challenges in the History of Urban Schools

Historically, in the United States, educators valued social control which was seen as essential to the existing social privilege, interests, and knowledge of one component of the population at the expenditure of less powerful groups (Apple, 1990). African Americans were often viewed as the less powerful assemblage, while Caucasians were viewed as the more powerful assemblage. Many believed that for African American students, school failure and economic deprivation were related to their inferior intelligence; thus, attributing to African Americans' history of slavery, segregation, and limited opportunities (Irvine, 1990). According to Anderson (2006), the shift has changed to include His-

panic students along with the African American students as the portrait of urban schools. Irvine also found that schools were believed to have a mirror relationship to the workplace or environment. As a result, economically deprived communities developed deprived schools. These schools came to be known as urban schools.

Subsequently, many urban schools were predominantly populated by African-American students. According to Jackson (2001), African American education dated back to the early 1600s. From 1600-1800, African Americans struggled to exist in America. According to Jackson, African indentured servants arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, and because of legalized slavery, soon realized that as slaves it was illegal to learn how to read. Before long, slaves learned about other slaves that were being taught to read and write in Europe. As a result, action was slowly taking place to oppose slavery laws. A school for African American children was established in Philadelphia by the Abolitionist Society. This society believed in the principles of abolishing slavery. Jackson reported that by 1790, 92% of African Americans in the United States were slaves. Several schools commenced to open for freed African Americans. From 1800 to 1900, many other schools opened their doors to African Americans. Several African American colleges and universities were established and the struggle for equal rights ensued (Jackson).

As these struggles persisted, across the United States students were denied an education based on the color of their skin. Lawsuits were both won and lost in states that openly denied admission to educational institutions. Jackson (2001) noted a specific incident in Ohio where from 1829-1849 African Americans were excluded from public schools. Also, in 1834, the state of South Carolina passed a law prohibiting the teaching of any African Americans whether freed or not. According to Watkins (2005) members

of the Black Abolitionist Movement crusaded against slavery to improve education for African Americans. This group was aggressive with their attempts at equality. They openly challenged Caucasian racist groups and assisted with increasing attendance at segregated African American schools.

Almost parallel with segregation, according to Watkins (2005), some African American leaders believed that African American people should have relocated from urban communities to the countryside because urban areas were lowering the values of African Americans. Watkins also found that in the state of New York, Gerritt Smith, an antislavery leader and philanthropist, recommended that African Americans move to upstate New York and accept land donated by him to offer some idea of hope. Although there existed a desire for integration in the South by many African Americans, there simultaneously existed a sense of pride and separation by some African Americans in the north who wanted independence from a racist society (Watkins, 2005).

Although efforts were boldly made to improve education for African Americans, education was still not a luxury to which African Americans were privy. However, several amendments were written to support former slaves. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery. In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment awarded African Americans "equal protection under the laws," and in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment bestowed African American men the right to vote (Jackson, 2001).

As amendments were written and laws were established, life seemed to be getting better for African Americans and their quest to realize literacy and an opportunity for education. According to Jackson (2001), by 1900, 55% of the African American popula-

tion was literate. Between 1900 and 2000 this literacy rate would come with a cost. Although laws were passed to end segregation and discrimination, African Americans were consistently denied an equal education.

According to Anderson (2006), there was an establishment of what was known as the comprehensive high school led educational reform toward the development of urban schools. Anderson explained how the Smith Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 led to the development of vocational programs to supplement previously established academic programs. These programs would enhance a growing industrial society and possibly enhance the economy. However, Anderson cited the Second World War as the prelude to educational reform for schools. There was a desire to "reinvent" society in the United States (Anderson, p. 36). As policy makers tried to go back to the way things were during the farming era, there was the realization that population and industry were on the rise. This led to the concept of the acceptance of diversity. Many solutions to the acceptance of diversity were considered to include establishing a basic education for all, establishing small communities of like-minded people, and establishing rural anachronism (Anderson).

Although changes were being made to improve high schools, many southern institutions refused to allow African American students to integrate with Caucasian students. In 1954, Thurgood Marshall served as lead counsel representing the plaintiffs in their successful challenge of racial segregation. The Supreme Court found in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) that racial segregation violated the fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution. By 1963, the University of Alabama

made national headlines as the governor, George Wallace, blocked the front doors of the institution to prevent African American students from entering (Jackson, 2001).

By 1980, according to Jackson (2001), another form of segregation materialized. The conception of "White flight" took place. As a result of laws permitting African Americans to integrate into Caucasian schools, Caucasians moved from integrated neighborhoods, thus avoiding having their children taught in the same school as African American children (Jackson). Miron and St. John (2003) added that desegregation hastened white flight from urban schools and the concentration of poverty in inner cities. According to Higgs (2004), in Birmingham, Alabama, the urban schools were 98-99% African American and rural schools were 98-99% Caucasian. Some of the county schools were integrated, but the image was portrayed as though society was looking forward to keeping African Americans and Caucasians separate. However, "integration is necessary for life, not just for Birmingham, but for the world" (Higgs, 2004, p. 186).

Segregation was the consequence of racism. As a result, race conscious initiatives like affirmative action rose across the United States after 1980 to ensure that not only K-12 schools end discrimination practices but higher education make accommodations to accept minority individuals for education and employment. According to Schwartz (1994), it was Ronald Reagan administration's assault on the rights of minorities and women that lead to the focus on affirmative action. However, Steele (1990) disagreed with the notion of affirmative action and referred to it as racial discrimination in reverse. It appeared that with each attempt at equalization there arose a counteraction by racist groups. Although many new careers and opportunities opened for African Americans as

a result of civil rights movements and affirmative action policies (Banks, 2009), by 2000, the nation was still at war with what was considered “equal” (Jackson, 2001).

As time went on, African American teachers in the south were well regarded and respected in their communities (Jackson, 2001). According to Banks (2009) a large number of African Americans entered the middle class due to the opportunities and possibilities that resulted from efforts made to end racism. As the largest group of people, African American teachers were among the few who were formally educated. The teachers created a spirit of hope for the future of African American education.

Obstacles

Along with the list of urban school characteristics that can be seen as obstacles, were the obstacles students faced. Kuykendall (2004) provided several school-related obstacles that have been known to hinder the progress of urban students. These obstacles included the following: (a) the lack of representative pluralistic curricula, (b) the incongruent implementation of teaching and instructional strategies or differentiated instruction, (c) the academic tracking and ability grouping, (d) the test biases reported, and (e) the negative labeling (Kuykendall, 2004). The pluralistic curricula included the need for African American students and Hispanic students to gain more culturally diverse education and training. This diversity would concentrate teaching all students about culture, history, sciences, literature, and so on with an emphasis on responsibility, curiosity, industry, kindness, empathy, and courage (Kuykendall, 2004). Kuykendall eluded that there was a need for more fidelity in the teaching of historic facts so that African American and Hispanic children will no longer feel the need to question the motives of their

teachers and appreciate the values and ideas of others. Garcia (2002) supported Kuykendall by adding that many minority students believed the role of power was out of their reach. Instead, they believed the teacher, as well as members of the "dominant" culture, held the power: "Many students conclude that if they are not a part of that culture, they will not be in a position to hold power" (Garcia, 2002, p. 26). Power can be used to manipulate individuals to buy into what they believe. According to Garcia, this can lead to students trying really hard to be acknowledged, heard, and respected by the teacher as worthy of their time and attention.

The incongruent teaching and learning instructional strategies and differentiated instruction reflected the imbalance in what was being provided and what the students needed. According to Kuykendall (2004), African American and Hispanic students who found evidence of their own culture and specific learning styles present in the instructional program of the school, were more likely to be motivated to learn. However, if this imbalance continued, these students often begin to blame themselves for the imbalance and distrust for the school. Kuykendall states: "To reach all children, educators must expand their repertoire of instructional strategies to include the various approaches children use to learn" (p. 72). In an effort to reach the students, Garcia (2002) suggested that urban teachers needed to refrain from making unfair assumptions when dealing with urban students. Kuykendall stressed the fact that "All Black and Hispanic children do not use the same learning style" (p. 72). As a result, Dalton (2008) suggested that teachers at every level in urban school districts must assume the responsibility of preparing students to learn in a multicultural environment.

Without this adequate preparation, students could be subject to unfair grouping. Academic tracking and ability grouping were seen as a form of institutional racism for African American and Hispanic students. There has been an over-representation of African American and Hispanic students in either low ability groups or special education classes. As Murell (2008) explains: "dropout rates, low levels of academic skills, and school failure are higher for children and youth of color than their white, culturally mainstream, European American counterparts" (p. 45). There were alternatives to these placements. Heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning strategies were cited as two of the most effective ways to assist minority students prior to tracking and ability grouping (Kuykendall, 2004).

In Alabama, schools must use the Building Based Student Support Team (BBSST) prior to testing for special education services. BBSST matriculated as a result of overrepresentation of African American students being referred to special education programs. According to the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE; 2009),

> BBSST is a support-based collaborative team found in all (Alabama) schools, K-12. BBSST was designed to meet the diverse needs of general education students who were at-risk of failure or drop out due to chronic academic and/or behavior challenges

One of the main purposes of BBSST was to reduce referrals to inappropriate programs (ALSDE). According to the ALSDE, disproportionality in IDEA referred to comparisons made with groups of students by race or ethnicity that are identified for special education services. When students from specific racial or ethnic groups were identified, more or less than all other students, that group may be disproportionately represented. African American students referred for and tested in special education programs experienced less positive outcomes than their Caucasian counterparts (ALSDE).

As a result, test bias had been a frequent problem for students in urban schools. "Culturally biased tests should not be used for the placement of Black and Hispanic youth because they do not reflect the true ability of many students" (Kuykendall, 2004). Kuykendall stated that parents of African American and Hispanic students noted that the placement of children in lower achieving classes based on biased tests led to them accepting that they have a disability. The students adapted to the expectations of the teachers and the biased test that revealed that they are inadequate. Garcia (2002) reported that many teachers make assumptions about urban students by separating them into groups with students of the same race. These assumptions sent the wrong messages to students about multiculturalism by making them believe they were destined to be separated- and to learn differently. This created dominant and subordinate cultures which lead to lower confidence in test-taking ability (Garcia). Kuykendall suggested alternatives to biased tests. Schools could offer biased free tests that tested students' ability, progress, and potential. Criterion-referenced tests are quite popular as biased free tests that measure what had been taught in school as opposed to being culturally and racially biased (Kuykendall).

Conversely, culturally and racially biased tests could lead to negative labeling. Negative labeling was the enemy of positive self-esteem. Kuykendall (2004) mentioned that negative labels were used too often to describe urban students. The students that constantly heard negative adjectives, in relation to their personalities and abilities, had a tendency to believe them. Kuykendall suggested substituting denigrating labels with language that is positive. A few of Kuykendall's recommendations to changing negative comments are listed.

> Instead of Too talkative…Is expressive, loquacious, and a future motivational speaker; Disrespectful…Shows no shortage of self-pride; Too grown…Exhibits maturity and is self-assured; Sassy…Has a quick wit and a sharp tongue; Lacks social skills… Is introverted, quiet; Obnoxious…Is prone to excesses in innocent irritation; Hardened…Is an old soul, has seen a lot of life's sordid side; Hostile…Expresses feelings of being misunderstood. (pp. 45-90)

By changing the negative labels to positive character traits, the teacher can more easily solicit the support of the parents and the cooperation of the students (Kuykendall, 2004). Families were more receptive to positive comments about their children than negative ones.

Current Challenges in Urban School Settings

Urban Schools Now

Today, a majority of African American teachers teach in urban schools. According to Jackson (2007), urban communities were in need of quality urban teachers. Most urban environments were composed of a large number of minority individuals. Minority teachers chose this profession in hopes of providing a service to their respective communities. Jackson professed that considering many of the minority teachers were from these same communities in which they teach, they seek to bring their lived experiences to the profession as they share many commonalities with their urban students.

However, in contrast to Jackson's (2007) belief about minority teachers returning to teach in urban environments, there was much research on Caucasian teachers who were teaching African American students in urban environments. There was an ongoing belief in Caucasian teachers as the saviors of the urban school (Randolph, 2006). Nowhere was this concept more prevalent than in Hollywood. According to Randolph, there were three movies that depict urban schools as places in which the students were in

trouble and needed to be saved. It appeared that the perception from Hollywood was that the current African American teachers cannot save the urban students. The three movies were *Lean on Me, Dangerous Minds,* and *187*. Randolph purported that Hollywood depicted these schools as some of the worst places in the city. There were images of African American and Hispanic students involved in the sale of drugs, acts of violence, and excessive cases of disrespect of themselves and those in authority. According to Randolph, in two of the three films, there existed the Caucasian teacher who came into the students' lives and exposed them to their world while simultaneously learning more about theirs. Each teacher was shown as a heroic individual who took radical measures to change the urban environment, yet received opposition from the administration (Randolph). Randolph referred to this hero teacher as the "lone revolutionist." It appeared, in each film that the other veteran teachers at the schools were mediocre at best and did not care about the state in which each school was in prior to the arrival of the revolutionist. Randolph stated that the films insinuated that "educated and veteran teachers and educators are not successful in their jobs" (Randolph, p. 426). Ayers (2001) added that current urban teachers were considered not up to the challenge. One could deduce from watching these films that "teachers and staff in urban schools are generally shown as uncaring, incompetent, and ineffective educators" (Randolph, p. 426). As a result, many viewers begin to believe what they saw in the movies about urban schools. This was truer of those individuals who had no other knowledge of urban schools than that seen on the big screen. However, Ayers stated that from these films an avid viewer may witness these teachers as able to invest in some youngsters while driving many more away. Unfortunately, Hollywood was helping to maintain the stereotypes U.S. citizens have about

urban schools. Lowe (2001) supported Randolph in the review of the film *Dangerous Minds*. It was in this movie that the "savior White teacher" was portrayed as the caring teacher while the absence of caring was identified in the African American teachers. Lowe stated that even though this film depicted Caucasian educators who were dedicated to working with children of color, this was not standard practice. Instead, "white educators too often question the intellectual capacities of such children and write them off" (Lowe, p. 211).

Whereas many Caucasian teachers transferred to urban districts, many African American teachers not only begin their career in urban environments, but elected to remain their throughout their careers. These teachers opted to remain in urban environments for a reason. Tenure laws were responsible for some of the teachers remaining in the profession, while self-efficacy keeps others there. Regardless of the underlying reasons to staying in the urban school environments, the urban middle school teachers were the focus of this research.

School Reform Efforts That Targeted Urban Schools

The terms education reform and politics seemed to be synonymous over the past few decades. The federal role in urban education surfaced after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik and congress passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Shortly after that, according to Hayes (2008), one of the first reform efforts was during the era of President Lyndon B. Johnson who initiated the "war on poverty." In 1965, the office of economic opportunity during the Johnson Administration, adopted a definition of poverty. This definition was the following: A family in the United States was consi-

dered poor if their gross cash income was below the threshold corresponding to that family's size and composition (Iceland, 2005). In 1965, the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law under President Johnson's administration. ESEA was created to improve educational opportunities for the "disadvantaged" (Miron, 2003). ESEA was later reauthorized as what we know today as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB included a section of the plan labeled "Title I," which provided a large financial aid package for poor schools (or children from disadvantaged backgrounds) (Miron). Schools received funding based on the number of poor children enrolled. The funding was to be used to improve mathematics and reading proficiency skills. Schools with an abundance of poor children were and still are considered "Title I Schools." Ten years after the ESEA, Public Law 94-142 mandated that schools provide a free and appropriate education to students identified as having disabilities.

Jackson (2001) noted that approximately 5 years after Public Law 94-142, the catalyst noted for triggering education reform was *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* This document noted that education in the United States was mediocre and noncompetitive. The country as a whole was considered in danger of performing below the standards of other countries, thus leading to future economic destruction Jackson. Considering the nation's realization that education across the nation was in trouble, the urban environments suffered even greater. Bracey (2004) added, in contrast, that this report instead documented U.S. risks involving test scores. Berube and Berube (2007) supported Bracey by stating that *A Nation at Risk* specified that the United States was near to the bottom in reading, mathematics, and science according to standardized test scores. However, the developed European countries educated through "meritocracy-

a succession of examinations to promote to the next level. The report was comparing different education systems, a fact that was largely ignored" (Berube & Berube, 2007). Bracey believed that the report spun some of the statistics related to the nation's academic status and selectively used and distorted others. As a result, "*A Nation at Risk* offered no actual evidence that high test scores led to economic good times. The link was merely correlational: Japan, Germany, and Korea, among other nations, were enjoying economic booms and their kids scored well on tests" (Bracey, 2004, p.36-37). Nichols and Berliner (2007) supported Bracey in stating that *A Nation at Risk* included false and mythical claims that national security may be compromised unless student achievement improved. They stated that "despite its mistaken false claims, after publication of *A Nation at Risk*, many politicians aligned with a growing public demand to improve the 'failing' educational system" (Nichols & Berliner p. 4). Since then, the U.S. education system continues to be transformed by policies and initiatives designed by politicians to solve the education problem (Nichols & Berliner).

Despite these attempts at reform, according to Yeager (1998), nearly half of all new urban teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years. Howard (2003) supported this claim by revealing that close to 16% of new urban teacher left the profession within the first year. Although this may be true, an aspect of education reform for urban education included recruitment and retention. Retaining urban middle school teachers was essential to the success of urban middle schools. According to Darling-Hammond (2009) teachers were more effective after having taught three or more years. However, urban school systems struggled to retain teachers that long. This highlighted the importance of proper preparation of teachers for the urban environment. To prepare teachers for

the urban environment, attention must be paid to prospective teachers. Darling-Hammond stated: "Prospective teachers rarely see in action the sophisticated practice of great teachers who know how to work with students who live in poverty, and have little prior educational support" (p. 16). There was a great need to expand the pool of potential teacher education students through outreach and recruitment efforts.

There were four areas in need of reform in the 1980s. The areas were (a) shifts in the demographics of schools, (b) increased use of technology as an instructional and management tool, (c) the practice of revisiting and redirecting the focus on educator professionalism, and (d) changes worldwide (Jackson, 2001). Based on the findings of a study performed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, six recommendations were made. These recommendations were to increase the following: (a) high school graduation requirements; (b) testing to measure achievement; (c) rigorous admissions requirements to college; (d) time on teaching the basics. If necessary have a longer school day or year; (e) preparation of teachers; and (f) accountability of educators and elected officials in school outcomes (Jackson, 2001).

As a result of these recommendations, education reform became a national trend. It was apparent that this would lead to restructuring of the education process. While some states had to restructure, others had only to expand on what already existed. Factors in education lead to outcomes. Students and teachers served as the factors while test scores, standards and grades served as the outcomes measures (Jackson, 2001).

The controversial subject of improving urban schools remained at the forefront of education reform across the nation. Abernathy (2007) writes that "reform efforts will change the production process in schools" (p. 45). Like many other topics that need re-

forming, urban teachers were critical components of changing the outcome of the students- the final products of our urban schools. To produce a better tomorrow, we must reform the institutes of today by bringing them up to standards with a changing society (Jackson, 2001).

The urban environment was impacted by society more than any other environment. As a result, reform efforts must continue to evolve to keep up with these changes. According to Jackson (2007) many reform efforts may seem to be headed in the right direction for those environments that fit the "one size fits all" approach. However, urban schools are far from fitting into this category. Saturated with unpredictable circumstances, urban environments are strangers to a preset mandate of standards. Jackson went on to state that current standards and reform initiatives impede urban teachers' creativity, energy, and personal commitment to teaching by stipulating this notion of every child should know specific objectives by specific times.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001)

Successful teachers were those whose, according to NCLB, standards continued to meet the national and state requirements set forth from year-to-year despite adverse conditions. The requirements changed every 1 to 2 years and teachers had to maintain the new benchmarks in order to have their students considered proficient. According to Essex (2006), NCLB also required teachers to become highly qualified in the subject area in which they teach. Becoming highly qualified depended on the amount of education and training a teacher received as well as the passing of an aptitude test in the subject area in which they teach. States, according to Essex, were allowed by law to create a

High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE), defined by each state in line with NCLB. Abernathy (2007) contradicts NCLB by stating two limitations to the Act. The first limitation was that NCLB made no effort to encourage teachers to excel. The second limitation was that NCLB failed to take into account that principals made decisions based on limitations on time and information available. Abernathy also went on to state that NCLB lacked faith in the ability of urban teachers and was viewed by many educators as a punitive system instead of a beneficial one.

In another sense, NCLB required urban teachers to meet rigorous standards every year. Meeting these standards may have appeared to be yet another obstacle, but resilient teachers achieved goals despite these challenges. Dalton (2008) discussed five pedagogical standards that may define urban teachers. These standards included the following: (a) Standard I: Teacher and Students Producing Together Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teacher and students using multiple classroom settings and student groupings. In standard I, students use prior knowledge and new information to form an understanding of the concepts. (b) Standard II: Developing Language and Literacy Develop competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum. In standard II, students can read, write, and speak about ways to use recycling at home, school, and in the community. Students can research literature and read about items that can be recycled and why we recycle. Students can write a persuasive letter to members of the community or lawmakers to convince them to make recycling laws. (c) Standard III: Connecting School to Students' Lives connect teaching and curriculum to students' experiences at home and in the community. In standard III students can make connections to their lives. Teachers can have students to bring discarded items from home and deter-

mine if they are recyclable. Students can complete a poster project on items they find that can be recycled and those that can not be recycled. Students can act as a resource for authentic items people throw away vs. recycle. (d) Standard IV: Teaching Complex Thinking Challenges students to think at increasingly complex levels. In standard IV, students can use mathematics concepts to determine how many years it will take for certain material to decompose and what effect that will have on the environment. Students could also count the number of plastic water bottles they use in a given time period and calculate how much money they could save by re-using them. (e) Standard V: Teaching Through Conversation Engage students in dialogue, especially instructional conversation (IC) (Dalton, 2008, p. 25). In standard V, students may have authentic conversations with others about learning to recycle.

Dalton (2008) recommended that the five standards to be integrated and applied simultaneously. For instance, if a teacher wanted to develop and teach the concept of recycling in science, each standard could be integrated to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Dalton referenced the class as a learning community in which students and teachers used activities to produce new understandings. Often, schools and teachers focused on silence as a discipline technique when silence was actually hindering the necessary conversations students and teachers needed to have about education. Dalton (2008) called this type of dialogue IC. Dalton noted that "IC's were planned, goal directed conversations between teachers and a small group of students on an academic topic" (p. 46). All five standards should be merged together to effectively teach urban students.

In order to meet the urban school challenges, not only did teachers possess certain personal characteristics and use standards based research approaches to teaching and

learning, but knowing what to expect in urban schools gave them an understanding from the beginning. Anderson (2006) cited the following characteristics of urban schools:

> Operating in areas with high population density
> Having larger school districts that serve more students
> Functioning in areas marked by profound economic disparity
> Having a high rate of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity
> Experiencing factionalized, in fighting on school boards over issues concerning resources and influence
> Being undermined by ineffective business operations
> Having familiarity with health problems by students of poverty who are more likely to have them
> Having higher student, teacher, and administrator mobility
> Serving higher immigrant populations
> Becoming more characterized by students with linguistic diversity
> Experiencing unique transportation problems. (pp. 23-27)

Although these characteristics repeatedly carry negative connotations, progressive teachers fulfilled the challenges. Resilient teachers perceived the characteristics as challenges they can and will overcome instead of as burdens keeping them, and especially the students, from success.

Opportunities in Middle Schools

Maniates and Doerr (2001) detailed many opportunities leading to teachers taking advantage of opportunities in urban schools. These opportunities serve as opposition to the later mentioned challenges. By including these opportunities in the teaching profession, urban teachers can have a more positive experience.

Building Personal Rapport

Teachers can build personal rapport with students to make teaching easier for them. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested building rapport with urban students can be

done by the following: (a) getting to know the students, (b) understanding the students' cultures, and (c) performing self-reflection of teaching practices. Building a personal rapport with students empowers the teacher to inspire the self-efficacy of his or her students (Maniates & Doerr).

Ritualizing Traditions

Teachers can ritualize student traditions in the classroom. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that ritualizing traditions can be done by the following: (a) reading aloud to students, (b) establishing and following morning meetings and routines, and (c) having family nights regularly. Traditions in urban middles schools are the mortar that gives strength to student-centered classrooms and permits students to operate successfully throughout the day (Maniates & Doerr).

Establishing Pride of Place

Teachers can establish pride of place in the classroom. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that pride of place can be established in the classroom by the following: (a) arranging classroom furniture for collaboration, (b) making the classroom welcoming, and (c) displaying student work. An invitation into the urban school curriculum can be communicated indirectly to students through the components of the urban environment (Maniates & Doerr).

Creating Sense of Belonging

Teachers can create a sense of belonging in the classroom. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that creating a sense of belonging can be done by the following: (a) sharing control with students, (b) promoting positive relationships and respect for all, and (c) giving students ways to take breaks. Students feel a sense of belonging by the way a teacher steers social relationships within the urban classroom, thus creating a positive climate for learning (Maniates & Doerr).

Bringing Out the Best

Teachers can bring out the best in students. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that teachers can bring out the best in students by the following: (a) developing self discipline, (b) bridging cultural differences, and (c) teaching responsibility. By communicating clearly and directly with urban students, they, in return, respond with respect, knowing that they are safe and expected to do their best (Maniates & Doerr).

Keeping Students Engaged

Teachers can keep students engaged in learning in the classroom. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that teachers can keep students engaged in learning by the following: (a) supporting inquiry, (b) activating prior knowledge, and (c engaging them in authentic experiences and experimentation. Maniates and Doerr state that “powerful learning occurs when students can become emerged in a topic, put their hands on the real thing, search out patterns, and put information into the big picture” (p. 81).

Supporting Student Independence

Teachers can support students' independence in the classroom. Maniates and Doerr (2001) suggested that teachers can support students' independence by the following: (1) identifying learning zones, (2) maximizing time in the zones, and (3) knowing what to teach. Helping children know where they are academically, where they need to be and how to get there supports their independence (Maniates & Doerr, 2001).

Upsides

Cowley (2003) suggested the following "upsides" to urban teaching. Teaching (a) is rewarding and worthwhile; (b) is a profession and a vocation; (c) will stretch you in a number of ways: intellectually, physically, emotionally, and psychologically; (d) gives you a good range of transferable skills; (e) offers good security in the long term; (f) is a mobile profession; (g) is a job that is reasonably well paid with rising salaries with experience; (h) is a job with a pension that offers an excellent deal for long term employees; (i) gets easier as you gain more experience; (j) is never boring; and (k) gives you the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children.

Challenges in Middle Schools

Discipline

Hicks, Glasgow, and McNary (2005) explain that "Classroom management and discipline are what new teachers are most insecure about before entering the classroom" (p. 44). However, discipline was not mentioned as a factor for identifying why urban teachers stay because it was believed to be a given that without good discipline one can-

not engage in quality instruction. If students were actively engaged in high quality instruction, then they will not have the time nor desire to engage in behavior that will negatively impact their learning. When students were confident about learning they had fewer discipline problems and more motivation to learn. As explained by Kuykendall (2004), "teachers have a better chance of increasing their students' motivation to achieve when they can develop in students a sense of responsibility, self-control, and the desire to achieve lifelong success" (p. 131).

Brain Development

Mertens, Anfara, and Caskey (2007) added that the adolescent brain development had an impact on middle school students. The prefrontal cortex of the brain, during puberty, experiences continual development that resulted in changes in behavior. Although the brain remained the same size, it underwent subcomponent changes. The prefrontal cortex was last to reach maximum volume. This part of the brain was linked to impulses, decisions, and strategizing. Acting impulsively could lead to discipline problems in adolescents (Mertens et al., 2007).

Middle School Characteristics

In addition to this, Swain (2003) listed several characteristics of urban middle school students that may lead to discipline problems. These problems included (a) having a strong need to belong to a group, with peer approval more important than adult approval; (b) gravitating toward affiliation with disruptive peers or membership in gangs in order to feel part of a group and to protect their physical safety; (c) experiencing mood

swing often with peaks of intensity and unpredictability; (d) exhibiting immature behavior due to social skills and ability to regulate emotions lag behind their cognitive and physical maturity; and (e) engaging in high-risk behaviors.

These characteristics were some of the most common in urban middle school students. However, Swain (2003) noted that the relative importance of these characteristics will vary among students. Urban middle school teachers may benefit from developing an understanding of these characteristics and using this knowledge to help urban middle school students grow physically and emotionally (Swain).

Likewise, teachers in urban middle schools may focus on their professional practice be exhibiting the following characteristics (Mertens et al., 2007): (a) combining a warm and friendly attitude with firm, but reasonable, expectations; (b) projecting an enthusiasm for their work that lends excitement to their teaching; (c) understanding and accepting that they are not perfect in doing and saying the right thing; (d) believing that they are thoroughly grounded in their subject area; (e) assuming responsibility for student outcomes; (f) getting to know their students as individuals; (g) giving feedback and a challenging curriculum; (h) reflecting about their work and develop a positive rapport with students; and (i) being able to adapt when necessary.

Similarly, Kuykendall (2004) suggested that urban middle school teachers can also help thwart discipline problems by making certain they take time with students to discuss goals, remember all students have a special gift or talent, help students understand that success is imperative, enhance responsibility by giving students a role to play in maintaining classroom management, and showing students respect. Using these ideas to prevent discipline problems in urban middle schools can facilitate getting the point across

to students that their education and lifelong success are essential to the school. Also, it helps urban middle school students to respond with favorable and positive behavior to adult correction and advice (Kuykendall).

Cultural Mismatch

Thompson (2004) suggested that in order to facilitate the need for high quality teachers, there needs to be attention drawn to the cultural mismatch among teachers and African American students. Kuykendall (2004) suggested that events like September 11th, where many U.S. citizens died allegedly at the hands of foreigners, led to an increase of the fear of differences in culture, race, and religion. Feelings of fear created a barrier among ethnicities of people. With society feeding fear as a motivator for racism, schools suffered the same issues. Irvine (1990) suggested that economically deprived communities have been known to increase deprived school districts. In comparison, communities that exhibit racism for fear of differences were likely to develop schools that exhibit racism out of fear of differences. Many teachers either took frames of racism to support a vision of equality or to justify racial supremacy (Lowe, 2001).

Although racism often created a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, it was possible for the mismatch to find common associations. According to Billingsley (1994), in a quantitative study, there was a positive correlation between the higher achievement of culturally diverse poor students and teachers who demonstrate culturally responsible instructional strategies. The correlation attempted to shed light on the realization that teachers, who met the challenge of teaching urban students, had to know how it was to be done successfully.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Gay (2000) there were many urban students of color who were not achieving in school to their academic potential. Many educators placed the responsibility on the students while others took responsibility to improve teaching practices. According to Love (2005), teachers of urban students will create a relational and personal environment. Gay implied that urban teachers should learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies. Teachers would secure the implementation of high student achievement through culturally responsive teaching.

According to Lee (2007), educators needed a lens through which they may understand the relevance of the cultural practices of everyday life for urban students. As stated by Brown and Leaman (2007), "educators can better understand ethnically diverse students by initiating processes to learn more about their lives" (p. 228).

Culturally responsive teaching has become a popular phenomenon. According to Thompson (2004), culturally responsive teaching was "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 16). In order to implement these aspects of culturally responsive teaching, educators who were prepared to make cultural connections with students fared best. A part of this training included an awareness of the differences that most likely impact teacher attitudes. The following student attributes affected teacher attitudes: (a) prior achievement, (b) prior behavior, (c) prior placement, (d) socioeconomic status, (e) language ability, (f) physical attributes, (g) gender, and (h) race/ethnicity (Kuykendall, 2004). The majority of these differences involved what students were exposed to *prior* to the teacher's interventions.

This implied that the urban teacher must spend quality time getting to know the students for whom they were and where they come from. Lee (2007) states that "cultural modeling is a framework for the design of learning environments that examines what youth know from everyday settings to support specific subject matter learning" (p. 15). In comparison, "culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of references" (Gay, 2000 p. xix). Additionally, Gay concludes that culturally responsive teaching "teaches to, and through, the strengths of students" (p. 29). Gay cited the following characteristics as those of culturally responsive teaching: (a) acknowledged the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum; (b) built bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities; (c) used a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles; (d) taught students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages; and (e) incorporated multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Culturally responsive teachers were empowering. As a result, they recognized the need to empower their urban students. According to Gay (2002), the teachers knew that society seemed to have a goal of making everyone believe, value, and act the same across the U.S. However, this sameness was unrealistic and destroyed the uniqueness and empowerment of multiple cultures. Culturally responsive teachers were aware of the risks involved in empowering students to believe they can achieve at high levels. Yet these

teachers persisted. Therefore, successful urban teachers had no problem accepting the dual role of culturally responsive teacher.

What Influences Them to Stay

Teacher Characteristics

Teacher characteristics varied in teaching and learning. Characteristics appropriate for the urban environment included but were not limited to: resilience, persistence, academic optimism (self-efficacy, trust in clients, and academic emphasis), social justice, caring, and hope.

Resilience

According to Patterson, Patterson, and Collins (2002), resilience was one characteristic that urban teachers used to thrive in the face of adversity. Patterson et al. suggested that schools must, through adequate administration, prevent from placing the blame for failing to overcome obstacles on outside pressures and take responsibility themselves. Often schools blame outside entities like national, state, and district demands for being the catalyst for their lack of resiliency. Many schools fell into a rut of depending on other factors to determine their success. As Patterson states,

> by putting themselves in the dependent, victim position of not being responsible for their own organizational health, they place themselves at the mercy of others and continue to deplete their resilience account. (p. 8)

In comparing hypothetically School A--a school who decided to face adverse conditions by adding skills to handle the disruptions--to School B-- a school who decided that they could face difficult circumstances if and only if the outside factors would stop hindering

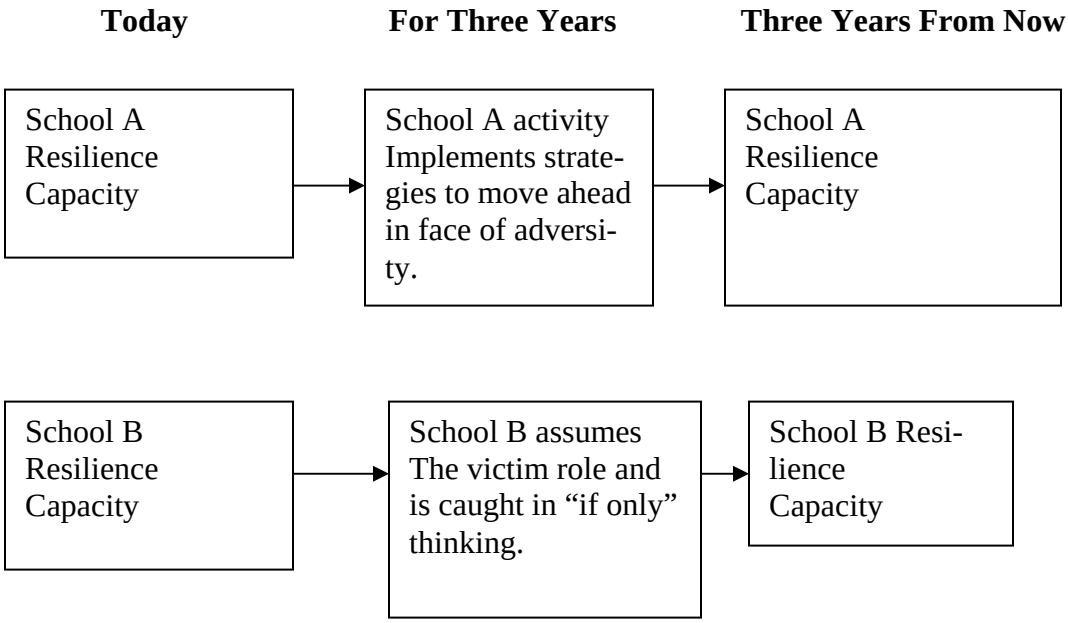

Figure 1. Importance of resilience capacity. Permission to reprint. Patterson, Patterson, and Collins. (2002). *Bouncing back: How your school can succeed in the face of adversity*: Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

their progress without difficult demands. Figure 1 represented the hypothetical analysis of the importance of resilience capacity of both schools and the outcome in 3 years as viewed by Patterson et al. The figure compared the possible resilience capacity of two different urban schools now and in the future.

As you can tell, School B's resilience capacity ended up to be much smaller than School A. It appeared that the more schools took responsibility for their teachers and students growth, the more resilience they developed.

Patterson et al. (2002) revealed that resilience in urban schools can be viewed using the following three target levels: (a) just getting by, (b) getting back to the status quo after experiencing adversity, or (c) getting ahead through consistent improvement or consistent high performance. Schools may use the appropriate strategy depending on where they are and their current needs. Patterson et al. stressed that the genuine reflection of resilience, when given different school situations, was the concept of moving ahead. Those who show marked improvement despite adversity, then, were considered resilient. Patterson states:

> Schools that continue to move ahead, within a context characterized by a relative lack of adversity (compared to other schools), become the basis for describing effective schools. When you add to the mix an environment of crisis adversity or ongoing adversity, you have shifted your frame of reference to resilience. (p. 4)

According to Patterson et al. resilience was using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions. These types of teachers knew how to manage time so that they can meet deadlines and balance their careers. They had patience and offered an optimistic view of their situations. Resilience was not an attribute that every urban teacher possesses, nor is it easy to come by. Resilient teachers were the opposite of mediocre teachers.

Burney and Klau (2007) suggested that a major quality of a resilient teacher, in general, was the ability to teach those deemed at-risk which were usually urban students. "Students who live in poverty, who live with only one parent, who have experienced a high rate of mobility and absenteeism, or who have had other instabilities within the home are considered at risk of school failure" (Norlund, 2003, p. 67). As a result of higher at-risk student populations in urban schools, urban schools should be equipped with highly resilient teachers. According to Thompson (2004) the effectiveness of a teacher depended largely upon the resiliency of that teacher. Considering that most children in urban schools were from backgrounds of poverty, abuse, neglect, and or violence, a weak and mediocre teacher simply will not do. Weiner (1999) suggested that there were three aspects of curriculum and instruction that urban teacher should be skillful in performing. These three aspects were (a) Be knowledgeable about a broad range of teaching strategies; (b) Understand the content they teach well enough to ferret out the essence; and (c) Create a sense of community in their classrooms. With these three aspects in motion, resilient teachers can move urban students beyond their own frame of thinking.

Persistence

Persistence was named as a characteristic of urban teachers as well as an enemy of urban teachers. As a characteristic, persistence was the feeling that drives teachers to keep striving for excellence. On the other hand, persistence was present in ethnic differences as discrimination hinders the education of diverse students (Banks, 2009). According to Banks society has held tight to the idea that, in the United States, ethnicities would melt into one or vanish as individual entities. Banks explains that "Ethnic differences

persist in U.S. society for several reasons" (p. 3). No matter the reasons behind this persistence, urban education was affected by this persistence as teachers incorporated diversity into their curriculum. With the acknowledgment of these two types of persistence, urban teachers built a window in which to look out and see the armor of determination they needed to be persistent in the classroom as they strived for excellence and the persistence they needed as an agent for social change.

Academic Optimism

Academic Optimism was named as a characteristic of urban teachers by several researchers. Hoy et al. (2008) contrasted optimism and helplessness by labeling helplessness as optimism's "antithesis." Hoy et al. found that urban teachers may be less optimistic about their teaching abilities with students from diverse backgrounds. As a result, the need to develop academic optimism in teachers was great. Hoy et al. connected efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis to create teachers academic optimism. Each characteristic reciprocated the others to create teachers with academic optimism which is the type of teacher needed in an urban environment. The three components were explained below.

Efficacy as stated by Hoy et al. (2008) was named as a characteristic of academic optimism. The teachers' sense of efficacy was defined as "judgment of his or her capability to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 202). Shaughnessy (2004) presented a different definition by stating that efficacy is teachers' "perceptions about their own capabilities to foster students'

learning and engagement" (p. 154). Although the definitions were different in language, the concept was the same. With higher levels of efficacy it was believed and stated by Hoy et al. that teachers in urban environments will set higher expectation, exert more effort and persist in the face of adversity. Teachers with a greater sense of efficacy will also form greater bonds of trust with stakeholders. Efficacy focused on the cognitive abilities of teachers. Academic optimism was a general construct composed of efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis.

Jerald (2007), Brinson and Steiner (2007), Pfaff (2000), Shaughnessy (2004), and Protheroe (2008) all presented separate terms to describe teacher satisfaction. These terms included efficacy, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy. One consortment of these words will share the following definition: the belief of an individual educator that they possessed the qualities to perform tasks that developed satisfaction in self, student achievement, and colleagues, that will empower them with the necessary skills to overcome adverse conditions that may arise.

Trust was named as a characteristic of academic optimism. Hoy et al. (2008) suggested that teachers must possess trust in students, parents. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) emphasized that trust included feelings of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Hoy et al. went on to note that teachers who trusted in their students believed that the students "possess openness to learn, capability to grasp concepts, and honesty" (p. 822). Hoy et al. suggested that teachers set higher expectations for students they trust much like they set for themselves as they display efficacy. Trust focused on the affective response of teaching.

Academic Emphasis was named as a characteristic of academic optimism. According to Hoy et al. (2008), academic emphasis was used to refer to teachers' belief about academic success and their focus on academic tasks. Academic Emphasis focused on the particular behavior of the students of the teacher in the classroom. The three major dimensions as stated in the previous three paragraphs were efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis. These three have been organized as a "triadic" depiction of interactions with each reliant on the others. Hoy et al. (2008) stated:

> Trust in parents and students encourages a sense of teacher efficacy, and a sense of teacher efficacy reinforces and enhances the trust. When the teacher trusts parents, he or she can set high academic standards with the confidence that they will not be undermined by parents and high academic standards in turn reinforce the teacher's trust. When a teacher believes she or he has the capability to organize and execute actions for a positive effect on student achievement, the teacher emphasizes academic achievement, and academic emphasis in turn reinforces a strong sense of teacher efficacy. All the elements of academic optimism are in transactional relationships with each other and interact to create an individual sense of academic optimism in the classroom. (p. 823)

Together, these three dimensions simultaneously create academic optimism for teachers. This construct provided a foundation for urban teachers to build upon to ensure longevity in the urban setting. Figure 2 was a graphic representation of the dimensions of academic optimism. Figure 2 was created to present a more vivid picture of teacher characteristics. It was designed to show how the urban teacher characteristics can work together to improve urban teaching and learning.

Social Justice

Social Justice was named as a characteristic of urban teachers by researchers. Social justice was a characteristic that not only teachers needed to possess, but one in which teachers needed to foster in students. Darling-Hammond (2002) explains that "Learning

to teach for social justice is a lifelong undertaking" (p. 201). According to Kohn (2008) social justice was an integral part of progressive education. Through social justice teachers displayed a sense of community and responsibility for others.

Teachers who demonstrated social justice placed themselves in widening circles of care that extended beyond self, beyond friends, beyond their own ethnic group, and beyond their own country as they taught their students to follow their example (Kohn, 2008). This characteristic was one that the teachers utilized in and out of the classroom and taught their students to do the same. The more information urban teachers can tap about students' lives outside of school, the more efficient they will become in developing theories about their teaching (Weiner, 1999). Through social justice, urban teachers recognized "opportunities …not only to learn about, but to put into action, a commitment to diversity and to improving the lives of others" (p. 2).

"Teaching is a moral and political act, and teachers can play a key role in facilitating positive social change" (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 2.). As individuals experience life, they become shaped by those experiences. Those experiences bring about change. Change in the United States was laced with patterns of diversity. Darling-Hammonds suggested that teachers, administrators, and students needed access to strategies to implement for successful change. Without an appreciation for social justice, and the use of specific strategies, "well meaning unskilled teachers wind up blaming the children for their failures rather than reflecting on how they can transform their teaching" (p. 5). Teachers who understand and implement social justice focused on the belief that:

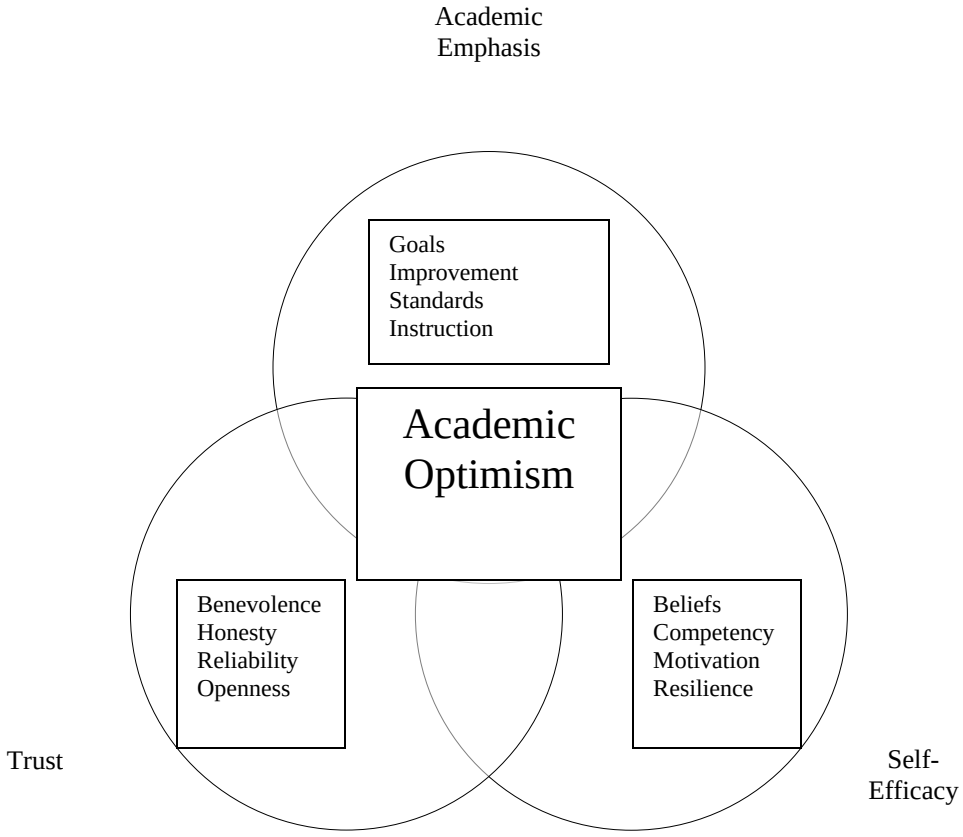

Figure 2. The rings of academic optimism.

Note: Data in Figure 2 are from "Teacher's academic optimism: The development and test of a new construct" by A.W. Hoy, W.K. Hoy, & N.M. Kurz,2008, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 821-835.

> Enabling learning for all students requires knowledge about how people learn and how different people learn differently, about how to organize curriculum so that it connects to students' prior knowledge and experiences and so that it adds up to powerful learning, about what motivates people to engage and put forth effort for learning, about language and literacy development across the curriculum, about how to assess learning, and about particular teaching strategies that enable different kinds of learning in different contexts. (p. 5)

A passion for social justice was mentioned by several researchers. Neito (2005) suggested that all teachers studied in *Why We Teach* listed social justice as an element in their motivation to teach in urban schools. As shown in Figure 3, social justice was not just about teaching, but went into the personal lives and communities of the students in urban schools. According to Neito, social justice involved mentoring, providing positive role models, racial, ethnic, and economic equality, sharing of your own identities, learning about the realities of others, and participating in activism.

Figure 3 was created to present an author comparison of the same concept of social justice. Both Neito (2005) and Darling-Hammond (2002) wrote research on social justice and its impact on urban schools. The figure showed how the two supported the same concept with different words.

Caring

Caring and commitment were listed as characteristics of urban teachers by Neito (2003) and Noddings (2002). According to Neito (2003), African American students who believed their teachers cared about them were more successful academically than others. Even though terms with religious undertones were sparingly used to describe educators, caring was defined as the "solid faith in the capability of students to learn, sometimes in spite of evidence to the contrary" (Neito, 2003, p. 42). Noddings added

Social Justice Concepts	**Sonya Neito's Theory**	**Linda Darling-Hammond's Definitions**
Responsibility	Positive Role Models	Accepting that what happens to children at school depend on who their teachers are.
Diversity	Racial Ethnicity	Avoiding "deculturalization" and accepting diversity.
Equality	Economic Equality	Examining how society constructs privilege and inequality and how this affects one' own opportunities as well as those of different people.
Relationships	Sharing of Your Own Identities	Engendering a climate of trust between and among adults and students.
Others	Learning About the Realities of Others	Coming to understand self in relation to others.
Action	Participating in Activism	Giving our students a voice and not contributing to their silence.

Figure 3. Social justice research comparison.

Note: Data in column 2 are from "*Why we teach"* by S. Neito, 2005, New York: Teachers College Press. Data in column 3 are from "*Learning to teach for social justice"* by L. Darling-Hammond, 2002, New York: Teachers College Press, and

that for most urban students being cared for was a prerequisite for caring for others. Urban students can sense when teachers have faith in them and they needed to feel as if they belonged. As noted before, "Teacher's caring promotes a sense of belonging for urban students" (Neito, 2003, p. 3). Noddings supported this claim by adding that continuity was necessary for teachers' caring to become authentic in the eyes of students. As urban students lack continuity in their everyday lives outside of school, teachers developed a responsibility to foster continuity at school. Through continuity, Noddings stated that urban students needed the continuity of having the same teacher for consecutive and multiple years in order to build a strong foundation of caring. It was believed that urban students needed more time with teachers who cared to form relationships critical for caring (Noddings). Neito (2005) suggested five qualities that urban teachers possessed as they displayed caring and commitment. These qualities were (a) a sense of mission, (b) solidarity with and empathy for students, (c) the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge, and (d) improvisation and a passion for social justice. Not only do teachers need to possess qualities of care, but they need to teach students to care. As Noddings states: "Children today need desperately to know how to care for themselves and for intimate others" (p. 33). As teachers displayed the above qualities for caring for students, they began to model for students how caring was to be practiced. With a model to follow, urban students had a guide for learning to become caring citizens.

Sense of mission was viewed as a motivator for urban teachers. Neito (2005) suggested that teachers saw themselves as serving the common good by using good intentions versus the sense of self-righteousness. Neito further states that "teachers' sense of mission often extended beyond their own specific classroom to their feelings about public

education in general" (p. 205). Teachers with a sense of mission believe in urban schools believed they can make a difference (Neito).

Solidarity with, and empathy for students was viewed as ways to express love. The term love was not used as a parallel to professionalism in the teaching paradigm. However, Netio (2005) mentioned that "teachers who love their students and feel solidarity with them also develop strong and consequential relationships with them (p. 206)." Neito went to on to suggest that love was equated with respect, high expectations, and an admiration for their students. With these terms as synonyms, love becomes an umbrella of numerous qualities of successful teachers, namely solidarity, empathy, respect, high expectations, admiration and more.

The courage to question mainstream knowledge was developed when urban teachers had access to contexts, experiences, or texts that challenged conventional thinking (Neito, 2005). Teaching was about continuous learning. Teachers need not believe that college graduation was the end of their journey of learning. Weiner (1999) suggests that "the most successful urban teachers regard their students as people from whom they have much to learn as well as much to teach" (p. 59). Neito (2005) suggested that teachers and those who work with teachers should develop the courage to confront societal truths. Exposing urban students to complex issues helps them to develop a curiosity that will not accept information at face value, but rather to study and prove that a concept is true by confronting different perspectives. Along with the courage to question mainstream knowledge, Neito (1999) stated that empowerment through world knowledge by giving urban students more control and ownership of their learning. Neito (1999, 2005)

suggested that making outside connections with students gave them access to information about the world along with new perspectives on their lives and goals.

Improvisation was used by urban teachers to see beyond traditional frameworks, rubrics and models. Neito (2005) purported that urban teachers used improvisation to teach students to "think on their feet (p. 212)." Improvisation included going pass borders and taking risks. Neito defined improvisation as preparing for uncertainties while exhibiting a great deal of flexibility and elasticity.

Hope

Kuykendall (2004) suggested that urban schools and communities need "merchants of hope." A merchant of hope was defined as "anyone who enriches the life of another" (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 197). Kuykendall believed that if more people used their natural power they possess as merchants of hope, then we could improve urban schools and urban communities. Both the merchants and recipients of hope benefit from their relationship. For instance, Big Brothers, Big Sisters was an organization where mentors spent quality time with children to make a positive difference in their lives. With most relationships, the mentor was affected positively by the relationship as well as the mentee. Kuykendall noted that in several interviews with *Bigs* and *Littles* 100% of the participants indicated that their relationships made coping with their own life challenges easier to deal with. Both aspects of the relationships were rewarding. Merchants of hope were helpful in (a) Building on strengths, (b) Helping students cope with today's challenges, (c) Being unbiased, (d) Listening, (e) Observing behavior for signs of trouble, and (f) Teaching anger management (Kuykendall, 2004). Merchants of hope were committed to

the entities they serve. This commitment does not end at the education of the students. Noddings (2003) suggested that parents and teachers of urban students should foster agreeable and desirable traits to assist in matriculating healthy personalities that in turn create feelings of hope in times of trouble.

Neito (2003) also defined hope as stated in the introduction, as the "essence of urban teaching." Hope drove urban teachers to see the positive aspects of urban schools more so than the negative. Hope prepared the urban teacher for tomorrow and encouraged the urban student to never give up. Neito (2005) mentioned that the core message from the teachers interviewed in "Why we teach" that urban teachers of today should take from reading the aforementioned book is *hope*. Hope was a concept that Neito believed beneficial for the teaching profession as well as public education in general.

Summary

Urban teachers and students both required proper education and support. Teachers needed quality education programs in college that adequately prepare them for the real world classroom. Students needed quality classroom instruction that prepared them for continuous education. Teacher preparation programs as well as professional developmental were designed to prepare and improve the quality of urban teachers.

Along with education and training, urban teachers must possess a cultural sensitivity to the environment in which they teach. Understanding, respecting, and appreciating one's culture was not something to be taught from a text. Rather, it was an appreciation that was learned through the sharing of experiences. To understand the culture of urban schools, one must first research the history of urban schools.

History indicated where urban schools have come from, where they are now, and where they are going in the future. From slavery, to segregation, to desegregation, urban education has been reformed many times. Some reform efforts were known to be more successful than others. The purpose of reform was to attempt to keep up with changing societies and economies. Although reform efforts have been written and re-written over time, the concept of education reform will always exist.

Currently, urban middle schools are taught by mostly African American or minority teachers. Of these teachers, the mediocre are short lived or miserable in the field of education. However, resilient teachers fostered hope for urban districts. The urban middle school teachers were motivated by their self-efficacy and optimism for the future. Urban teachers utilized current research about teaching standards and how to teach with diversity. They rose in the face of adversity. Urban teachers fostered a commitment to their profession unlike other teachers. As stated by Mikel and Hiserman (2001),

> Commitment is to citizenship for society in re-formation: a responsibility not only to interrupt the current norms, practices, and relationships, but also to help initiate modalities through which human lives always can be moving toward new richness and value. (p. 127)

With a commitment to education there existed hope for the future of urban education. Without commitment hope does not exist. Kuykendall (2004) mentioned that merchants of hope must be committed. Collecting evidence of lived experiences of urban middle school teachers may expose their levels of commitment to urban schools and hope for the future. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will seek the lived experiences of these urban middle school teachers to reveal their personal stories.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involved obtaining authentic field experiences with the participants involved. According to Moen (2006), a qualitative approach to the field of investigation means that researchers study things in "their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 5). Authentic field experiences were gathered in the natural settings of the participants.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research was conducted because a problem or issue needed to be explored. Kelly (2004) explains that "qualitative researchers, in general, are becoming more confident in drawing implications for policy and practice from their analysis" (p. 533). Qualitative research began with a research problem that inquired into the meaning that individuals or groups placed on the problem. The views of these participants were valuable to the researcher. Creswell also found that general worldviews and perspectives held qualitative research together. These views were obtained directly from the participants and interpreted by the researcher as results and findings. Participants' voices were presented in the final reports as a sequence of events leading to an epiphany.

Tradition of Qualitative Inquiry

The tradition of qualitative inquiry for this study was the narrative tradition. "The narrative analysis of lives, or life narratives, is currently a popular form of qualitative research" (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). When thinking about issues in education, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that educational experiences should be studied narratively. They also reported that narrative grew as an attempt to capture what the researcher and participants saw as healthy, productive, human relationships. Studying these relationships required obtaining experiences of the participants. The information obtained from the participants' lived experiences gave meaning in terms of the larger context. Merriam suggested that the key to narrative studies was the use of stories and experiences as data. Bruce (2008) believed that experience was the starting point for narrative research. Qualitative research had "multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time" (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). As a result, the meaning gained from qualitative and narrative experiences may change as time passes.

In the narrative tradition, the researcher selected one or more individuals to study. These individuals provided data about their lived experiences that will benefit the research. These experiences were told in a story format. According to Bruce (2008), narrative researchers collect and tell stories. According to Creswell (2007), we can conduct qualitative research if we need to empower individuals to share their stories. Bruce furthers this approach by stating that "narrative inquiry is both a procedure for qualitative research and a means of reading and understanding the significance of research participants' narrative histories" (p. 323).

The topic the researcher presents was to examine urban middle school educators, from a southeastern school district, who were once urban students to reveal why they return and stay in urban environments. The purpose was to find out from the teachers their perspectives on returning and staying in urban settings. The research problem to explore was the impact teachers from urban environments have as they return to teach current urban middle school students. This was a problem because every year there was a teacher shortage in urban districts which lead to hiring unqualified teachers and allowing academic achievement to suffer. According to Robinson (2007), the majority of urban schools lost teachers soon after they developed the experience and background that made them more effective. At the same time, other districts had waiting lists for their teaching positions.

A narrative research design helped examine the life of urban teachers who were products of urban schools. This information was used to determine what made them return and why they stay. The goal was to use findings from teachers' experiences to increase the amount of returning teachers who actually stay in urban settings.

For this reason qualitative research was chosen as it involved trusting the description of verbalized views of the participants. The researcher used the beliefs of the participants to analyze what worked and what didn't work. From the outside looking in, the researcher could be biased in their findings and reports. Analyzing personal interviews, stories, and observations requires the researcher to actually listen to those who lived the experiences that the researcher sought to study on a daily basis. Qualitative reports allowed for individual voices to be heard.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that “narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience; therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (p. 19). Moen (2006) suggests that narratives capture not the individual but also the context; therefore, “it is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant for the narrator or her or his audience” (p. 4). This design would align well with the methods used to conduct the research. In order to solve the research problem, the researcher had to obtain personal information and stories from the teachers about their experiences both as a students and a teacher in urban school districts. Participants were interviewed, their life stories were recorded, and then data were analyzed and compared to reach the findings.

Sites and Context

The sites selected for this study were urban middle schools in a southeastern school district. The schools had an influx of at-risk students. At-risk students were those that were labeled at-risk due to their individual and adverse circumstances. At-risk students can include those who have been exposed to homelessness, poverty, abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, drug use and abuse, disabilities and more. The federal government sent financial assistance to schools that have a high population of at-risk students. These funds were referred to as Title I funds. The school sites met the criteria as a Title I school. As stated previously, Jackson (2008) reported that Title I schools were schools that have a large number of poor children enrolled. The initiative that led to the Title I initiative was the “War on Poverty.” As a result, most Title I schools were in urban districts which were usually schools with a high enrollment of poor and often times minority students.

Context was present in the narrative tradition. For this study, spatial context and context of other people were utilized. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), context was very necessary for making sense of people, events, or things in narrative research. The way issues were perceived may vary depending on the context in which they were observed. Objectives can play different roles for participants inside of the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. In this study, the individuals in context (the participants) were of the most interest to the researcher as well as to the study.

Participants

The participants for this study were 12 urban middle school teachers in a southeastern school district who were once urban students. These teachers were considered "highly qualified" by NCLB standards. The participants were certified educators in a school district in Central Alabama. The participants have been teaching more than 3years and have obtained their 6th grade-12th grade education in an urban district.

A specific sampling technique was used to identify participants for this study. Participants were identified through the process of purposeful sampling. Through this process, individual participants were selected by the researcher based on their ability to qualify for the study. According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling is used when the researcher needs to select individuals and sites for a study because those specific participants and sites can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

According to Creswell (2007), data collection forms a circle of interrelated activities essential to qualitative research. These activities included: gaining access and making

rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, exploring field issues, and storing data. Collectively, these activities came together to help the researcher answer the central question. Of these activities, rapport was one of the most useful for the research on urban education. This was crucial for building the relationship between participant and researcher. Building relationships requires trust. Participants and researchers spent a great deal of time together and shared authentic experiences to build trust. Trust became a part of the foundation of the data collection process. Participants trust that the researcher utilized the data obtained for its intended purpose. The participants volunteered to become a part of the study because they trusted the intent of the researcher. According to the pragmatic approach, this was common in narrative research. The researcher dedicated one full work day in the classroom with the participants as well many hours after school and on weekends. After hours, the researcher and participants met during school sponsored events as well as phone conferences.

Data Collection

In the narrative tradition, data collection involves documents (i.e., pictures, notes, letters, sign-in sheets, memos, etc.) and archived material, open-ended interviews, participant observations, and casual chatting. Narrative researchers need to focus on the stories that emerge, recognizing that all people have stories to tell. The stories can be told in first or second order narratives. First order narratives were those in which individuals told stories about themselves and their own experiences, while in second order narratives researchers constructed the text about other people's experiences or presented a collective story that represented the lives of many (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this study,

second-order narrative research was used. The researcher retold the participants' stories by collecting data about their experiences. These data were stored so that only the researcher and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama at Birmingham had access. The researcher wrote a narrative that painted a picture of an urban middle school teacher. This narrative was taken from a combination of collected data.

Data Analysis

It required a process of inquiry that involved examining data and producing reports that interpreted that data. "Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell, 2007 p. 148). However, of all the qualitative traditions, the narrative research tradition represented and required the least structured procedure for data analysis.

Data analysis within the narrative tradition developed from the story of the participants. Creswell also found that data collected should be thoroughly analyzed, events should be in chronological order, and there should be evidence of turning points or epiphanies in the retellings. There were two approaches a researcher could follow for the purpose of analyzing data. The first approach was designed much like the elements of a great story. Great and well-written stories involved characters, settings, problems (plot), actions and resolutions. This was the basic structure of a story. Students from kindergarten through college learned to read and write from this story format. The second approach had three elements that included interaction (personal and social); continuity

(past, present, and future); and situation (physical places or the storyteller's places). Both approaches were beneficial for analyzing narrative data. Creswell went on to state that commonly in narrative research the process may follow these guidelines: (a) collect personal sketches of the individual's life; (b) search for and develop a chronology of the individual's life; (c) search for and establish stories and epiphanies that emerge; (d) prompt expansion of sections of participants stories to create theories; (e) reconstruct the biographies; and (f) identify the factors that shaped the participant's life. As a result, an analytic abstraction of the case was written.

Analyzing qualitative data in the narrative tradition required the researcher to immerse him/herself in the field of study. The researcher sat in classrooms, meetings, programs, as well as conferences to grasp firsthand knowledge of the day-to-day experiences of the participants. Each word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and page was critical to the analysis of the research data. Themes and theories were developed as a result of careful examination of the data. Without this type of thorough and extensive examination, findings would not represent an accurate picture of the life of the participant. This process was crucial to writing in qualitative research. The researcher wrote stories using the experiences of participants.

Interview transcriptions were used to establish ground work on how to proceed. After the interview, the researcher used this information to guide the analyzing of the data gathered and to continue to gather more data. Questions from the interviews were organized in the form of tables and charts to display a pictorial account of the analysis of data. The observations were used to write the narrative stories of participants' lives. According to Creswell (2007), it was common for narrative researchers to collaboratively

create a biographical sketch of the participant's life. This sketch helped the researcher develop the format for writing.

The process of zooming in and zooming out was used during this study. Creswell also found that in this process, the researcher will take a theme or concept and search for information that supports the theme from the past, present and future. The researcher took the observation notes, interview transcriptions, artifacts, and written accounts of the participant's lived experiences and established themes and subthemes. There was anticipated to be a great deal of back and forth writing and editing as the researcher attempted to analyze the data. Metaphors and transitions were used as the researcher analyzed the data in order to foster effective writing. The epiphany or turning point was highlighted as the plot of the retelling. According to Creswell (2007), the narrative process of data analysis was more flexible than others due to the nature of the retelling of an individual's life story. Lived experiences were unpredictable and required back and forth writing and rewriting.

As stated previously, the retelling involved two approaches mentioned by Creswell (2007): the analytic process as well as the three-dimensional process. The analytic process approach involved analyzing data from the five elements: characters, setting, problem, action, and resolution. These elements were the most common form of story telling. The three-dimensional space inquiry model was interaction, continuity, and situation. In interaction, the personal and social aspect, continuity involved the past, present, and future aspect, and situational involved physical places or the storyteller's place. The researcher used both approaches to develop a well-rounded retelling of the participant's experiences.

Establishing Credibility

The researcher established credibility and validity by establishing trust. Trust was established through interpretation of member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of member checking. Creswell (2007) suggested that it was here that the researcher solicited the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. In some studies the researcher may submit a rough draft of the retellings to be sure that they have captured what the participant intended. Lincoln and Guba considered this technique to be the most critical for establishing credibility in qualitative research. Member checking was used to establish credibility in this narrative research project.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were of grave importance to the life of the research. Participants spent a great deal of time with the researcher. In this time spent, the participants were asked to reveal details about their lived experiences that they may not have ordinarily been willing to share. As a result, it was vital that the researcher establish trust and do so through modeling sound ethical behavior. According to Hatch (2002), teachers perceived themselves to possess little power or status. As a result, they fell into the category of the vulnerable. The teachers may perceive themselves as subordinates to the researcher. They could have been reluctant to decline any requests. The researcher was sensitive to the needs of teachers as participants, and exercise ethical behavior at all times.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was an assistant principal in the district in which the urban teachers were employed. As an 11-year veteran educator, the researcher possessed knowledge that was needed to interpret educational findings. The researcher played the role of the knowledge seeker while the participants played the role of the gatekeepers (Hatch, 2002). Throughout this research, the researcher played multiple roles as needed if unique situations arose. Merriam (2002) stated: "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 5). For this narrative, the researcher was seeking information that exposed the lived experiences of urban middle school teachers who were once urban middle school students. The researcher strived to "understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is how people make sense of their experiences" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5).

Audit Trail

According to Merriam (2002), an audit trail described how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. In this study, data were collected through interviews, surveys, observations and checklists. Categories were derived from themes from transcribed interviews. Decisions were made based on the themes as well as the observations and stories. All data collected were kept in a locked file cabinet. Pseudonyms were used in the place of the participants' names in order to protect their identity.

Reliability

"Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). Within this narrative design the focus was not directed so much at the replication of the study as reliable, but at whether the results were consistent with the data collected. "Rather than insisting that others get the same results as the original researcher, reliability lies in others' concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense-they are consistent and dependable" (Merriam, 1995, p. 27).

Philosophical Assumptions

Social Constructivist Worldview

Philosophical ideas had an influence on qualitative research. The philosophical principle that underlies the research was the social constructivist worldview. Creswell (2009) reported that social constructivists assumed that individuals sought understanding of the world in which they live and work- like teachers. As a result, twelve teachers from urban middle schools were selected to participate in this study. Their experiences were obtained and recorded to formulate data to be used to gain meaning. "Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). These meanings can be interpreted and retold to develop theory or pattern of meaning for the topic of study. The meanings also lead researchers to look for complexity of views instead of narrow meanings in the form of a few categories or ideas.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The following research question was used for this study:

1. How do urban middle school teachers who were once urban students, describe why they return and remain in the urban setting?

Twelve urban middle school teachers in Central Alabama were interviewed for the purpose of gathering data concerning the perception of the urban environment, recruitment, and retention if urban middle school teachers. This chapter presented an analysis of the results of the study from data collected during interviews with participants, a review of the observation notes, teacher checklists, and teacher surveys. The analysis focused on the teachers' perceptions of the urban environment as well as how to recruit and retain quality urban teachers at the middle school level.

Several specific themes and subthemes emerged from the interview transcriptions. The themes were used as specific categories in order to analyze data collected. Spreadsheets, tables, and graphs were used to display data results. Results were explained in detail with specific examples to follow.

Profiles of Interviewed Participants

The researcher interviewed 12 participants on four separate occasions for approximately 1 hr each. The first 30 min were earmarked for introductions and explanations.

This pre-interview session served as a platform to develop a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Each interview was recorded and each recording was transcribed. Through these transcriptions, six themes and three subthemes emerged. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was an African American female who teaches 6th-grade reading. She was referred to as "Ms. Teal." She stood only 5'3" tall, had a petite frame and spoke with a soft and sweet voice. Ms. Teal had been teaching 6th-grade reading at the same school for the past 6 years. She sponsored an auxiliary unit in the school marching band. During her first 3 years of teaching she obtained her bachelors and master's degrees and was working toward her educational specialist degree in elementary education. She was single and had no children.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was an African American male who taught 8th-grade social studies. He was referred to as "Mr. Gilchrist." He stood 5'9" tall, had a large sized frame with a loud and commanding voice. Mr. Gilchrist had been teaching 8th-grade social studies for 8 years at his current school and had taught one year at a previous school. He served as basketball coach, mentoring coordinator, debate team coach, academic bowl coach, and he chaired several extra-curricular committees. He obtained his bachelor's degree at a Historically Black College, which he spoke of proudly, and he was working on his mas-

ter's degree in secondary education, through an online university. He was single and had no children.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was an African American female who taught 7th-grade pre-algebra. She was referred to as "Mrs. Missy." She stood about 5'7" tall, had an average sized frame and spoke with a soft and shy voice. Mrs. Missy had been teaching 7th-grade pre-algebra for the past 6 years. After obtaining her bachelor's degree from a Historically Black College, she went on to take additional courses to obtain highly qualified status instead of a master's degree. She was married with two adult children.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was an African American male teacher who taught music and band. He was referred to as "Mr. Montgomery." He stood about 6'3" tall with an extra large frame, yet had a soft friendly voice. With a bachelor's degree in music education, he had been teaching for 12 years at a combination of two schools. He sponsored a young gentlemen's club as well as an adult breakfast club. Having a jurist doctorate degree and previously holding a city office, he continued to be involved in politics. He was married with no children and had a very positive and motivating personality.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was an African American male teacher who taught 8th-grade social studies. He was referred to as "Mr. Smith." Mr. Smith stood about 5'10" tall with an av-

erage sized frame. Through a deep raspy voice, he had been teaching for 12 years at two different schools. With a bachelor's degree, he planned to retire at the end of this school year. He was married with two adult children, who happen to be a college professor and a veterinarian. Mr. Smith had a very positive and stern personality.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was an African American female who taught reading in grades 6th-8th. She was referred to as "Ms. Tee." She stood about 5'6" tall and had a small to medium frame. With a monotone and leveled voice, she had been teaching for 9 years. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree and was working on an educational specialist degree. Her first two degrees were obtained at Historically Black Colleges. She helped coach teachers on how to deliver instruction. As a single mother with one 10-year-old son, she had a very positive and bubbly personality.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was a female African American teacher who taught 8th-grade reading. She was referred to as "Mrs. Thomas." She stood about 5'6' tall, had a medium frame and spoke in a slow and steady voice. After attending a Historically Black College, she received a bachelors and master's degree. Married with two children, she was a member of an African American Sorority. She had a serious but kind personality.

Participant 8

Participant 8 was a female African American teacher who taught 6th-grade mathematics. She was referred to as "Mrs. Green." She stood about 6' tall and had a loud and commanding voice that demanded her students' attention. She attended a Historically Black College, and had a humorous and positive personality.

Mrs. Green was married with no children.

Participant 9

Participant 9 was a female African American teacher who taught 6th-grade reading. She was referred to as "Ms. Wrigley." She stood about 5'7" tall, had a medium frame and an assertive personality. With a leveled tone voice, she talked a great deal. Her former "mixed" college used to be predominantly white but has integrated tremendously. From this university, she obtained a bachelors, masters and educational specialist degrees. She was divorced with three adult children and had a very confident attitude.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was an African American female who taught 8th-grade mathematics. She was referred to as "Mrs. Cabbott." She stood about 5'8" tall and had a strong administrative voice. She attended a historically black college where she obtained a bachelor's and master's degree. Although separated, she had two teenage sons. Being very well spoken, she had a spiritual and positive attitude. Mrs. Cabbott seemed very fair and consistent.

Participant 11

Participant 11 was an African American male teacher who taught physical education. He was referred to as "Mr. B." He stood about 6'2" tall and had a large frame. Despite his large stature, he seemed quite meek and kind. He obtained his bachelors degree at a Historically Black College. Mr. B had a wife, two children, and a positive and uplifting attitude.

Participant 12

Participant 12 was a Caucasian female teacher who taught small groups of 6th-8th grade literacy. She was referred to as "Mrs. Bearden." She stood about 5'7" tall and had a large frame. Mrs. Bearden obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees from predominantly White universities. She was married with one adult son and has a kind and motivating personality.

Figure 4 was created to present the demographic information of the participants. The figure included information pertinent to the study in that it provided the necessary data about participants to provide a more vivid picture of who they were as teachers.

Themes

Burton, Brundrett, and Jones (2008) suggested that qualitative data "requires the identification of emergent key themes for it to be organized, collated and interpreted (p. 147)." The key themes that emerged from the interview transcriptions included opportunity, mentors, caring, motivation, relationships, and commitment. The subthemes included observations, parental involvement, and hope.

Participant	Gender	Race	Years Exp.	Grade	Degrees
Ms. Teal	F	A.A.	6	6th	Ed.S.
Mr. Gilchrist	M	A.A.	8	8th	B.S.
Mrs. Missy	F	A.A.	6	7th	M.S.
Mr. Montgomery	M	A.A.	18	6th -8th	J.D.
Mr. Smith	M	A.A.	18	8th	B.S.
Ms. Tee	F	A.A.	11	6th- 8th	Ed.S.
Mrs. Thomas	F	A.A.	15	8th	B.S.
Mrs. Green	F	A.A.	12	6th	B.S.
Ms. Wrigley	F	A.A.	22	6th	B.S.
Mrs. Cabbott	F	A.A.	11	8th	M.S.
Mr. B	M	A.A.	12	6th-8th	B.S.
Mrs. Bearden	F	C.	21	6th-8th	M.S.

Figure 4. Demographic chart of participants. Information in all columns obtained from participant interviews. A.A. = African American; C = Caucasian.

Opportunity. The first theme was opportunity. Opportunity developed as a theme as participants credited opportunity as the anchor for landing them in the urban district. After applying in as many districts as possible, participants mentioned that the urban school district was the one that gave them the opportunity to begin their first year of teaching. Participants reported seeking employment in the urban district but not limiting themselves to only that district. After accepting the position, several participants began to recognize the opportunity that presented itself to work with different groups of children. There are some (teachers) that seek an urban setting because of the diversity and opportunity it has to offer" (Bartell, 2005, p. 101).

Mentors. The second theme was mentors. Mentors developed as a theme as participants reflected on what helped to sustain them in the urban classroom. Participants spoke of a mentor relationship that made them feel accepted and comfortable. While participants wanted the assistance, they did not want the pressure of having to feel like they were being observed.

Caring. The third theme was caring. Caring developed as a theme with many of the participants. During the interviews with participants, the notion of returning to urban schools to emulate a teacher who cared surfaced and resurfaced. "Sympathizing with, as well as admiring, those who have given so much of their own lives to care for others is a step in learning to care (Noddings, 2002, p. 53)." Noddings further counseled that caring should be an important component of education. She focused on six conventions of care that create a firm foundation. These conventions were (a) Be clear and unapologetic

about your goal; (b) Take care of affiliative needs –like keeping students and teachers together; (c) Relax the impulse to control; (d) Get rid of program hierarchies-provide program for all children; (e) Give at least part of every day to themes of care; and (f) Teach students that caring in every domain implies competence (Noddings, 2002, pp. 100-101). Mr. Smith spoke of a teacher that cared enough for him to send someone to his house to bring him to school after he learned that Mr. Smith intended to drop out of school. His teacher's words were "if you are not here on Monday, I will come and get you!"

Motivation. The fourth theme was motivation. Motivation was mentioned by participants in two forms. The first form of motivation was that of motivating others (students). Pintrick and Schunk (2002) defined motivation as "something that gets us going, keeps us going, and helps us complete tasks" (p. 5). They went on to later define motivation as "the process where by goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (p.5). Both Mrs. Tee and Ms. Teal implied that urban middle school students of today lack motivation to learn. As a result, these participants expressed the need for an increase in the motivation from teachers, as well as an increase of motivation from students through goals they may have set for themselves.

The second form of motivation mentioned by the participants was motivation of teachers by their own desire. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) revealed that intrinsic motivation is motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake. Intrinsically motivated people enjoy what they do and the desire to complete the task is what motivates them. Intrinsic motivation can change over time. As a person's interests change so shall their motivation (Pintrich & Schunk). Mrs. Tee expressed the need for intrinsically motivated teachers.

She provided a mental image of what teachers who are self motivated look like. She described them as teachers who make teaching a part of their everyday lives.

Because motivation involved a desire to complete a task, teachers must create the desire in urban middle school students to achieve academic goals. If it was true that intrinsic motivation can change, then it was imperative that teachers vary instruction to keep students motivated in general, as well as intrinsically. In contrast, McCarty and Siccone (2001) believed that it is impossible to motivate someone unless "one can tap into the motivations already present in that person" (p. 2). This suggested that there existed groups of students and teachers who had motivation and separate groups who do not have motivation. However, if it was true that "all humans are motivated by their unmet needs or fulfilled wants" (McCarty & Siccone, 2001, p. 2), then it may be possible to tap into the motivation of everyone if the needs and wants of that person are exposed or revealed. A successful urban teacher finds the motivation in students and applies them to educational objectives and directs them to core components of the lessons (McCarty, 2001).

Relationships. The fifth theme that developed from participants' interviews was relationships. "Our relations with one another-student to students, student to teacher, teacher to teacher, teacher to administration-give purpose to everything else we do" (Wormeli, 2003, p. 169). Mr. Montgomery mentioned the building of relationships in his interview. He stated that it was important not only to build relationships with students but with colleagues as well. "In the student-teacher relationship, the teacher, when in the role of caregiver, knows and understands the students well, and, as a result, is able to effectively respond to them" (Peterman, 2008, p.82). In turn, students recognized the car-

ing in teachers and responded accordingly. Some students responded by reciprocating and some by increased cooperation (Peterman, 2008). Caring and cooperation fostered humanity. Humanity can be shared among teachers and students. “Sharing our humanity strengthens relationships with students” (Wormeli, 2003, p. 170).

Another way to build relationships was explained by the perceptions of urban middle school students. In Storz and Nestor’s (2008) study, 200 urban middle school students’ views on education were described. The following perceptions were developed: (a) Caring teachers enhance motivation and learning, (b) Students are responsible for learning and for the school and community climate, (c) Students contribute to developmentally responsive and earner-centered practices that match best practices, and (d) Students accept issues of equity and fairness in educational experiences. All perceptions affirm the quality of relationships between students and teachers.

Caring was not the only form of building relationships. Relationships can be built through quality pedagogy. “Sound pedagogy develops far more positive teacher-student relations than Look-how-much-fun-I-can-be teacher presentations” (Wormeli, 2003, p. 169). While the emotional and social aspects of education were important to fostering positive relationships, cognitive growth is important as well. Overall,

> there is a notion that the quality of interpersonal relationships was a foundational factor in determining how successful middle schools and middle school students will be. Teachers had a clear role in developing such relationships themselves and in advocating for such relationships in schools. (p. 79)

Participant 1 (Mr. Montgomery) referred to a teacher who influenced him not only as an urban student but throughout his life. They formed a lifelong relationship that provided the foundation for Mr. Montgomery’s career. Wormeli (2003) said the following of taking risks as teachers and encouraging students to trust teachers so that they may take risks

as well: "Cultivating positive relationships with students, then, directly influences their academic achievement" (p. 171). It was clear, during the interview, that Mr. Montgomery trusted his band teacher.

Commitment. The sixth theme that developed from participants' interviews was commitment. "It is important that individual teachers be committed to each one of their students" (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 155). Kuykendall went on to suggest that when commitment exists beyond the one-on-one student and teacher relationship, and flourishes among all teachers, it is the students' belief that they are expected to do well and accept nothing less than their best. When students know that teachers are committed to their success they begin to rise to the level of teacher expectations. Shulman (2006) suggested the need for a commitment to lifelong learning and to the education profession. When students perform poorly on a task, a committed teacher re-teaches until the student masters the objective. This behavior lets the student know the level of commitment a teacher is willing to display, and in turn the student increases their level of commitment. However, if students perform poorly on a task and the teacher shows little commitment by moving on to the next objective without re-teaching or addressing the failure, the student assumes this behavior and decreases commitment to the task (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

In addition to the themes, subthemes that developed from the participant interviews were observations, hope, and parental involvement. Participants mentioned these concepts less frequently as they mentioned the six themes. However, these concepts were part of what drove urban teachers to remain in urban schools.

Observations. Observations developed, as a subtheme, as participants described ways to retain urban middle school teachers. Wormeli (2001) purported that new teachers and mentors can benefit from observations that are videotaped for improvement. He went on to suggest that mentors "stop by" daily to observe new teachers on a small scale to ensure comfort and see if they need anything. Mrs. Cabbott supported this notion by stating that new urban teachers need mentors who are supportive and discreet. In their discretion, she believed observations and conversations should remain between only the new teacher and the mentor.

Parental Involvement. Parental involvement developed, as a subtheme, as participants described what they believed to be a major problem in urban schools. Wormeli (2001) expressed that parents should be invited and encouraged to become a part of the classroom. Parents should be asked to help in various ways such as: presenting topics, supervising breakout groups, supervising learning centers, tutoring individual students, setting up labs, caring for plants and animals, and maintaining portfolio records (Wormeli). Kuykendall (2004) also suggested that educators get parents involved by being creative in efforts to get their attention and exciting them. Educators must be persistent in creating partnerships with families. This can be done by planning fun activities and using and strengthening community resources (Kuykendall). Mrs. Tee suggested that this type of parental involvement is lacking in the urban middle school but is much needed. She recalled back when she was in school and she viewed school as a home away from home. There was an understanding that the community (including all the teachers) was sharing

the responsibility of raising the children. As a result, there was a sort of partnership present between family, community and school.

Hope. Hope developed as a subtheme as participants described what drove them to believe they could succeed. According to Kuykendall (2004), educators can become "merchants of hope." As merchants, educators can be effective in giving a sense of hope to urban middle school students. Educators can help students cope with challenges of urban districts (Kuykendall).

Figure 5 was created to present the frequency of themes that emerged from the participants' interviews with responses from least to greatest. It provided a visual account of individual participants' and their responses. The figure showed which participant mentioned the themes. Figure 6 was created to present the results of all of the participants' responses to why they are in urban environments and what makes them stay. The questions were different from the interview questions in order to grasp a more comprehensive concept of their overall reports.

Survey Results

The participants shared experiences and personal stories of the reasons they stay in urban environments. The survey results were compared with the urban checklists, responses to prove consistency, and reliability of participants' perceptions. A copy of the survey and checklist are found in the appendices.

	Participant Emphasis											
Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Caring	X			X		X		X		X	X	X
Motivation	X	X	X			X	X	X	X			X
Mentors	X		X	X						X	X	X
Opportunity	X		X	X	X						X	
Relationships		X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X
Commitment		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X

Figure 5. Emerging themes and emphasis by participant.

QUESTION	**YES**	**NO**	**NA**
My college major was always education.	6	6	0
I majored in something else and added education as a fifth year student.	3	9	0
I arrive early or leave late most days.	9	2	0
I receive support from my administration.	11	0	1
I see discipline as a major problem in the classroom.	6	6	0
I attend professional development regularly to improve teaching and learning.	12	0	0
I solicit information from my colleagues when needed.	11	1	0
I trust the knowledge and expertise of my colleagues.	12	0	0
I am the first from my family to receive a college education.	6	6	0
The urban environment was my first choice in which to teach.	9	2	1
I was prepared for my first year of teaching.	4	8	0
I had a positive experience as an urban student.	12	0	0
I had a negative experience as an urban student.	1	11	0
My experience as an urban student helps me understand my job.	12	0	0
My experience as an urban student has an impact on why I stay.	10	2	0

Figure 6. Results of checklist for urban teachers.

As participants expressed their opinions of urban schools, five of them reported opportunity as the reason they selected an urban environment right out of college. The teachers in this study suggested that the urban environment was the first district to give them the opportunity to teach. This again was consistent with the urban teacher checklist in that nine of the participants reported that the urban school was their first choice in which to teach. Mrs. Teal stated, "I came here because this was the first opportunity I was given." Bartell (2005) noted that teachers who come to urban environments (as new teachers or as alternate route teachers) for the opportunity to learn while working need to have positive experiences. As a result, this opportunity can lead to a longterm career. In addition, Mr. Montgomery agreed not only that the urban district was the first to give him the opportunity to teach but he phrased it as "the urban district gave me the opportunity to change lives and give the students hope." His impression of opportunity expanded from a job to a mission. He went on to state that "Teaching is the greatest profession in the world." It was clear that his opportunity changed his life as well as the lives of the students he teaches.

In addition to opportunity, half of the participants mentioned mentoring as a key element in retaining urban middle school teachers. However, the remaining six participants mentioned some type of dialogue needed between new and veteran urban teachers that were quite similar to mentoring. The results were consistent with the urban teacher checklists in that only 50% of the participants reported that they were prepared for their first year of teaching. The results stood as evidence that they lacked a much needed mentor. Two of the participants claimed to have been thrown into the classroom without a mentor or anyone else to guide them along. For instance, Mr. Gilchrist reported that on

his first day in the classroom, he was given a grade book, plan book, and teacher's manual and told, "They are all yours!" At that point he used his prior knowledge and experience not only to survive his first year, but to thrive as a new urban middle school teacher. In addition, Mr. B. reported not having anyone to guide him his first year of teaching. He was "thrown to the wolves" as he put it. He was still, however, able to overcome the challenges and remain in the urban environment.

These teachers were success stories of those who did not have mentors but still achieved success. They were able to overcome the obstacles. However, not all new teachers possessed the same drive, determination, and resilience as described by Patterson et al. (2002), that these two teachers had. In particular, Ms. Missy mentioned that one reason for her success was her mentor. She noted that her mentor made the first few years easier for her. Ms. Missy also noted that she found her own mentor. This mentor was someone she could connect with instead of someone who appointed to her. Wormeli (2001) supported the need for mentors as individuals that provide support and advice as apposed to serving as a reporter to the administration.

In addition to the previously mentioned themes, caring was a theme that was mentioned by seven of the participants out right but implied by more. For example, Mr. Smith talked about a teacher that pushed him to succeed and even went so far as to threaten to come to his home and pick him up for school if he did not see him on Monday morning. Also, Mrs. Tee mentioned teachers that went the extra mile by providing students with soap, deodorant, and other hygiene products when needed. She referred to school as a home away from home. These two participants did not say the word "care" but one can deduce from their experiences that their teachers cared for them. This level of care be-

came a part of them as teachers as well. Noddings supported this by stating that, "sympathizing with, as well as admiring, those who have given so much of their own lives to care for others is a step in learning to care (Noddings, 2002, p. 53)." These teachers learned how to care by watching and observing their own teachers who cared for them.

In addition to caring, eight of the participants revealed motivation as the driving factor not only for students but for teachers as well. For instance, Mrs. Thomas reported "lack of motivation" among students as a negative aspect of teaching in an urban school. She emphasized that schools need parents and communities to help in motivating students to view education as important for their future. McCarty and Siccone (2001) supported the importance of motivation in that people are motivated by having their needs met.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Tee reported that urban schools need more teachers who are intrinsically motivated. She went on to suggest that teachers need to make teaching a part of their everyday lives. Mrs. Tee believed that by exhibiting a natural desire to improve urban schools teachers could cultivate intrinsic motivation. Hoy et al. (2008) connected motivation to self-efficacy in that teachers can be motivated by their belief in their abilities to perform well.

Regarding relationships, eight of the participants expressed the building of relationships as a vital part of becoming a successful urban middle school teacher. After building these relationships, the likelihood of discipline problems would be less. Only 4 of the 12 participants reported that discipline was a problem for them. The results are consistent with the interviews in that the better the relationship between teacher and student, the less discipline problems will occur.

Building the aforementioned relationships required commitment, in keeping with this, nine of the participants discussed commitment as a leading factor in retaining urban teachers. "Teaching well requires a more determined effort of teachers working in under-resourced communities or school districts, teachers who are nonetheless committed to making their classrooms places where (urban) students are educated and liberated rather than warehoused" (Michie, 2005, p. 186). The teachers emphasized the need for urban teachers to demonstrate commitment and loyalty to urban schools by focusing on the purpose of education and the future goals of urban students. "Teachers often come to urban schools because they have deep commitments to perform a service to society and make a difference in the lives of the students they teach" (Bartell, 2005, p. 101). Exactly 100% of the participants listed commitment as a factor in keeping urban teachers. A demonstration of their commitment was reported on the urban teacher checklists in that they arrive early to work and leave late on most days. This was a demonstration of their commitment. While most of the participants used the term commitment in their interviews, others again implied it with their responses. Mr. Montgomery stated that he wanted to come back and make an impact on urban schools, Mr. Gilchrist stated that he wanted to make a difference, Mrs. Wrigley stated that she wanted to give to the urban students what the suburban district thought she had to offer, and Mrs. Tee stated that she wanted to make a difference and that teaching was a part of her life. Bartell (2005) reported that urban school districts should build upon the commitments that drew the urban middle school teachers into the urban setting in the first place. Each of these participants implied a level of commitment without actually saying the word. Delpit (1995) sug-

gested that once urban teachers are committed to teaching all students then the chance for transformation in urban middle schools is great.

In summation, these themes helped to shape the participants' perceptions as they reported their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences during the interviews. The themes represented the most commonly reported accounts of the participants' lives as they relate to urban education. As stated before, the themes were derived from the transcriptions of interviews with participants. The essence of urban teaching was captured through the development of these themes. A couple of the themes could be used not only to include the teachers but also to include the students. For instance, caring could be used to describe the personality of the teachers toward the students as well as the personality of the administration towards the teachers. Motivation could be used to describe the desired attitude of the teachers as well as the desired attitude of the students. Mentoring could be used to describe the need of new teachers to have a mentor to help them teach as well as being used to describe the needs of students to have mentors help them make decisions. All six themes could relate to both students as well as teachers. Putting these themes together, an educational philosophy could be written that states: "Urban middle school teachers should care enough to motivate urban students by offering them an opportunity to build healthy relationships with mentors that have a commitment to change the lives of urban youth."

Two of the interview questions were made into a table to compare and contrast the experiences of the urban teacher as student and the urban teacher as adult. The two questions were as follows:

1. What were some of the positive and negative aspects of your 6-12 education?

2. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of working in an urban environment?

The results of these two questions were displayed side-by-side to show their similarities and differences. Figure 7 was created to present a comparison of the participants' experiences as they changed from urban student to urban teacher. Participants were asked to share positive and negative experiences first as a student in an urban school, then positive and negative experiences as a teacher in urban schools.

In comparison, both experiences as a student and a teacher reported as negative, included the lack of needed resources. It appeared that the same shortage of material that existed 20 years ago still exists today. The participants noticed the lack of material as they were students in the urban school. Now, as teachers, the participants felt the burden of not having enough resources. For instance, Mr. Smith stated the following about his experiences as an urban student, "The negatives that I experienced were not having some of the materials that I needed to do my best in school." Also, Mr. Montgomery stated that, "I think the negative thing is the lack of equipment, and tools to work with." These examples support the data presented in Figure 7 about lack of needed equipment and tools.

According to the urban teachers, there were more negative experiences as a student than positive experiences. As children, these participants were faced with encounters beyond their control. On the contrary, these same students reported that they experienced almost equal amounts of positive encounters as negative encounters (as students).

In contrast, there were no positive experiences in common from the life of the participant as a student and the life of the participant as teacher. This suggested that the

Experiences	Positive	Negative
Experiences of Urban Teachers as Students	• Good Teachers/Support • Was taught perseverance • Staying out of trouble • Actively involved and receiving awards • Learning -Teachers pushed and motivated • School was home away from home	• No after school activities • Corporal Punishment • Students thought they knew all the answers • A few bad teachers • Transition was lacking • Top of my class in urban school but not in white college • Not having material • Witnessed others being labeled
Experiences of Urban Teachers as Teachers	• Knowing the children • Meeting different people • Watching children grow into productive citizens • Contributing to my community • Relating to families • Opportunities to come back and make a difference	• Lack of Parental Involvement • Lack of equipment, tools • Lack of motivation in students

Figure 7. Positive and negative experiences from urban student to urban teacher.

perception of the urban environment was different from the eyes of the students than the eyes of the adults. The student perceptions included good teachers, actively involved, being motivated and more. However, the teachers' experiences included getting to know students and new people, contributing to the community, relating to others and more. It appeared that children view life more concrete while adults view life more abstractly. As a result, the adults may benefit from exposing urban students to a variety of encounters that broaden their foundations.

As urban teachers, the participants experienced almost twice as many positive encounters as negative encounters. All of the negative encounters involved a lack of resources, support etc. in their schools and districts. All of the positive encounters involved interactions with other people.

Figure 8 represented the results of the urban teacher survey given to participants. The survey was created to record participants' opinions of their specific school district and their sense of responsibility. Participants were asked to complete the surveys using a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*) were used as a means to measure participants' responses. There was also a comments section that all participants left blank. The columns labeled Blames District and Blames Problems were reversed scored to ensure fidelity of the survey.

The survey was scored using the following point system. The survey was created and scored by the researcher. There were limited surveys already in existence relating to urban teachers who were once urban students. As stated in the introduction, there is a void in the literature that tracks urban teachers who were once urban students. There was

Participants	Self-Efficacy	Blames District	Blames Parents	Gives 100%	Blames Problems	Credentials Important	Flexible	Defiant	Totals
1	1	2	2	2	2	3	1	3	525
2	1	1	2	3	4	3	1	4	625
3	3	3	3	2	4	2	1	3	550
4	1	4	4	1	4	4	1	1	725
5	1	3	3	2	3	3	1	3	600
6	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	4	500
7	1	3	3	2	2	4	1	4	625
8	1	1	1	2	1	4	1	4	500
9	1	3	3	1	2	3	1	3	650
10	1	3	3	1	3	2	1	3	650
11	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	4	500
12	1	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	550

Scoring Rubric:
200-400 = Teacher was merely hanging on, playing victim not accepting responsibility for student achievement, blames others for issues and problems in urban schools.
400-600 = Teacher was indifferent, sees the good and the bad in situations, has days of complaint and days of content, accepts responsibility in specific situations.
600-800 = Teacher had positive impression of urban environment, likely sees urban school as welcomed challenge instead of loathsome task. Self-efficacy drives success, doesn't desire to work in any other setting.

Figure 8. Urban teacher survey results.

a lack of surveys available that question urban teachers who were products of urban environments specifically.

Participant 4, Mr. Montgomery, scored the highest on the survey with a score of 725. According to the rubric, he had a positive impression of the urban environment. As stated before, Mr. Montgomery referred to teaching as "the greatest profession in the world." This supported his results on the survey. There may be a correlation between the fact that Mr. Montgomery teaches music instead of a core subject area, like math, science, or social studies and the high level of satisfaction he has for the urban environment.

In contrast, participants 6, 8, and 11 all shared the lowest score of 500. These participants fell directly in the middle of the rubric. They were seen as teachers who were indifferent. They were content where they were and were not trying to move from this comfortable place. It was unknown if these teachers were torn between one score and the other because they left the comment section of the survey blank. When faced with adverse circumstances, it was not certain if they teachers will rise above or become victim to them.

In addition, the average score of the survey was 583.3. Exactly half of the participants scored above average on the survey. According to the rubric, the average scores suggested that half of the participants have a positive attitude about their urban school and are willing to do what it takes to keep it that way. If this were an accurate representation of the urban district, then about half of the teachers in the district fell just short of viewing their schools as positive environments, where they welcome the challenges that face them. However, three of the teachers scored 650 or above. This suggested that there

was hope in changing the remaining teachers into individuals who had a positive image of the urban environment and are motivated by their own desire to make a difference.

The following are narrative stories of the lived experiences of two of the participants. The two participants were preferred to have their narrative stories written as they were more open and descriptive in their responses to the interview questions. The two voluntarily shared more information than the researcher asked. Mr. Gilchrist and Mrs. Bearden were selected to share more of their life stories in a narrative format. Ironically, the two painted a picture of diversity in that Mr. Gilchrist is an African American male and Mrs. Bearden is a Caucasian female.

Mr. Gilchrist's Narrative

It was his planning time when I caught up with Mr. G. in the hallway. During this hot and muggy day in the south, he was complaining about the lack of air conditioning in his classroom. He greeted me in the hall and asked me to walk with him as he searched for a quiet place for us to talk. We settled for the library as young adolescent whispers circled our every move. We started the interview and Mr. G. seemed excited to be able to recall so many intriguing memories of his childhood. As time passed, several people, students as well as adults, peeked in to see what he was doing. It appeared that this teacher was quite popular and well sought out.

As the interview came to a close, Mr. G. walked me around the school searching for the lucky participant whose interview was next. After he dropped me off with the next teacher, he encouraged me to call on him whenever I need to for the purpose of my research. I looked forward to coming back to observe Mr. G. in his natural environment.

One week later, I came back to see Mr. G. and prepared myself for his jovial and humorous whit to greet me at the office. Instead, I got a somber coworker who informed me that Mr. G. would not be in for a while. Not understanding where she was coming from, I immediately asked "Why?" She informed me that Mr. G. had lost his father a few days ago and was home preparing for his upcoming funeral. Feeling quite sad, I finished my other observation and decided to give Mr. G. some time before I contacted him about the study again.

A couple of weeks later, I called Mr. G. and inquired about his well being and the stability of his family. Sounding very upbeat and relaxed, he assured me he was fine. I asked Mr. G. if he was comfortable enough to continue the study and he quickly revealed that he was ready whenever I was. I made plans to meet Mr. G. the very next day.

Upon my arrival at his school, Mr. G. met me in the cafeteria. Again, the lack of air conditioning was an issue as we sat in close proximity, trying to fit our adult bodies onto the small child sized stools. Mr. G. laughed as we bumped knees trying to adjust so that I could begin to write. Mr. G. stands about 5'10" tall and has a large build. His dark brown skin blended with that of his students as he ushered them to quiet down. During this monitoring, we talked about times he enjoyed as a student in the urban district. Mr. G. reminisced about his social status as a student.

"I was kinda small, and I didn't really belong to a clique. I kinda hung with every body." When asked if he got bullied or picked on as a smaller student he replied, "Do you know who you talkin' to? I was the one who did the crackin! I would get on them when we got in that classroom!"

Mr. G. chuckled as he remembered times when he defended himself against would-be bullies who thought he wouldn't make fun of them as badly as or worse as they made fun of him.

As he recalled these fond memories of awkward school days, a male student approached him and asked "Mr. G can I slap Carson?" Mr. G jokingly replied, "after school man. Wait until after 3:00!" Students around us giggled as they realized he was kidding. The student responded, "I got to slap him 'cause he is showing me the food in his mouth!" Mr. G. redirected the boy's frustration by stating, "Well you know the boy is still trying to get used to being in this country- go easy on him." The student agreed and slowly retreated back to his seat at the lunchroom table. He continued with the discussion as if we were never interrupted.

> I remember being friends with many local gang members. I mean these were not the low members, but these were the guys at the top of the gang ladder. They were the big men in the gang world. Then, there was this really big guy at school that I got smart with (used sarcasm). I was a little rattled when he retaliated. He caught me in the hall and pushed me against the lockers ready to pummel me (beat me down). My big time gang member friends showed up and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "What you doing man? What's up?" The guy quickly released me and brushed off my clothes as if he were making sure I was ok. Then responded, "Oh he's good, we just talking." I never had a problem out of him again.

As we laughed again at his school days, he gestured for me to prepare to leave the lunchroom with his class by waving his hand my way. We walked the children to their next class (which was physical education in the gymnasium next door) and we retired to his classroom to talk some more. Mr. G. ordered us Chinese food through an off-campus friend. While waiting for our food to arrive, I asked Mr. G. about his social status as he transitioned from middle school, to high school, and to college. He began to describe life as an adolescent and a young adult as a time of discovery of who he would be-

come. He cited his parents as guiding him through this transition by paying close attention to him and offering the following advice: His dad would say, "Work hard at everything. Always look nice and above all treat yourself. Take vacations as much as possible". His mom would say, "Strive to do better than I did. And shut your mouth in those teachers' classes! By the way, clean you room!" When practicing band routines by dancing to the most popular secular music, his band director would declare, "Hey! This is a family show! Do it again- until you get it right!"

All this advice helped to keep him grounded as he faced making difficult decisions. Mr. G. assured me that he still made mistakes and bad decisions as most adolescents did, but these adults brought him back to reality. "I cracked on a lot of people." Mr. G. said as he chuckled about a school mate that he secretly made fun of for doing something he thought was dumb. The story went like this…

"A guy was mad at another guy for taking his girlfriend. So he brought a gun to school after he saw his girlfriend kissing the guy. (He planned to whip out the gun and shoot the guy in front of the girl) He immediately tried to take out the gun and shot **himself** in the butt instead!" Mr. G was hysterical with laughter as he demonstrated how the gun got stuck in the guy's back pocket. I had no choice but to laugh as I too imagined this scene. Our food finally arrived as Mr. G. began telling me a story that was not so funny.

> There was yet another bigger guy who often bothered me. He bothered me in order to impress the girls. Well, he slapped me! I was mad as hell! I played it off and slowly walked to the next teachers' class. Once I got into the room, I took a huge, thick mathematics textbook and pretended to go to the trash can (which was next to the door). When the guy tried to walk into the class, he came near the door. I revved back and SMACKED him in the face with the hard back book! I proceeded to slam the door and quickly lock it because at this point I feared for my life. He didn't bother me anymore!

Mr. G. repeatedly demonstrated how he swung the book at the bully as if he was going for a homerun in a World Series baseball game. Looking proud of the decision he made back then, he then settled down so we could eat our lunch.

After we finished lunch, Mr. G. continued by picking up with, "I had friends in everything. I was the neutral guy." He was referring to his ability to blend in with many social groups. He claimed to only have a few incidents throughout adolescence where he needed assistance. "I was always a politician." (We will discuss this more in the section on his adult experiences) He used this statement to support his ability to have back-up when found in a sticky situation. Sticky situations occurred because of the adverse circumstances of his community. He discussed gang violence, teen pregnancy, and lack of parental involvement as common problems faced by students. He also reported that not all of his teachers expected the best from them. He stated in his interview that there were teachers who would degrade the students and tell them that they would not amount to anything. Even though these negative teachers existed, Mr. G. was glad that the positive ones outnumbered the negative ones. He and his classmates decided to use the negative teachers' comments as a challenge to prove them wrong.

As a result of his crafty ways, he entered college as a political science major. He didn't go home a whole lot from college due to lots of parties, band performances, and athletic games. While in college, he got a car. He decided to try to be "cool" and smoke like his friends.

> I didn't do weed. I drank, but never again wanted to smoke. I tried to smoke a cigar and I got sick. I puffed the cigar and tried to flick the ashes out the car window on a nice summer day.

He claims he thought he was “cool” as he strolled down the campus streets with the window down and music playing. The daily sounds of *Oukast* rang from his speakers as he sang along to their hit tune: “Get Up, Get Out and Get Something.” The cigar ashes didn’t quite make it out the window. It seemed as if they had a mind of their own. Instead, the ashes came flying back into the car and landed on his brand new blue Polo shirt! “I never tried to smoke again!” He claimed as he remembered parting ways with his precious fashion find.

Not only did smoking turn out to be a bad idea, so was political science as a major. “I wasn’t such a good writer. My professor put so many red marks on my first paper; I didn’t know what to think. I had to take remedial courses after that.”

Mr. G. expressed how he got on track with his academics and changed his major accordingly. He had to decide that “When it was time to handle my business (completing his coursework) I went to my room (dorm room) and would catch my friends later.” He tells of a time when he was “referred” by a friend to join the band fraternity. As a “politician,” he observed the workings of the fraternity, as well as the reputation of its leaders. Referring to himself as a politician meant that he had interpersonal skills.

> If you are genuine with people whether they like you or dislike you, they will respect you. They will work with you. I pride myself on treating people right and that serves me well. But, when you try to deceive people, then you lose them.

He decided that the leadership was faulty and he was not going to sign his name to become a part of it. Even though most of the male bad members joined this fraternity, he had no respect for the person in leadership. “I later saw benefits other people gained from membership, but it wasn’t for me.” This proved his willingness to stand alone for what he believed.

As he approached his junior year in college, he realized that he was getting into a major and needed to solidify his decision about his career path. It was then that he went home to work a summer camp that he had been working since he was 15 years old. He transitioned from a 15 year old camp counselor who was given a plan book and a room full of 11-13 year olds and told “here you go”, to directing other teenagers to do the same. However, not only was he working the summer camp, but he was promoted to camp director. As camp director, Mr. G. experienced the joy of working with children from the same community he grew up in. He enjoyed watching them learn the objectives the camp had planned for their overall summer growth. He also realized that directing this camp became his confirmation that this setting was one in which he wanted to spend the rest of his life surrounded by. The former director of the camp remained in his life as a mentor. He constantly gave him advice that helped to build a foundation for dealing with children. Mr. G. secured his major in education and began his application into the Teacher Education Program. This experience became his epiphany. It was the one experience that convinced him that urban education was where he belonged.

After college, Mr. G. claimed to have obtained his first teaching job fairly quickly. He graduated from college in December and had a job in January. He was called for an interview at a local urban middle school. He learned that he was one of many teachers that transitioned out of this class since August. As he walked down the hall in his new school, Mr. G. had different emotions and thoughts going through his mind. He wondered what this experience would be like. His first day, at his first job, with his first group of children, would be memorable. He walked into the room to find another teacher holding the class and awaiting his arrival. The teacher turned to him, handed him a grade

book, plan book, and teacher's manual. He looked him square in the eyes and said, "They are all yours. Good luck! As the teachers walked out of the room, he turned one last time and exclaimed, "I got a good feeling about you. You will be ok!" Mr. G. didn't know what to think but he went on with his day. Since that day, Mr. G. has maintained that he is happy in the urban environment. He spent great deals of time getting to know who his students were. However, with layoffs and non-tenured teacher pink slips floating around, he eventually got his walking papers. His mentor put in a word for him at a local middle school.

> I went there as a permanent substitute. My mentor and I knew we could convince the principal to let me stay. However, it was like an audition for the job everyday. As I showed up for work daily, I saw others come and interview for the very same position. I made sure I did not miss any days because I had to be on top of my game. Plus, I had to work 20 straight days to get teacher's regular pay. I was observed by the school administration as well as the board personnel for my subject area. My biggest worry was not in the classroom but it was maintaining my job. The classroom was easy. After learning through the summer how to build relationships with the children, teaching was rudimentary; the teaching part comes easy to me.

He moved to another school with his principal after his first year, taught at four other schools and has maintained his current position for the past 6 years. Mr. G. saw the need for role models in urban middle schools and he strives to provide his students with an excellent one. He has come to understand what his students are going through and seeks to educate the "whole person." He claims to always keep an open mind and suggests that other teachers do the same. When asked what advice he would give to others thinking about pursuing a career in an urban district he declared, "Be observant, talk to people, volunteer in urban environments, grow a thick skin, and contribute to the positive pool of teachers instead of the negative ones. Go where you are comfortable." When asked what advise he would give to urban administrators who are looking for quality ur-

ban teachers he replied, “Offering a monetary compensation helps, but look for someone who has a similar background as the urban students.”

Mr. G. believed that new teachers need to have similar background as the students so that they can build better relationships together. He mentioned that it takes time and commitment to build lasting relationships. He examined his own level of commitment and reported the various ways he helps the students. Mr. G. has coached the basketball team, soccer team, debate team, and academic bowl team. He claims to stay after school most days practicing with teams, coordinating technology with teachers and parents, or mentoring young males.

> During the day, every Wednesday morning, we meet for breakfast (he and the mentoring group) and everyone has to wear a shirt and tie. We go out and provide community service by completing yard work for the elderly, and helping teachers move their home furniture. I also bring in guest speakers to talk to them about careers, choices and consequences. We search for field trips to take them out of the city because you know so many of them have never been outside the city.

Mr. G. described a close knit relationship with these young men. He told of a time when he offered himself to the young men by telling them they talk to him about anything.

> This young man took me at my word. He was engaged in premarital sex, smoking marijuana, and fighting outside of school. I would tell him what to do and what not to do. I really tried to scare him with the smoking especially. Since I knew he liked talking about having sex, I reminded him that smoking can lead to erectile dysfunction. That got him! After that he would come to me with different stories. He found pride in telling me this weekend I did not do this, and this, and this. He switched from telling me what he had done to what he had not done. I used the truth about life to try and save him. Like I said before, *when you try to deceive people you lose them.*

As we progressed in the story of his life, the subject of his father’s death came up. I asked Mr. G. if he was comfortable talking about his father’s recent death. He said he

was fine having this discussion and that it wouldn't bother him at all. Mr. G. previously told me that his father offered him sound advice growing up. As a result, I asked him if he had anything that he wished he could have done with his father before he passed. Revealing that his father was not a huge part of his life, Mr. G. wished for more quality time with him. He mentioned having a younger brother who lived with his father and took on many of his ways. Mr. G., however, like so many of his urban students, was raised solely by his mother. "I wish I could have had the *Cosby* relationship with my dad. I didn't have the benefit of a father-son relationship." When asked if he thinks his life would have turned out any differently if he had that *Cosby* relationship with his father he replied, "I think I would not have turned out differently. My brother grew up there (with his father) and they are just alike. I think I would have turned out the same."

Although his father was not married to his mother, Mr. G. has plans to get married in the future. Much like he defied the comments of his negative teachers, he plans to defy the pattern his father set up for him to follow with his concept of family. Mr. G. not only wants a wife but children as well. When asked about his future educational and career goals, Mr. G. cited becoming a principal in an urban environment and starting his own nonprofit mentoring association for young boys.

Mrs. Bearden's Narrative

I was escorted to her room by a female 7th-grade student. She was sitting at her desk working when I opened the glass door. This was a nice glass door with a wooden frame. The door was only a small treat to this beautiful room amidst a brand new school building. When she noticed me, Mrs. Bearden turned around with this warm and friendly

smile on her face. She sat there as this sweet white woman with long pretty hair. Her office had several displays of affection for her favorite college football team. She immediately greeted me with a warm hug and offered me not only a chair to sit in, but also a piece of candy from her huge candy jar. I took a piece of red licorice and proceeded to make myself comfortable. We talked about her family which consisted of a husband and an 18 year old child. Mrs. Bearden seemed like a person who is considerate of others.

As we shifted gears from discussing her family to discussing her career, I asked her how she ended up in this urban district. Mrs. Bearden told me that she had two interviews after she gained her teaching certificate. One interview was with a school in the suburbs and the other was with an urban school district. The urban interview took place after the suburban interview. The principal from the urban school knew she had the interview with the suburban district. He knew he would have to offer her something different. He offered her this statement to ponder, "I know the suburban school wants you and you need to decide who needs you more, and I need you more." This touched Mrs. Bearden. "So I felt like … (pausing for words) that lead me here. Referring to the principal who hired her she stated, "He wanted me there. He made it seem like an adventure. He had a flare for the dramatics." Mrs. Bearden reported this as the epiphany of her life that brought her to the urban school district. She added that, "this is what GOD wanted me to do. I have found myself with people who share my beliefs."

I found this statement interesting since she was the only white face I saw in the building. I asked her how she would go about recruiting other white teachers who would share her feelings and not leave. She replied,

> I think I would tell them that they got to have a tough skin - You can't be concerned about what you wear, look like, etc. Middle school kids are tough. Be

> sure of whom you are. If you are white, don't try to be black. Ask yourself-Can I be who I am? You can't be somebody who lets a child get you so upset that you cry. If so, this is not the place for you." When asked about ways new teachers could get urban students to achieve Mrs. Bearden stated, "you get to step out of what you know and choose literature that includes your kids- that is if you want to reach them. Listen to what they listen to, see their movies, etc. You need to experience what they experienced to use their prior knowledge.

After listening to her advice for upcoming teachers, I asked Mrs. Bearden about her current position and why she stays. She claimed to be very happy. She tells of how she enjoys working with urban students. "I think my students are very creative, my job is never boring. I don't know what is going to happen from day to day." When asked to elaborate on this, Mrs. Bearden mentioned how she is glad her students are not closed minded. "They are open to new and different things. They like variety. I work with different programs. I love that many of my students have not experienced what I have, so I enjoy providing them with the opportunity to share my experiences."

On the other hand, Mrs. Bearden discussed what she does not like about teaching in urban schools. "There is a lot of baggage that students bring from home." Mrs. Bearden cited the community as being economically disadvantaged which leads to issues. "Sometimes you have to deal with things you shouldn't. For example, if a child is hungry it is hard for them to concentrate. Sometimes, I take trips to the snack machine." Mrs. Bearden also mentioned children who may be tired and exhausted from having to listen to fussing and fighting all night at home.

When asked about her own childhood and her 6th -12th grade experience, Mrs. Bearden revealed some interesting details. Prior to her 6th -12th grade experience, she recalls a jovial and pleasant life with just her and her parents. Her mother owned a beauty salon which was rare in the early 70s for a Caucasian woman in the southeast. Her bi-

ological father worked at the airport. When dad got off work, he spent a great deal of time with her and taught her things until her mother got done with the shop. They were a happy little family. Then suddenly, tragedy ensued. As an innocent little six year old girl, Mrs. Bearden lost her beloved father in a horrible car wreck. This tragedy hit her hard and devastated her mind. She would not speak again for a very long time. Sensing her pain and understanding that there was a real problem at hand, her mother had her go to see a speech therapist. Thankfully, the therapy worked. Many months later, Mrs. Bearden began to speak again. Years later, after much healing and sorrow, her mother married again. Within the new marriage, Mrs. Bearden found herself having to adapt to a lot of situations. It was at this stage in life that she learned to get along with a variety of people. "Mom married someone who already had a son. I had to learn new people, and new ideas. I have always wanted people to get along."

As a youth, she stated, "I did not have all the name brand clothes and shoes and I grew up in a home with an alcoholic." She said this in a lower tone of voice which made me believe it was something she felt resentment about. She stated that her step dad was an alcoholic. We paused here as one of her colleagues walked in to ask her a question about the upcoming student production. The teachers finally left and we picked up where we left off. Living with an alcoholic was difficult, but Mrs. Bearden maintained a positive outlook on life.

"I always rooted for the underdog and took up for the kids nobody liked." She reported that she grew up during a time when racism was big and words like segregation and desegregation were common. She found herself gaining an even softer side as she remembered things she went through. "I remember I grew up during busing. All blacks

in the city were bused to the mountainside where we lived and they were trying to mix the schools. I remember my friends' parents telling us not to hang with people of another race. They told us not to make friends with them." Mrs. Bearden had many talks with her mother who felt rather differently. Her mother told her "I don't care what everyone else does. You treat everyone the same. Judge people, not because of their color but because of who they are. Now, there may be problems at your school tomorrow but you do what is right!" Those words stuck with Mrs. Bearden and made her the kind hearted and open-minded person she is today. She stated, "I remember always being the peacemaker in the neighborhood. I am still friends with a lot of people from school. My mother gave me the freedom to make my own judgments which could have changed my whole life."

After reporting that she went through a lot of problems in school because of the alcoholism, she talked about how at school she would appear to have it all together. She was always clean and neat and did not bring any unnecessary attention to herself. She wanted to hide her problems from everyone at school. However, inside she was suffering. As a result, she claimed, "I can recognize it (alcoholism or other family substance abuse). It (acting out) is usually because of the abuse of drugs at home. I even had the counselor here to check on a child who was having similar characteristics that I had and sure enough-that was the problem." Although the alcoholism was a problem in her house, Mrs. Bearden still found a way to not let her family issues cloud her thinking. Her parents tried, despite the alcoholism, to continue to instill in her that she should be a neutral thinking person-free from judgment. She recalls living with a couple of democrats. She refers to her parents as big Obama fans. "Well you know it is not popular to be an Obama fan in a republican state."

Directing her back to her own childhood, I asked Mrs. Bearden who it was that saved her. She stated that there was a librarian/teacher (she served both roles) that came to her rescue. "I didn't start reading until she came and asked-Have you read this book? (The book was about something she could relate to) She wanted to get us interested in reading-we kept journals and stuff. The simple things worked. I am glad my teacher saw that (potential) in me."

After having that teacher in her life, Mrs. Bearden says she developed a love for reading. Mrs. Bearden added that not all the teachers cared as much as hers did. "Some teachers just didn't care." She claimed that her school was a big school and that it was very diverse. When asked to expand on the diversity of the school, she noted that there were students of different ethnicities as well as students from different socio-economic statuses. "If you weren't rich, white, and blonde with blue eyes, then you got no attention. There were rich students whose parents ran the community. If you got into a fight with one of their children then *you* would be going home and not *them*."

After finishing high school, Mrs. Bearden found herself in college majoring in education. She recalled having to choose a field experience. Her college professors wanted them to observe in the city schools. The professor thought it was important to see all aspects of every school system. However, she had several classmates who did not want to observe the city schools. "I didn't know the difference because I was not from this particular district." As a result, Mrs. Bearden observed in the city schools and liked it. She also worked in other aspects of the city including religious student unions, mission trips, vacation bible school, church youth groups and more. "I like older kids and big groups of people." Her religious beliefs helped to keep her loyal to working with di-

verse groups of people. She believes in GOD and works diligently to please him by being of service to others.

Mrs. Bearden mentioned how her beliefs have rubbed off on her husband and son. "My husband is not going to judge people- we raise our son that way." Words of wisdom they offer their son are, "everywhere you go there is somebody hating someone for something. You get to know them first." The Beardens hope that this message will carry on throughout their family as well. Speaking of family, Mrs. Bearden stated that her grown brother also ended up working with children in a gymnasium as well as at baseball parks. She laughed at the fact that her mother always says they picked similar careers. She speaks of her own house as the place where all the kids hang out. "They know that there are rules but they want to be here. Right now we have a teenager sleeping on our couch. He is a senior and his mom is in rehab. He is going through a lot. My son is somebody who roots for the underdog too!" The kids that hang out at her house are usually friends of her son. Her friends all know how she is and they accept her as is.

Mrs. Bearden and I shifted gears yet again to discuss what she thinks is the best way to recruit and retain more urban teachers. She shifted in her seat as if she was getting ready to have a long discussion and then replied, "I think having a mentor that is there the first day of recruitment, like a sponsor, who stays with them and works with them daily would help. New teachers need an experienced person to help them. They don't need to feel *observed.* They need someone who is positive and uplifting." Mrs. Bearden stressed the need for teachers to feel as if the person observing them is not there to judge them or report back to the administration about their progress or lack of progress. Mrs. Bearden

believes administrators should look for individuals who are open-minded. She recalled an experience with a co-worker who happens to be African American.

> My co-worker and I had a lot in common, but I noticed her pulling away from me often. After she and I were alone at a conference, she told me she never had a white friend. She lives outside of the city limits right now but had never been around anyone white (thinking about this a minute she paused then picked back up). We have always made sure my son was never in all white schools. It gives them a narrow view of the world. Some of life you need a real experience (with other cultures).

Through this conversation, I gathered that Mrs. Bearden envisions a school where teachers are open with one another and they are teaching the children to experience the world for themselves instead of living by the hands of other people's ignorance.

When I asked about her future goals, Mrs. Bearden spoke of retirement. "I made National Boards. I'll work a few more years then get some rest." Reflecting back to why she is in the urban district she replied, "Our jobs are not boring. You never know what is gonna happen the next day." With excitement and joy she ended the session talking about her upcoming drama production she has planned with the urban middle school students. "Our drama program is coming up Tuesday! The kids have truly enjoyed helping me write and re-write the skits. It started out as a couple skits but sometimes we don't give our kids enough credit for what they can do. There is some Shakespeare with Romeo and Juliet in it and what Romeo and Juliet would be like today. The kids say, "its kinda like High School Musical for black kids!" She laughs and shakes her head as if to say no.

I asked her about her other extra-curricular activities to get a feel for her dedication after school hours and she mentioned the drama club, book clubs, and an upcoming film club where they will watch old and new versions of the same movies and compare

and contrast them as movie critics. "I wanted to come up with something different. I feel the need to expose the children to other things." Mrs. Bearden made an important connection to her college days. "My college professor would make connections in class. I wonder what our kids would be able to say when they get to college. Will they be able to make connections with what the professor is talking about?"

All these thoughts made Mrs. Bearden aware of the challenges that are ahead for her urban middle school students. Her goal, during her tenure, as an urban educator, is to expose her students to as much of the world as she can. Consideration for others and a sincere love for GOD keep her motivated to do what is right.

Both participants shared experiences that developed into narrative stories of their lives in the urban environment. Data from observations, checklists, surveys, and interviews were collectively used to paint a picture of what life was like for the participants as urban students and what life is like now for them as urban teachers.

Summary

The complete data analysis yielded useful insight relative to the urban teachers' perceptions of the urban environment both in the past and now. Experiences from life as a student were recorded and compared to recorded experiences as adults. Although participants were looking through a completely different lens as students than they were as adults, the experiences were important to devise a plan as to how we can recruit and retain more urban teachers. The comparisons were charted to provide a visual representation of similarities and differences. Direct quotes were used as much as possible to present participants' responses as accurate.

Through the reporting of experiences and opinions, in the data collection process, coherent themes emerged as participants shared their stories regarding the urban environment. The themes were taken from repetitious comments, responses, and retellings of events from the past and present. The themes provide a milieu for understanding the participants' perceptions of factors impacting recruitment and retention of teachers in urban middle schools.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Findings

Urban teachers who were once urban students had vital knowledge that could be used to improve urban schools despite adverse circumstances. This knowledge included ways to work in a variety of contexts. According to Peterman (2008), "Teaching is a complex task-one that is complicated by the sociocultural dimensions of the context in which it occurs" (p. 21). Urban teachers, however, work specifically in communities under the contexts of poverty, diversity, inequality, violence and sometimes hopelessness (Peterman). These contexts were viewed as obstacles to some and mere challenges to others. In order to "make a difference in the lives of their students", urban teachers must "understand and respond to the nature of their communities" (Peterman, 2008, p. 33). This may involve building relationships with students and other stakeholders.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of urban middle school teachers in a southeastern school district, who were once urban students, to divulge why they stay in urban school districts despite adverse conditions. The participants were veteran urban middle school teachers. Each participant met all of the following criteria: (a) currently teach in an urban middle school in a southeastern school district, (b) have five or more years teaching experience in an urban setting, and (c) have attended urban schools as a 6th -12th grade student.

The study focused on why urban teachers stay in urban middle schools. The 12 participants were interviewed and the data analyzed to identify emerging themes. Through the process of data collection, and analysis, six major themes and three subthemes emerged. The subthemes represented themes that emerged but were not mentioned as much as the six themes. The subthemes were important in that they were significant to the experiences of a few participants, but not significant to the majority. The rest of this chapter presented a summary of findings, conclusions, implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for further study.

Researcher's Findings

The following research findings are presented:

1. Having been a student in an urban middle school positively affected caring, motivation, the relationship to mentors, opportunity, relationships with students, and commitment to remain teaching in urban middle schools.

2. Growing up in an urban environment gave teachers experiences that were useful to them as urban teachers.

3. Mentoring behavior that meets the needs of new teachers was necessary for teacher retention.

4. Caring and commitment of urban middle school teachers have a direct effect on students' success.

Summary of Findings

The research offered six major themes identified as having tremendously affected the extent to which the participants were able to remain in the urban environment. The combination of information obtained in the study suggested that opportunity, mentors, caring, motivation, relationships, and commitment were imperative to understanding why urban teachers stay. The results of the study strongly supported the notion that as urban students the participants had a positive experience in urban schools and as urban teachers participants are committed to staying.

Initially, the participants in this study revealed opportunity as one of the reasons they stayed in urban environments. Epstein (2006) reported that today, urban schools provide the opportunity to serve two functions. One function was a positive function where schools provide services to obtain skills and knowledge. The other function was a negative function where urban schools become a social sorter where some students get to move forward and some are held back. "Most urban families need the service and are harmed by the sorting" (Epstein, 2006, p.106). To help make the social sorting a more positive function, "teachers should take the opportunity to talk to parents during impromptu meetings like during carpools (Maniates, 2001) and other chance encounters.

In keeping with opportunity, the participants revealed quality mentors as one of the reasons they stay in urban districts. Wormeli (2003) emphasized the need for mentors for new and non-tenured teachers in the urban schools. The participants discussed different types of facilitating a mentoring program to best meet the needs of the new teachers. There was mention of a program where teachers felt less observed and more supported as they interact with mentors.

In addition, many participants in the study revealed that they stay in urban districts not only because they had a caring teacher that showed them the way, but that they too striving to be a caring teacher. Noddings (2002), Kuykendall (2004), Nieto (2003), and Michie (2001) agreed that caring teachers are necessary for the success of urban schools. Corbett, Wilson, and Williams supported this notion of caring teachers by adding that caring teachers take responsibility for student success instead of placing the blame on others.

Subsequently, participants revealed motivation as one of the reasons they stay in urban environments. "Teachers share certain motivations, commitments, dispositions of mind, and ways of seeing children, schools, and the world" (Michie, 2005, p. 189). Not only did teachers mention motivation of students as important but also intrinsic motivation was mentioned as what inspired them to stay.

For the most part, Fischman, DiBara, and Gardner (2006) agreed with the study participants in that building relationships with urban students was a key factor in encouraging teachers to stay. Developing positive and sustainable relationships by listening to students helped participants gain access to students' potential. Listening to students can, "give students the opportunity to vent and have their feelings validated" (Maniates, 2001, p. 2). Urban teachers should, "Do what it takes to learn about their cultures" (Wormeli, 2001, p. 8). "Teachers can cement school-family relationships by communicating their interests in the children to parents and guardians throughout the year" (Maniates, 2001, p. 10). Showing interest in the students and their families and sharing life experiences helps to build a sense of trust. "Developing a relationship with each student and family

means that we as teachers must share ourselves with our students" (Maniates, 2001, p. 18).

After building solid relationships, Michie (2005) suggested adding a sense of commitment. In keeping with this, the study revealed commitment to teaching as a reason teachers stay in urban environments. According to Michie,

> Teaching well isn't easy in any circumstance, but it requires even more determined effort of teachers working in under-resourced communities or school districts, teachers who are nonetheless committed to making their classrooms places where students are educated and liberated rather than warehoused (p. 186).

Finally, the teachers in this study emphasized teaching in the environment and community like the one in which they were raised as a reason urban teachers remain in urban environments. Michie (2005) agreed by sharing that in his research on urban schools, many of his teachers stated that they "hoped to teach in communities like the ones in which they had been raised, and felt committed to working with students with whom they shared racial or cultural backgrounds" (Michie, 2005, p. 3). Michie also noted this way of thinking as being a tradition in the African American community. The teachers in this study supported this tradition in that many of them responded to the question "Why did you choose to teach in an urban setting?" by replying "because I am a product of an urban environment."

Theme 1: Opportunity

The first theme that emerged was opportunity. Participants mentioned opportunity as they reflected on how they obtained their positions in the urban middle school. Several reported that the urban district was the first district to give them an opportunity to

teach, while others reported that they felt privileged to have an opportunity to come back and teach in an urban school.

Theme 2: Mentors

The second theme that emerged was mentors. Participants mentioned mentors as they brainstormed ways in which administrators could get new teachers to remain beyond their first few years of teaching. Wormeli (2001) supported the participants' beliefs that mentors are important to new urban middle school teachers by quoting that "middle school teaching is a tough job, but it can be easier when a new teacher feels supported" (p. 169).

Theme 3: Caring

The third theme that emerged was caring. Participants mentioned caring as they reminisced about the experiences they had as urban middle school students. Atmospheres of care were a common topic as the interview questions were answered. Not only did the participants note the caring teachers they had, but they reported wanting to replicate those caring qualities as they teach their own students. Goslin (2003) supported this behavior by stating that "one of the most important principles governing the behavior of all organisms, including human beings, is that behavior that satisfies basic needs will tend to reoccur" (p. 18).

Theme 4: Motivation

The fourth theme that emerged was motivation. Participants mentioned motivation in two ways. There was the motivation students needed (and many reported that the students lack motivation) to learn, and the motivation that the teachers needed to make them want to stay. For both students and teachers, motivation can be driven intrinsically or by outside motivation. Goslin (2003) purported that the learner's expectation that he or she will be able to succeed at the learning task has a colossal influence on their motivation. Hence, students needed to believe they can learn and teachers needed to believe they can teach successfully.

Theme 5: Relationships

The fifth theme that emerged was relationships. Participants mentioned relationships as the number one way to reach urban middle school students. By doing what it takes to learn about their cultures (Wormeli, 2001, p. 8), teachers can begin to build relationships with their students. French (2002) noted that "relationships are built and alliances are formed when individuals speak openly and actively listen to one another" (p. 42). Teachers and students benefitted when they realized that relationships required dialogue between both parties in which they shared experiences and thoughts.

Theme 6: Commitment

The last theme that emerged was commitment. Participants mentioned commitment as one of the driving forcing keeping them in urban districts as well as the driving force that brought them back. The idea of being a product of an urban environment and

returning to give back to the community was repeatedly stated by participants. The participants noted wanting to "come back and make a difference" as the rationale for their commitment.

These findings suggested that without experiences with urban students, teaching in the urban environment may be unsuccessful and short lived. The findings provided direction for recruiting and retaining teachers with the necessary qualities and experiences needed for the urban middle school. They also provided opportunities for administrators to seek those individuals who possessed the resilience to overcome adverse circumstances. This research will optimistically contribute to encouraging more urban middle school teachers to stay in urban environments.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the central research question asked about urban middle school teachers who were once urban students and why they return and remain in the urban setting. The research sub-questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do teachers describe what they do to ensure longevity in the urban setting?

2. What personal experiences do urban teachers explain that allows them to handle problems and issues as they remain in urban education?

3. What are common problems faced by urban teachers from their perceptions?

Central Research Question

The central research question asked about urban middle school teachers who were once urban students and why they return and remain in the urban setting. Urban middle school teachers described why they return and remain in the urban setting in terms of personal convictions. The majority of the participants stated that they returned to the urban environment simply because they were products of such an environment. As a product of the urban environment, urban teachers can relate to the social injustices that their current students face. According to Murrell (2008), social justice was defined as the disposition toward recognizing and eliminating all forms of oppression and unequal treatment existing in urban schools. Murrell went on to deduce that teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds were more equipped to create social learning environments among diverse student populations. This level of competency was a catalyst for why urban teaches stay in urban environments.

Sub-Question 1

Sub-question 1 explored how teachers ensure longevity in the urban classroom setting. Urban teachers described building relationships with urban students as what they do to ensure longevity. The varieties of relationships that existed in urban middle schools reflected the dynamics based on function and need (Storz & Nestor, 2008). Urban students have specific needs. With the building of relationships, both parties developed a sense of trust between each other that strengthens their dedication to withstand the test of time and provide for specific needs. In building these relationships, urban teachers listed activities like getting to know the children Teachers can get to know students by sharing

their experiences and offering support to students who may need teachers to become more than teachers (in place of the parent). While sharing experiences, urban teachers gain insight on the functions and needs of urban students. Billingsley (2005) supported this argument by revealing giving students experiences simply by sharing experiences. Billingsley shared experiences of studying abroad as well as learning another language. Sharing builds trusting relationships. When teachers are willing to open up and share a part of themselves with their students, the students begin to trust them more. Ms. Teal reported that her needs were met by teachers she trusted who built relationships with her and gained knowledge of her problems at home. Instead of using this personal issue against her, the teachers shared a part of themselves with her. Ms. Teal considered teachers as her parents while at school. These teachers then supported her through her parents' divorce.

Sub-Question 2

Sub-question 2 focused on personal experiences that urban teachers have and how they are able to handle problems and issues as they remain in urban education. Urban teachers explained how they handle problems differently than most because they were in the students' shoes before. Marquez-Zenkov (2008) noted that urban students might reengage with schools through the use of community experiences as valid educational material. Teachers connected their prior experiences to the students' current experiences as a way to demonstrate a community kinship that allows them to understand the students. The fact that lack of resources was listed as a problem when the participants were urban students and lack of resources was still a problem now was evidence that the

participants can directly relate to the students experiences. As a result, handling these same problems and issues was something that the participants are accustomed to already.

Sub-Question 3

Sub-question 3 asked urban teachers about their perceptions on common problems they have faced as urban teachers. The participants cited common problems or inadequacies as lack of resources, lack of parental involvement, lack of discipline, lack of motivation, and lack of caring. According to Peterman (2008), urban middle schools were defined repeatedly by their inadequacies. The inadequacies were stated by the participants during their interviews as the negative aspects of working in an urban environment. One of Peterman's five inadequacies that parallel with the participants' report of inadequacies was limited resources.

Conclusions

A qualitative research design was used for this study of urban middle school teachers. Within the qualitative research design, the narrative methodology was used to complete this study. Readers may draw conclusions or view areas of transformation from this study. However, it should be noted that the data and findings presented are limited to the perceptions of the 12 participants interviewed, surveyed, and observed and should not be generalized. The following conclusions resulted from the qualitative data collected during this narrative study:

1. The data collected and analyzed during this study suggested that urban middle schools have a positive impact on future urban middle school teachers. The 12 successful

urban middle school teachers identified caring, motivation, mentors, opportunity, relationships and commitment as factors having a positive impact on why they stay.

2. The participants in this study acknowledged that the urban environment provided experiences that were useful in facilitating successful practices in teaching and learning. Mr. Montgomery stated, "Well I grew up in that setting and uh, had a lot of respect for my instructors in first through the twelfth grade. And they exemplified professionalism and a higher respect for higher achievers, so they influenced me to go and teach where I grew up." The participants in this study credited being a product of an urban environment and previous urban teachers as having a role in their commitment to urban middle schools.

3. A comprehensive retention program was necessary to meet the immediate needs of the 12 urban middle school teachers in this study. Mentors during the first 3-5 years helped with the retention of these teachers. Urban teachers' needs must be met in order to guarantee teacher retention.

4. Participants in this study indicated that caring and commitment had a direct effect on students' success.

Implications for Practice

While a single study cannot provide a sound basis for the effectiveness of the general population of urban middle school teachers, the findings from this study suggest that building relationships was possibly the most influential factor in enhancing the lives of urban middle school students. As a result of the findings, in this study, administrators should consider searching for new teacher candidates who have some experience with ur-

ban students before they enter the urban district. This experience can come in the form of volunteer work in any urban capacity with urban children. Administrators should also retain teachers by providing support through sound mentoring programs geared toward systematic progress through personal relationship with mentees instead of evaluative programs that end up on their permanent records.

The following implications are based on research findings, conclusions, reviews of associated literature, and realistic experiences of the researcher. The researcher demonstrated triangulation by combining and comparing findings, literature, and participants' responses.

1.Urban teachers can benefit from the findings of this research by being committed to urban environments. This informs current practice by encouraging administrators to seek teacher candidates who demonstrate commitment to urban students and by urban teachers committing or re-committing themselves to urban education. Jackson (2007) professed that considering many of the minority teachers come from these same communities in which they teach, they seek to bring their lived experiences to the profession as they share many commonalities with their urban students. Mr. Smith stated, when asked what advice he would give a teacher who was deciding between an urban environment and a suburban environment, "I would say that it all depends on your level of commitment."

2. Urban teachers can benefit from the findings of this research by caring about their students. This informs current practice in that urban students need caring adults to provide for their needs. According to Neito (2003) African-American students who believed their teachers cared about them were more successful academically than others.

Mrs. Green expressed when asked bout her positive experiences as an urban student that, "I experienced the school/community relationship that helped me to see the bond of families caring for all. This is the type of relationship I'm trying to have with my students in my career." Noddings (2002) added that for most urban students being cared for was a prerequisite for caring for others. Mrs. Thomas expressed that, "I experienced very good and caring teachers who were involved in and respected in the community. I try to exemplify the same characteristics and obtain the same respect from my students." Noddings echoed Mrs. Thomas by noting that, "Children today need desperately to know how to care for themselves and for intimate others" (Noddings, 2002, p. 33).

3. Urban environments can benefit from the findings of this research by providing experiences that are useful in facilitating successful practices in teaching and learning. This informs current practice in that prior experiences are needed to connect to new experiences in order for authentic learning to occur. "To reach all children, educators must expand their repertoire of instructional strategies to include the various approaches children use to learn" (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 72). Mrs. Wrigley stated, "My teachers impacted me. They are why I am here. They instilled in me that I could get what I wanted but it would come through education. I had to be better than a Caucasian with no education. All were black (one was white-the music teacher). They impacted my career as a teacher. I do find myself teaching like them. A lot of my discipline comes from the way I was disciplined in school." Darling-Hammond maintained Mrs. Wrigley's reciprocity of teaching style by noting that, "Teaching is a moral and political act, and teachers play a key role in facilitating positive social change" (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 2). Mrs.

Wrigley positively changed by adopting her teachers' way of teaching to her own practice.

4. Urban districts can benefit from the findings in this research by offering opportunities to urban students seeking a career in education after college graduation. This informs current practice by creating an avenue to recruit teachers for urban schools. According to Banks (2009) a large number of African Americans entered the middle class due to the opportunities and possibilities that resulted from efforts made to end racism. Ms. Tee claimed, "I was working in retail and in school when the principal came in (who I had interviewed with previously) and they had no positions open and he said well come and see me and the opportunity came about and so I tell him all the time "You did what Moses did!" So, I was just given the opportunity. I had the interest and I was given the opportunity."

5. Urban teachers and students can benefit from the findings of this research by being motivated about education. This informs current practice by serving as the tool that drives teachers and students to learn. According to Kuykendall (2004) African American and Hispanic students who found evidence of their own culture and specific learning styles present in the instructional program of the school, were more likely to be motivated to learn. Ms. Tee supported motivation by stating, "The intrinsic motivators I think those are the best teachers. I would always change my room around and people would say "Ms. Tee you must have ADHD," but no I got to keep them motivated." Kuykendall added, "Teachers have a better chance of increasing their students' motivation to achieve when they can develop in students a sense of responsibility, self-control, and the desire to achieve lifelong success" (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 131).

6. Urban districts can benefit from the findings of this research by offering mentoring for new and nontenured teachers. This informs current practice by establishing reciprocal relationships with teachers that promotes guidance and support. According to Yeager (1998) nearly half of all new urban teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years. Howard (2003) supported this claim by revealing that close to 16% of new urban teachers left the profession within the first year. Mrs. Teal stated of mentoring that, "Once I got here I didn't know if I was gonna stay, but I had to find me a great mentor who would understand my first year of teaching and who would kind of guide me." Also, Mrs. Bearden stated, "I think having a mentor that is there the first day of recruitment like a sponsor who stays with them and works with them daily. They need an experienced person to help them. They don't need to feel "observed." They need someone who is positive and uplifting." Darling-Hammond supported Mrs. Bearden and Ms. Teal by revealing that, "Prospective teachers rarely see in action the sophisticated practice of great teachers who know how to work with students who live in poverty, and have little prior educational support" (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 16).

7. Urban middle school teachers can benefit from the findings of this research by fostering hope for the future of urban students. This informs current practice by serving as the core of urban teaching. Kuykendall (2004) suggested that urban schools and communities need "merchants of hope." Neito (2003) defined hope as the "essence of urban teaching." When asked about advice he would give a teacher deciding between an urban environment and a suburban environment Mr. Montgomery stated, "Well I think that both settings are important, but in the urban setting you have an opportunity to change lives and to give people Hope who have despair."

8. Urban middle school students can benefit from the findings of this research by understanding experiences of adverse circumstances like poverty, high drop-out rates, violence and more. This informs current practice in that teachers must know what students are experiencing in order to build relationships with them. "Dropout rates, low levels of academic skills, and school failure are higher for children and youth of color than their white, culturally mainstream, European American counterparts" (Murrell, 2008, p. 45). Swain (2003) noted that gang violence, mood swings, and high risk behaviors are typical for urban middle school students. When asked about his positive experiences as an urban student, Mr. Gilchrist added, "I think mostly it (the urban school) taught me perseverance- Uh, never to give up. That I can make it through adverse situations because the situation in the urban setting was not always the most positive for me, but like I said, there were certain situations that led me to believe that there could have been a better way than what was going on around me on a daily basis."

9.Urban students can benefit from the findings in this research in that it was more difficult for urban students to succeed at the same rate as students in non-urban environments with the resources provided. This informs current practice because it exposes inequalities that may create achievement gaps between urban and suburban schools. Murrell (2008) was noted for supporting this notion by referencing that urban school failure was higher than suburban school failures. When asked about negative experiences as an urban student, Mr. Smith noted, "The negative that I experienced was not having some of the materials that I needed to do my best in school." To support the idea that it was more difficult for urban students than suburban students to succeed, Irvine (1990) suggested

that economically deprived communities have been known to increase deprived school districts.

10. Urban teachers can benefit from the findings in this research by building relationships with urban students by showing that they care, utilizing their mentors, provide opportunities for growth, help to motivate students, and demonstrate commitment. This informs current practice by serving as foundational principles for urban teachers to follow. “Teachers who love their students and feel solidarity with them also develop strong and consequential relationships with them (Neito, 2005, p. 206).” Neito went to on to suggest that love was equated with respect, high expectations (growth), and an admiration for their students. Mr. Montgomery demonstrated the benefit for this admiration by divulging that, “You can uplift souls and change minds and enrich and enhance lives.” Teachers with a sense of mission believed that they could make a difference (Neito, 2005). Mr. Gilchrist agreed by noting that, “I really think it was the relationship with certain teachers, them talking to you and just showing you that you can make it cause a lot of them grew up in the same area. And you knew they had done things- they had nice homes, and they drove nice cars. They were educated and they did not act like the status quo of the environment.” Randolph (2006) contradicted Mr. Montgomery by highlighting the current impression of urban schools as such, “Teachers and staff in urban schools are generally shown as uncaring, incompetent, and ineffective educators” (p. 426).

Recommendations for Further Study

The findings and conclusions gained from this study lead to the following recommendations.

1. A qualitative study utilizing a higher volume of urban middle school teachers should be conducted to determine if comparable findings and conclusions would materialize. A larger sample size in more urban middle schools would provide data that can be used to search for patterns that will confirm or deny the consistency of urban teachers' perceptions across the state.

2. A longitudinal study that includes a population of urban middle teachers from all middle schools in the state should be completed. A longitudinal study would capture the ongoing experiences of urban teachers. This study could document experiences first hand and provide for more specific examples of what actually happens in urban middle school classrooms and what is done to ensure success on a regular and consistent basis. The current study provided experiences that were reported by the participants and only observed on announced visits by the researcher. A longitudinal study would help to prevent "staged" settings where teachers may not act as they would in their normal capacity.

3. A comparison of non-urban middle school teachers should be considered to show differences. This should be done to compare more closely and specifically experiences of the two types of teachers. A future study should compare similar experiences and responses to distinguish how teachers are similar or different in their methods of teaching. This future study could serve as proof of the findings of this study being specific to only urban environments (or not).

4. A national study that examines how urban districts can encourage urban students to become urban teachers after graduation should be conducted. This future study can assist districts in recruiting the type of teachers that were a part of this study. If districts can encourage urban students early on to become urban teachers some day, then

there needs to be a process or program in place to do this recruiting. A study should be conducted to analyze how to do this best.

5. Additional studies using similar methodology and data collection techniques but focusing on one of the major themes identified, namely building relationships in urban middle schools between teachers and students as well between teachers and colleagues are recommended.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATION DATA SHEET

Participant Data Sheet

Participant Information:

Name_____

Position_____ Years of Experience_____

Subject Taught_____

School Clear Status_____

School Information:

Name of School _____

School Address _____

School Phone _____Fax_____

Number of Students on Your Grade Level _____

_____

Researcher's Notes:

_____ Informed Consent Form Signed Date _____

_____ Interview Completed Date _____

_____ Observation Completed Date _____

_____ Artifacts Collected Date _____

_____ Study Codes Assigned Date _____

_____ Thank You Card Sent Date Delivered _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name:
School:
Date:
Time:
Location:

Introduction:

I started teaching in an urban district at the age of 22. I was fresh out of college and thought I could change the world. During my first year of teaching I had a friend who was also new to the urban district. She would complain about the condition of the school, the poor behavior of the students, the lack of support from other teachers and administration and the lack of parental support. After many pep talks, she quit. In the middle of the school year-she quit. I was shocked! I remember thinking that this was unheard of and she would be in big trouble. That friend went on to work for corporate America and vowed to never teach again. I decided I would not follow in her footsteps.

As I transitioned from classroom teacher, to curriculum coach, to assistant principal I started to notice a pattern with new teachers. There was a large number of teachers leaving the urban district or leaving the profession. One of those individuals was my sister. I noticed her unhappiness during her third year of teaching. I did not know at the time that she was giving warning signs of defeat. She had begun to show up late for work, or not at all. Her drive and excitement about teaching started to diminish way before she got tenure. There were many nights we had late night phone calls that ended in tears. She could not bear to watch urban children in such a horrible state knowing that there was little she could do to change their lives. Her breaking point came when one of her fourth grade female students was raped by a drug abuser in the neighborhood. After many conversations with her pleading for her to stay, she opted out. She went home and became a housewife.

I sincerely believe that the image of urban schools may be too hard for me to change as an individual; however, by sharing success stories of those who weathered the storms, I can help persuade others that there is hope.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose to teach in an urban setting?
2. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of working in an urban environment?
3. What are some experiences you have had as an urban student that may have made an impact on your adult life? Career?
4. What advice would you give a teacher who was trying to decide between working in an urban setting versus a suburban setting?
5. What strategies did you incorporate to ensure resilience?
6. What were some of the positive and negative aspects of your 6-12 education?
7. What was the turning point in your life that gave you the green light to teach in an urban setting?
8. What do you believe would be most beneficial in recruiting and retaining teachers in an urban middle school setting?

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE INTERVIEW JOURNAL LOG

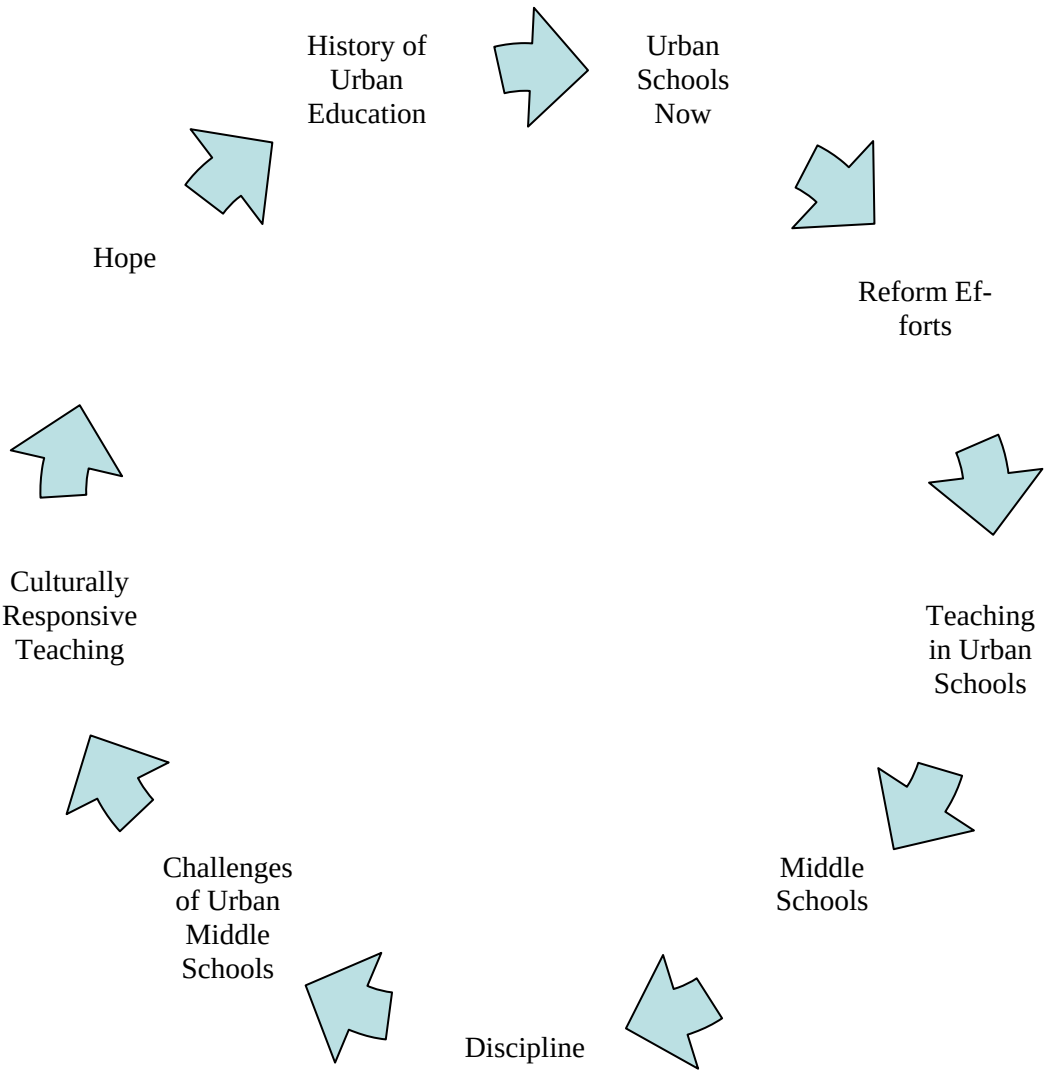
Questions	Response	Notes/Comments
1. Why did you choose to teach in an urban setting?		
2. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of working in an urban environment?		
3. What are some experiences you have had as an urban student that may have made an impact on your adult life? Career?		
4. What advice would you give a teacher who was trying to decide between working in an urban setting versus a suburban setting?		
5. What strategies did you incorporate to ensure resilience?		
6. What were some of the positive and negative aspects of your 6-12 education?		

7. What was the turning point in your life that gave you the green light to teach in an urban setting?		
8. What do you believe would be most beneficial in recruiting and retaining teachers in an urban k-8 setting?		

APPENDIX E

LITERATURE MAP

LITERATURE
MAP



APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORMS

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 23, 2012. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines.

Principal Investigator:	DAVIS, NICHOLE S.
Co-Investigator(s):	COLLINS, LOUCRECIA
Protocol Number:	**X090716008**
Protocol Title:	*From Urban Student to Urban Teacher: A Narrative of the Lived Experiences of Successful Teachers in the Birmingham Metro Area*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 7/24/09. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 7-24-09

Date IRB Approval Issued: 7/27/09

Marilyn Doss

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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BIRMINGHAM AL 35294-0104

Informed Consent Document

TITLE OF RESEARCH:	From Urban Student to Urban Teacher: A Narrative of the Lived Experiences of Successful Teachers in the Birmingham Metro Area
IRB PROTOCOL:	**X090716008**
INVESTIGATOR:	Nichole S. Davis
SPONSOR:	UAB Department of Educational Leadership

Explanation of Procedures

This research study will examine the life of successful urban K-8 teachers. The purpose is to obtain information to solve the research problem: Urban school districts face the challenge of recruiting and retaining resilient, highly qualified and high quality teachers. The objective is to find out what makes these teachers so successful and why they stay in urban environments. This study will enroll 12 participants from Alabama's Torchbearer Schools and none of them will come from UAB.

You will participate in interviews, checklists, surveys, storytelling and member checking. These activities will cumulatively take about 20 hours. The researcher plans to observe you in the classroom for two to three days. The research will be completed over the course of two months. Once all the data is collected, the researcher may meet with you to ask additional questions for clarification.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks of participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life. You do not have to answer any questions which you find offensive or make you uncomfortable.

Benefits

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this study may help explain how teachers become successful in urban environments.

Alternatives

Your alternative is to not participate.

Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The Educational Leadership Department; and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).The results of this study may be published for further research purposes with pseudonyms (made up names) for the participant's names. The findings include your life story and experiences. However, your

UAB – IRB
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Expiration Date 7/24/10

Participant's Initials:_____

identity will not be exposed. Data will be stored and protected in the office of Nichole S. Davis at 200 Dalton Drive, Birmingham, Alabama 35215 Room A146 in a locked file cabinet.

Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Your taking part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to participate in the study. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

Cost of Participation

There will be no cost to you from taking part in this study. All material and supplies related to this study will be provided to you at no cost.

Payment for Participation in Research

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Questions

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Nichole S. Davis. She will be glad to answer any of your questions. Nichole Davis' number is 205-213-5817.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore. Ms. Moore is the Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB). Ms. Moore may be reached at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

Participant's Initials:_____

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of investigator or other person obtaining consent	Date
Signature of Witness	Date
Signature of Investigator reviewing consent document	Date

APPENDIX G

APPROVAL FOR RESILIENCE CHART

Nichole Davis has permission to use the resilience chart from the book Bouncing Back in the face of Adversity.

Dr. Loucrecia Collins

Dr. Loucrecia Collins

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

THEME	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES
	Where did you obtain your 6-12 education? College?
NA	I attended ********** Elementary in North ********. I went to ********** High School. I attended ******** State University - Bachelors of Science.
	Why did you choose to teach in an urban setting?
NA	Well I grew up in that setting and uh had a lot of respect for my instructors in first through the twelfth grade. And they exemplified professionalism and a higher respect for higher achievers, so they influenced me to go and teach where I grew up. So the teachers made you want to come back? Correct.
	What are some of the positive and negative aspects of working in an urban environment?
RELATE	The positive is that you get a chance to relate to some of the family members that you grew up with and you teach their children, and their children's children. Another thing is that you have a chance to come back and make an impact on the community that you grew up in and all urban settings have something in common. We are all in need of a string background in education. That was positive, what were some of the negative? I don't have any. But I think the negative thing is the lack of equipment, tools to work with. I think that overall I don't have any negative.
	What are some of the experiences you have had as an urban student that may have made an impact on your adult life? Career?
NA	Well my high school band director, uh used to talk about pride all the time and he was a well-dressed man he influenced me all through my life he was in a particular fraternity and I joined that particular fraternity also Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity because of the influence he had on me and uh he was a strong disciplinarian and those were the things I latched onto and anybody influence you with discipline, it teaches you how to go on in life and do well and to have pride in yourself. So did you select this career because of him? Because of the band director? I sure did. I always loved music and when I was growing up I used to beat on anything I could get my hands on. I beat on the garbage cans in the neighborhood and I was into music g rowing up and my mother was the type person when she saw their was a need she would do whatever it took to make sure I had the equipment or whatever I needed to be successful, so she had to save her money to buy me drums at an early age.
	What advice would you give a teacher who was trying to decide between working in an urban setting versus a suburban setting?
OPPORTUNITY	Well I think that both settings are important but t he urban setting you have an opportunity to change lives and to give people Hope who have despair they come from impoverished neighborhoods and you can instill in them that it is not where you come from, you can come from the

	brickyard but the brickyard does not have to be in you. You can uplift souls and change minds and enrich and enhance lives.
	What were some of the positive and negative aspects of your 6-12 education?
NA	As a student the positive things was I wasn't the type of child to get into trouble but I used to talk a lot so the teacher would call my mother and my Social Studies teacher in 6th grade and she told her that I talked all the time, and I did talk and eventually I was able to …She told him "well you need to give him more things to do." He took me to Noccalulah Falls and I saw that falls and I came back and was able to get into the Social Studies Fair and get an honorable mention using the pictorials view of Noccalulah Falls. And my teacher took me there I was in 5th grade.
	What was the turning point in your life that gave you the green light to teach in an urban setting?
REALTIONSHIP	Well I was blessed to go back to ****** where I grew up I was able to go to school everyday to do my practice teaching with my former band director. So that was a good relationship. And that right there was my point of saying "Hey I can give back" and by seeing family members, who grew up in my neighborhood, now their children are in high school and you have relationships and everybody knew me in the community and it was a good experience for me. My wife saw that leadership in me and said You can do more
	What do you believe would be most beneficial in recruiting and retaining teachers in an urban 6-12 setting?
MENTOR	You need more team teaching and the new teachers need to be able to understand to have a mentor when you are coming in and also the need to want to change lives and if you really… not to have the love to enhance and to enrich children of urban settings would not be for you. Because you have to have a love that everybody come to you won't have pencil, paper, food, but you can give them much love. You can change the moment by you giving them some of the personal experiences. You could make them go so much farther by seeing you come back to where you grew up. I think the most pleasurable experience is being able to teach. I think the greatest profession in the world is a teacher and I would like to say that sometimes we don't see our self-worth until someone tell us.